

LEADER-FOLLOWER COMPATIBILITY:  
HOW (DIS-)SIMILARITIES IN VALUES, SOCIAL CYNICISM  
AND LEADERSHIP QUALITIES RELATE TO EMPLOYEE  
OUTCOMES

by

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### SUMMARY

Prior research suggests that leaders' values, social beliefs and leadership qualities are important factors that directly relate to followers' work outcomes (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Offermann, Hanges, & Day, 2001; Rubin, Dierdorff, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2009). However, the majority of research has not gone beyond the predominant focus on leaders' characteristics and neglected the crucial role of followers' characteristics in the leadership process. Yet, analyzing the compatibility between leaders' and followers' variables in combination, offers important insights into understanding leader-follower dynamics and an explanation why some leader-follower dyads produce better outcomes than others. Based on person-supervisor fit and leadership theory, the present work extends former research by analyzing (dis)similarities between leaders' and followers' variables in three empirical studies. With data of 116 leader-follower dyads in Germany and the use of polynomial regression and response surface analyses, study 1 addresses objective person-supervisor value congruence and its relation to followers' job satisfaction and affective commitment, analyses differential effects of value congruence in strongly versus moderately held values and tests perceived empowerment as a central mediating mechanism. Study 2 further explores leader-follower congruence effects in social cynicism on followers' extra-role behavior and followers' proactive work behavior, tests differential effects of congruence when leaders' and followers' social cynicism is low rather than high and analyses leader-member exchange (LMX) as a possible mediator. Finally, study 3 performs an experimental design with 160 participants in the US, exploring the effect of leader-follower comparison of leadership skills on followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness and competence and analyses followers' core self-evaluation as a moderating mechanism. The results show that leader-follower congruence in values and social cynicism has a positive influence on important followers' outcomes, congruence effects are not uniform and followers'

empowerment and LMX are central mediating mechanisms in our congruence models (study 1 and study 2). Moreover, followers' self-perception of their own leadership qualities compared to their supervisors has a crucial influence on how effective and competent followers perceive their leader and followers' core self-evaluation functions as a moderating mechanism (study 3). Overall, the results of the three studies suggest that it is the (dis)similarity between leaders' and followers' characteristics that directly relates to followers' outcomes and explains why certain leader-follower dyads are more productive than others. The present work entails theoretical and practical implications and offers suggestions for future directions to further explore and understand leader-follower dynamics.

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## Introduction

People experience their work environment in different ways. For example, due to individual personalities, values, abilities or goals some employees experience their work environment as empowering and satisfying (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Maier & Brunstein, 2001; Zhang, Wang & Shi, 2012) whereas others see it as a stressful and demotivating place (Edwards, Caplan & Harrison, 1998). The extent to which individuals fit their work environment has crucial consequences (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Indeed, former research shows that person-environment fit (PE fit), the degree to which an individual's characteristics matches the characteristics of his/her work environment, directly relates to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, as well as psychological and emotional well-being (Edwards, 1991; Spokane, Meir, & Catalano, 2000; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003). The fit between individuals and different fields of their work environment (e.g., the organization [PO fit], the job [PJ fit], the team [PT fit] or the supervisor [PS fit]) has been analyzed over the last 100 years and holds an important place in the organizational literature (for a meta analysis see Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

The vast majority of research regarding PE fit concentrates on person-organization fit (PO fit) (Edwards, 2008; Schneider, 2001). The results show that fit between employees and their organization results in positive work outcomes like employees' affective commitment and work satisfaction (Kemelgor, 1982; Van Vianen, Shen, & Chuang, 2011). However, according to Schein (2010) it is not only the organization but especially the supervisor who affects employees' outcomes. Similarly, studies on employee health and social support at work indicate the crucial role supervisors play in relation to work related health (Kuopalla, Lamminpää, Liira, & Vainio, 2008; Stadler & Spieß, 2002) and the leadership literature points out that person-supervisor fit (PS fit) is a central factor for employees' loyalty and

work satisfaction (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Person-supervisor fit is defined as the similarity between leaders' and followers' characteristics and is supposed to positively affect followers' attitudes and behaviors (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Indeed, similarity is seen to lead to positive sentiments and liking, whereas dissimilarity can engender negative emotions and even repulsion (Byrne, 1971). This should particularly hold true for similarities in values and social beliefs (specifically social cynicism), as values are a fundamental aspect of a person's identity (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Schwartz, 1992) and social cynicism is one of the most central beliefs that guide people's reactions toward others (Leung et al., 2002) and directly affects employees' work outcomes (Bond et al., 2004; Leung, Ip, & Leung, 2010). However, former research mainly focused on person-organization value congruence and research on person-supervisor value congruence seems to be fairly inconsistent due to methodical issues (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Thus, PS fit research knows less than one would assume about how congruence in values or social beliefs influences followers' work outcomes. Moreover, the PS fit literature has paid little attention to asymmetric congruence effects (e.g., differential effects of congruence in values or social cynicism) that may be inherent to PS fit. For example, the congruence literature assumes that there exist general effects of similarity (Hayibor, Agle, Sears, Sonnenfeld, & Ward, 2011). Yet, as leaders and followers may hold extreme or moderate views on different values, congruence may not be as equally beneficial. Similarly, given that social cynicism can have a strong negative (high cynicism) or strong positive (low cynicism) valence, congruence in high or low social cynicism may also have differential effects on followers' outcomes. Even though we expect general positive effects of congruence in values and social cynicism, overlooking such nuances of congruence may be a central barrier to further developing congruence models (Edwards, 2008).

Besides PS fit between leaders' and followers' values and social beliefs, the leadership



literature indicates that further comparison mechanisms are crucial in the context of successful leadership and leader-follower relationships (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). Leader categorization theory states that followers compare their leaders with a cognitively represented ideal image of a leader (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984). According to the theory, the better the leader matches the ideal leader prototype, the better the follower will respond to the leader (Van Quaquebeke, Graf, & Eckloff, 2014). A large body of literature supports the theory by showing that individuals develop schemas based on experiences with their leaders, which will be activated when they interact with their supervisor (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). However, even though extant research has made an important contribution, it largely neglected a central point, namely followers' self-perception against their leader. Social comparison theory indicates that individuals do not judge in isolation and use the self as a comparison mechanism (Alicke, Dunning, & Krueger, 2005; Kahneman & Miller, 1986). Research by Miller and Suls (1977) could show that individuals generally prefer to compare themselves with others who have a slightly better standing (see also Festinger, 1954). Buunk and Gibbons (2007) conclude in their overview about social comparison that in general individuals have an upward drive to confirm their similarity with a superior person and to learn from him/her. In the work context, this superior person might be the leader. Yet, only few studies analyzed followers' self-perception of their leadership attributes and followers' self-perception against their supervisors' leadership qualities has not been explored (Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, & Eckloff, 2011b; Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, & Brodbeck, 2011a).

The aim of the present work is to address these limitations in the existing literature and to contribute to PS fit and leadership theory by analyzing the compatibility between leaders' and followers' variables in combination. By that, we offer a deeper understanding into why some leader-follower dyads produce effective working relationships while others struggle to be

successful. Specifically, we extend former PS fit and leadership research by developing and testing the argument that it is not leaders' values, social beliefs and leadership qualities in isolation that shape followers outcomes, but in fact, the (dis)similarity in leaders' and followers' values (study 1), social cynicism (study 2) and leadership qualities (study 3). Besides analyzing this general effect of compatibility between leaders and followers in our three studies, we further contribute to PS fit theory by examining differential effects of congruence in values and social cynicism (study 1 and 2) and by testing mediating mechanisms like followers' empowerment (study 1) and LMX (study 2). Moreover, our work contributes to leadership theory by looking at leader-categorization and social comparison research in combination, incorporating followers' self-perception in comparison to their leader and analyzing followers' core self-evaluation as a possible mediator (study 3).

### **Theoretical Background**

For decades, leadership theories and research have tried to analyze why certain leader-follower dyads manage to have productive interactions and produce favorable outcomes, while others have failed to work effectively together (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Looking at both, leaders' and followers' characteristics in combination seems to be a promising approach to explore effective leadership (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). As the aim of the present work is to analyze person-supervisor (dis)similarities between values, social cynicism and leadership qualities, we start by introducing the construct of PS fit, demonstrate recent findings in the PS fit literature and analyze necessary fields for further empirical investigation. Moreover, we give an overview about leader categorization and social comparison theory in combination and follow by indicating open research fields to enhance former investigations and contribute to the existing literature.

**Person-supervisor fit**

Person-supervisor fit in personal characteristics has been an important line of research in the person-environment fit literature (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The PS fit theory predicts that leader and follower who fit, because they are similar to each other in terms of values, attitudes or personality, will experience more positive individual outcomes like higher job satisfaction (e.g., Bretz & Judge, 1994; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991) or organizational commitment (e.g., Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989). These approaches are based upon the psychological theory that similarity between individuals leads to attraction (Byrne, 1971). According to the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), people who are more similar to each other report more rewarding interactions and are more attracted to each other than do people who are less alike (Engle & Lord, 1997). Thus similarity has an important impact on the quality of relationships between individuals and leader and follower who share certain characteristics, even if they are not aware of those similarities, express higher levels of liking for each other (Byrne, 1971). Furthermore, similar leaders and followers interact with one another more effectively because they perceive and interpret external information in a similar way, experience less misunderstandings and are more able to predict each other's behavior (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Suazo, Turnley, & Mai-Dalton, 2005; Meglino et al., 1989). Similarities between leaders and followers insure a leader that a follower will behave in a preferable way even when his/her action cannot be monitored or rewarded. Thus, leaders seek to build relationships with similar followers because they have a higher level of trust in them and believe that they will perform successfully (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin, & Peyronnin, 1991; Tsui & O'reilly, 1989). Followers again, who experience higher levels of trust and appreciation by their leaders, feel more empowered and show higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011).

**Leader-follower value (in)congruence**

The majority of PS fit research analyzed person-supervisor value congruence (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). According to Schwartz (1992), values are beliefs that guide individual's decisions and behaviors. Individuals place different importance on different values and thus shape their subjective value system, which influences how individuals pay attention and see the world around them (Schwartz, 1996). This implies that high-priority values guide human perception and attention to value-relevant situations (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Individuals categorize a value-relevant situation and respond to it depending on their values and the importance they give to each value (Schwartz, 1992). Thus, values have a huge impact on people's life as they indicate desirable outcomes and control individuals' thoughts and behavior in different environments, including work settings (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). For instance, Senger (1971) in an early study found that similar values between leaders and followers relate to higher competence ratings for the follower and Pulakos and Wexley (1983) indicated the tendency to lose objectivity concerning followers who share similar values. Relatedly, studies in the leadership context have shown that value congruence is important in the process through which leadership styles influence followers (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

However, PS fit in values is far less studied than PO fit in values (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Moreover, former PS fit research shows mixed results. For example, while some studies show a significant relation between actual person-supervisor value congruence and positive work outcomes (e.g., Meglino et al., 1989), other studies could not support these findings (e.g., Hayibor et al., 2011). A possible reason for these inconsistent results might be methodical problems. Indeed, former studies mainly measured value congruence subjectively, but did not obtain objective measures (perceived value congruence compared to actual value congruence) (Erdogan, Kraimer, & Liden, 2004). Though, according to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and self-perception theory (Bem, 1967), measuring subjective value

congruence can lead to bias perception of congruence (e.g., social desirability response, Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Followers may induce cognitive manipulation and falsely report value congruence (Edwards, 1993, Hewlin, Dumas, & Burnett, 2017). Thus, measuring value congruence objectively is an important step to avoid artificial covariance due to consistency biases and illusory correlations (Edwards, 1993; Van Vianen et al., 2011). Moreover, most studies have evaluated value congruence based on difference scores and not with polynomial regression and response surface analysis (e.g., Ashkanasy & O'Connor, 1997; Meglino et al., 1989). Yet, using polynomial regression analysis and response surface plot is an important step to avoid statistical problems (like problems with reliabilities due to difference scores) and to study congruence effects more accurately. For example, by using polynomial regression and response surface analysis, it is possible to study independent effects of individual components and to evaluate the effect of two predictors on one outcome variable in a three dimensional space (Edwards, 2002; Shanock, Baran, Gentry, Pattison, & Heggstad, 2010). By that, different shapes of congruence can be analyzed (e.g., differential effects) which is necessary to further advance congruence theory (Edwards, 2002; Shanock et al., 2010).

Furthermore, recent studies have largely ignored why person-supervisor value congruence relates to followers' outcomes. However, in order to completely understand the theoretical construct of value congruence and to provide practical implications, it is important to analyze mediating processes (Edwards & Cable, 2009). We expect that a possible mediator between person-supervisor value congruence and positive outcomes might be followers' perceived empowerment. Empowerment is described as a set of people's perceptions about them shaped by their work environment, particularly by their supervisor (Menon, 1999). Empowered followers are described as self-determined, decisive, motivated towards their task and able to cope with unexpected situations (Menon, 1999; Spreitzer, 1995). That is because followers who feel empowered, experience leaders who share necessary skills and information, delegate

their work and encourage followers' confidence (Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). Person-supervisor value congruence should foster the development of followers' perceived empowerment in different ways. For example, person-supervisor value congruence leads to more positive communication (Dulebohn et al., 2012), less misunderstandings (Suazo et al., 2005) and a better prediction of each other's behavior (Meglino et al., 1989). Thus, leaders should be more likely to trust their followers and provide better resources and delegate responsibilities. Followers, in turn, should perceive empowerment because they feel valued and understood by their leader. Moreover, value similarity leads to a more positive perception of the similar other, like being competent and benevolent (Turban & Jones, 1988), which are both important preconditions for perceived empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Also, as values are described as motivational goals (Schwartz, 1992), similar values should foster followers' task motivation (which is also described as a central element of empowerment) (Spreitzer, 1995). Perceived empowerment again is one of the central explanations why followers experience positive work outcomes (Gregory, Albritton, & Osmonbekov, 2010; Seibert et al., 2011). Followers who feel empowered are more confident in their work, are more satisfied with their job and are more motivated to perform well (Krishnan, 2012).

### **Leader-follower (in)congruence in social cynicism**

Besides values, social beliefs have attracted considerably attention in the leadership literature (Deng, Guan, Bond, Zhang, & Hu, 2011; Leung et al., 2002). According to former research, the beliefs that leaders hold about human nature and the abilities and intentions of others affect leader-follower interactions (Argyris, 1957; McGregor, 1960). However, prior studies largely assume that leadership is a one-way street and mainly runs from leaders to followers. Yet, leadership is also described as an interactive exchange process between leaders and followers and it is crucial to focus on leaders' and followers' social beliefs in

combination to fully understand leadership dynamics (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Karakowsky, DeGama, & McBey, 2012). Indeed, leaders and followers do not necessarily have similar social beliefs which may affect their leader-follower interactions (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006). Social cynicism is described as one of the strongest social beliefs of individuals and significantly influences the dynamics between leaders and followers (Argyris, 1957; Leung et al., 2010; McGregor, 1960). A cynical view on the social world includes a negative social perception and a general mistrust towards other people and institutions (Leung & Bond, 2004). Leaders and followers with highly cynical views have very little expectations towards others, are skeptical about others intentions and question others potential (Navia, 1996). While high social cynics feel competitive towards others and use pressure tactics to reach their goals (Fu et al., 2004), low social cynics view their social environment positively and generally trust others ideas and motivations (Deng et al., 2011; Singelis, Hubbard, Her, & An, 2003). Social cynicism is an especially interesting social belief as former PS fit research has only concentrated on concepts with a positive or neutral valence. Looking at PS fit in social cynicism, however, should improve former congruence theory as research points out that negative drivers play a powerful role in guiding leaders and followers behavior (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012).

A congruence in social beliefs like social cynicism should be a crucial factor for leader-follower dyads to establish a positive interactive relationship. According to PS fit theory leaders and followers feel closer to each other, when they have similar attitudes (Byrne, 1997; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Moreover, leaders and followers have the need that their views are confirmed by their social world, specifically by a similar other. This confirmation can be obtained by a constant leader-follower interaction with a similar leader/follower (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). When leaders and followers experience that they share the same views, they feel understood and a form of complicity can develop. Even leaders and followers

who are both highly cynical can confide their negative views to each other without fearing a negative judgment. As social cynicism is one of the central social beliefs in the leadership literature (Leung et al., 2002), leader and follower who confirm each other in this belief should develop a positive interactive relationship (high LMX). Yet, if leaders and followers have to work together who are contrary in their social beliefs (e.g., a high cynical follower has to work with a low cynical leader or vice versa), it might be that both parties have less understanding for each other's views, they might feel judged by each other and don't get a validation of their beliefs. Furthermore, a PS fit in social cynicism means that leaders and followers have similar positive or negative perceptions of others in their work environment and use a similar communication style (Li, Zhou, & Leung, 2011; Neto, 2006). This affects how leaders and followers interact and communicate with and about others (Bond et al., 2004; Fu et al., 2004). Thus, leaders and followers who are similar in social cynicism should be more effective in their interactions and better prepared to predict each other's behaviors (Meglino et al., 1989). An effective communication should foster the development of a high LMX relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In contrast, leaders and followers who are dissimilar in social cynicism prefer different communication styles which may lead to misunderstandings and it might be difficult to establish a high quality LMX relationship. A high LMX relationship again should positively relate to followers' motivation and satisfaction. As followers in a high quality LMX relationship experience more support and more trust from their supervisor, they have a better attitude towards him/her and are more motivated to work. In contrast, followers in a low quality LMX relationship do not get much support and trust from their supervisor and are thus less motivated and satisfied (Ariani, 2012). Indeed, former research could show that a high LMX relationship positively relates to followers' affective commitment (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007) and proactive behavior (Kim, Liu, & Diefendorff, 2015).



**Asymmetric effects of leader-follower (in)congruence**

In order to understand the effect of PS fit more thoroughly, it appears crucial to analyze differential effects of leader-follower congruence. Even though congruence literature assumes that PS fit is generally beneficial, this assumption may obscure important nuances in leader-follower dynamics and to achieve a more complete understanding of values and social cynicism in leader-follower relationships, it may be important to recognize that the effects of congruence are not necessarily uniform (Edwards, 2008). Congruence in values on which leaders and followers hold extreme views (e.g., values they strongly agree or disagree with) may relate stronger to followers' outcomes than congruence in values on which leaders and followers have only moderate views. For example, some leader-follower dyads may see power as an extremely important value or completely refuse this value whereas other leader-follower dyads may see power as moderately relevant.

According to Edwards (2008) it is especially important to resolve this shortcoming in the literature in order to further extent congruence theory. This is also important against the background of socio psychological research which states that extreme attitudes have a stronger effect on individual's behavior than moderate views (Krosnick & Smith, 1994; Sherif & Hovland, 1980). Attitude extremity is defined as an extremely positive or extremely negative feeling towards a specific object (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Individuals with extreme beliefs have a large amount of information about the specific belief object available and evaluate other people based on their belief similarity. Because of the similarity-attraction effect, people with similar beliefs are seen as more attractive than people with contrary beliefs, which than leads to better interpersonal relationships (Krosnick & Smith, 1994). As people with extreme attitudes attach higher importance to attitude similarity, this seems to be particularly true for congruence in strongly held values as compared to moderate ones (Krosnick & Smith, 1994). To date, the value congruence literature has paid little attention to

this aspect of extremity—although it may significantly advance our understanding of value congruence effects (Edwards, 2008). While attitudes and values are conceptually different, they are certainly related (Rokeach, 1973) and findings on attitude congruence (particularly on attitude extremity congruence) may inform predictions regarding value congruence.

Similarly, it seems to be inaccurate to assume that leader-follower congruence in social cynicism is uniform no matter of the nature of fit (e.g., congruence in high or low social cynicism). Other than values, high social cynicism is based on a negative belief system and may lower positive dynamics of congruence whereas low social cynicism may boost positive effects of PS fit. Even when leader-follower dyads share a common view on the social world, the negative component of social cynicism (e.g., mistrust towards others, Fu et al., 2004; Li et al., 2011; Singelis et al., 2003) may hinder the development of a positive LMX relationship (Bauer & Green, 1996). For example, as social cynicism implies a general level of distrust, this may reduce the development of a high-quality leader-follower interaction, as LMX is based on a trustful relationship (Bauer & Green, 1996; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Moreover, social cynics tend to be skeptical of others skills, competences, and motivation (Kierein & Gold, 2000; Rubin et al., 2009). Such low expectations should also impede with the development of positive social exchanges. Leaders form high LMX relationships based on expectations of high followers' skills and motivations and are likely to develop positive exchanges if they anticipate high follower performance (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Leaders who anticipate that their followers are less committed and not able to fulfill their tasks successfully, won't assign important tasks and resources to their followers and may not offer additional support (McNatt & Judge, 2004; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Thus, high social cynicism may, to some degree, offset the positive dynamics of congruence.

**Social comparison and leader categorization theory**

While PS fit concentrates on the congruence between leaders' and followers' characteristics, the leadership literature points out further comparison mechanisms that are important when analyzing leader-follower dynamics (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). According to the leader categorization approach (Lord et al., 1984), followers compare their supervisor with an ideal image of a leader that the follower holds in memory. The theory suggests, that followers, through socialization and past experience with leaders, develop cognitive structures or prototypes specifying the characteristics of a leader vs. a non leader. Followers then categorize their supervisor as leader through the comparison of their supervisor's behavior or character and the attributes of the previously developed mental image of an ideal leader. Followers use this leader prototype to implicitly judge the leadership quality of their supervisor. The better the supervisor matches the abstract leader prototype, the more open the follower is to leadership (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Lord et al., 1984; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2014). Yet, when the supervisors' characteristics are not similar to the ideal leader prototype, followers respond reluctant to their leadership (Lord & Maher, 1991). According to this approach, followers use the categorization process as an uncertainty reduction mechanism to form an opinion about their leader and judge the quality of their leader-follower exchange process. The leader categorization model has received considerable attention in the leadership literature (e.g., Lord et al., 1984; Kenney et al., 1996) and is described as the most relevant in the field of leadership perception (Lord & Maher, 1991). However, as social comparison theory points out, individuals do not judge in isolation and also have the need to compare the self with others (Alicke, Dunning, & Krueger, 2005; Kahneman & Miller, 1986). Social comparison theory indicates that individuals compare themselves with others, either intentionally or unintentionally, and this comparison process is a central aspect of social life (Festinger, 1954). Moreover, research shows that individuals have a so called "upward drive"

and tend to compare their abilities with others who are superior to them (e.g., a leader) (Millier & Suls, 1977; Aspinwall, 1997; Collins, 1996). For example, studies indicate that students tend to compare their grades with others who performed better and this also increased their academic performance (Huguet, Dumas, & Monteil, 2001; Gibbons, Blanton, Gerrard, Buunk, & Egelston, 2000). Thus, followers may not only compare their supervisor with an ideal leader prototype, but also with themselves.

### **Leader-follower comparison in leadership potential**

So far recent studies mainly concentrated on followers' perception of the leader but less on followers' self-perception against the leader (Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999). This is surprising as research points out that individuals perceive others in comparison to themselves (Alicke et al., 2005; Kahneman & Miller, 1986). When we look at the leader categorization and social comparison theory in combination, it seems that followers evaluate their supervisor not only based on their leader prototype but also in comparison to themselves (Alicke et al., 2005; Miller & Suls, 1977). Indeed, former research did indicate that individuals tend to compare themselves with a superior person (Buunk & Gibbons; 2007; Huguet et al., 2001), which in the leadership context seems to be the supervisor. Through this comparison process, followers get aware of their own leadership potential and compare it to their leaders' ability to lead. Though, only few studies have analyzed followers' self-perception in the leadership context. Van Quaquebeke et al., (2011b), and Van Quaquebeke et al., (2011a) could show that the comparison between the supervisor and the ideal leader prototype relates to followers' respect and is mediated by the self-awareness of the followers in comparison to the ideal leader prototype. In a similar vein, research suggests that social comparison and social judgment runs in both directions. Both concepts indicate that individuals don't compare or judge in isolation but use their self-awareness as a guideline (Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001; Dunning,

2000; Krueger, 2000).

Based on leader categorization theory and social-comparison research we argue that followers who believe that they have more leadership qualities than their supervisor, automatically categorize their supervisor as a bad leader, who is inefficient and incompetent. This is because followers have certain expectations how an ideal leader should be (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002). For example, leaders are expected to have several leadership attributes like being encouraging, motivating or thoughtful (House et al., 2004). Yet, when followers believe that they are more similar to an ideal leader than their current supervisor, they might question the capability and leadership potential of their supervisor. This is problematic, as leaders can only be successful when their follower perceives them as competent (Connelly et al., 2000).

Moreover, former research points out that individuals do not compare themselves to others in the same way (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995). Indeed, leader-follower comparison process could be influenced by the followers' personality, specifically followers' core self-evaluation (CSE). The concept of CSE describes a higher order personality trait, which develops through values, success and one's own abilities (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). CSE includes self-esteem, neuroticism, the belief in one's own capabilities and the feeling of control (Harter, 1990; Watson, 2000). One of the main reasons why people engage in social comparison is to improve one's own self-concept (Festinger, 1954). Yet, the need to increase one's self-concept differs between individuals and depends on the personality (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Wheeler, 2000). As one of the main reasons for social comparison is to improve one's self-concept (Festinger, 1954) and the individual personality affects how strongly people compare themselves with others (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Wheeler, 2000), followers' CSE might be an important moderator between followers' comparison with their leader and organizational outcomes. Specifically, we assume that followers with a low CSE who believe

that they would be a better leader than their supervisor will perceive their supervisor as both less competent and less effective compared to followers with a high CSE. This is because people with high CSE are described as self-assured, confident, stable, perceive themselves positively and have a high power and control feeling (Erez & Judge, 2001; Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, & Scott, 2009; Zhang, Kwan, Zhang, & Wu, 2014). As people who evaluate themselves in a positive way, are less prone to external influence (Brockner, 1988), followers with high CSE are more stable and less affected by external information even in a negative work situation (Bono & Colbert, 2005; Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012). Followers with low CSE however, feel less self-confident and are more affected by their external environment (Judge et al., 1997; Kacmar, Collins, Harris, & Judge, 2009). In other words, for followers with a high CSE the social comparison with their supervisor should be less important and they should be less affected by the social information (e.g., that their supervisor is more or less of a leader than they would be) compared to followers with a low CSE. Thus, CSE seems to explain how follower perceive their work environment and engage in leader-follower comparison differently.

### **Aims and Outline of the present work**

The aim of the present work is, to further explore the construct of PS fit and to gain new findings regarding leader-follower comparison. So far, PS fit is far less explored than PO fit and existing findings show inconsistent results (Hayibor et al., 2011; Meglino et al., 1989). To further understand and expand the field of PS fit, it seems to be necessary to analyze the dynamics of PS fit in more detail. As value congruence is a central construct in PE fit research, study 1 analyses the link between person-supervisor similarities in values with positive work outcomes (affective commitment and job satisfaction), how this relation is mediated by followers' empowerment and if extreme value congruence is stronger linked to work outcomes than moderate value congruence. Moreover, study 2 further contributes to PS

fit research by studying PS fit in social cynicism, as one of the strongest social beliefs of individuals (Leung et al., 2010). Besides investigating its relation to LMX and positive work outcomes (extra-role behavior and proactive behavior), study 2 also analyses differential congruence effects of low versus high social cynicism. Lastly, study 3 expands former leadership research by looking at leader categorization and social comparison theory in combination and analyzing person-supervisor (dis)similarities in leadership qualities. Specifically study 3 explores the self-comparison of followers with their direct supervisor regarding leadership attributes on followers' outcomes (followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness and competence) and how followers' core self-evaluation plays a moderating role.

**Study 1 – When leaders and followers match: The impact of objective value congruence, value extremity, and empowerment on employee commitment and job satisfaction**

The aim of study 1 was a) to analyze the effect of objective person-supervisor value congruence, b) to study empowerment as a possible mediator and c) to compare extreme versus moderate person-supervisor value congruence. To reach a heterogeneous sample of the working population in Germany, 58 human resource departments from different industries were contacted and asked to invite their employees to our study. 301 leader-follower dyads were invited to participate and to fulfill a short questionnaire. The participants were informed in advance that the study serves a research purpose and that their data will be treated confidentially. The questionnaires were given to the participants separately with pre-stamped envelopes and the participants were asked to send the questionnaire back to the main researcher. By that, only authorized researcher had access to the data. Followers and leaders were matched based on a coding system in order to analyze the dyads. 116 leader-follower dyads participated in the study (return rate 39%).

Leaders' and followers' values were measured with the German questionnaire by Schmidt, Bamberg, Davidov, Herrmann and Schwartz (2007), based on the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz, 1992). Schwartz (1992) distinguishes between four higher order value dimensions: Self-enhancement, self-transcendence, conservation and openness to change. Those value dimensions play a central role in the value literature and have a direct influence on organizational outcomes (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Polynomial regression and response surface plots were performed to analyse person-supervisor value congruence. As expected, the results show that empowerment, affective commitment and job satisfaction increase when leaders and followers share similar values (a concave surface shape along the incongruence line for all four value dimensions and for all outcomes). In line with Edwards (1994), the three second-order polynomial terms (the quadratic term of leader values, the quadratic term of follower values, and the product of leader and follower values) showed a significant increase in the explained variance for all four values ( $\Delta R^2$  ranged from .10 to .13;  $F$  ranged from 2.94 to 4.16;  $p < .05$ ). With the use of block variables and bootstrap confidence intervals we could also show that empowerment mediates the relation between person-supervisor value congruence and the work outcomes job satisfaction and affective commitment (path coefficients ranged from .21 to .28; all  $p < .05$ ). Finally, the results showed that empowerment, affective commitment and job satisfaction increase more with extreme value congruence (degree of favorability) compared to moderate value congruence.

### **Study 2 – Are two cynics better than one? Toward understanding effects of leader-follower (in)congruence in social cynicism**

As study 1 could show that PS congruence in values relates to positive work outcomes, study 2 had the aim to analyze other congruence variables apart from values, namely social cynicism. With the same questionnaire and sample from study 1, we measured leaders' and followers' social cynicism with the 18-item scale by Leung et al. (2002) in the German



version by Bierbrauer and Klinger (2000). With the help of polynomial regression and response surface analysis, we evaluated the relation of person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism and LMX. Similar to study 1, we could show that a congruence in social cynicism between leaders and followers positively relates to LMX (a concave surface shape along the incongruence line  $a_4 = -.91, p < .01$ ). This effect even stayed significant when controlling for personality traits (Big Five).

Other than values, social cynicism is based on a negative view about the social world. Thus, we predicted that LMX is higher when leader and follower are congruent at low rather than high social cynicism. By analyzing the congruence line of the surface charts, we could show that this is the case (a concave surface shape along the congruence line:  $a_1 = -.84, p < .001$ ). Moreover, study 2 had the aim to test LMX as a possible mediator between person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism and our outcomes extra-role behavior and proactive behavior. Before testing our mediation hypothesis, we analyzed the relation between person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism and our two outcomes. As expected, our results show a concave surface shape along the incongruence line for both outcomes ( $a_4$  was between  $-.72$  to  $-1.27$ ; all  $p < .01$ ). The outcomes were also significantly lower when leader and follower were both highly cynical compared to low cynical leader-follower dyads ( $a_1$  was between  $-.34$  to  $-.74$ ; all  $p < .01$ ). Similar to study 1, we tested the mediation with the help of block variables and bootstrapping analyses as recommended by Edwards and Cable (2009). As expected, our results show that LMX mediates the relation between person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism and our outcomes extra-role behavior ( $\beta = .33$ ; 95% CI = [.18 to .49]) and proactive behavior ( $\beta = .13$ ; 95% CI = [.03 to .23]).

### **Study 3 – Are you meant to play this part? Effects of leader-follower comparisons on employee outcomes**

While studies 1 and 2 had the goal to analyze PS fit in values and social cynicism, study 3 aimed to analyze further comparison factors that explain leader-follower dynamics. As followers' leadership perception plays an important role in the leadership literature (Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, & Brodbeck; 2011a), study 3 expanded former research by integrating leader categorization theory with insights from social comparison research. Specifically, study 3 analyzed followers' self-perception against the supervisors' leadership qualities. An online experiment was created, in which the participants were told that a group of researchers is collaborating with a large paper producing company in order to create future leader programs and to analyze leader-follower interactions. After answering questions about their leadership qualities and about themselves<sup>1</sup>, the participants were told that they will be linked to a supervisor that prepared a short task for them. As part of the leadership manipulation, we informed participants, that their supervisor had filled in the same questionnaire. Then participants read one of two manipulations. The participants were informed that their supervisor would either be a better (experimental condition 1) or worse (experimental condition 2) leader than they would be. After the manipulation, the participants were asked questions regarding the supervisor and fulfilled a short task. At the end of the experiment, there was a clarification that the leadership qualities of the participants were not analyzed and that the participants were not linked with a supervisor either. To reach a heterogeneous sample of the working population in the US, we used MTurk to invite US participants to our study. Recent studies could show, that members of MTurk are more attentive to instructions than traditional pool samples (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016). The members received a web link to our online experiment and were offered 1\$ for about 10

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<sup>1</sup> As a questionnaire participants filled out 22 items of the GLOBE study, containing people's ideas about good leadership (House et al., 2004).

minutes participation. The study has been approved by an ethics review committee. 160 employees from various industries participated in the experiment. To test our manipulation, we performed a T-test. Indeed, participants in the experimental condition group 1 (high leadership qualities) perceived themselves as being more capable as a leader in comparison to their supervisor in the experiment and vice versa (Group 1:  $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = .82$ ;  $t = -18.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Group 2:  $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). All analyses were calculated by using hierarchical regression analyses as this allows to examine the proposed moderation effect of CSE (which we measured as a continuous variable; Aiken & West, 1991). Our analysis shows that followers who believe that they have more leadership qualities than their supervisor perceive their supervisor as less competent ( $b = -.40$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and less efficient ( $b = -.41$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, to test the proposed moderating effect, that this relation is moderated by followers' CSE, we examined the interaction term in the hierarchical regression equation. The results show that this term was significant for perceived leader effectiveness ( $b = .16$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but not for leader competence ( $b = .07$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .29$ ). To further examine the nature of the interaction for leader effectiveness, we conducted simple slope analysis. Results show that the effects of self-leader comparison were more pronounced for employees with low CSE ( $b = -.53$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than for employees with high CSE ( $b = -.28$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Taken together, we found the proposed interaction effects for leader effectiveness but not for leader competence.

## **General Discussion**

### **Summary of the present work**

PS fit and leadership perception are central parts in the leadership literature and research (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011a). With the present study we aim to achieve deeper knowledge regarding PS fit in values and social cynicism and further explore

followers' self-perception against their leader. The findings of this work show that (dis)similarities between leaders and followers in values, social cynicism and leadership qualities play a crucial role in the leader-follower process. Specifically, the present work analyzed in study 1 and study 2 empowerment and LMX as possible mediators between PS fit and favorable work outcomes and evaluated in detail differential effects of person-supervisor congruence in values and social cynicism. Moreover, study 3 explored the link between leader-follower comparison regarding leadership qualities and followers' perception of leadership effectiveness and competence, and analyzed followers' core self-evaluation as a possible moderator.

### **Theoretical implications**

The present work has several important theoretical implications. First, with our three studies we did not only concentrate on the leader in isolation or only on the organization but also focused on the follower, specifically on leader-follower congruence (study 1 and study 2) and followers' self-perception against the leader (study 3). So far, the majority of former leadership research has analyzed leader categorization (Kenney et al., 1996; Junker & Van Dick, 2014) or leadership styles (Bono & Judge, 2004) and did mainly focus on the leader but less on leaders' and followers' characteristics in combination (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011b). While PE fit research did take follower variables into account, the research mainly focused on person-organization congruence and less on PS fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Moreover, with the help of polynomial regression and response surface analysis, we could avoid former methodical problems in PS fit research and show that person-supervisor congruence in values and social cynicism relates to various positive work outcomes (e.g., empowerment, organizational commitment and job satisfaction for PS fit in values; LMX, extra-role behavior and proactive behavior for PS fit in social cynicism). By that, we could provide an important contribution to the congruence research. In addition to the general positive results of person-

supervisor value congruence, our results show that congruence in the value dimension self-transcendence has a stronger impact on our outcomes than a congruence in other value dimensions. This finding may be explained by the higher meaning individuals place towards self-transcendence compared to other values (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Indeed, self-transcendence is described as an exceptionally important value dimension as it reflects universal desires like equality and tolerance (Abbott, White, & Charles, 2005; Finegan, 2000). Furthermore, we could expand former PS fit research by not only exploring similar values but also person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism. Previous research of social cynicism assumes that social cynicism generally has a negative impact on followers and organizational outcomes (Leung et al., 2010). Yet, our results show that person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism is positively linked to leader-follower interactions, even if followers and leaders are highly cynical.

Second, Kistorf-Brown et al. (2005) concluded in her meta-analysis that so far PS fit research shows inconsistent results. In line with this observation, we did not find any congruence effects for PS fit in personality. However, in study 2 we controlled for personality and could show that person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism is positively linked to LMX, extra-role behavior, and proactive behavior even after controlling for the Big Five personality traits. This finding is important as it indicates that PS fit can not be found in all content dimensions and it is necessary to analyze which individual dimensions support PS fit. Similar to our findings, Strauss, Barrick and Connerley (2001) could hardly show congruence effects on Big Five personality traits, while Zhang et al. (2012) found effects of person-supervisor congruence in the dimension of proactive personality and Glomb and Welsh (2005) identified an incongruence effect on person-supervisor congruence in the personality trait of control. These seemingly different results might be explained by distinguishing between broad versus narrow personality traits (Bergner, Neubauer, & Kreuzthaler, 2010).

Former research did indicate that narrow personalities traits predict work outcomes (e.g., extra-role performance) considerably better than the Big Five (Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki & Cortina, 2006; Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). This may be explained by the more specific and detailed nature of narrow traits, whereas broad personality traits are more superficial (Kausel & Slaughter, 2011). Compared to the Big Five personality traits, social cynicism, proactive personality and the personality dimension of control are all narrow variables, which might be the reason why person-supervisor congruence related to specific outcomes. This explanation also fits to our findings from study 1, which could show that person-supervisor value congruence is not linked to followers' outcomes likewise and it depends on the specific value dimension.

Third, besides showing the positive link of PS fit in values and social cynicism, we could further develop PS fit theory by analyzing mediating mechanisms, which explain why PS fit leads to positive work outcomes. In study 1 we could show that followers perceived empowerment acts as a mediator between person-supervisor value congruence and our outcomes organizational commitment and job satisfaction. So far, former research did barely analyze followers' empowerment in relation to person-supervisor value congruence. This is surprising as Gregory et al. (2010) did suggest that person-job fit may be related to employees perceived empowerment and it has been shown that similar values affect followers' work motivation (Meglino et al., 1989). Moreover, we could show in study 2 that LMX is a central mediator between person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism and our outcomes extra-role behavior and proactive behavior. This shows that integrating empowerment and LMX in the PS fit literature is important to further understand why PS fit relates to crucial followers' outcomes.

Fourth, by analyzing differential effects of congruence, our study expands the theoretical knowledge of person-supervisor fit. As Edwards (2008) pointed out, prior research has mainly

overlooked that congruence effects may not be uniform. Indeed, we could show with study 1 and study 2 that person-supervisor congruence in values and social cynicism varies.

Specifically, study 1 could show that a congruence in values which leader and follower strongly agree or disagree with, is more powerful than a congruence in moderately held values. Similarly, study 2 indicated that congruence effects in social cynicism are also not equally beneficial and a congruence in high social cynicism is less effective than a congruence in low social cynicism. Those findings are important advancements of congruency theory, which did not consider asymmetric congruence effects yet (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Our findings are also in line with research of Zhang et al. (2012), which shows that congruence in extreme personalities is more powerful regarding LMX than PS fit in moderate personalities (even though the researcher did neither predict nor discussed those findings). Yet, the central role of extremity in PS fit is an important addition to PE fit research.

Fifth, with study 3 we expand the leadership literature and offer a new explanation for leadership effectiveness by looking at person-supervisor (dis)similarities in leadership qualities. Our results show that leader-follower comparison in leadership qualities is linked to followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness and competence. These findings are crucial as they underline the central role of followers' self-perception in the leadership process, which has barely been analyzed by former research (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011b). Moreover, we further contribute to the former literature by showing that CSE as a stable personality trait, works as a moderator between leader-follower comparison and followers' perception of leadership effectiveness. As research in social comparison did indicate, individuals engage in social comparison differently based on their self-concept (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). In line with this view, study 3 could show that low CSE followers who have the opinion that they would be a better leader than their actual leader, view their supervisor as less effective

compared to high CSE followers. This finding is important as it shows how followers' personality is linked to leader-follower comparison and lessens or increases followers' outcome.

### **Practical implications**

Besides the theoretical implications of the present work, our three studies also have important practical implications. First, organizations should be aware about the importance of matching leader-follower dyads based on their values, social cynicism and leadership qualities. However, in practice it might be difficult for organizations to achieve this match as other factors like diversity, technical skills or special knowledge are priorities (Northouse, 2015). Nevertheless, it might be beneficial for organizations to inform their leaders about the pivot role of person-supervisor congruence in values and social cynicism and to increase leadership trainings. Leaders should be educated through coaching, newsletters or video presentations (Ely et al., 2010) and made aware about the relevance of extreme value congruence, the significance of self-transcendence values, the importance of PS fit in low social cynicism and the significance that supervisors have better leadership skills than their followers. Leaders who have those knowledge may engage in self-reflection of their own values, beliefs and behavior (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Also, by educating leaders about the importance of low social cynicism, organizations can foster a positive work culture and leaders may be less likely to express their cynical beliefs (Schein, 2010).

Second, if organizations struggle to achieve congruence in values or social cynicism, they should directly address followers perceived empowerment and LMX. Edwards and Cable (2009) indicated that focusing on mediating mechanisms in congruence research is a beneficial way to offset low congruence effects. Indeed, our results from study 1 and study 2 show that followers' perceived empowerment and LMX intervene when person-supervisor



congruence in values and social cynicism is low. Organizations have several options to increase followers' perceived empowerment and LMX. For example, prior research could show that delegating work assignments (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999), sharing responsibility, authority and resources (Srivastava et al., 2006), integrating followers in decision making (Ahearne et al., 2005), and explaining the crucial role followers have in the organization (Zhang & Bartol, 2010) are key approaches to boost followers' perceived empowerment. Moreover, as LMX relationships are based on trust and frequent communication (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), organizations should train their leaders to establish a trustful and communicative relationship with their followers by clarifying leadership actions, allocating important tasks and knowledge (Dulebohn et al., 2012), and offer open and honest communication (Frese & Beimeel, 2006).

Finally, besides educating and training their leaders, organizations should focus on employee selection, specifically on selecting employees with low social cynicism and high CSE. Leaders and followers with low social cynicism seem to be able to form better LMX relationships and thus produce better work outcomes (Deng et al., 2011). High-CSE employees again are more motivated to perform (Erez & Judge, 2001, Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009) and are less involved in social comparison compared to low-CSE employees (Bono & Colbert, 2005; Chang et al., 2012). Thus, high-CSE employees are less likely to be affected by leaders with low leadership skills. Additionally, organizations should try to only select and promote supervisors with excellent leadership skills, as our results from study 3 show, supervisors who are perceived with less leadership qualities than their follower, have problems to lead effectively. We are aware that leadership trainings and employee selections can be costly and time-consuming. Nevertheless, the results of our three studies clearly show that such measures can be extremely beneficial to establish better leader-follower interactions, more effective leadership and eventual better organizational outcomes.

**Strength and limitations**

Similar to other research, the present work has strength as well as limitations. The main strength of the present work is that we were able to expand former congruence research by showing the importance of actual person-supervisor-congruence in values and social cynicism, analyzing mediating mechanisms and indicating the crucial role of asymmetric congruence effects with the use of polynomial regression and response surface plot analyses. By that we could avoid former statistical problems like common rater bias and were able to study congruence effects in a three dimensional space (Edwards, 2002; Shanock et al., 2010). Moreover, by looking at leader categorization and social comparison theory in combination we were able to identify the central role of followers' self-perception against their leader and could identify followers CSE as an important moderator.

However, besides the key strength of the present work, our research also has few limitations. First, besides using superior statistical methods, we also used a cross-sectional design which precludes us from testing for causality. Yet, congruence research and theory support the notion that value congruence and social beliefs predominantly affect employees' attitudes and behavior and not vice versa (Gabriel, Diefendorff, Chandler, Moran, & Greguras, 2013; McGregor, 1960; Leung et al., 2010). Moreover, study 1 and study 2 were part of a larger data collection effort and used the same sample (same 116 leader-follower dyads who completed the questionnaire). Importantly, however, as researcher suggest, study 1 and study 2 do not overlap in any of the used variables and there are no other studies from this dataset (Kirkman & Chen, 2011). Second, to avoid common rater bias in our experiment in study 3 (where we analyzed followers' self-perception and followers' perception of their leader), participants were informed about their leadership qualities and those of their supervisor after performing a test. In practice, however, followers usually evaluate themselves and their leaders subjectively and are prone to misinterpretations and misjudgment (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Fleenor,

Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010). Hence, researcher might want to explore those self and other perception biases in future studies when analyzing leader-follower comparison. Third, participants from our studies came from western societies (Germany and USA) and it might be difficult to generalize our findings to countries with different cultural backgrounds. For example, Asian countries like China or India show more power distance compared to western cultures. As power distance might be a possible reason why followers pay more attention to leaders' characteristic (Zhang et al., 2012), stronger congruence effects and leadership perception may unfold. Finally, study 3 did analyze CSE as a possible moderator between followers' self-perception against their leader and followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness and competence. While we could clearly show that CSE functions as a moderator for our outcome followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness, we could not reveal this link for followers' perception of leaders' competence. A possible explanation for these results may lie in the nature of those two outcome variables. Leaders' competence is described by leaders' capabilities and intelligence while leaders' effectiveness captures warmth judgments like leaders' trustworthiness (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2002; Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2005). According to Fiske, Cuddy and Glick (2007), judgments based on warmth have a more significant role for individuals compared to competence and thus, followers may place higher meaning to leaders' effectiveness compared to leaders' competence. However, this explanation is speculative and should be reviewed in future research.

### **Future directions**

Besides providing important theoretical and practical implication, our research offers new insights and inspirations for future congruence and leadership research. One main recommendation to further advance PE fit and leadership research is to concentrate more on PS fit and to further analyze the role of followers' self-perception against the leader. The field

of PS fit is still far less explored than PO fit and followers' self-perception against the leader has barely been considered. However, the results of the present work show the importance and complexity of (dis)similarities between leaders and followers regarding important work outcomes and future research should continue to explore this field.

Specifically, it might be interesting for future studies to test our congruence results from study 1 and study 2 with longitudinal or experimental design and to analyze leader-follower congruence effects across different cultures. Moreover, as our results show, using robust methodological approaches advances the field of congruence research. Thus, using polynomial regression and response surface analyses may also be useful for other congruence variables like PS fit in affect (Cropanzano, Dasborough, & Weiss, 2017), humor (Wisse & Rietzschel, 2014) or even for areas beyond PS fit (e.g., congruence between colleagues in teams; Walter & Bruch, 2008). Also, even though actual congruence is not affected by multiple cognitive factors like subjective congruence, some researcher believe that subjective person-supervisor congruence is similarly important (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Thus, it might be desirable for future studies to integrate perceived and actual person-supervisor congruence in one model in order to explore the relative significance of both congruence concepts.

Furthermore, as study 1 could show, leader-follower congruence in self-transcendence had a stronger influence on followers' affective commitment and job satisfaction compared to the other three value dimensions. Thus, it might be also interesting for future research to further explore those findings. So far, former congruence research implies that value congruence is universally desirable and did not distinguish between different values (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). However, based on our results, future research should consider that the strength of congruence may depend on the specific analyzed value, belief or personality trait. Indeed, we could also show with study 2 that while leader-follower congruence in social cynicism results

in severable desirable outcomes, PS fit in the Big Five personality traits did not reveal that link. As mentioned before, looking at broad versus narrow personality constructs may be an interesting route for future congruence studies.

Finally, future studies should analyze more variables which may explain leader-follower dynamics. For example, scholars could expand our research by analyzing other social beliefs than social cynicism and compare not only person-supervisor leadership qualities but also other leader-follower variables. Additionally, future congruence research should consider the mediating role of empowerment and LMX in PS fit research and the central role of CSE as a moderator between leader-follower comparison and favorable outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Analyzing the compatibility between leaders' and followers' values, social beliefs and leadership qualities is an inspiring field of research that provides important knowledge into understanding leader-follower dynamics. The results suggest that looking at leaders' and followers' characteristics in combination can provide valuable insights into why some leader-follower dyads produce better outcomes than others. By identifying the crucial role of person-supervisor congruence in values and social cynicism, the importance of asymmetric congruence effects, the pivotal role of followers' self-perception against their leader, as well as mediating and moderating mechanisms, we contribute and expand former PS fit and leadership theory and hope that our results provide important insights for future leadership research.

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**STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertation " Leader-follower compatibility: How (dis-)similarities in values, social cynicism and leadership qualities relate to employee outcomes" weder in der gegenwärtigen noch in einer anderen Fassung einer anderen Fakultät vorgelegt habe oder hatte.

Ich versichere, dass ich die Dissertation selbstständig und ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt sowie unter ausschließlicher Verwendung der von mir angegebenen Quellen verfasst und wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus der Literatur entnommene Textstellen kenntlich gemacht habe.

Ferner bestätige ich, dass ich den federführenden Beitrag zu den unter gemeinschaftlicher Autorenschaft entstandenen Manuskripten geleistet habe.

San Francisco im November 2017,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Byka', is written below the date.

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**When Leaders and Followers Match: The Impact of Objective Value Congruence, Value  
Extremity, and Empowerment on Employee Commitment and Job Satisfaction**

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## Abstract

Although the topic of value congruence has attracted considerable attention from researchers and practitioners, evidence for the link between person-supervisor value congruence and followers' reactions is less robust than often assumed. This study addresses three central issues in our understanding of person-supervisor value congruence (a) by assessing the impact of *objective* person-supervisor value congruence rather than subjective value congruence, (b) by examining the *differential effects* of value congruence in strongly versus moderately held values, and (c) by exploring perceived empowerment as a central *mediating mechanism*. Results of a multi-source study comprising 116 person-supervisor dyads reveal that objective value congruence relates to followers' job satisfaction and affective commitment and that this link can be explained by followers' perceived empowerment. Moreover, polynomial regression and response surface analyses reveal that congruence effects vary with the importance that leaders and followers ascribe to a certain value: congruency in strongly-held values have more robust relations with followers' outcomes than congruence in moderately-held values.

*Keywords:* person-supervisor value-congruence, empowerment, polynomial regression

When Leaders and Followers Match: The Impact of Objective Value Congruence, Value Extremity, and Empowerment on Employee Commitment and Job Satisfaction

The study of value congruence is one of the oldest and most enduring topics in organizational research (Edwards 2008; Schneider 2001). Values show us what we should do or not do and we refer to values when justifying the legitimacy of our behavior (Roccas et al. 2002). Values include tendencies for promoting safety and stability, for tolerance, and for protection of the welfare of others (Schwartz 2012). As guiding principles for what is right and wrong, values are a central topic in organizational studies and in the domain of business ethics (Joiner and Payne 2002). Values are individuals' moral compasses that guide people's decisions and interactions in their social and work environment (Fritzsche and Oz 2007; Van Quaquebeke et al. 2014). When people experience value congruence at work, they feel trust towards their organization and are more motivated (Posner 2010; Schuh et al. 2015). An extensive volume of research has linked value congruence to favorable followers' outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). One aspect in the study of values that has attracted considerable attention is the interplay between leaders' and followers' values (e.g., Hayibor et al. 2011; Meglino et al. 1989; Ogunfowora 2014). Indeed, studies suggest that when leaders' and followers' values are congruent, followers find their work more satisfying and they are more committed to their organizations (see also Kemelgor 1982; Van Vianen et al. 2011).

Despite considerable progress in understanding the effects of value congruence between leaders and followers, important points have remained open for further investigation. First, a thorough review of the existing literature suggests that the evidence for person-supervisor value congruence is less solid than often assumed and has produced mixed effects. Whereas some studies have found significant relations of person-supervisor value congruence and favorable followers' outcomes (e.g., Meglino et al. 1989), other studies did not reveal such links (e.g., Hayibor et al. 2011). These mixed results are puzzling and may be due to

several methodological issues (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Indeed, existing studies have largely relied on *subjective* measures of value congruence as reported by the follower. However, such measures are prone to perceptual and motivational distortions such as dynamics of cognitive dissonance (Erdogan et al. 2004). As Hewlin et al. (2017) indicated, employees may pretend to perceive a fit, even when this is not the case. Moreover, these studies have often analyzed person-supervisor value congruence based on difference scores (e.g., Ashkanasy and O'Connor 1997; Meglino et al. 1989). However, difference scores are seen as problematic indicators as they may lead to inaccurate results regarding congruence effects – for example, due to their low reliabilities and issues of discarded information (Edwards 1993).

Second, to date the literature on person-supervisor value congruence has paid little attention to important differential effects that may be inherent to value congruence. Specifically, extant research largely assumes that congruence in different values is equally important – no matter whether leaders and followers hold *extreme* or *moderate* views on these values. For example, some people may see stability as extremely important or as extremely unimportant whereas other people may assume that stability is of moderate relevance. Yet, current congruence theory does not distinguish between value congruence in strongly- versus moderately-held values (Hayibor et al. 2011). Indeed, existing theory assumes that value congruence is equally beneficial – no matter whether it exists in strongly- versus moderately-held values. As Edwards (2008) pointed out, overlooking such nuances and differential effects of congruence may be a central barrier to further developing value congruence models. Moreover, treating extreme and moderate values as equally important for value congruence is puzzling – it contradicts fundamental insights from the field of social psychology that extreme beliefs generally have a stronger effect on people's affect and behavior than moderate ones (Krosnick and Smith 1994).

Third, as the notion of person-supervisor value congruence evolves, it is important to understand *why* person-supervisor value congruence affects followers' reactions.

Unfortunately, previous research has largely ignored the psychological mechanisms and little is known about the underlying processes of person-supervisor value congruence.

Understanding such mediating dynamics is desirable from a conceptual standpoint to further enhance congruence theory but also from a practical perspective – as it may indicate important levers for practical interventions.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of person-supervisor value congruence in the following ways: First, rather than relying on subjective measures of person-supervisor value congruence, we examine to which extent *actual* person-supervisor value congruence, based on leaders' and followers' ratings, relates to favorable employee outcomes. In doing so, we apply polynomial regression and response surface methodologies, which allow for a more accurate analysis of potential congruence effects. We are not aware of any research that has examined objective person-supervisor value congruence using polynomial regression. Second, we develop and test the notion that congruence in values on which leaders and followers hold extreme views, may be related more strongly to followers' outcomes than congruence in values on which leaders and followers have moderate views. We develop this perspective by reconciling value congruence theory with central insights from social psychological research. Third, we seek to shed light on how person-supervisor value congruence effects are related to followers' outcomes. Specifically, given that holding similar convictions facilitates perspective-taking as well as mutual appreciation and motivation (Meglino et al. 1989; Suazo et al. 2005), we develop and test the argument that followers' perceived empowerment is a central mechanism that links person-supervisor value congruence and followers' reactions. Figure 1 shows our theoretical model.



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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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### **Person-Supervisor Value Congruence**

Values are influential and universal manifestations in the lives of individuals, groups, organizations, and cultures (e.g., O'Reilly and Chatman 1996; Rokeach 1973; Lord and Brown 2001; Cha and Edmondson 2006). Rokeach (1973) described values as “enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence” (p. 5.). Similarly, Schwartz (1994) defined values as “desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity” (p. 21). Values affect human life by indicating desirable outcomes and by influencing individuals’ attitudes in various life contexts, including work situations (Bardi and Schwartz 2003).

In organizational context, value research has paid strong attention to the notion of value congruence – the extent to which employees hold similar beliefs as their social environment (Edwards 2008). Person-supervisor value congruence is defined as the similarity between the value system of the leader and his or her follower and is supposed to positively affect followers’ attitudes and behaviors (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Indeed, similarity is seen to lead to positive sentiments and liking whereas dissimilarity can engender negative emotions and even repulsion (Byrne 1971). This should particularly hold true for similarity in values, as values are a fundamental aspect of a person’s identity (Edwards and Cable 2009; Schwartz 1992). Accordingly, studies have explored the effect of person-supervisor value congruence. For instance, Kemelgor (1982) in an early study found that similar values between leaders and followers relate to higher job satisfaction, Van Vianen et al. (2011) indicated the link between person-supervisor value congruence and organizational commitment and Hayibor et al. (2011) have shown that value congruence is important in the

process through which leadership styles influence employees.

However, the value congruence literature has most often analyzed person-organization value congruence or followers' perceptions of congruence but not the actual congruence between leaders' and followers' values (e.g., Gregory et al. 2010; Jung and Avolio 2000; Van Vianen et al. 2011). This is surprising as subjective value congruence can be affected by multiple cognitive factors that may bias perceptions of congruence (Ravlin and Ritchie 2006). For example, according to self-perception theory (Bem 1967) and cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) individuals try to maintain consistency. Followers who experience low value congruence with their leader may struggle with cognitive dissonance (Erdogan et al. 2004). It is thus likely that followers induce cognitive manipulation and report perceived value congruence even when this is not the case (Edwards 1993, Hewlin et al. 2017). Value perception allows individuals to apply their own subjective assessment, which can result in common rater bias (like social desirability response, Crowne and Marlowe 1964). For example, because of personality factors or leadership influence, followers may have mistaken beliefs about the value congruence with their leaders. That again can lead to artificial covariance due to consistency biases and illusory correlations (Edwards 1993; Van Vianen et al. 2011). These processes underscore the importance of measuring value congruence objectively (i.e., based on separate measures of leaders and followers).

### **Congruence Effects and the Mediating Role of Empowerment**

Besides examining the relationship between similar values on outcomes, we expect that person-supervisor value congruence will relate directly to affective commitment and job satisfaction and indirectly through followers' perceived empowerment. Menon (1999) describes empowerment as a set of people's perceptions about them shaped by their work environment, particularly by their leader. Specifically, empowerment is defined as a cognitive state characterized by self-determined work, chance of independent decision-

making, perceived competence, coping with unexpected situations and challenges and the availability of resources (Menon 1999). Spreitzer (1995) indicated: “Widespread interest in empowerment comes at a time when global competition and organizational change have stimulated a need for employees who can take imitative, embrace risk, stimulate innovation, and cope with high uncertainty.” In other words: “Focusing only on work related outcomes may not be sufficient anymore. There is a need to better understand the processes by which desirable personal outcomes of employees can be enhanced” (Krishnan 2012, p. 550).

We expect that value congruence between leaders and followers is positively related to followers’ empowerment: First, similarity in values fosters a better understanding between leaders and followers (Suazo et al. 2005). When leaders and followers hold similar ideals, they are better equipped to predict the behavior of their counterpart (Meglino et al. 1989), they experience fewer misunderstandings (Graen and Scandura 1987), and they have more positive communication (Dulebohn et al. 2012). These processes, in turn, should foster followers’ perceived empowerment because followers may feel understood and appreciated by their leader and because the leader may provide more resources. Second, by definition, values are representations of motivational goals (Schwartz 1992). As empowerment is described as an increased task motivation (Spreitzer 1995), holding similar motivational goals may positively relate to followers’ task motivation. Specifically, value similarity reduces the likelihood of interpersonal frictions often associated with divergent goals and motivations (Meglino et al. 1989). Conversely, holding different values involves a need to discuss or compromise one’s convictions. Both should hamper with the development of an increased followers’ empowerment. Finally, as noted earlier, similarity fosters positive perceptions of the other party, including attributions of competence and benevolence (Turban and Jones 1988). Thus, leaders may provide more responsible and challenging work tasks for followers with similar values. The higher responsibility again should foster followers’

perception about their competence, impact, self-determination and meaning of their job which can be summarized as followers' perceived empowerment (Spreitzer 1995). In sum, we expect that value congruence facilitates perspective-taking, mutual appreciation and goal motivation and, consequently, fosters followers' perceived empowerment. Thus, we predict:

*Hypothesis 1:* Person-supervisor value congruence is positively related to followers' perceived empowerment.

Furthermore, perceived empowerment is one of the most important factors to influence followers' work attitudes (Gregory et al. 2010; Spreitzer 1997). As perceived empowerment is described as a series of cognitions that shape intrinsic motivation (Thomas and Velthouse 1990), it is conceivably that followers who perceive empowerment find their job more meaningful, feel powerful in their work environment and are therefore more enthused to fulfill their job successfully (Seibert et al. 2011). Indeed, higher followers' perceived empowerment has been shown to relate positively to followers' work attitudes like job satisfaction and commitment (Liden et al. 2000; Seibert et al. 2011; Spreitzer 1997). These empirical findings suggest that followers are more committed to their organization and experience higher levels of job satisfaction, when they have a feeling of competence, can work independently and know that their work is a meaningful contribution to their organization (Gregory et al. 2010). Therefore, we predict that similar values between followers and their leaders will not only relate to followers' perceived empowerment, but also that followers' perceived empowerment mediates the relation between person-supervisor value congruence and affective commitment and job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2:* Followers' perceived empowerment mediates the relation between person-supervisor value congruence and a) affective commitment and b) job satisfaction.

### **Moderate versus Extreme Values: Differential Congruence Effects**

In order to understand the effect of value congruence more thoroughly, it appears

crucial to analyze person-supervisor value congruence for which leaders and followers hold extreme sentiments (degree of favorability). Former research has largely overlooked the possibility that congruence in values on which leaders and followers hold strong beliefs (e.g., which they regard as extremely important or extremely unimportant) may relate stronger to followers' outcomes than congruence on values on which leaders and followers have only moderate views (Edwards 2008). This is despite evidence from fundamental research that the link between people's values and actions is not as straight forward as often assumed and that value extremity is a central predictor for whether people will act in accordance with their values (Krosnick and Smith 1994). For instance, prior studies have shown that people with extreme attitudes are more likely to speak up in an effort to persuade those who disagree with them (Baldassare and Katz 1996; Binder et al. 2009). Moreover, Taber and Lodge (2006) found that people with strong attitudes became even more extreme in their views when presented with supporting and contradicting arguments. This was because they accepted congruent evidence rather uncritically but strongly devaluated incongruent information.

Hence, extreme values seem to have stronger influence on people's reaction than moderate attitudes (Krosnick and Smith 1994). This is because extreme beliefs have stronger influence on cognitive processes and behavior (Sherif and Hovland 1980; Krosnick and Petty 1995). Individuals with extreme beliefs have a large amount of information about the specific belief object available and evaluate other people more on their belief similarity than people with moderate beliefs. Because of the similarity-attraction effect, people with similar beliefs are seen as more attractive than people with contrary beliefs, which then leads to better interpersonal relationships (Krosnick and Smith 1994). In a similar vein, principles of cognitive consistency suggest that similarity in attitudes should results in more positive interaction (Byrne, 1971). As people with extreme attitudes attach higher importance to attitude similarity, this seems to be particularly true for congruence in strongly held values as

compared to moderate ones (Krosnick and Smith 1994).

Thus, we expect that congruence in values for which leaders and followers hold extreme sentiments will relate more strongly to followers' reactions than similarity in moderate values (a curvilinear effect). That is, because values, leaders and supervisors strongly agree or disagree with, may be seen as more important than moderate beliefs. Leaders and followers have gathered more information about those important values and consequently form a strong negative or positive opinion towards them. Drawing from findings on attitude extremity, leaders and followers than seem to pay more attention towards similarity with others in those extreme values (Krosnick and Smith 1994). Thus, we predict:

*Hypothesis 3:* Objective person-supervisor value congruence on a high and low level is more strongly related to a) followers' perceived empowerment, b) followers' affective commitment, and c) followers' job satisfaction than objective person-supervisor value congruence on a moderate level.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedures**

To reach a broad spectrum of the working population, we contacted the human resource departments of 58 different organizations in Germany to take part in this study. The human resource departments invited in total 301 leader-follower dyads to participate. Every leader and follower received the survey separately with a pre-stamped envelope addressed to the principal researchers' university, to ensure that no unauthorized person could see their responses. We received complete data from 116 person-supervisor dyads from various sectors, mainly from media (18%), services (15%), and trade (13%). Sixty percent of the participating leaders were male with an average age of 41.92 years ( $SD = 9.57$ ). They had worked in leadership positions for on average 11.01 years ( $SD = 9.31$ ) and supervised 13.70 employees ( $SD = 18.55$ ). The average age of followers was 31.25 years ( $SD = 8.41$ ) and 39%

was male. Their tenure with leaders was 4.60 years ( $SD = 5.80$ ) and their tenure in the organization equaled 5.83 years ( $SD = 7.14$ ).<sup>1</sup>

## Measures

**Leaders' and followers' values.** We measured leaders' and followers' values using a 29-item German version of the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz 1992; German version by Schmidt et al. 2007). This survey assesses the four universal value dimensions defined by Schwartz (1992) (self-enhancement, self-transcendence, conservation and openness to change). Previous studies have assessed these value dimensions in the work context and have shown their relevance (e.g., Brown and Treviño 2006; Edwards and Cable 2009).

The PVQ presents participants with short description of different people. Each of these descriptions involve a personal goal, aspiration, or wish that point implicitly to the importance of a single value dimension (Schwartz and Bardi 2001). Example items are: "It is important to him / her to show his / her abilities. S/he wants people to admire what s/he does" (self-enhancement); "S/he thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally" (self-transcendence); "It is important to him/her that things be organized and clean. S/he doesn't want things to be a mess" (conservation); "Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him / her. S/he likes to do things in his /her own original way" (openness to change). Participants rated these statements on six point scales – this person is... 1 = *not like me at all*, 6 = *very much like me*. The reliabilities for employees and supervisors were .89 and .90 for self-enhancement, .82 and .83 for self-transcendence, .68 and .73 for conservation, and .74 and .67 for openness to change, respectively. The reliabilities of two of our scales were slightly below .70 (.68 for employee conservation and .67 for supervisor openness). However, these scores were close to .70 and previous studies had reported similar reliabilities (e.g., Feather, 2004; Schmidt et al. 2007). Hence, we believe that these

reliabilities may not be a severe problem in the present context.

**Followers' empowerment.** We measured followers' perception of empowerment with 10 items by Menon (1999). To ensure translation equivalence, all items were translated into German and back-translated into English by two bilingual researchers (Brislin, 1970). While one researcher worked on the initial translation, the other researcher did the back-translation. We could only find minor variations when comparing the original and the back-translation. Those were resolved through discussion. Example items include "I can influence the way work is done in my department" and "I have the authority to make decisions at work" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Affective commitment.** We assessed followers' affective organizational commitment with the nine-item German version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) by Maier and Woschée 2002. An example item is: "I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this company" and "I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization" (1 = *totally disagree*, 5 = *totally agree*;  $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Job Satisfaction.** We measured followers' job satisfaction with the eight-item scale by Neuberger and Allerbeck (1978). An example item is: "How satisfied are you with your colleagues?" We applied a five-point scale, anchored by a smiling and frowning face scale (Kunin 1955; see also Kristof-Brown et al. 2002;  $\alpha = .90$ ).

### **Polynomial regression with response surface analysis**

To test the proposed congruence effects, we applied polynomial regression with response surface analysis. The response surface methodology combined with polynomial regression offers a deeper look into the relation of two predictor variables and an outcome variable (Edwards, 2002). By using this analysis, we are able to study our proposed model in a three-dimensional space and can explore the proposed relations from different angles (Edwards and Parry 1993). This approach has several advantages compared to the traditional



use of difference scores (Edwards 2002; Shanock et al. 2010): First, it avoids difficulties with extenuated reliability produced when two variables are subtracted from each other. Second, polynomial regression analysis shows independent effects of single components and allows for analyzing the degree to which each predictor contributes to variance in the outcome variable. Third, response surface analysis enables plotting the results in a three-dimensional graph and hence offers a new perception of the relationship between the two predictor variables and the outcome variable. This three-dimensional presentation makes it possible to study the degree of discrepancy and the combined effect on the outcome variable in more detail.

The basic equation for polynomial regression analysis is:  $Z = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2 + e$ .  $Z$  is the dependent variable (e.g., affective commitment),  $X$  the first predictor (in our case supervisors' values), and  $Y$  the second predictor (in our case employees' values).

Besides the two predictors  $X$  and  $Y$ , their higher order terms  $X^2$ ,  $XY$ ,  $Y^2$  were entered into the analysis. We constructed the response surface patterns and interpreted the results of the four surface test values  $a_1 - a_4$  (Edwards 2002). In the surface chart, the line of congruence depicts perfect agreement between the two predictor variables (e.g., value congruence) in relation to the outcome variable (e.g., affective commitment). The line of incongruence runs perpendicular to the line of congruence and captures how the degree of discrepancy between the predictor variables may affect the outcome variable. The test values  $a_1 - a_4$  represent the response surface in numerical terms. Specifically, the value  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  represent the slope and curvature of the congruence line and the test values  $a_3$  and  $a_4$  represent the slope and curvature of the incongruence line. Mathematically,  $a_1 - a_4$  are calculated by adding and subtracting the regression coefficients of the polynomial regression equation.  $a_1$  equals  $b_1 + b_2$  ( $b_1$  is the regression coefficient for leader values and  $b_2$  is the regression coefficient for followers' values).  $a_2$  equals  $b_3 + b_4 + b_5$  ( $b_3$  is the regression coefficient for leader values

squared,  $b_4$  is the regression coefficient for the product of leaders' values and followers' values, and  $b_5$  is the regression coefficient for followers' values squared). Lastly,  $a_3$  equals  $b_1 - b_2$  and  $a_4$  equals  $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$  (Edwards 2002). Following the recommendation by Edwards (1994), we mean-centered the predictor variables prior to analysis. Figure 2 shows an example for perfect fit.

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Insert Figure 2 about here  
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## Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, reliability scores, and inter-correlations.

### Test of Hypotheses

Table 2 presents the results of the polynomial regression analyses and the coefficients of the response surfaces (i.e., of the slopes and curvatures along the congruence and incongruence lines).

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here  
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Hypothesis 1 predicted a congruence effect of leaders' and followers' values on empowerment. As shown in Table 2 and in line with Edwards (1994), jointly adding the three second-order polynomial terms (the quadratic term of leader values, the quadratic term of followers' values, and the product of leaders' and followers' values) resulted in a significant increase in the explained variance for all four values ( $\Delta R^2$  reached from .10 to .13;  $F$  reached from 2.94 to 4.16;  $p < .05$ ). The related surface charts are shown in Figure 3.1. In order to test the congruence effect, we have to analyze the slope of the incongruence line (Edwards 1994). As can be seen in Figure 3.1 and in line with our hypotheses, the shape of the response surface followed an inverted U-shape along the incongruence line (i.e., a downward-curved,

concave surface). Relatedly, as shown in Table 2, the curvature was negative for all four value dimensions – as indicated by the  $a_4$  value). Moreover, this  $a_4$  value was significant for self-enhancement ( $a_4 = -.22, p < .01$ ). Hence, the pattern of results provides general support for Hypothesis 1 with regard to empowerment. It is important to note that for the interpretation of the polynomial regression results, main emphasis is often placed on the shape of the surface chart – i.e., whether the surface generally supports the predicted relationships. For example, as Kristof-Brown and Stevens (2001) noted, in polynomial regression “less emphasis is typically placed on the significance of specific regression weights than on the variance explained by the set of predictor variables and the surface pattern yield by the regression equation” (p. 1087; see also Voss et al. 2006).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relationship between leader-follower value congruence and affective commitment as well as job satisfaction was mediated by empowerment. Before we examined this hypothesis, we tested whether leader-follower value congruence also had a *total effect* on the two outcome variables (i.e., affective commitment and job satisfaction). Even though this total effect is not necessarily a requirement for mediation (MacKinnon et al. 2002), we believe that this analysis can provide additional confidence in our theoretical model. For affective commitment, the three second-order polynomial terms were also jointly significant for self-transcendence, self-enhancement, and conservation value variables ( $F$  ranged from 2.73 to 4.32; all  $p < .05$ ). As shown in Figure 3.2, we found again a negative curvature along the incongruence line ( $X = -Y$ ) for all value dimensions. Moreover, as shown in Table 2, the coefficients for self-transcendence and self-enhancement values were significant ( $a_4 = -.86, p < .01$ ;  $a_4 = -.29, p < .03$ ). In a similar vein, for job satisfaction, we found again a negative curvature along the incongruence line ( $X = -Y$ ) for all values, as shown in Figure 3.3. In addition, as shown in Table 2, self-transcendence and openness to change values differed significantly from zero ( $a_4 = -1.05, p < .01$ ;  $a_4 = -$

1.50,  $p < .01$ ). In sum, these findings suggest that affective commitment and job satisfaction generally increased when leaders' and followers' values became more similar.

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Insert Figures 3.1 – 3.3 about here  
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In a next step, to test our mediation hypotheses, we created block variables as advocated by Edwards and Cables (2009). This approach allows obtaining a single coefficient for each path in a mediated value congruence model. Specifically, a block variable is “a weighted linear composite of the variables that constitute the block, in which the weights are the estimate regression coefficients for the variables in the block” (Edwards and Cable 2009, p. 660). Results showed that the path linking supervisor and subordinate values to empowerment was significant for all four value dimensions (conservation: .36,  $p < .001$ ; openness to change: .34,  $p < .001$ ; self-transcendence: .40,  $p < .001$ ; self-enhancement: .37,  $p < .001$ , see Table 3). Then we examined the paths between empowerment and the outcomes. To this end, and following Edwards and Cable (2009), we regressed affective commitment and job satisfaction on empowerment while controlling for the terms representing supervisors' and followers' values (i.e., X, Y, X<sup>2</sup>, XY, Y<sup>2</sup>). This path was significant for both outcomes (affective commitment and job satisfaction) and all four value dimensions (path coefficients ranged from .60 to .76; all  $p < .01$ ; see Table 3). These coefficients were then used to calculate the indirect effects transmitted through empowerment in our mediation analysis. We calculated bootstrap confidence intervals to test the indirect effects (Edwards 2002). The results show that empowerment mediated the combined effects of leaders' and followers' value congruence on followers' affective commitment and job satisfaction (path coefficients ranged from .21 to .28; all  $p < .05$ ; see Table 3). Taken together, these results provide support for Hypothesis 2.

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Insert Table 3 about here  
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Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicted that empowerment, affective commitment, and job satisfaction increase more sharply when value congruence exists for either high or low rated values rather than for moderately-rated values. In other words, we predicted a curvature along the congruence line ( $X = Y$ ). As can be seen in Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3, the shape of all surface charts followed an inverted U-shape along the congruence line. Moreover, the related coefficient  $a_2$  was positive for all value-outcome relations also indicating an inverted U-shape along the congruence line. Eight of these coefficients were statistically significant (see Table 2 and Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 for visualizations). In sum, this indicates that empowerment, affective commitment, and job satisfaction increased more strongly when leaders and followers agreed that a specific value is very important or very unimportant, respectively, than when they agreed that a value is of moderate relevance. This finding provides support for Hypothesis 3.

### **Discussion**

Person-supervisor congruence has been an important line of research in the leadership and ethics literatures (e.g., Brown and Treviño 2006; Kristof-Brown et al. 2005; Kim and Kim 2013). With the present study we aimed to provide three important extensions to these fields by focusing on objective value congruence, by testing the impact of values at different levels of importance, and by analyzing a central mediating process. In line with our hypotheses, results showed that objective person-supervisor value congruence related to followers' perception of empowerment, which, in turn, was linked to followers' affective commitment and satisfaction with their jobs. However, the strength of these person-supervisor congruence effects was not linear. Indeed, it varied as a function of the importance that leaders and followers ascribed to a certain value. Congruence in values that leaders and followers rate as extremely important or extremely unimportant relates more strongly to

followers' attitudes than congruence on moderate values. These findings are relevant for theory and practice.

### **Theoretical Implications**

First, our findings indicate that value congruence between leaders and followers does indeed matter and does relate to important followers' outcomes. This finding is relevant because the mixed findings in previous studies have casted some doubt on the existence of person-supervisor value congruence effects (Hayibor et al. 2011). In the present study, by using polynomial regression with response surface analyses, we were able to overcome several issues that may have affected previous studies. Moreover, by measuring leaders' values and followers' values separately, we could avoid several problems that may be inherent in subjective measures of value congruence – e.g., influences self-perception and cognitive dissonance (Erdogan et al. 2004; Hewlin et al. 2017). In sum, this is an important finding because it reaffirms the notion of person-supervisor value congruence using robust methodological approaches. We believe that polynomial regression and response surface analyses can also be beneficial for areas beyond person-supervisor value congruence. For example, these analyses may be useful to examine similarities between leader-follower affect (e.g., Cropanzano et al. 2017), attachment styles (Hinojosa et al. 2014), and humor (Wisse and Rietzschel, 2014), and to analyze similarities between colleagues in teams (Walter and Bruch, 2008). Besides showing the importance of person-supervisor value congruence in general, our findings also indicate stronger congruence effects on the self-transcendence dimension than on the other three value dimensions. Although we did not expect this differential effect, it may point toward another important extension of theorizing on person-supervisor value congruence, which generally assumes that “similarity on values is [...] universally desirable” (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005, p. 290). Indeed, the stronger relations of self-transcendence are consistent with an argument that self-transcendence is a particularly

crucial and impactful dimension – because this value meets universal needs like fairness and social acceptance (Abbott et al. 2005; Finegan 2000). Relatedly, self-transcendence values have often been rated as more important than other values (Schwartz and Bardi 2001) and seem to foster leadership effectiveness more strongly than other value dimensions (Qu et al. 2017).

Second, our study also advances our theoretical understanding of person-supervisor fit. Specifically, although researchers have called for a more nuanced perspective on effects of congruency (Edwards 2008), extant research has largely overlooked the role of value extremity on congruence effects. However, as the present findings indicate, value congruence effects may not be uniform but are contingent on the importance that leaders and followers ascribe to a value dimension. This finding is consistent with fundamental notions of social psychological research, which state that extreme attitudes are more powerful than moderate attitudes (Krosnick and Smith 1994). More importantly, it challenges a central tenet of congruence theory, which traditionally predicts that the effects of congruence are the same regardless of whether congruence emerges at low, medium, or high levels (Edwards and Cable 2009). The pivotal role of extremity in person-supervisor congruence is further underscored when considering the results of several past studies (e.g., Meyer et al. 2010; Zhang et al. 2012). Even though the authors did not predict nor discuss these results, an inspection of the congruence effects in these studies also show that congruence at very high or very low levels has stronger effects on important dependent variables. For example, Zhang and colleagues (2012) analyzed the congruence effect of leader personality on leader-member exchange (LMX). While they found the proposed congruence effect, their results also show a significantly curved surface along the congruence line. In other words, congruence in extreme personalities relates more strongly to LMX than congruence in moderate personalities. Thus, we believe that incorporating the notion of extremity in accounts of

person-supervisor fit is an important step in advancing theorizing in this field.

Third, we also examined the process through which person-supervisor value congruence is linked to organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Our findings indicated that empowerment is a central variable in these relationships. This finding is important as proposing and testing mediating effects is crucial for further theory development. Even though conceptual work has suggested that employees fit with the work environment may contribute to perceptions of empowerment (Gregory et al. 2010) the relationship between person-supervisor value congruence and empowerment has barely been examined in empirical work. This is surprising, as fit, especially shared values, play a central role in triggering followers' work motivation (Meglino et al. 1989). We believe that integrating empowerment and value congruence literatures offers important insights into why person-supervisor value congruence is associated with key employee outcomes.

### **Practical Implications**

Besides their theoretical implications, our findings also offer important insights for practice. First, they suggest that organizations may benefit from educating their leaders about the importance of value congruence with their followers. Human resources newsletters, video modules, or even one-on-one coaching may provide effective ways to do so (Ely et al. 2010). These programs should inform leaders about the pivotal role of value congruence at extreme levels and about the significance of self-transcendence values. The importance of self-transcendence values may also be interesting in view of person-organization value congruence. Indeed, Schein (2010) indicated that some values may be more important for employees than others – partly because these values directly reflect desirable aspects of the organization that are crucial for the organization's identity. Thus organizations may seek emphasize their views on self-transcendence values through HR marketing to be attractive for future employees and to promote a better person-organization fit (Fischer 2014).



However, achieving person-supervisor value congruence may not always be easy. For example, organizations increasingly strive to become inclusive and diverse and value congruence is only one consideration when organizations select employees (Bowen et al. 1991). Hence, if value congruence is difficult to achieve, organizations may seek to directly address employees' sense of empowerment. As our results indicate, followers' perceived empowerment transmits value congruence effects and hence may be a promising starting point for interventions if value congruence is low. Indeed, as congruence researchers have pointed out, addressing the mediating mechanism can be an effective way to compensate for low congruence (Edwards and Cable 2009). Prior research has identified several effective measures for leaders to empower their followers. For example, leaders can share authority through the use of managerial practices and techniques such as sharing necessary skills and knowledge (Srivastava et al. 2006), delegation of work tasks (Kirkman and Rosen 1999), and delineating the importance of followers' work (Zhang and Bartol 2010). Furthermore, leaders should integrate followers in decision making, try to remove difficulties to perform and boosting followers' confidence regarding their abilities and skills (Ahearne et al. 2005).

For future research, it would also be interesting to examine potential boundary conditions for the proposed effects of congruence in extreme values. For example, some organizations may see moderate levels of a certain value dimension as desirable (e.g., on the dimension of openness to change). Hence, in these organizations, person-organization fit may be highest if employees have a moderate level of this value. Consequently, in these organizations, person-supervisor fit effects may also be strongest when supervisors and employees are similar on a moderate level of this value dimension (rather than on low or high levels). We believe that this would be an important and interesting area for future studies.

### **Limitations**

Like all research, this study has several limitations. First, we applied a cross-sectional

design, which precludes us from making causal inferences. However, the notion that value congruence predominantly influences subsequent employee reactions is consistent with theory and prior research (Gabriel et al. 2013). Nevertheless, it would be desirable for future research to apply longitudinal or experimental designs.

Second and interestingly, the congruence relations were more pronounced for some value dimensions than for others. Specifically, as noted above, congruence on the self-transcendence dimension was more strongly related to affective commitment and job satisfaction than congruencies on the other three value dimensions. This may be explained by the higher importance of the self-transcendence value dimension. Self-transcendence values typically receive higher rating than other value dimensions (Schwartz and Bardi 2001) and are described as universally accepted and favored (House et al., 2004). Based on our findings, it may be interesting for future research to further explore the differential effects of different value dimensions for value congruence and to pinpoint exactly why these differential effects exist.

Third, albeit an important form of fit, PS fit is only one kind of fit in an organization (Kirstof-Brown et al. 2005). For example, employee relations at work do not only include the supervisor but also other members in the team. It would hence be interesting to examine potential combined or interactive effects between PS fit and person-team fit. Moreover, leaders typically have several subordinates and may thus have higher value congruence with some employees than with others. It may be interesting to examine the effects of these different levels of congruence. E.g., previous studies suggest that differentiation within teams (such as LMX differentiation) may be related to lower team performance and / or higher turnover (Nishii and Mayer 2009; Henderson et al. 2008). However, it is unclear whether the same effects would emerge for differentiation in value congruence or whether differentiation in value congruence may, for instance, be related to positive effects such as deeper

information processing among team members (e.g., De Dreu 2007). Testing such effects may be an interesting avenue for future studies.

### **Conclusion**

Person-supervisor value congruence is a fascinating field of study that offers important insights into the dynamics between leaders and followers. Our findings identify objective person-supervisor value congruence as a central factor for followers' outcomes, followers' empowerment as a mediating mechanism, and the pivotal role of value extremity. We believe that the findings of this study offer important extensions that can advance both theory development and practical interventions in the fields of value research and business ethics.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The data presented in this manuscript were part of a larger data collection effort. A first paper has recently been accepted for publication by the Journal of Organizational Behavior. The current manuscript is the second and last paper from this database. Importantly, the published paper and the current manuscript do not overlap in any of the used variables. To keep the review process anonymous, we had to withhold the exact reference of the published paper. However, it is known to the Editor of the Journal of Business Ethics.

### **Ethical Approval**

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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Table 1. *Descriptive, Correlations, and Reliabilities Among Study Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Supervisor self-transcendence	2.56	0.65	(.83)										
2. Supervisor self-enhancement	2.74	0.92	-.26**	(.90)									
3. Supervisor conservation	2.67	0.79	.23*	.36***	(.73)								
4. Supervisor openness to change	2.10	0.55	.26**	.27**	.12	(.67)							
5. Employee self-transcendence	2.50	0.69	.25**	-.03	.11	-.03	(.82)						
6. Employee self-enhancement	2.94	0.98	-.03	.10	.15	.15	-.11	(.89)					
7. Employee conservation	2.67	0.80	.18*	.06	.27**	-.08	.39***	.09	(.68)				
8. Employee openness to change	2.18	0.64	.14	.00	.09	.09	.33***	.44***	.05	(.74)			
9. Empowerment	3.69	0.83	.20*	-.08	-.01	.06	.20*	.00	.18	.11	(.88)		
10. Affective commitment	3.38	0.82	.15	-.04	-.08	-.06	.14	.01	.16	.04	.73***	(.93)	
11. Job satisfaction	5.11	1.09	.16	-.08	-.02	-.12	.15	-.10	.11	-.02	.64***	.77***	(.90)

Note. *N* = 116 supervisor-subordinate dyads.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 2. *Value congruence effect on empowerment, affective commitment and job satisfaction*

Variable	Self-transcendence			Self-enhancement			Conservation			Openness to change		
	EM	AC	JS	EM	AC	JS	EM	AC	JS	EM	AC	JS
	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>	<i>b (se)</i>
Constant	4.07 (.15)**	3.61 (.21)**	5.31 (.28)**	4.12 (.09)**	3.47 (.12)**	5.26 (.16)**	4.00 (.10)**	3.44 (.14)**	5.19 (.19)**	4.85 (.40)**	4.22 (.58)**	6.89 (.74)**
Supervisor values	-.35 (.19)	-.32 (.27)	-.24 (.36)	-.08 (.07)	-.04 (.10)	-.07 (.13)	-.28 (.10)**	-.41 (.14)**	-.31 (.19)	-.49 (.45)	-.32 (.65)	-.45 (.83)
Employee values	-.10 (.18)	-.28 (.25)	-.33 (.33)	-.16 (.08)*	-.23 (.11)*	-.45 (.15)**	-.09 (.14)	-.02 (.20)	-.14 (.27)	-.96 (.34)**	-1.01 (.49)*	-1.81 (.62)**
Supervisor values <sup>2</sup>	.11 (.10)	-.07 (.14)	-.14 (.19)	-.06 (.04)	-.12 (.05)*	-.13 (.07)	.08 (.06)	.05 (.08)	-.01 (.11)	-.08 (.16)	-.13 (.24)	-.45 (.30)
Supervisor values x employee values	.32 (.12)**	.63 (.16)**	.75 (.22)**	.19 (.05)**	.25 (.07)**	.27 (.09)**	.17 (.08)*	.27 (.12)*	.32 (.16)*	.59 (.17)**	.45 (.25)	1.12 (.32)**
Employee values <sup>2</sup>	-.07 (.07)	-.16 (.10)	-.17 (.14)	-.03 (.05)	.08 (.07)	.16 (.09)	.05 (.07)	-.001 (.10)	.02 (.13)	.09 (.10)	.18 (.14)	.07 (.18)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.16**	.16**	.14**	.14**	.13*	.12*	.13**	.11*	.06	.12*	.05	.12*
<i>DR</i> <sup>2</sup>	.10**	.13**	.10**	.13**	.13**	.11**	.10**	.07*	.04	.10**	.05	.10**
<b>Surface Test</b>												
Congruence line (X = Y)												
Slope ( <i>a</i> <sub>1</sub> )	-.46	-.59	-.57	-.24*	-.27	-.52**	-.37*	-.43*	-.46	-1.46*	-1.33	-2.26
Curvature ( <i>a</i> <sub>2</sub> )	.36**	.40*	.44	.16*	.21*	.30*	.31**	.32*	.34	.76**	.50	.74
Incongruence line (X = -Y)												
Slope ( <i>a</i> <sub>3</sub> )	-.25	-.04	.09	.08	.20	.37	-.20	-.40	-.17	.47	.68	1.36
Curvature ( <i>a</i> <sub>4</sub> )	-.29	-.86**	-1.05**	-.22**	-.29*	-.25	-.04	-.21	-.30	-.43	-.40	-1.50**
<i>F</i> for the three quadratic terms	4.16**	4.32**	3.56**	3.46**	3.21*	3.01*	3.37**	2.73*	1.29	2.94*	1.15	2.95*

*Note.* *N* = 116 supervisor-subordinate dyads. EM = empowerment. AC = affective commitment. JS = job satisfaction.  $a_1 = (b_1 + b_2)$ , where  $b_1$  is beta coefficient for supervisor values and  $b_2$  is beta coefficient for employee values.  $a_2 = (b_3 + b_4 + b_5)$ , where  $b_3$  is beta coefficient for supervisor values squared,  $b_4$  is beta coefficient for the cross-product of supervisor values and employee values and  $b_5$  is beta coefficient for employee values squared.  $a_3 = (b_1 - b_2)$ .  $a_4 = (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)$ . *b* is the unstandardized regression coefficient and *se* the standard error. Significance depends in part on standard errors, thus values of equivalent magnitude may not both be significant \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3. *Mediation through empowerment (EM)*

Variables (Conservation)	Empowerment	Affective commitment	Job satisfaction
Coefficient of the block variable (i.e., direct effect of congruence)	0.36***	0.12	0.10
Coefficient of Empowerment (yEM)	-	0.71***	0.64***
Indirect effect of congruence via Empowerment (= .36*** x yEM)	-	0.26***	0.23***
95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effect	-	(0.14, 0.38)	(0.13, 0.34)
<hr/>			
Variables (Openness to change)			
Coefficient of the block variable (i.e., direct effect of congruence)	0.34***	0.15*	0.23**
Coefficient of Empowerment (yEM)	-	0.76***	0.62***
Indirect effect of congruence via Empowerment (= .34*** x yEM)	-	0.26**	0.21**
95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effect	-	(0.11, 0.41)	(0.09, 0.34)
<hr/>			
Variables (Self-transcendence)			
Coefficient of the block variable (i.e., direct effect of congruence)	0.40***	0.19**	0.19**
Coefficient of Empowerment (yEM)	-	0.69***	0.60***
Indirect effect of congruence via Empowerment (= .40*** x yEM)	-	0.28***	0.24***
95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effect	-	(0.16, 0.40)	(0.12, 0.35)
<hr/>			
Variables (Self-enhancement)			
Coefficient of the block variable (i.e., direct effect of congruence)	0.37***	0.12	0.18*
Coefficient of Empowerment (yEM)	-	0.70***	0.64**
Indirect effect of congruence via Empowerment (= .37*** x yEM)	-	0.26***	0.22***
95% bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effect	-	(0.14, 0.38)	(0.11, 0.33)

*Note.*  $N = 116$  supervisor-subordinate dyads. EM = Empowerment. AC = affective commitment. JS = job satisfaction. 1000 bootstrap samples. 95% CIs are reported.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Figure 1. Research Model.

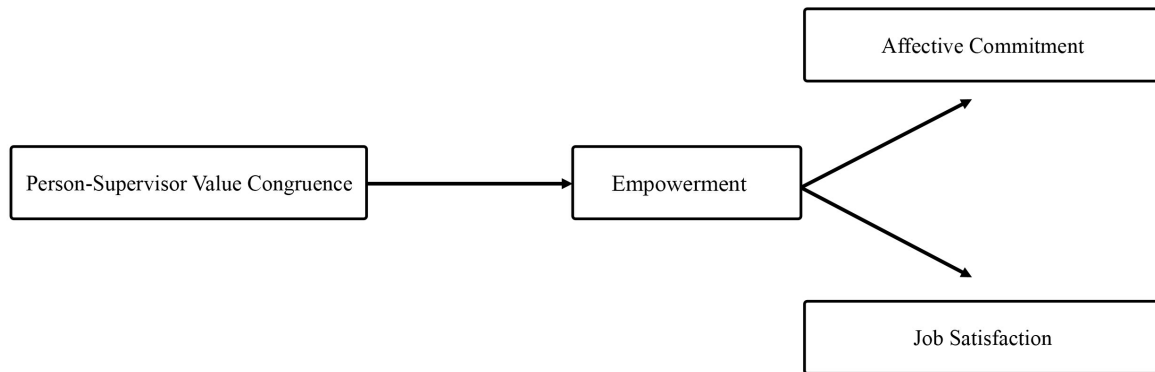


Figure 2. Example Perfect Fit.

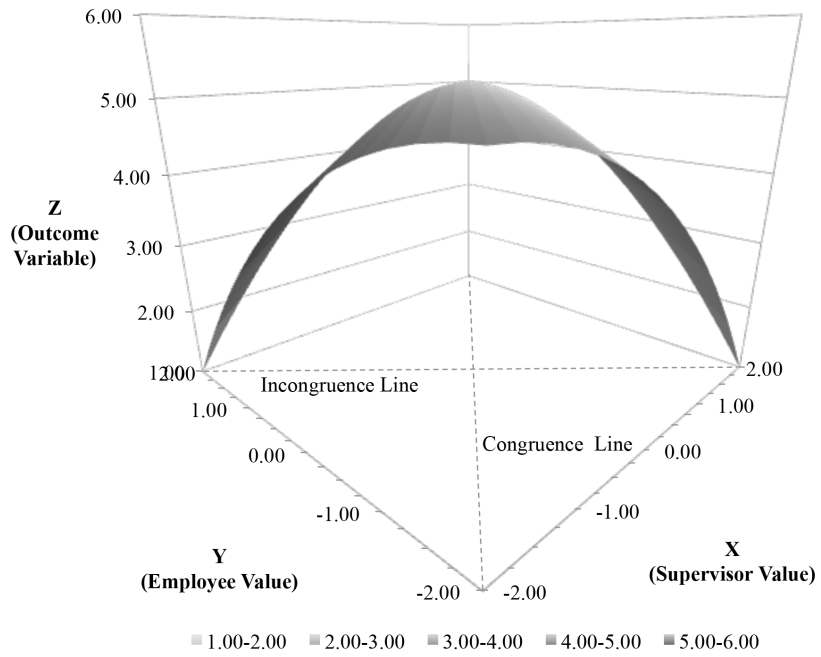


Figure 3.1. Empowerment as predicted by objective employee-supervisor value congruence.

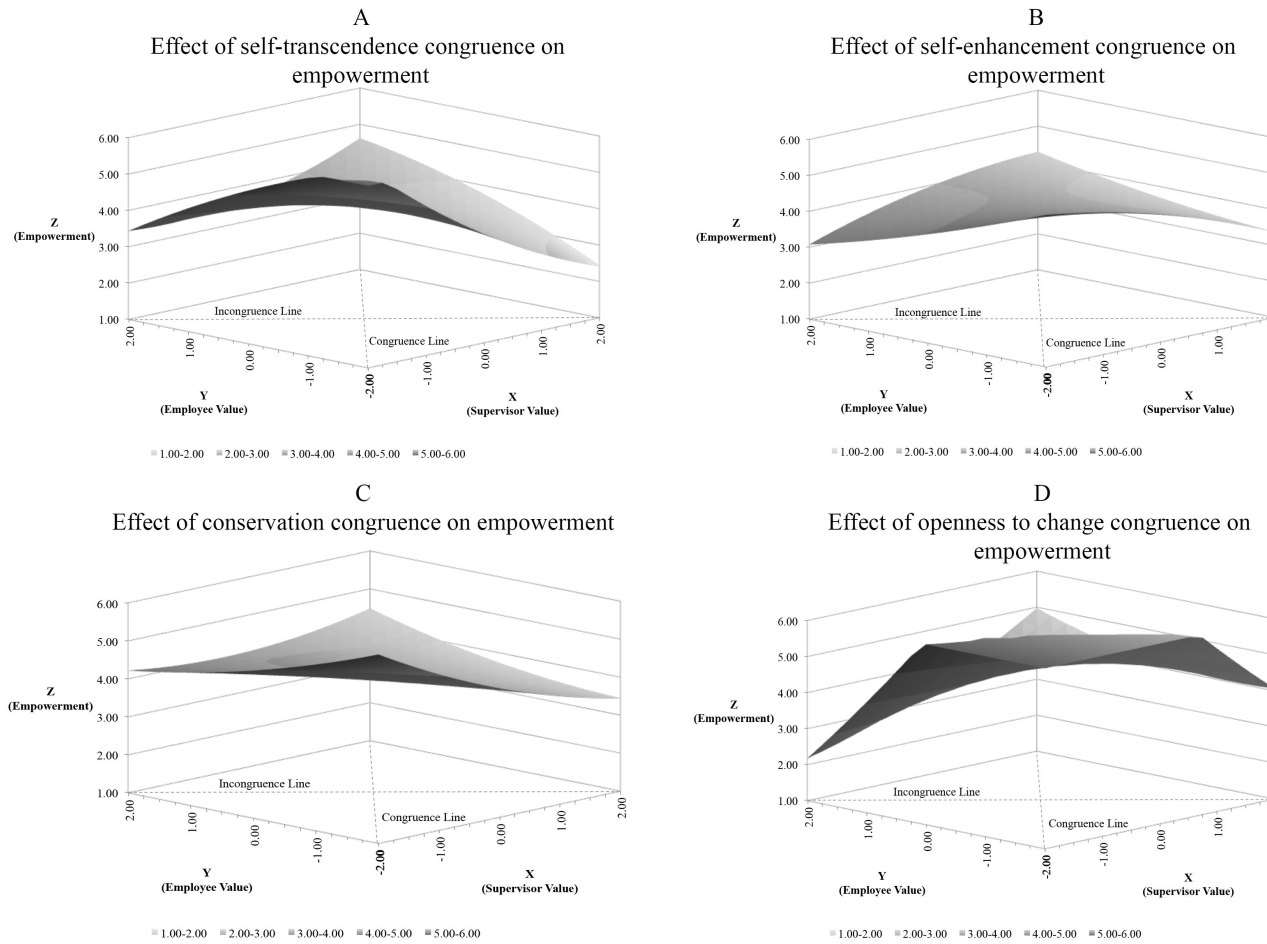
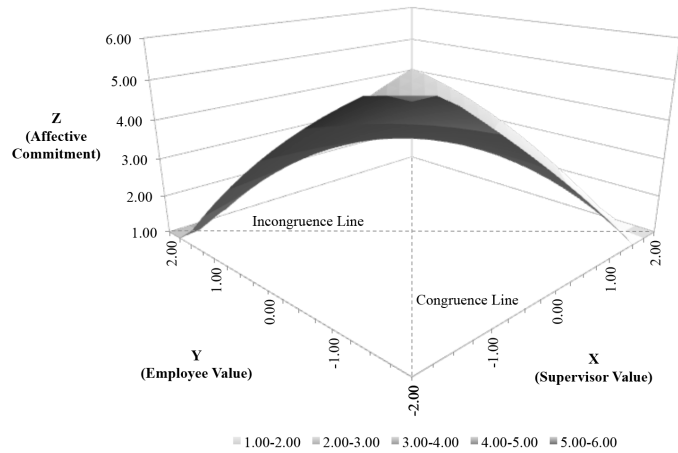
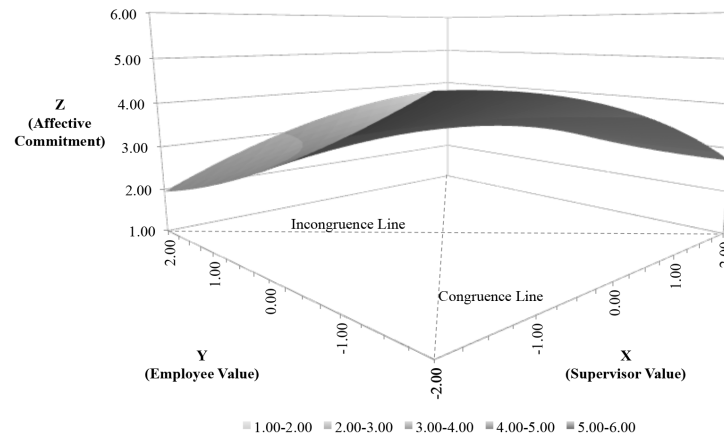


Figure 3.2. Affective commitment as predicted by objective employee-supervisor value congruence.

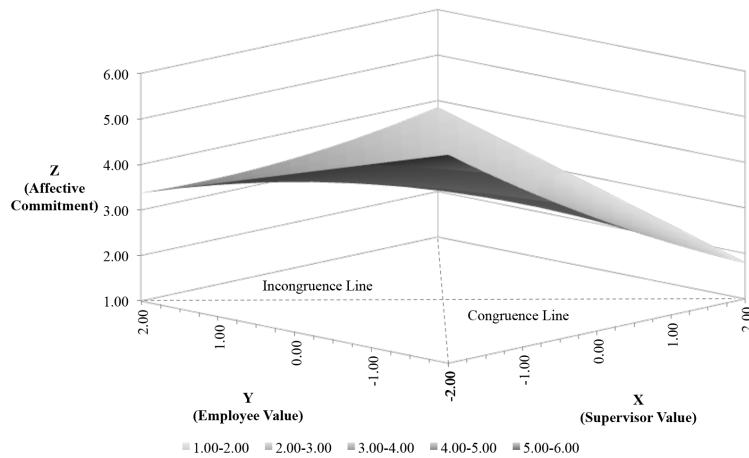
A  
Effect of self-transcendence congruence on affective commitment



B  
Effect of self-enhancement congruence on affective commitment



C  
Effect of conservation congruence on affective commitment



D  
Effect of openness to change congruence on affective commitment

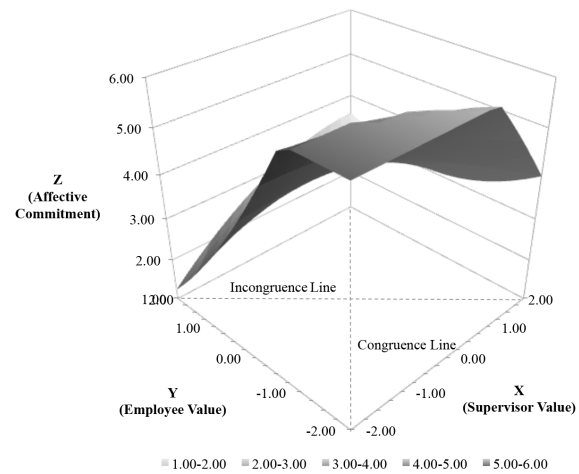
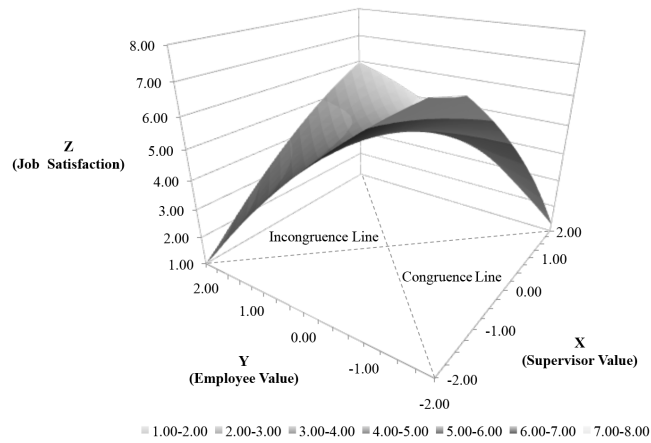
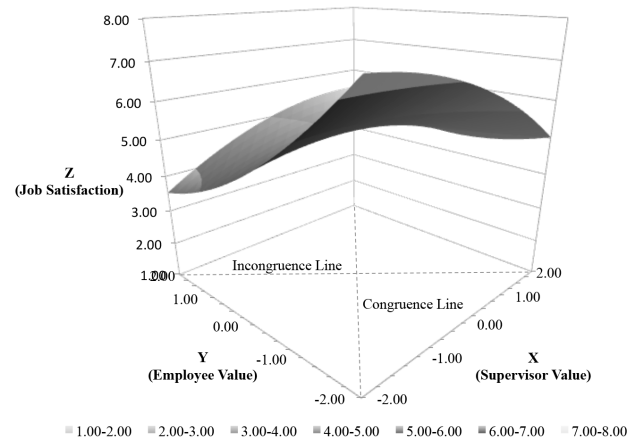


Figure 3.3. Job satisfaction as predicted by objective employee-supervisor value congruence.

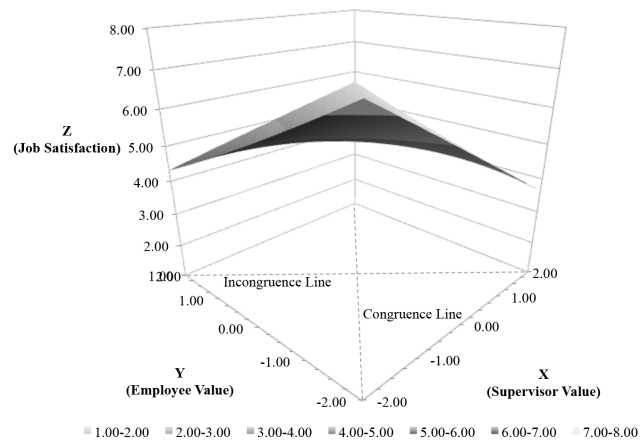
A  
Effect of self-transcendence congruence on job satisfaction



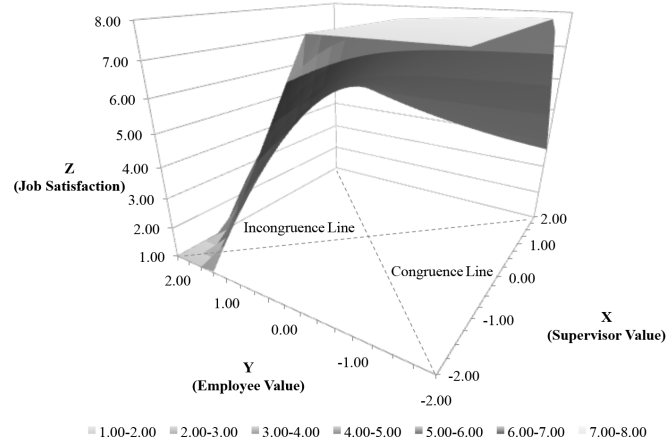
B  
Effect of self-enhancement congruence on job satisfaction



C  
Effect of conservation congruence on job satisfaction



D  
Effect of openness to change congruence on job satisfaction





**Are Two Cynics Better Than One? Toward Understanding Effects of  
Leader-Follower (In-)Congruence in Social Cynicism**

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### Abstract

Prior research suggests that leaders' social cynicism can undermine important follower outcomes such as followers' motivation and performance. However, these studies have exclusively focused on leaders' social cynicism and neglected that followers' views on the social world might also influence the leadership process. Based on theories of social beliefs and person-supervisor fit, we offer an integrative perspective and predict that it is the congruence between leaders' and followers' social cynicism that shapes leadership dynamics. Data from 116 leader-follower dyads from a broad range of organizations and industries support our model: polynomial regression and response surface analyses show significant congruence effects of leaders' and followers' social cynicism on followers' extra-role behaviors and followers' proactive work behaviors. These positive effects of congruence on follower outcomes are transmitted by leader-member exchange quality. Finally, congruence effects are stronger when leaders' and followers' social cynicism is low rather than high. Overall, our study suggests that it is the correspondence between leaders' and followers' social cynicism that influences followers' LMX, extra-role, and proactive behavior. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings for designing functional leader-follower dyads in organizations.

*Keywords:* Social cynicism, person-supervisor fit, person-environment fit, polynomial regression

Are Two Cynics Better Than One? Toward Understanding Effects of  
Leader-Follower (In-)Congruence in Social Cynicism

People have different beliefs about their social environment. For example, some see the social world as an iniquitous place full of competition, exploitation, and injustice whereas others see the world as a benevolent place with caring people, trustworthy institutions, and mutual support (Leung, Ip, & Leung, 2010). Such social beliefs affect how people think and feel, but also how they act and communicate with others, for instance in their work environment (Deng, Guan, Bond, Zhang, & Hu, 2011; Leung et al., 2002). Indeed, the notion of people's social beliefs has attracted considerable attention in the organizational literature, especially in the field of leadership. Leadership researchers have argued that the beliefs that leaders hold about human nature and the competencies and intentions of others affect how they interact with and relate to their followers (Argyris, 1957; McGregor, 1960). More specifically, findings indicate that leaders with negative and cynical views tend to mistrust the skills of others, and are posited to undermine followers' motivation and performance (Kierein & Gold, 2000; Rubin, Dierdorff, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2009). In contrast, leaders with positive beliefs tend to hold more sanguine expectations of others and are assumed to be more adept at fostering followers' aspiration and efforts (Eden, 2003; Sager, 2008).

Prior studies have provided empirical evidence for this view. They show that leaders' negative beliefs relate to important follower outcomes and go along with lower follower motivation (Eden, 1992; Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004; Vroom, 1995), reduced levels of follower performance (Natanovich & Eden, 2008), and lower leader-member exchange quality (LMX quality; Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). A concept that captures such social beliefs is social cynicism, or the extent to which a leader has a general positive (low social cynicism) or negative view (high social cynicism) of the social world (Leung et al., 2002). Social cynicism is common in today's world and many people are

skeptical about others' intentions (Peng & Zhou, 2009). It is one of the most central beliefs that guide people's reactions towards others (Leung et al., 2002) and directly affects employees' work outcomes (Bond et al., 2004; Leung et al., 2010).

Although prior studies have shown that social beliefs play an important role in the leadership process, they have one important shortcoming: they tend to consider leadership as a one-way street that largely flows from leaders to followers. However, there is a growing consensus that leadership is an interactive phenomenon that involves social exchanges between leaders and followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). As leadership researchers have pointed out, focusing on leaders' or followers' variables in separation thus results in a fragmented understanding of leadership dynamics. To achieve a more complete picture, it is important to consider the beliefs of leaders and followers in tandem (Karakowsky, DeGama, & McBey, 2012). Indeed, it is one of the central characteristics of social beliefs that they are not always aligned across people, but that people may have different views (Leung et al., 2002). Followers may or may not share their leaders' views on the social world, which is likely to influence their interactions and relationships (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006). Regrettably though, we know very little about how this alignment or misalignment in social beliefs may affect the leadership process and followers' reaction to their leader. Even though researchers have begun to examine congruence effects between leaders and followers, no study has examined the effects of leader and follower social cynicism or other social beliefs. This is a crucial shortcoming because social beliefs are one of the oldest and most central concepts in the leadership literature (Agyris, 1957; Yukl, 2010). Moreover, extant studies on congruence between leaders and followers have shown very few and very heterogeneous effects (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Hence, whether or which form of fit occurs between leaders and followers seems to strongly depend on the dimension of fit. For example, while Strauss et al. (2001) barely found support for person-

supervisor personality fit on employee performance, Zhang et al. (2012) showed that person-supervisor congruence in proactive personality relates to leader-member exchange. Other studies found *incongruence* effects – for example Glomb et al. (2005) who showed that employees' satisfaction with the leader was highest when leaders and followers were *dissimilar* in the personality dimension of control. Social cynicism should be a crucial dimension for fit because it significantly affects the dynamics between leaders and followers (Bond et al., 2004; Leung et al., 2010) and because it adds predictive power above and beyond the effects of personality in the organizational environment (Deng, 2011). Moreover, social cynicism is a particularly interesting concept as extant fit research has been restricted to variables with a positive or neutral valence. However, there is increasing evidence that leaders' and followers' actions are not always guided by positive intentions and traits, but that negative drivers also play an influential role (Jonason, Slomski & Partyka, 2012; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks & McDaniel, 2012). Hence, we know little about whether and how fit in rather dark variables may affect the dynamics between leaders and followers.

Our purpose in this study is to address this limitation in the existing literature. In doing so, we aim to extend prior research in mainly three ways. First, by building on person-supervisor (PS) fit theory, we develop and test the argument that it is not leaders' positive or negative social beliefs in isolation that shape follower outcomes, but in fact, the congruence or similarity in leaders' and followers' social beliefs. We argue that leaders and followers who share similar social beliefs, particularly social cynicism, interact more effectively and develop a better LMX relationship. If this prediction of PS fit theory is correct, it qualifies important assumptions of existing theory on leaders' beliefs by showing that leaders' positive beliefs may not always have the most positive effects on followers' outcomes but that in dealing with certain employees, cynical leaders may in fact be more effective. Second, when examining effects of leaders' and followers' social beliefs, it may to a certain degree be an

oversimplification to expect general effects of similarity as often assumed in congruence research. In fact, given that social beliefs can have a strong negative (high cynicism) and strong positive (low cynicism) valence, it seems to be important to consider whether congruence in high and low cynicism may have differential effects. Such analysis can advance PS fit theory and lead to a refined view on the dynamics in leader-follower dyads (Edwards, 2008). In this study, we contribute to PS fit theory by proposing and testing such dynamics based on polynomial regression and response surface analyses. Moreover, we add to the PS fit literature by going beyond the generally examined neutral or positive content dimensions of fit and instead extending it to social cynicism, which is typically considered as a dark and negative variable. Finally, even though previous research has shown that leaders' social beliefs relate to follower outcomes, few studies have examined why this is the case and which processes underlie this relationship. Yet, understanding such mediating links is a central step in testing and advancing organizational theory (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Thus, by drawing on the notion of leader-member exchange, which captures the social dynamics in leader-follower dyads (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), we seek to offer a deeper understanding for when and why social beliefs contribute or undermine effective leader-follower relations. Figure 1 presents the theoretical model of our study.

### **Leader-Follower Congruence in Social Cynicism**

Person-supervisor fit has become a central theoretical perspective in the leadership literature (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). It offers an effective approach to analyze the dynamics between leaders and followers (Van Vianen, 2000) and can help to understand follower attitudes and behaviors (Van Vianen, Shen, & Chuang, 2011). According to the notion of supplementary person-supervisor fit, leaders and followers seek to confirm their view on the world (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). When a leader and a follower are

congruent in how they see the social world, they share a mutual understanding, feel connected, and have similar expectations of how to act (Uhl-Bien, 2006). These shared social perceptions determine how leaders and followers make conclusions about each other and how their relationship develops (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011).

Theoretically, a cynical view on the social world contains a mistrust of social institutions and people (Leung & Bond, 2004). Leaders and followers with highly cynical beliefs are skeptical about others' ideas and motivations and have relatively low expectations of others. Thus, social cynicism contains negative social perceptions about other people and a disbelief in others' potential (Navia, 1996). Moreover, people with highly cynical beliefs see themselves in a competitive relation with others and use assertive influence tactics. High social cynicism is associated with the use of pressure tactics, repeated pleading, and upward appeal (Fu et al., 2004). In contrast, low social cynicism implies a positive perception of the social environment and the belief in benevolent and encouraging people. Low social cynics have a less judgmental view on others, are open and communicative, and believe in the good intentions of others (Deng et al., 2011). They show stronger interpersonal trust (Singelis, Hubbard, Her, & An, 2003) and focus more on interpersonal justice (Peng & Zhou, 2009).

We expect that (in-)congruence in social cynicism will affect how leaders and followers interact and whether they develop a high-quality work relationship. Specifically, prior research suggests that leaders develop LMX relationships of different quality with different employees (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX refers to a bond between leaders and followers that develops through interactive work role processes over time (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Through these role processes, leaders and followers invest resources to develop a personal relationship (Bauer & Green, 1996). High-LMX relationships are marked by high levels of trust, emotional support, frequent communication, and shared responsibility (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In such relationships, leaders tend to grant followers more

freedom, better job assignments, increased access to resources, and more opportunities to work with their leaders (Bauer & Green, 1996). In contrast, leaders and followers tend to develop relationships of lower quality when there is a lack of trust, connection, and disagreements. These low-LMX relationships are marked by low levels of emotional support, low expectations, and are generally restricted to formal exchanges (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

Congruence in social beliefs should be one important factor that helps leaders and followers to develop positive exchange relationships. According to person-supervisor fit theory, leaders and followers feel closer and are more attached to others whose attitudes are similar to their own (Byrne, 1997; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Leaders and followers seek to validate their views on the world, which can be achieved through interactions with those similar to them (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). Thus, employees feel close to similar others in their work environment that can lead to a strong bond and even a form of complicity. For example, an accomplice for a highly cynical follower may be a highly cynical leader and vice versa. Cynical leaders and followers can share their views on the social world (e.g., the belief that most people hope to be repaid after they help others) without facing negative judgment. As social cynicism implies a negative view on the social world and is one of people's core social beliefs (Leung et al., 2002), a validation in this belief by the leader or the follower, should foster a positive leader-member relationship. In contrast, if a lowly cynical follower has to work with a highly cynical leader (or a highly cynical follower with a lowly cynical leader), they do not easily sympathize with each other's views, do not achieve a validation in their beliefs, and may feel judged by the other side. Accordingly, they should be less likely to develop a high-quality LMX relationship.

Moreover, congruence in social cynicism implies that the leader and follower have the same positive or negative expectations of other people and their social environment (Li, Zhou, & Leung, 2011). This shapes how they approach others, interact with and exchange



views about them. For example, employees with low cynicism are looking for open interactions with others (Neto, 2006). Furthermore, when conflicts arise, they tend to use a collaborative conflict style (Bond et al., 2004). In contrast, highly cynical employees do not seek to frequently interact, show less effort in finding cooperative conflict resolutions, and often use assertive persuasion styles (Fu et al., 2004). Therefore, if leaders and followers are aligned in their social cynicism, they have a similar way of communicating, are more effective in their interactions, and are better equipped to predict each other's behaviors (Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989). Being able to communicate effectively should support the development of high-quality exchanges and thus of positive LMX relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In contrast, leaders and followers with different levels of social cynicism will prefer different forms of interactions. They may thus struggle to effectively communicate, are likely to encounter misunderstandings, and, as a result, may find it difficult to establish a high LMX relationship. Based on our reasoning, we predict:

*Hypothesis 1:* Congruence in social cynicism between leaders and followers will be positively related to leader-member exchange.

### **Congruence in High versus Low Social Cynicism**

Our rationale of leader-follower congruence in social cynicism is based on the premise that similarity in cynicism generally fosters positive exchange relationships between leaders and followers. This view is consistent with extant PS fit research, which posits that congruence between leaders and followers is generally beneficial (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Yet, this assumption may obscure important nuances in leader-follower dynamics, and to achieve a more complete understanding of social cynicism in leader-follower relationships, it may be important to recognize that the effects of congruence are not necessarily uniform. Specifically, high social cynicism may imply dynamics that reduce positive congruence effects whereas low social cynicism may enhance favorable dynamics of congruence.

Although cynical followers and leaders share a common view on the social world, social cynicism also implies several tendencies that may undermine the development of positive exchange relationships (Fu et al., 2004; Li et al., 2011; Singelis et al., 2003). These dynamics of cynicism may thus, to a certain extent, offset the positive effects of congruence. First, social cynicism implies a general level of distrust in other's intentions. However, according to LMX theory, trust in other's intentions is a central prerequisite of high-quality exchange relationships that involve a willingness to be vulnerable toward the other party (Bauer & Green, 1996). A trustworthy leader-follower relationship is central for a high-quality interactive exchange relationship as positive LMX develops through confidence in each other (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), openness for each other's ideas (Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2008), and mutual obligation (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009). Leaders and followers in a high LMX relationship refrain from constantly monitoring each other but are willing to take personal risks for the other party, share valuable resources and information, and support each other's goals (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Second, social cynics tend to be skeptical of others skills, competences, and motivation. They expect others to lack drive and proactive motivation (Kierein & Gold, 2000; Rubin et al., 2009). Such low expectations should also impede with the development of positive social exchanges. In a role-making process, leaders form high LMX relationships based on expectations of high followers' skills and motivations, and are likely to develop positive exchanges if they anticipate high follower performance (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Leaders who anticipate that their followers are committed and able to fulfill their tasks successfully assign important tasks and resources to their followers and offer additional support. Indeed, high leader expectations may serve as self-fulfilling prophecies that have been shown to positively relate to LMX (McNatt & Judge, 2004; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). In summary, we predict:

*Hypothesis 2:* LMX will be higher when leaders and followers are aligned at low levels of social cynicism than when they are aligned at high levels of social cynicism.

### **Linking Social Cynicism, Leader-Member Exchange, and Followers' Reactions**

The relationship quality between leaders and followers has a strong impact on followers' motivation and performance (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Prior research has consistently shown that a high-quality LMX relationship between leaders and followers is positively associated with extra-role performance (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007) and proactive behavior (Kim, Liu, & Diefendorff, 2015). As noted earlier, in a high-quality LMX relationship, followers receive better supervisor support and experience a leader who is reliable and trustworthy. Thus, followers in a high-LMX relationship have a more positive perception of their leader and tend to be more satisfied with their leader than employees in a low-LMX relationship, where guidance and support are scarce (Ariani, 2012). Furthermore, followers in a high-LMX relationship experience greater access to resources and more leeway (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This fosters followers' motivations and encourages them to engage in extra-role and proactive behaviors (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Indeed, followers in a high-LMX relationship receive more responsibility and decision influence, which fosters followers self-directed effort for the organization (Bauer & Green, 1996; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Our reasoning suggests that leader-follower congruence in social cynicism will positively relate to LMX (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Moreover, LMX has been linked to positive employee behaviors (e.g., extra-role and proactive behavior; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ilies et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2015). Integrating these notions suggests a mediation effect. Specifically, we hypothesize that LMX quality links leader-follower congruence in social cynicism and followers' behavior. We thus predict:

*Hypothesis 3:* Leader-follower congruence in social cynicism will indirectly relate to

followers' (a) extra-role behavior and (b) proactive behavior. These relationships will be mediated through LMX.

## Method

### Participants and Procedures

To reach a heterogeneous sample of the working population, we contacted the human resource (HR) departments of multiple companies to invite them to take part in this study. We invited in total 58 companies, which were randomly chosen from the authors' professional networks. The companies were located in Germany and represented various industrial and occupational backgrounds. The companies' HR departments invited in total 301 random German leader-follower dyads to participate. Leaders and followers received the invitation and questionnaire separately by mail and were requested to send it back in an enclosed, pre-stamped envelope. In a cover letter, participants were informed that this survey was purely conducted for research purposes and that participation was voluntary and anonymous.

We received responses from 116 leader-follower dyads for a response rate of 39%. Participants worked in various industries with the most frequent ones being media (18%), services (15%), and trade (13%). The average age of the participating leaders was 41.92 years ( $SD = 9.57$ ) and 60.3% of them were male. They had on average 11.01 years of leadership experience ( $SD = 9.31$ ) and were responsible for approximately 13.70 followers ( $SD = 18.55$ ). Among the followers, 38.8% were male and followers' average age was 31.25 years ( $SD = 8.41$ ). On average, they had been working with their supervisor for 4.6 years ( $SD = 5.8$ ) and with their organization for 5.83 years ( $SD = 7.14$ ).

### Measures

**Leaders' and followers' social cynicism.** To measure social cynicism we used the 18-item scale by Leung et al. (2002) in the German version by Bierbrauer and Klinger

(2000). Leaders and followers rated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “People will stop working hard after they secure a comfortable life” and “Most people hope to be repaid after they help others (1 = *strongly disbelieve* to 5 = *strongly believe*). The reliabilities for the leader- and follower-rated scales were  $\alpha = .83$  and  $\alpha = .87$ , respectively.

**Leader-member exchange.** We measured followers’ perceptions of LMX with the 7-item LMX scale by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) in the German version by Schyns (2002). Example items are: “How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?” and “How well does your leader recognize your potential?” (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *fully*;  $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Follower extra-role behavior.** We measured followers’ extra-role behavior with the 3-item scale from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass & Avolio, 1995; German version by Felfe & Goihl, 2014). Example items are “My supervisor gets others to do more than they are expected to do” and “My supervisor increases my willingness to try harder” (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Follower proactive behavior.** We assessed followers’ proactive behavior with the 7-item scale by Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, and Tag (1997), which has been widely applied in previous research (Crant, 2000; Hahn, Frese, Binnewies, & Schmitt, 2012). We used the original German items. Example items are “I take initiative immediately, even when others don’t” and “I actively attack problems” (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Controls.** We also conducted our analyses including several control variables that may influence the links between the variable of our model. Specifically, we controlled for participants’ industry as employees’ extra-role behavior, proactive behavior, and LMX can vary across industries (Zhong, Wayne & Liden, 2015). We followed the dummy variable approach as described by Aiken and West (1991) to code participants’ industry. Moreover, we controlled for leaders’ and followers’ Big Five traits to examine whether the effects of social cynicism congruence relate to the proposed outcomes over and above effects of leader

and follower personality. We measured leaders' and followers' personality with 20 items by Rammstedt and Jon (2005). Example items are "I do a thorough job (conscientiousness)", "I don't talk a lot (R) (extraversion)", "I get irritated easily (neuroticism)", "I am generally trusting (agreeableness)" and "I have an active imagination (openness to change)" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha$  for leader extraversion = .76;  $\alpha$  for follower extraversion = .75;  $\alpha$  for leader neuroticism = .68;  $\alpha$  for follower neuroticism = .64;  $\alpha$  for leader openness to experiences = .67;  $\alpha$  for follower openness to experiences = .76;  $\alpha$  for leader agreeableness = .61;  $\alpha$  for follower agreeableness = .74;  $\alpha$  for leader conscientiousness = .65;  $\alpha$  for follower conscientiousness = .68).

Importantly, results for the analyses including and excluding control variables were essentially identical. That is, with and without controls the congruence effects are significant (Hypotheses 1 and 2) and also the path coefficients for the proposed mediation effect remained stable (Hypothesis 3). As the tables including all control variables are very long (additional 17 variables), in the results section we report the results excluding controls. The results including controls are available from the first author.

### **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses to examine the distinctiveness between the variables rated by the followers (i.e., follower social cynicism, LMX, extra-role behavior, and proactive behavior). The hypothesized four-factor model showed an adequate fit with the data ( $\chi^2 = 650.61$ ,  $df = 511$ ; CFI = .922; RMSEA = .049). We compared this model to six alternative models—a one-factor model that combined all variables into one factor, a two-factor model that combined the mediator and the two outcomes into one factor, a three-factor model that combined social cynicism and LMX into one factor, a three-factor model that combined LMX and extra-role behavior into one factor, a three-factor model that combined LMX and proactive behavior into one factor, and a final three-factor model that combined the

two outcome variables into one factor, while the remaining scales in each case built individual factors. Results showed that the four-factor model fit the data significantly better than all alternative models. The best fitting alternative model was the three-factor model that combined LMX and extra-role behavior ( $\chi^2 = 683.27$ ,  $df = 514$ ; CFI = .906; RMSEA = .054;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 32.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### **Polynomial Regression with Response Surface Analysis**

To test our hypotheses, we applied polynomial regression with response surface analysis, as described by Edwards (1993). Polynomial regression is being used with increasing frequency because it allows more fine-grained insights into congruence effects than difference scores and, perhaps most importantly, because of statistical problems inherent in difference score indices (Edwards, 1993; see also Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). For example, difference scores confound the effects of person and environment, they reduce fundamentally three-dimensional fit relationships into two dimensions, and they have generally lower reliability than the components used to calculate them. In contrast, polynomial regression with response surface analysis indicates the degree to which each predictor contributes to variance in an outcome, it avoids difficulties with extenuated reliability inherent in the subtraction of variables, and it allows for response surface analysis that offers nuanced insights into the joint effects of two predictor variables (Edwards, 2002). Polynomial regression analysis is based on the equation:

$$Z = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2 + e. \quad (1)$$

X represents leader social cynicism, Y indicates follower social cynicism, and Z represents the dependent variable (e.g., proactive behavior). We constructed the response surface plots and used the surface indicators  $a_1 - a_4$  to conduct the associated significance tests (Edwards, 2002). The surface indicators  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  represent the slope and curvature of the congruence line ( $X = Y$ ) and the surface indicators  $a_3$  and  $a_4$  represent the slope and

curvature of the incongruence line ( $X = -Y$ ). Mathematically,  $a_1$  is the sum of  $b_1$  and  $b_2$  from the polynomial regression equation, where  $b_1$  is the regression coefficient for leader cynicism and  $b_2$  is the regression coefficient for follower cynicism. Additionally,  $a_2$  is the sum of  $b_3$ ,  $b_4$  and  $b_5$ , where  $b_3$  is the regression coefficient for leader cynicism squared,  $b_4$  is the regression coefficient for the product of leader cynicism and follower cynicism, and  $b_5$  is the regression coefficient for follower cynicism squared. Finally,  $a_3$  is calculated by subtracting  $b_2$  from  $b_1$  and  $a_4$  is calculated by subtracting  $b_4$  from  $b_3$  plus adding  $b_5$ . Following the recommendation by Edwards (1994), we mean-centered the predictor variables prior to the analyses.

### Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, reliability scores, and inter-correlations of all variables. To test Hypothesis 1, we analyzed whether congruence in leader and follower social cynicism relates positively to LMX. To this end and in line with Edwards (1994), we examined whether the three second-order polynomial terms (the quadratic term of leader social cynicism, the quadratic term of follower social cynicism, and the product of leader and follower social cynicism) jointly explained a significant amount of variance in LMX when entered into the regression equation. As shown in Table 2, this was the case ( $\Delta R^2 = .08$ ;  $F = 3.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ). We then explored the response surface along the incongruence line. As shown in Table 3, results showed a significant downward curvature ( $a_4 = -.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These two findings indicate a significant congruence effect of leader and follower social cynicism (Edwards, 1994). Panel A of Figure 2 illustrates these results. It shows that along the incongruence line, the surface followed an inverted U-shaped form. Taken together, these results support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that LMX quality is higher when leaders and followers are aligned at low levels of social cynicism rather than at high levels of cynicism. To test this hypothesis, we need to consider the slope along the congruence line. Consistent with our



hypothesis, results revealed a negative and significant slope along the congruence line ( $a_1 = -.84, p < .001$ ; see Table 3). Panel A of Figure 2 illustrates this result: the response surface shows that LMX is lower in the rear corner (where leader and follower social cynicism is high) than in the front corner (where leader and follower social cynicism is low).

Before testing the mediation proposed in Hypothesis 3, we examined the joint relationships of leader and follower social cynicism with the two outcome variables in our model—i.e., with extra-role behavior and proactive behavior. Although several scholars have argued that a significant relationship between independent and outcome variables is not a necessary condition for mediation (MacKinnon et al., 2002), examining these total effects may bolster the confidence in a proposed mediation model. For extra-role performance and proactive behavior, the three second-order polynomial terms were jointly significant; (two-tailed testing;  $\Delta R^2$  ranged from .07 to .12;  $F$  ranged from 3.19 to 5.37,  $p < .05$ ). As can be seen in Panels B, and C of Figure 2 and in line with the results that we found for LMX, the surfaces along the incongruence lines all showed downward curvatures ( $a_4$  ranged from -.72 to -1.27; all  $p < .01$ ; see Table 3). Furthermore, and also in line with the results that we found for LMX, extra-role behavior and proactive behavior were significantly lower when leaders and followers were aligned at high levels of social cynicism, rather than at low levels ( $a_1$  ranged from -.34 to -.74; all  $p < .01$ ).

To test the proposed mediating effect that leader-follower congruence in social cynicism indirectly relates to follower extra-role and proactive behavior through LMX (Hypotheses 3 a-b), we applied the block variable approach (Cable & Edwards, 2004). This approach has the advantage that it translates the five terms of a polynomial regression (i.e., for  $X$ ,  $Y$ ,  $X^2$ ,  $XY$  and  $Y^2$ ) into a single estimate that represents the path coefficients in a mediation model. It thereby helps to analyze the direct and indirect effects of a mediating model (Zhang et al., 2012). Specifically, a block variable is a weighted linear composite of

regression coefficients multiplied with respective predictors. For the proposed PS fit effects, the block variable equals  $b_{Y1}X + b_{Y2}Y + b_{Y3}X^2 + b_{Y4}XY + b_{Y5}Y^2$ . The block variables then replace the five quadratic terms in Equation 1 and the equation is re-estimated. The resulting standardized regression coefficients on the block variables provide estimates for the proposed paths. Moreover, we also ran another regression model (model 2 in Table 2), in which we added LMX to the initial polynomial regression to further analyze the effects of LMX after controlling for the effects of congruence in social cynicism.

Using the block variable approach, we tested whether leaders' and followers' social cynicism has a joint relationship with LMX and found that this relationship was positive and significant ( $\beta = .48, p < .001$ ). For calculating the paths between LMX and the outcomes, we regressed extra-role behavior and proactive behavior on LMX while controlling for the terms representing leaders' and followers' social cynicism (i.e.,  $X, Y, X^2, XY, Y^2$ ; Edwards & Cable, 2009). Results indicate that these paths were significant for both outcomes (extra-role behavior:  $\beta = .70, p < .001$  and proactive behavior:  $\beta = .28, p < .01$ ). By multiplying these path coefficients for the dependent variables with the coefficient representing the path between leader-follower cynicism and LMX, we received estimates for the indirect effects. Confidence intervals based on 1,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples indicate that LMX mediated the joint relationship of leader-follower cynicism with extra-role behavior ( $\beta = .33$ ; 95% CI = [.18 to .49]) and proactive behavior ( $\beta = .13$ ; 95% CI = [.03 to .23]). These results provide support for Hypotheses 3 a-b.

### **Supplemental Analysis**

As a supplemental analysis, we evaluated whether leader and follower personality traits (Big Five) also form congruence effects with LMX, extra-role behavior, and proactive behavior. This analysis is important because it allows us to test whether the proposed congruence effects between leaders and employees are specific to social cynicism or whether

they represent a general principle of leader and follower congruence in trait-like variables. To the best of our knowledge, our paper is the first to provide a test of congruence effects on both specific (social cynicism) and general (Big Five) congruence effects.

The results did not show systematic congruence effects for the Big Five—there were no congruence or incongruence effects for 12 out of the 15 possible links between the Big Five and the three mediator and outcome variables. We only found a weak congruence effect for the personality trait of openness to experiences and the outcome of proactive behavior ( $a_4 = -.41, p < .05$ ; albeit  $\Delta R^2$  for the three quadratic terms was not significant), and for agreeableness with the outcome extra-role behavior ( $a_4 = -.52, p < .05$ ). Furthermore, results showed an *incongruence* effect for the personality trait of conscientiousness and the outcome of proactive behavior ( $a_4 = .83, p < .001$ ; see Table 4).

### Discussion

It is a central tenet in the leadership literature that leaders' social beliefs affect the dynamics between leaders and followers, and thus followers' behaviors (Argyris, 1957; McGregor, 1960; Sager, 2008). Though, empirical studies have provided consistent support for this view (Natanovich & Eden, 2008; Leung et al., 2010), this line of research has largely focused on leaders' perceptions of the social world, and neglected the impact of followers' social beliefs. This is an important shortcoming as leadership is socially constructed and influenced through interactions between leaders and followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). By developing and testing a model that examines the joint effects of leaders' and followers' social cynicism, the present study sought to address this limitation and has several theoretical implications.

First, one of the central factors that have long been discussed in the leadership literature is the set of expectations and beliefs that leaders have about their followers (Argyris, 1957; Eden, 1992; McGregor, 1960). For example, McGregor (1960) noted, that “behind

every managerial decision or action are assumptions about human nature and human behavior” (p. 43). In line with this view, studies have shown that leaders’ positive beliefs about their followers can drive followers’ motivation and performance, whereas negative beliefs will diminish followers’ efforts (Rubin, 2009; Vroom, 1995). Our study contributes to a better understanding in this important domain by showing that it is not leaders’ beliefs per se that relate to followers’ outcomes. This finding is important because it qualifies important assumptions of traditional top-down leadership models – that low leader social cynicism will result in positive effects on employees (Fu et al., 2004; Singelis et al., 2003). In contrast, our model suggests that indeed two cynics might be better than one, and that socially cynical leaders may be better positioned to work with cynical employees than leaders with low cynicism. Hence, this study offers an important extension to one of the most traditional accounts in the leadership literature, theories of leaders’ social beliefs, by showing that follower beliefs also need to be taken into account. This will result in more complete and more accurate understanding of important leader-follower dynamics.

Second, to date, studies on person-supervisor fit that use polynomial regression analysis have largely yielded inconsistent results. As Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) concluded in their meta-analysis “studies generally show little support for supplementary fit on personality or values” (p. 314). In line with this view, we found hardly any congruence effects for leaders’ and followers’ Big Five personality traits on employee outcomes. However, our results show that person-supervisor congruence in social cynicism relates to LMX, extra-role behavior, and proactive behavior even after controlling for personality. Thus, congruence in social cynicism is linked to employee outcomes over and above the broad effects of Big Five personality traits. This result is important because it shows that PS fit congruence effects may exist on some content dimensions but not on others, and that it is crucial to identify the specific dimensions that support congruence effects. Moreover, this

finding is in line with prior studies that barely found any congruence effects on Big Five traits (e.g., Strauss et al., 2001), but that showed congruence effects on leaders' and followers' proactive personality (Zhang et al., 2012), and incongruence effects on the personality trait of control (Glomb et al., 2005). One potential explanation that may account for whether or not congruence effects occur may be found in the differentiation between broad and narrow personality traits (Bergner, 2010). Indeed, narrow personality traits can be a better predictor of work-related outcomes than broad personality traits such as the Big Five. For example, prior research has found a stronger link between narrow personality traits and employees' extra-role performance than between the Big Five and employee performance (e.g. Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki & Cortina, 2006; Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). Moreover, studies suggest that narrow personality traits predict work outcomes even when controlling for the Big Five (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). This is because narrow traits are more precise, more comprehensible, and better aligned with narrow criteria, while broad personality traits conceal important information on the facet level (Kausel & Slaughter 2010). Indeed, proactive personality, the personality dimension of control, and social cynicism are all rather narrow concepts (compared to the Big Five), which may explain why studies indicate congruence effects on these dimensions. Of course, the focus on narrow versus broad personality traits is speculative at the moment. However, we believe that it can stimulate future research and make an important contribution to our understanding of PS fit. Indeed, testing the proposed distinction between narrow and broad traits can be a fruitful avenue for future studies, and may provide an insightful and systematic extension to PS fit theory.

Third, our study also contributes to the general knowledge of person-environment fit (PE fit). As Edwards (2008) lamented, most studies mainly focus on congruence or incongruence but neglect the fact that congruence at high levels may have different effects than congruence at low levels. Finding such differential effects is important for developing

PE fit theory because up to now, PE fit theories claim that “person and environment match regardless of their absolute levels, which in turn implies that the same outcome results regardless of whether the person and environment are low or high in absolute terms” (Edwards, 2008, p. 216). Our results show that congruence effects in social cynicism are not equally positive but form differential relationships depending on leaders’ and followers’ level of social cynicism. Specifically, congruence in social cynicism has a considerably stronger relationship with LMX when leaders and followers are low than when they are high in cynicism. Even though congruence in social beliefs can facilitate high-quality relationships between leaders and followers, the characteristics of social cynicism—e.g., distrust in other’s abilities and intentions (Fu et al., 2004; Singelis et al., 2003)—seem to partly offset the positive dynamics of congruence. Thus, social cynicism seems to set a limit for the LMX quality that leaders and followers can develop. Our study thus supports the important point that congruence research can benefit from paying more attention to asymmetric congruence or incongruence effects in order to accurately understand the person-supervisor relationship.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The present study also has some limitations. First, even though we used data from different sources (both leaders and followers), our research design is cross-sectional and thus does not allow testing for causality. However, theoretical considerations and past studies support the assumption that social beliefs largely shape subsequent behaviors (McGregor, 1960; Leung et al., 2010). Nevertheless, it would be desirable for future research to test the causal flow implied in our model with a longitudinal or experimental design.

Second, as our study was conducted in a western society (Germany), we do not know to what extent our results generalize to countries with different cultural characteristics. For instance, densely populated countries such as China and India have higher levels of power distance. As Zhang et al. (2012) pointed out, power distance may cause employees to pay

closer attention to their leaders' characteristics, which in turn may lead to stronger congruence effects. Indeed, it might be a promising route for future research to test congruence effects between leaders and followers across different cultures.

Third, in this study, we have focused on actual congruence between leader and follower social cynicism. That is, we based our analyses on leaders' and followers' ratings of social cynicism. Some researchers have argued that it is largely the actual congruence that is relevant, whereas other scholars suggest that subjective congruence should also be considered (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). It would thus be interesting for future research to integrate actual and subjective congruence in social cynicism in one model to examine the relative importance of both types of congruence.

Fourth, since we measured extra-role behavior with reference to the leader, one may argue that this variable conceptually overlaps with LMX. However, besides showing in a confirmatory factor analysis that these concepts are empirically distinct, our findings are also in line with former research that has analyzed LMX and extra-role behaviors as separate variables. For example, according to several studies, followers in a high LMX relationship go beyond required in-role behavior and engage in extra-role behavior in order to continue a balanced social exchange (Wayne et al., 2002; Liden et al., 1997; Settoon et al., 2003). Thus, despite their relatively high correlation, previous conceptual and empirical work suggests that LMX and extra-role behaviors can be seen as distinct concepts.

Fifth, the reliabilities of some of our Big Five measures were rather low. Even though similar reliabilities have been found in earlier research (e.g., Anderson, Flynn & Spataro, 2008; Celic & Oral, 2016; Costa & McCrae, 1991), one may wonder whether low reliabilities may be one reason for why we did not find systematic congruence effects for the personality variables. However, there are some indicators that suggest that the reliabilities were not the key drivers for our findings. For example, for leader and follower extraversion, the

reliabilities were rather high with  $\alpha = .76$  and  $.75$ , respectively. Yet, we still did not find congruence effects for this personality trait. Of course, we cannot rule out that there may have been congruence effects on other personality dimensions if the reliabilities had been higher. But the finding for extraversion is in line with our reasoning that there may not be a general effect of congruence in trait-like variables.

### **Practical Implications**

Our findings also have important practical implications. As beliefs like social cynicism are rather stable and thus difficult to change, the primary implication of this research relates to personnel selection. Based on the results of former studies organizations often invest time and resources into assessing employees' value congruence when making selection and promotion decisions. Our findings suggest that organizations should not only focus on similar values, but also on low social cynicism. Leaders with low social cynicism seem to be best positioned to establish high LMX relationships with their followers and thus have the potential to foster favorable attitudes and work behaviors (Deng et al., 2011). However, our results also add an important consideration: leaders seem to primarily benefit from low social cynicism if followers share their positive view on the social world. This suggests that it is not sufficient to select and promote only leaders with low social cynicism but to extend this practice to followers as well. Across several employee outcomes, our results show the best outcomes when leaders' *and* followers' social cynicism is low.

In theory, it may also be advisable that organizations should match leaders and followers based on their social beliefs. In practice, however, it may be difficult to avoid that leaders and followers with different levels of social cynicism need to work together, for example, because they possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for a certain project or task. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to inform leaders about the crucial role of social cynicism in the work environment, and about how congruence can relate to followers'



outcomes. The awareness of social cynicism on an individual level may foster self-reflection of one's own behavior and interactions (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Awareness on an organizational level may promote a positive work culture. Strong cultures in organizations can guide positive leader behaviors and may make it less likely that leaders will actually express their cynical views (Schein, 1992).

Finally, if leaders realize that their followers do not share similar social views, our results suggest that measures targeted at LMX may prove beneficial. Indeed, as Edwards and Cable (2009) outlined, initiatives that address the mediating mechanisms can effectively compensate a lack of person-environment fit. For example, as a high quality LMX relationship implies high levels of mutual trust, leaders should invest in initiatives that directly enhance followers' trust (Brower et al., 2009). Such initiatives could focus on explanations of manager and organizational decisions, transfer of resources and responsibility to followers, or fair and transparent evaluation processes (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Furthermore, given that communication is a crucial element of LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), leaders could achieve some of the benefits of social cynicism congruence by focusing on frequent, honest, and consistent conversations. Past research suggests that communication skills can be effectively enhanced through leadership trainings (Frese & Beimeel, 2006). Clearly, measures targeted at selection and training cost time and resources. However, as our results suggest, such investments may pay off by creating better employee performance.

## **Conclusion**

Integrating the literatures on social beliefs and PS fit, our study sought to contribute toward a more complete understanding of important dynamics between leaders and followers. The results suggest that going beyond the predominant focus on leaders' social beliefs and also incorporating followers' perspectives can provide important insights into when and why leaders are effective. We hope that our results will trigger further studies into the topics of

social beliefs and PS fit with meaningful contributions to leadership theory and organizational practice.

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Table 1. *Descriptive, Correlations, and Reliabilities Among Study Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Leader extraversion	3.66	0.86	(.76)														
2. Follower extraversion	3.69	0.83	-.11	(.75)													
3. Leader neuroticism	2.47	0.72	-.30**	.04	(.68)												
4. Follower neuroticism	2.78	1.01	-.12	-.25**	.05	(.64)											
5. Leader openness to experiences	3.77	0.69	.37**	.06	-.27**	-.05	(.67)										
6. Follower openness to experiences	3.72	0.74	-.05	.39**	-.07	.00	.22*	(.76)									
7. Leader agreeableness	2.77	0.78	.18	-.08	-.12	-.03	.19*	.02	(.61)								
8. Follower agreeableness	2.83	0.91	.04	-.10	.05	-.05	-.01	-.08	-.01	(.74)							
9. Leader conscientiousness	4.20	0.63	.24**	.04	-.27**	-.13	.32**	.14	.02	.07	(.65)						
10. Follower conscientiousness	3.97	0.65	-.08	.23*	-.12	-.28**	.08	.20*	.09	-.09	.17	(.68)					
11. Leader social cynicism	2.92	0.60	-.28**	.05	.08	.10	-.02	.19*	-.39**	-.05	-.08	.05	(.83)				
12. Follower social cynicism	3.05	0.64	-.03	-.09	.06	.18	.16	-.09	-.10	-.17	-.12	-.03	.36**	(.87)			
13. LMX	3.69	0.83	.00	-.02	-.03	-.25**	-.01	-.09	.22*	.05	.08	.14	-.32**	-.32**	(.90)		
14. Follower extra-role behavior	3.35	0.97	.19*	-.07	-.03	-.19*	-.03	-.14	.13	.11	.09	.11	-.24*	-.30**	.73**	(.90)	
15. Follower proactive behavior	3.95	0.65	.02	.34**	.03	-.33**	.02	.39**	.08	.00	.19*	.35**	-.03	-.29**	.37**	.29**	(.87)

Note. *N* = 116 leader-follower dyads. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

Table 2. *Polynomial Regression Results for Leader-Follower Congruence in Social Cynicism*

Variable	<i>LMX</i> <i>B (SE)</i>	Extra-role behavior		Proactive behavior	
		<i>Model 1</i> <i>B (SE)</i>	<i>Model 2</i> <i>B (SE)</i>	<i>Model 1</i> <i>B (SE)</i>	<i>Model 2</i> <i>B (SE)</i>
Constant	3.80 (.09) <sup>***</sup>	3.46 (.11) <sup>***</sup>	0.36 (.33)	4.01 (.07) <sup>***</sup>	3.18 (.29) <sup>***</sup>
Leader social cynicism	-.65 (.16) <sup>***</sup>	-.49 (.19) <sup>*</sup>	.04 (.15)	-.17 (.13)	-.03 (.13)
Follower social cynicism	-.20 (.13)	-.24 (.15)	-.08 (.11)	-.17 (.10)	-.13 (.10)
Leader social cynicism <sup>2</sup>	-.49 (.15) <sup>**</sup>	-.38 (.18) <sup>*</sup>	.03 (.14)	-.41 (.12) <sup>**</sup>	-.30 (.12) <sup>*</sup>
Leader social cynicism x follower social cynicism	.37 (.19)	.67 (.22) <sup>**</sup>	.37 (.17) <sup>*</sup>	.39 (.15) <sup>**</sup>	.31 (.15) <sup>*</sup>
Follower social cynicism <sup>2</sup>	-.05 (.14)	-.23 (.17)	-.19 (.12)	.08 (.11)	.09 (.11)
<i>LMX</i>			.82 (.08) <sup>***</sup>		.22 (.07) <sup>**</sup>
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.23 <sup>***</sup>	.18 <sup>**</sup>	.56 <sup>***</sup>	.21 <sup>***</sup>	.27 <sup>***</sup>
$\Delta R^2$			.38 <sup>***</sup>		.06 <sup>**</sup>
$\Delta R^2$ for the three quadratic terms	.08 <sup>*</sup>	.07 <sup>*</sup>		.12 <sup>**</sup>	

Note. *N* = 116. \* *p* < .05; \*\* *p* < .01; \*\*\* *p* < .001, two-tailed. *B* is the unstandardized regression coefficient and *SE* the standard error.

Table 3. *Surface Values for Leader-Follower Congruence in Social Cynicism*

Variable	LMX	Extra-role behavior	Proactive behavior
Congruence line ( $X = Y$ )			
Slope ( $a_1$ )	-.84 <sup>***</sup>	-.74 <sup>***</sup>	-.34 <sup>**</sup>
Curvature ( $a_2$ )	-.18	.06	.07
Incongruence line ( $X = -Y$ )			
Slope ( $a_3$ )	-.45 <sup>*</sup>	-.25	.00
Curvature ( $a_4$ )	-.91 <sup>**</sup>	-1.27 <sup>***</sup>	-.72 <sup>**</sup>

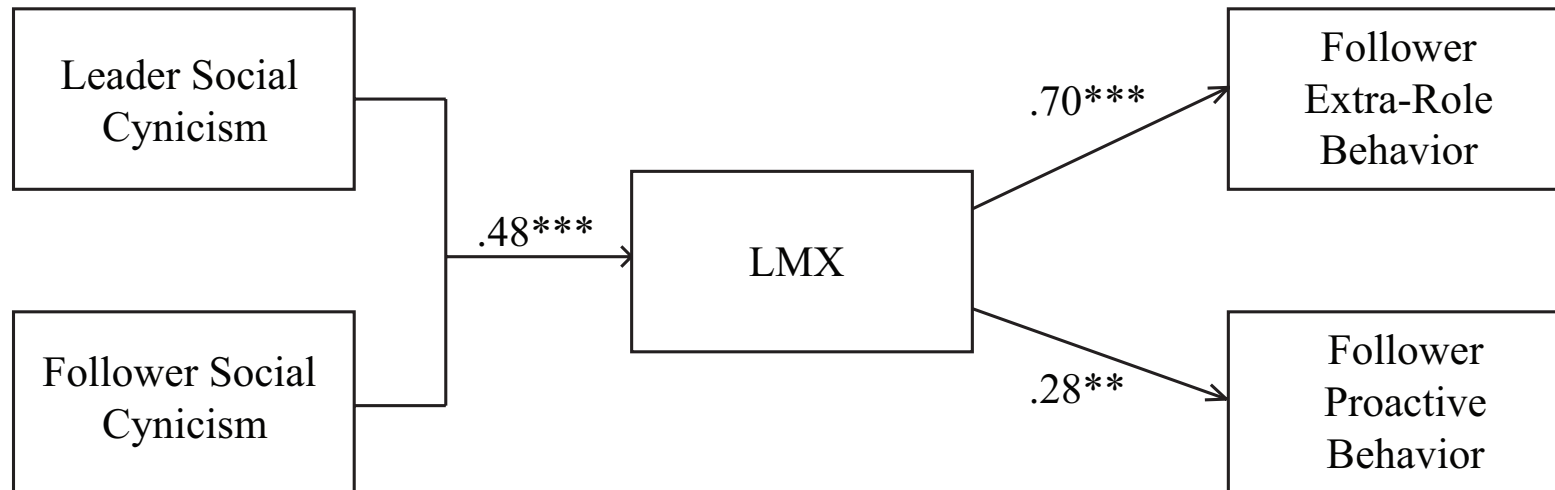
*Note.*  $N = 116$   $a_1 = (b_1 + b_2)$ , where  $b_1$  is beta coefficient for leader cynicism and  $b_2$  is beta coefficient for follower cynicism.  $a_2 = (b_3 + b_4 + b_5)$ , where  $b_3$  is beta coefficient for leader cynicism squared,  $b_4$  is beta coefficient for the cross-product of leader cynicism and follower cynicism and  $b_5$  is beta coefficient for follower cynicism squared.  $a_3 = (b_1 - b_2)$ .  $a_4 = (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)$ . \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

Table 4. *Polynomial Regression Results for Leader-Follower Congruence in Personality*

Variable	Extraversion			Neuroticism			Openness to Experiences			Agreeableness			Conscientiousness		
	LMX <i>B (SE)</i>	Ext <i>B (SE)</i>	Pro <i>B (SE)</i>	LMX <i>B (SE)</i>	Ext <i>B (SE)</i>	Pro <i>B (SE)</i>	LMX <i>B (SE)</i>	Ext <i>B (SE)</i>	Pro <i>B (SE)</i>	LMX <i>B (SE)</i>	Ext <i>B (SE)</i>	Pro <i>B (SE)</i>	LMX <i>B (SE)</i>	Ext <i>B (SE)</i>	Pro <i>B (SE)</i>
Constant	3.70 (.14)***	3.38 (.16)***	3.75 (.10)***	3.53 (.12)***	3.25 (.14)***	3.86 (.09)***	3.86 (.15)***	3.60 (.17)***	3.85 (.11)***	3.90 (.12)***	3.62 (.14)***	4.02 (.10)***	3.66 (.25)***	3.47 (.29)***	3.42 (.17)***
Leader personality	-.26 (.17)	.05 (.19)	-.16 (.13)	.05 (.19)	.07 (.22)	-.01 (.14)	-.08 (.18)	-.17 (.20)	-.13 (.13)	.08 (.11)	.02 (.13)	.01 (.09)	-.26 (.37)	-.64 (.42)	-.17 (.24)
Follower personality	-.28 (.18)	-.31 (.21)	.12 (.13)	-.27 (.09)**	-.22 (.11)*	-.24 (.07)**	-.35 (.18)	-.31 (.21)	.17 (.13)	.07 (.09)	.18 (.10)	.02 (.07)	-.20 (.24)	-.23 (.28)	-.04 (.16)
Leader personality <sup>2</sup>	.12 (.10)	-.02 (.12)	.09 (.08)	.10 (.14)	.11 (.17)	-.04 (.11)	-.09 (.14)	-.02 (.16)	-.08 (.10)	-.33 (.12)**	-.32 (.14)*	-.13 (.10)	.07 (.18)	.23 (.21)	.23 (.12)
Leader personality x follower personality	.18 (.10)	.28 (.12)*	.14 (.08)	-.09 (.11)	-.07 (.13)	.06 (.08)	.38 (.16)*	.38 (.19)*	.30 (.12)*	-.04 (.10)	.16 (.11)	.00 (.08)	.25 (.20)	.35 (.23)	-.17 (.13)
Follower personality <sup>2</sup>	.12 (.11)	.06 (.12)	.06 (.08)	.05 (.04)	.01 (.05)	.06 (.03)*	-.02 (.10)	-.13 (.12)	-.03 (.07)	.03 (.08)	-.04 (.10)	.03 (.07)	.08 (.13)	.02 (.16)	.42 (.09)***
R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.09	.16**	.08	.04	.17**	.07	.07	.21***	.11*	.10*	.02	.06	.08	.32***
ΔR <sup>2</sup> for the three quadratic terms	.05	.05	.04	.02	.01	.05	.06	.05	.06	.06	.07*	.02	.04	.06	.18***
<b>Surface Test</b>															
Congruence line (X = Y)															
Slope (a <sub>1</sub> )	-.54*	-.26	-.04	-.22	-.15	-.24	-.42*	-.48*	.03	.15	.21	.03	-.46	-.87	-.22
Curvature (a <sub>2</sub> )	.43*	.32	.29	.06	.05	.08	.27*	.23	.20*	-.34*	-.20	-.09	.39*	.59*	.48***
Incongruence line (X = -Y)															
Slope (a <sub>3</sub> )	.01	.37	-.28	.32	.29	.23	.27	.14	-.30	.01	-.16	-.01	-.06	-.40	-.13
Curvature (a <sub>4</sub> )	.07	-.24	.02	.24	-.19	-.04	-.50	-.53	-.41*	-.25	-.52*	-.10	-.10	-.11	.83***

Note.  $N = 116$   $a_1 = (b_1 + b_2)$ , where  $b_1$  is beta coefficient for leader personality and  $b_2$  is beta coefficient for follower personality.  $a_2 = (b_3 + b_4 + b_5)$ , where  $b_3$  is beta coefficient for leader personality squared,  $b_4$  is beta coefficient for the cross-product of leader personality and follower personality and  $b_5$  is beta coefficient for follower personality squared.  $a_3 = (b_1 - b_2)$ .  $a_4 = (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)$ .  $B$  is the unstandardized regression coefficient and  $SE$  the standard error. Ext = Extra-role behavior. Pro = Proactive behavior. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

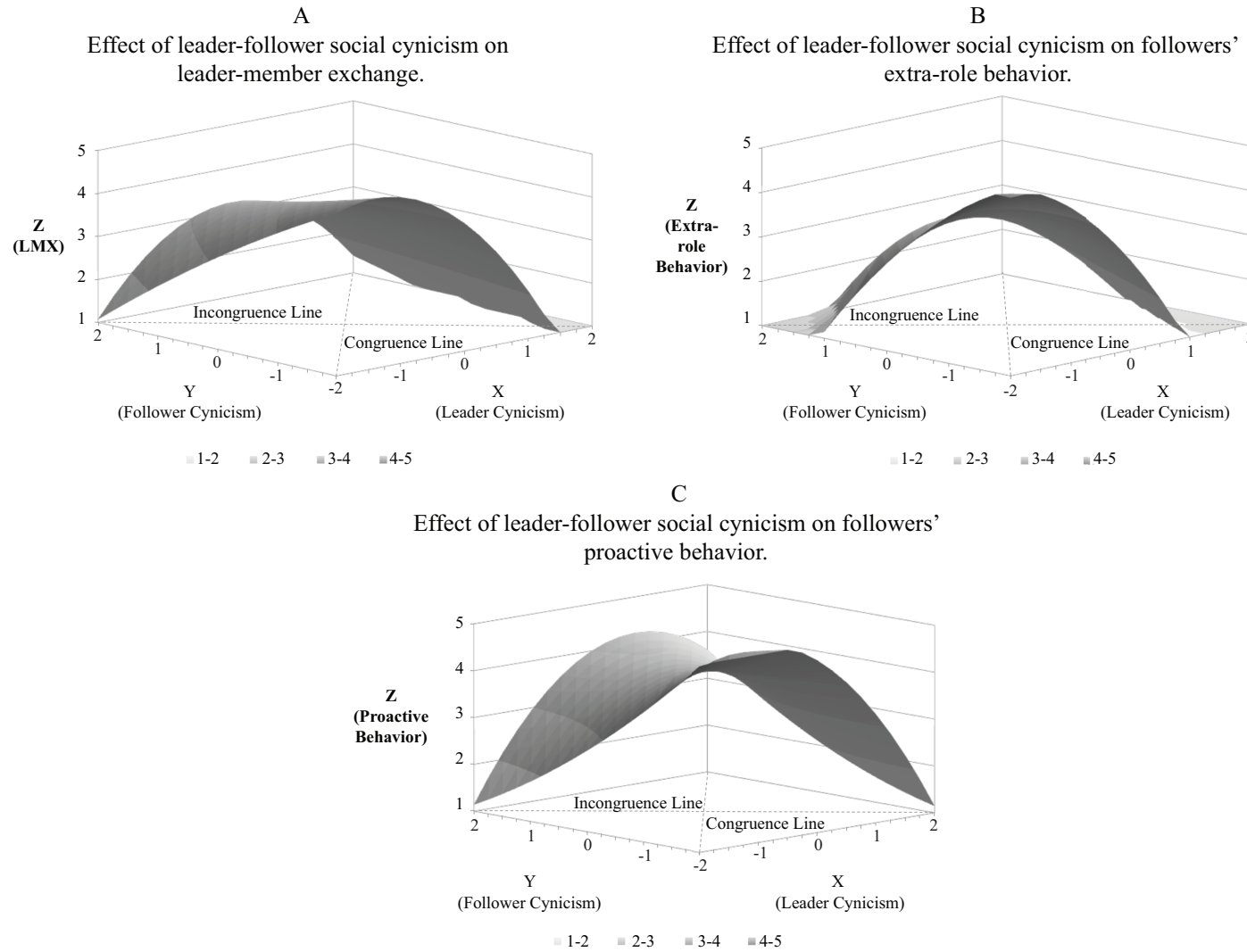
Figure 1. Hypothesized model and estimated standardized coefficients.



Note.  $N = 116$  leader-follower dyads.

\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Figure 2. Effect of leader-follower social cynicism on followers' outcomes.





**Are you meant to play this part?**

**Effects of Leader-Follower Comparisons on Employee Outcomes**

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### Abstract

Prior research suggests that followers compare their leader to an ideal leader prototype and respond positively when their leader matches their expectations. However, these studies have mainly concentrated on the leader but less on followers' self-perception against the leader. We extend leader categorization theory and use insights from social-comparison research to demonstrate that followers not only compare their leader to an ideal leader prototype but also to themselves. By performing an experimental design, we can show that leader-follower comparison of leadership skills affects followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness and competence. Moreover, we demonstrate that followers differ in the degree to which they engage in leader-follower comparison based on their personality. Specifically, we analyze followers' core self-evaluation as a possible moderator.

*Keywords:* Leader-follower comparison, leader categorization, leader effectiveness, leader competence, core self-evaluation

### Are you meant to play this part?

#### Effects of Leader-Follower Comparisons on Employee Outcomes

In the world famous Disney production “Mulan”, we find a girl who is not satisfied with the role she is supposed to fulfill. Mulan asks herself: “Can it be, I am not meant to play this part?”. After evaluating the capability of her elderly father/leader who is willing to go to war for his king, Mulan decides to take his role as she believes that she would be a better warrior than him. While this Disney movie is clearly fictional, it reflects a central theme in our everyday work-life, namely that followers evaluate their leaders. While some complain that their leaders are rather unqualified for their role, others seem to be pleased with their supervisors (Giessner and Van Knippenberg, 2008). It is a common experience that we hold expectations about other people. Our underlying assumptions, stereotypes, beliefs and schemas influence how we view someone and this is especially true in the work context (Argyris, 1957; Leung et al., 2010; McGregor, 1960). For example, leader categorization theory states that followers compare their leaders with a cognitively represented ideal image of a leader. According to the theory, the better the leader matches the ideal leader prototype, the better the follower will respond to the leader (Lord et al., 1984; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2014). A big body of literature supports the theory by showing that individuals develop schemas based on experiences with their leaders, which will be activated when they interact with their supervisor (Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Kenney et al., 1996; Schyns and Schilling, 2013).

However, even though extant research has made an important contribution, it has largely neglected a central point, namely followers' self-perception against their leader. As shown in the movie “Mulan”, she not only evaluates her father’s capabilities, she also compares them to hers and acts accordingly. In other words, followers may not only compare their leader to an ideal leader stereotype but also to themselves. Research by Miller and Suls

(1977) could show that individuals generally prefer to compare themselves with others who have a slightly better standing. Buunk and Gibbons (2007) conclude in their overview about social comparison that in general, individuals have an upward drive to confirm their similarity with a superior person and to learn from him/her. Indeed, studies among students indicated that students like to compare their academic performance with students who had better grades and this also lead to a better academic performance (Blanton et al., 1999; Huguet et al., 2001; Gibbons et al., 2000). Thus, we belief that followers compare themselves to their leader (as he/she has a superior position) and that this comparison will directly influence followers' reaction.

However, the leadership literature assumes that followers' self- perceptions is a result of leadership (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004) and less a factor that may shape followers' responses to their leaders (Lord et al., 1999; Lord et al., 2001). Thus, former research did rarely consider followers' self-perception as an important predictor in the leadership process much less followers' self-perception in comparison to the leader.

The purpose of this paper is to integrate leader categorization theory with insights from social comparison research. Specifically, we show that followers do not evaluate their leaders' leadership qualities on a stand-alone basis. Rather, it seems to be the comparison between followers' leadership qualities and their leaders' leadership qualities that drives followers' response to their supervisor. Moreover, we further extent social comparison theory, by demonstrating that followers engage in self-supervisor comparison differently based on a central part of their personality - the core self-evaluation.

By doing so, we contribute to the literature in the following ways: First, we provide a better understanding of leader effectiveness by questioning the passive role former research has attached to followers' self-perception in the leadership context (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004) and by analyzing the effect of leader-follower comparison on favorable outcomes.

Individuals experience and judge the outside world in relation to the self (Leary and Tangney, 2005). Yet, followers' self-perception against the leader has barely been analyzed. We demonstrate in our study that followers' self-perception against the leader is a crucial component in leader-follower interactions and directly relates to leader effectiveness. Second, by drawing from social comparison theory (Dunning, 2000; Krueger, 2000), we contribute to the literature by showing that followers vary in the way they engage in leader-follower comparison. This contribution is important because former studies did indicate that people differ in their tendency for social comparison (Gilbert et al., 1995; Steil and Hay, 1997), but not yet in the context of leader-follower comparison. However, followers' personality may be an important moderator in explaining why they engage differently in judging and comparing themselves with their leader (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999; Wheeler, 2000). In particular, we show that followers' core self-evaluation (CSE) as a stable personality trait moderates the relation between leader-follower comparison and the degree to which followers perceive their leader.

### **Followers Self-perception against the Leader**

For centuries, the leader categorization theory has received a lot of attention, and significant empirical work has been done to support the approach (e.g., Kenney et al., 1996; Lord and Maher, 1991). According to the theory, followers categorize their leaders by comparing their leaders' characteristics with the prototype of a leader. A prototype of a leader is, for example, a cognitive image specifying the most representative characteristics of leaders. The leader prototype is accessed from followers' memory when activated by an outside stimulus (e.g., the current leader) (Junker and Van Dick, 2014; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2014). Thus, the leader prototype is created by past experiences and socialization. When followers evaluate their leaders, they activate/encode their leader prototype and compare the prototype schema with the actual leader. When followers then perceive a good match

between their leaders' characteristics and behavior, and their leader prototype, they categorize their leader as a good leader and vice versa (Kenney et al., 1994).

The centerpiece of leader categorization theory is that followers categorize their leaders based on their perception of how suitable they fit into the leadership role (Lord and Maher, 1991; Van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003). Followers who categorize their leaders close to their leader prototype have a better leader-member exchange, are more committed to the organization, and consequently, leadership is more effective (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Van Quaquebeke and Van Knippenberg, 2012). Followers' perceptions of leadership effectiveness and competence are important facets in the leadership process, as successful leadership can only happen with open and willing followers who respect their leader (Yukl, 2005). This positive categorization of leadership can then not only result in followers' perception of leadership effectiveness, but also in better followers' performance (Lord and Maher, 1991).

How followers perceive their leaders is the foundation of leader categorization theory. However, only concentrating on followers' perception of the leader seems to be one-sided, as social-comparison research points out that the evaluation of others is coherent with self-perception. Indeed, the way individuals perceive others seems to be strongly related to their self-perception and the degree to which they participate in self-other comparison (Alicke et al., 2005; Kahneman and Miller, 1986). According to findings on self-concept, self-perception even becomes activated unconsciously while perceiving someone else (Dunning and Hayes, 1996). When looking at leader categorization theory and social-comparison research in combination, it becomes clear that followers not only evaluate their leaders against a leader prototype, but they also start to evaluate themselves against their leader and their ideal image of a leader. As a result, followers should become aware of the leadership qualities of their supervisors and compare those qualities with their own leadership potential.

However, the majority of past research on followers' self-perception in the work context did not concentrate on followers' self-perception against the leader him/herself (Chhokar et al., 2007; Gerstner and Day, 1994; House et al., 2004). Van Quaquebeke et al. (2011a) and Van Quaquebeke et al. (2011b) could show that followers' perceptions of their leaders against an ideal leader prototype are related to followers' respect for their leaders and leadership effectiveness perceptions, and that these relationships are moderated by followers' self-perceptions against the ideal leader prototype. Similarly, scholars argued that social comparison and social judgment works in both directions (Buunk and Mussweiler, 2001; Dunning, 2000; Krueger, 2000). Even though social comparison and social judgment research evolved from different areas, both concepts come to the same conclusion, namely that individuals do not compare and judge in isolation, but rather take their self-perception as a guideline to compare and judge others (Buunk and Mussweiler, 2001; Dunning, 2000). Based on leader categorization theory and social-comparison research, we argue that followers who perceive themselves as a better leader than their supervisor automatically categorize their leader as a bad leader who is ineffective and incompetent. That is because followers have specific expectations about the characteristics of a good leader (House et al., 2002). According to the Globe study (House et al., 2004), followers expect from their leader a variety of qualities, like being visionary, inspirational or decisive. When followers then believe that they would actually have more of these leader attributes than their supervisor, they may doubt the ability of their leader to act as a competent and efficient leader. Competence and capability (like being clever, intelligent, creative, foresighted, knowledgeable etc.) are central dimensions in the social cognition literature and account for how individuals rate others (Fiske et al., 2007). When individuals spontaneously form impressions about others, they automatically judge them on how capable they are in their role. For example, when a person is categorized as capable, people expect that he/she

behaves, in general, competent and rarely incompetent. Thus, incompetent behaviors once in a while do not impact the general perception of capability. However, a person who was once categorized as incapable, is viewed as someone who is not able at all to fulfill their role successfully. This once formed opinion is than barely changeable (Fiske et al., 2007). In other words, followers who categorize their leaders as incapable in their role, will unlikely change that impression. Just as leadership studies have shown that only leaders who are perceived as capable in their role can practice effective leadership (Connelly et al., 2000), this negative perception may in turn lower followers' expectations regarding the effectiveness of the leadership. Based on our reasoning, we predict:

*Hypothesis 1:* The more followers perceive themselves as a better leader than their supervisor, the less a) competent and b) efficient they perceive their leader.

### **Personality as a Moderator**

Our assumption above suggests that employees' perceptions of leader effectiveness are based on a comparison process in which followers judge their leaders' capabilities against their own. Further evidence for this theory may be gained by identifying boundary conditions in which this comparison process may be less important and hence the effects on perceived leader effectiveness might be muted. One such condition may be found in employees' core-self-evaluations, a stable interpersonal trait that describes the combination of one's value, success, and ability as a person (Judge et al., 1997). The concept combines self-esteem (the worthiness an individual places on him/herself), neuroticism (the evaluation of negative facets of one self), generalized self-efficacy (the focus on one's competences) and locus of control (the belief about one's own capability to control an outcome) (Harter, 1990; Locke et al., 1996; Watson, 2000).

Although social comparison is a universal process, there is substantial evidence that individuals differ in the degree they engage in social comparison and judgment (Gilbert et al.,



1995; Steil and Hay, 1997). According to Festinger (1954), people who feel uncertain about how to feel and react are especially likely to engage in social comparison. This is because they feel the need to evaluate their beliefs and behaviors in comparison to others in order to gauge and enhance their self-concept (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999; Thornton and Arrowood, 1966; Wood, 1989). Indeed, it has been argued that individuals' personality, like CSE, plays a distinct role when it comes to social comparison (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999; Wheeler, 2000).

As the main reason for social comparison is to improve one's self-concept (Festinger, 1954) and as individual personalities influence how people engage in social comparison (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999; Wheeler, 2000), we believe that followers' CSE, as a stable, latent, higher-order trait will be an important moderator between followers' comparison with their leader and our outcomes.

Specifically, we predict that followers with a low CSE who believe that they would be a better leader than their supervisor will rate their supervisor as both less competent and less effective compared to followers with a high CSE. This is because individuals who score high on CSE pay less attention to external cues like leader-follower comparison compared to low-CSE followers (Bono and Colbert, 2005; Chang et al., 2012). High-CSE followers are well-adjusted, self-confident and efficacious, believe in their own agency, seek active problem solving and show higher levels of performance and motivation (Erez and Judge, 2001, Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). It is this broad core that is then manifested in high levels of self-esteem, emotional stability, general self-efficacy, and an internal locus of control. Furthermore, followers with high CSE are more likely to evaluate themselves positively (Zhang et al., 2014). According to behavioral plasticity theory, individuals who evaluate themselves positively are less likely to be influenced by their external environment (Brockner, 1988). In other words, high-CSE followers seem to trigger self-regulatory

processes and maintain their focus on performance without paying too much attention to external information. Indeed, research indicates that high-CSE followers are less likely to take external cues personally and, as such, are likely to stay committed to their goals even in unfavorable work environments (Bono and Colbert, 2005; Chang et al., 2012). In contrast, low-CSE followers, described as weak or vulnerable, frequently fail to achieve their goals and show less self-esteem as well as less effective coping behavior (Erez and Judge, 2001; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). Moreover, they feel powerless and easily influenced by unfavorable environments (Judge et al., 1997; Kacmar et al., 2009). According to the big body of power literature, power again influences the way people judge and pay attention to others (Ellyson et al., 1981; Montagner et al., 1988). For example, studies could show that low-power individuals pay more attention to social information and use a more controlled and complex way of judging than high-power individuals (Snodgrass et al., 1998). In other words, powerful and self-confident individuals seem to be less influenced by their social environment than low-power individuals. On the basis of behavioral plasticity theory and power literature, we argue that for followers with a high CSE (high-power and control feeling) the social comparison with their leader is less relevant and they will not respond to the social information (e.g., that their supervisor is less of a leader than they would be) as strongly as followers with low CSE (low-power and control feeling).

Thus, we predict that CSE is a moderator between the comparison of followers with their leaders and our outcomes, and, more specifically, that followers with a low CSE who believe that they would be a better leader than their supervisor perceive their leader as less competent and less efficient.

*Hypothesis 2:* CSE moderates the relationship between followers' perception of themselves against their leader and a) followers' perception of leaders' competence and b) followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness, such that the relationship is stronger when

CSE is low rather than high.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedures**

At the beginning of the experiment, the participants read a cover story, in which they were told that a group of researchers were collaborating with a large paper producing company in order to create future-leader programs and also to analyze leader-employee interactions. After answering questions about their leadership qualities and about themselves<sup>1</sup>, the participants were told that they would be linked to a supervisor that had prepared a short task for them. As part of the leadership manipulation, we informed the participants that their supervisor had filled in the same questionnaire. The participants then read one of two manipulations. The participants were informed that their supervisor would either be a better (experimental condition 1) or worse (experimental condition 2) leader than they would be. After the manipulation, the participants were asked questions regarding the supervisor and fulfilled a short task. At the end of the experiment, there was a clarification that in truth the leadership qualities of the participants were not being analyzed and that the participants had not been linked to a supervisor either.

To reach a heterogeneous sample of the working population in the US, we used MTurk to invite US participants to our study. Recent studies showed that members of MTurk are more attentive to instructions than traditional pool samples (Hauser and Schwarz, 2016), participants can be recruited rapidly and inexpensively, and the data quality is at least as reliable as with traditional methods (Buhrmester et al., 2011). The participants received a web link to our online experiment and were offered \$1 for about 10 minutes of their time. The study has been approved by an ethics review committee.

160 participants from various industries in the US, with the most frequent being

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<sup>1</sup> As a questionnaire we used the 22 items of the GLOBE study, containing peoples ideas about good leadership across cultures (House et al., 2004).

information and communication technology (15.6%), manufacturing (10%), and education (10%), completed our experiment. The average age of the participants was 35.37 years ( $SD = 10.57$ ) and 55% of them were male. They had an average work experience of 14.35 years ( $SD = 10.29$ ), had worked for approximately 6.01 supervisors ( $SD = 6.56$ ) and had worked for their current supervisor for approximately 3.28 years ( $SD = 3.75$ ).

### Measures

**Leader effectiveness.** We measured leaders' effectiveness with the 5-item scale by Van Knippenberg (2005). Example items are "I will put my trust in this supervisor" and "I assume this team leader is effective as a leader" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .95$ ).

**Leader competence.** We assessed leaders' competence with the 6-item scale by Fiske et al. (2002). Example items are "I assume my supervisor is competent" and "I assume my supervisor is confident" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Core Self-Evaluation.** We measured followers' core self-evaluation with the 12-item CSES scale by Judge et al. (2003). Example items are: "I am confident I get the success I deserve in life" and "I complete tasks successfully" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .91$ ).

### Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, reliability scores, and inter-correlations of all variables. We checked our manipulation by performing a T-test. The results show that participants in the high leadership qualities condition (Group 1) really perceived themselves as being more capable as a leader compared to their supervisor in the study and vice versa (Group 1:  $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = .82$ ;  $t = -18.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Group 2:  $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ).

We calculated all of our analyses using hierarchical regression analyses, as this allows

us to examine the proposed moderation effect of CSE (which we measured as a continuous variable; Aiken and West, 1991). To test Hypothesis 1, we analyzed whether followers who perceived themselves as a better leader than their supervisor, perceived their supervisor as a) less competent and b) less effective. As can be seen in Table 2, our analysis supports Hypothesis 1, as it shows that followers who believe that they would be a better leader than their supervisors perceive their supervisor as less competent ( $b = -.40, SE = .05, p < .001$ ) and less effective ( $b = -.41, SE = .06, p < .001$ ).

To test the proposed moderating effect (that this relation is moderated by followers' CSE) we examined the interaction term in the hierarchical regression equation. As shown in Table 2 this term was significant for perceived leader effectiveness ( $b = .16, SE = .08, p < .05$ ) but not for leader competence ( $b = .07, SE = .07, p = .29$ ). To further examine the nature of the interaction for leader effectiveness, we conducted a simple slope analysis. Results show that the effects of self-leader comparison were more pronounced for employees with low CSE ( $b = -.53, SE = .09, p < .001$ ) than for employees with high CSE ( $b = -.28, SE = .09, p < .01$ ). Figure 1 depicts these results. Taken together, we found the proposed interaction effects for leader effectiveness but not for leader competence. These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 2.

## Discussion

We argued that only concentrating on followers' perception of the leader in isolation may not be as beneficial and that it is more important to focus on followers' self-perception against the leader. With our study we could show that social comparison plays an important role in the leadership context and that followers' self-comparison with their supervisor regarding their leadership qualities directly relates to important outcomes.

Our research makes important theoretical contributions. First, by integrating leader categorization theory and social-comparison research, we expand the leadership literature and

offer a different explanation for leadership effectiveness. So far, former studies have mainly concentrated on leader categorization and social comparison theory in isolation. Looking at both theories in combination, we offer a different angle on why it is important to consider leader-follower comparison as a central factor in the leadership process. Only few studies have analyzed followers' self-perception regarding their leadership qualities (e.g., Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011a; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011b) and none to our knowledge have analyzed followers' self-perception regarding their leadership qualities compared to their supervisor. However, this is an important shortcoming, as our study has shown that leader-follower comparison determine how competent and effective followers perceive their leaders. Second, drawing from social comparison theory, we could show that personality specifically followers CSE is an important moderator between leader-follower comparison and followers' perception of leaders' effectiveness. Former literature did indicate that individuals differ in the degree to which they engage in social comparison (Gilbert et al., 1995; Steil and Hay, 1997), however our study shows that individuals do not have the same need to enhance their self-concept and therefore do not compare themselves with others in the same way (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999; Wood, 1989). Furthermore, we could extend those findings by showing that this is also true in the work context, specifically in leader-follower comparison. Our results show that CSE moderates the relation between leader-follower comparisons and how effective followers perceive their leader. Moreover, we could show that followers with low CSE who believe that they would be a better leader than their supervisor will rate their leader as less effective compared to followers with a high CSE. While high-CSE followers maintain their focus on their work, low-CSE followers seem to be more affected by external information and tend to engage more in social comparison in order to enhance their self-concept.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The present study also has some limitations. First, we could only show in our moderation analysis that CSE moderates the relationship between followers' perception of themselves against their leader and followers' perception of leader effectiveness, but not for followers' perception of leader competence. One potential explanation that may account for why we found that effect only on perceived leader effectiveness may lay in the concept of leader effectiveness compared to competence. While leader effectiveness is based on trust, the competence dimension captures perceived ability based on intelligence and skills. Former studies indicated that warmth judgments (like trustworthiness) are primary to competence (Fiske et al., 2007). In other words, as leader effectiveness is based on trustworthiness, it may have a higher importance for followers than for leader competence. Future studies should reanalyze this relation and may also want to consider integrating further moderator and outcome variables.

Second, individuals' perception of self and others is always prone to bias (John and Robins, 1994; Kruger and Dunning, 1999). The ability of a person to assess one's own and their supervisors' leadership qualities accurately may differ dramatically among individuals. To avoid this bias in our experiment, we told the participants about their own and their supervisors' leadership qualities. However, in real life, people make mistakes in their perceptions, and by that, in self-other comparisons (Fleenor et al., 2010). Thus, it might be interesting for future research to further analyze those self and other perception biases in the context of leader-follower comparison.

Finally, we only concentrated on the comparison of leadership qualities. However, it might be interesting for future research to also compare other skills, like specific technical skills between leaders and followers. Yet, the comparison of technical skills might differ depending of the level of leadership. As Northouse (2015) indicated, technical skills are more

important on lower and middle levels of leadership and less on top levels (e.g., CEO level). Nevertheless, analyzing leader-follower comparison in other than leadership qualities might be an interesting field for future research. Moreover, Harari et al. (2017) showed in their meta-analysis that perceived overqualification is associated with a variety of followers' outcomes like job satisfaction or organizational commitment. Thus, looking not only at followers' self-perception against the leader but also at followers' perceived overqualification might also be a fruitful extension to our study.

### **Practical Implications**

Our findings also have important practical implications. Drawing from leader categorization theory and social-comparison research, our study could show that it is important for organizations to focus on the follower and not only on the leader. Indeed, concentrating on followers' perception, in particular, on followers' self-perception against the leader, may be a beneficial way to improve organizational outcomes. Our findings suggest, that organizations should try to match leaders and followers based on their leadership skills. For example, a supervisor should not lead a follower, who shows higher leadership skills than him/her as this seems to result in unfavorable outcomes. Moreover, as it might be difficult in practice to always match leaders and followers based on their leadership skills, we suggest that organizations focus on personnel selection. Our findings indicate that organizations should select and promote employees who are high on CSE. As high-CSE employees are less affected by external information and seem to engage less in social comparison (Bono and Colbert, 2005; Chang et al., 2012; Festinger, 1954), a supervisor with low leadership skills will not negatively affect those followers as strongly compared to low-CSE followers. Moreover, high-CSE employees were also found to show higher levels of performance and motivation (Erez and Judge, 2001, Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009) which should be another reason for organizations to select them.



**Conclusion**

By integrating leader-categorization and social comparison research, our study aimed to provide important insights into understanding followers' leadership perception and leaders' effectiveness. Our results suggest that going beyond the common focus on followers' perception of their leader and also incorporating followers' self-perception in comparison to their leader can lead to a better understanding of leader-follower dynamics. We hope that future studies can expand on our results on leader-follower comparison with further findings for leadership and social comparison theory.

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Table 1. *Descriptive, Correlations, and Reliabilities Among Study Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
1. Follower core self-evaluation	3.60	0.80	(.91)		
2. Leader competence	4.09	0.79	.22**	(.94)	
3. Leader effectiveness	3.89	0.90	.27**	.74**	(.95)

*Note.*  $N = 160$ . \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

Table 2. *Hierarchical regression analyses*

Variable	Perceived Competence		Perceived Effectiveness	
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>
Constant	4.09 (.05) <sup>***</sup>	4.09 (.05) <sup>***</sup>	3.80 (.06) <sup>***</sup>	3.80 (.06) <sup>***</sup>
Leader-follower comparison	-.40 (.05) <sup>***</sup>	-.40 (.05) <sup>***</sup>	-.41 (.06) <sup>***</sup>	-.41 (.06) <sup>***</sup>
Follower core self-evaluation	.17 (.07) <sup>*</sup>	.17 (.07) <sup>*</sup>	.25 (.08) <sup>**</sup>	.25 (.08) <sup>**</sup>
Interaction		.07 (.07)		.16 (.08) <sup>*</sup>
$R^2$	.29 <sup>***</sup>	.29 <sup>***</sup>	.26 <sup>***</sup>	.28 <sup>***</sup>
$\Delta R^2$		.00		.02 <sup>*</sup>

Note.  $N = 160$ . <sup>\*</sup>  $p < .05$ ; <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < .01$ ; <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < .001$ , two-tailed. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

Figure 1. *Effects of leader-follower comparison moderated by followers' core self-evaluation (CSE)*