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Followers' personality and the perception of transformational leadership:

Further evidence for the similarity hypothesis

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Abstract

Managers and supervisor are thought to affect their followers' attitudes and behaviour. Within leadership research, behaviour of leaders and managers is usually considered as the independent variable whilst followers' reactions are considered the dependent variable. In this study, we reverse this order and investigate the degree to which the evaluation of leadership is a result of followers' perceptions and attributions. In order to corroborate and extend previous experimental research, a field study was conducted to analyse the influence of followers' personality and perceived leader personality on followers' perception of leadership within an organisational setting. The results provide further evidence that followers' personality influences the perception of transformational leadership and commitment to the supervisor. Moreover, the perception of leaders' personality was related to the perception of leadership and commitment to the supervisor. The finding that the perception of supervisors' personality mediates both the relationship between followers' personality and the perception of leadership and commitment provides support for the similarity hypothesis. Results are discussed in the light of feedback and leader development.

Keywords: transformational leadership, followers' personality, perception of leadership, similarity

Introduction

Most research in the field of leadership has focused on leaders' behaviour and its effectiveness with regard to different outcome criteria and, therefore, can be labelled as leader-centric. In the last decade, starting with Hollander's seminal work (Hollander, 1992a and b), however, research with a follower-centred perspective that emphasizes the role of the followers in an interactive, dyadic leadership process has received increased attention (e.g., Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Densten, 2005; Felfe & Schyns, 2006; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Lord & Maher, 1993; Meindl, 1995; Nye, 2002, 2005; Schyns & Felfe, 2006; van Dick, Hirst, Grojean, & Wiseke, 2007). This line of research has provided evidence that the chance to emerge as and remain an effective leader does not depend solely on the leaders' own behaviour but also on followers' information-processing (Lord & Emrich, 2000). Such an approach posits that the evaluation and acceptance of a leader in a specific situation is determined by followers' mind-sets which consist of assumptions, beliefs, and expectations regarding the causes, nature, and the consequences of leadership, or, in other words, their implicit leadership theories (ILTs) (Eden & Leviatan, 1975, 2005). Similarly, from a Social Identity Theory background, researchers argue that the emergence of a leader is based on the leader fitting a prototype ("prototypicality") for the characteristics of a group within a specific situation (Haslam & Platow, 2001).

In this study, we concentrate on the concept of charismatic or transformational leadership for the following reasons. In the last decades, transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most important leadership concepts and there is still a growing interest in the functioning of this kind of leadership style. Therefore we consider transformational leadership an obvious starting point for this study. Moreover, Max Weber already postulated in 1922 that the perception of followers is an essential precondition for the emergence and existence of charisma. Much recent research on charisma focuses on the concept of transformational leadership which was introduced by Bass (1985) as the behavioural manifestation of charismatic leadership, emphasizing the role of followers' perceptions and attributions

regarding this leadership style. While these arguments led us to choose the perception of transformational leadership as the dependent variable in our study, the arguments made on the basis of different theoretical backgrounds are equally valid for other leadership styles. That it so say that not only the perception of transformational leadership is influenced by follower characteristics but also the perception of other leadership styles.

Klein and House (1995, 1998) used the metaphor of a fire to illustrate the interactive emergence of charismatic leadership. Here the leader serves as a spark and the follower is a flammable material. Oxygen stands for an appropriate environment. Metaphorically speaking, the emergence of leadership does not depend solely on the leader to light a fire. It also needs followers who perceive the respective leader as trustworthy, charismatic or transformational. Followers must be willing to allow the leader to be influential. Although most authors would strongly agree that charismatic or transformational leadership is at least an interactive phenomenon that depends on the leader and the follower (Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Shamir, House & Arthur, 1993), most research in this field has concentrated on leaders' behaviour.

However, it is of practical importance to better understand followers' information processing when evaluating leaders and managers because leadership behaviour is usually assessed by followers' ratings. As a lot of appraisal and training of leaders is based on follower rating, it is vital for organisations to know what they are actually assessing when asking followers to indicate their leaders' behaviour. Assessing leaders' behaviour using follower ratings implies that all followers perceive the same (i.e., the leader's behaviour) and are able to give an accurate record of their leaders' behaviour. However, followers' perception, and also the acceptance of transformational leadership, is not only determined by the actual behaviour of a leader but also by followers' characteristics. Consequently, the question must be raised to what extent followers' ratings are biased and what kind of follower perceives a leader as transformational (Howell & Frost, 1989). Additionally, it is at least questionable

whether all followers accept transformational leadership in the same way. Recent research provides evidence that followers' characteristics, and specifically similarity between leader and follower, influence the perception and acceptance of charismatic and transformational leadership (Felfe & Schyns, 2006; Keller, 1999). Prior experimental research, however, has not directly tested perceived similarity but has only assumed this mechanism to explain the relationship between followers' personality and their perception of transformational leadership. This study will address this issue and will examine the relationship between followers' personality and their perception of the leader's personality and their joint effect on the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership within an organisational context.

Theoretical background and prior research

Before providing details of our study, a summary of prior theory and research in the area of perception and acceptance of transformational leadership will be provided. Some prior research has taken Klein and House's (1995) three contradicting assumptions concerning the relationship between transformational leaders and their subordinates' characteristics, namely, completion, similarity and independence as a starting point. They addressed the question what types of followers are susceptible to transformational leadership. We will briefly explain their argument why similarity is relevant in the context of the perception of leadership. In addition, we will refer to Social Identity Theory (SIT) as well as social projection as potential explanations for our assumptions.

Similarity: Shamir et al. (1993) emphasize that subordinates' characteristics such as self-efficacy and value congruence as well as similarity to the leader are important preconditions for the attribution of transformational leadership. In contrast, people with low self-efficacy might feel over-stretched as transformational leaders set high standards. If followers' norms and values are different from those of

their leader, they do not perceive him/her as a role model nor do they experience pride on behalf of their leader. Consequently, the same transformational behaviour of a leader may be evaluated as more or less transformational depending on the followers' characteristics. Of course, leaders who do not display transformational behaviours at all will not be perceived as transformational, even if followers perceive similarity with regard to personality (e.g., leader and follower share low self-efficacy). That means that similarity only has influence on the perception of transformational leadership when followers rate leaders as similar to themselves with respect to characteristics conducive to transformational leadership.

Keller (1999) offers two theoretical explanations as to why similar leaders are preferred: (a) research on similarity and attraction suggests that similar persons are favoured and (b) positive self-illusions can be projected onto people who are similar to one's self. Moreover, from a cognitive perspective, similarity confirms one's own attitudes, reduces dissonances, and stabilizes one's own self-concept (Shamir et al., 1993). Numerous studies exist that indirectly support the assumption of similarity. Although these studies refer to similarity, all of them focus on characteristics conducive to transformational leadership but do not address any other kind of similarity. For example, followers' achievement orientation and high self-esteem have been found to be positively related to the preference for a charismatic leader (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). Keller's (1999) results indicate that followers' extraversion is related to the preference for charismatic leaders. She even concluded that "the ideal leader was construed as similar to self" (p. 600). In an experimental study supporting Keller's findings, Felfe and Schyns (2006) showed that extraversion in particular is positively related to the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership. In subsequent studies, Schyns and Sanders (2007) and Schyns and Felfe (2006) found that followers' agreeableness also influenced the perception of leadership. It is important to note that all the characteristics addressed in the studies mentioned above are supposed to be typical of transformational leaders (Bono & Judge, 2004).

Social identity: In line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the perception of communalities should enhance the identification with the leader. A positive evaluation of the leader also helps to develop a positive social identity which improves one's own self-concept. SIT gives attention to group-relevant characteristics (e.g., Duck & Fielding, 2003; Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Haslam & Platow, 2001), in our case personality variables that group members share. In order to have an effect, the personality variable in question must be salient and relevant in an organisational context, for example, extraversion in a sales-oriented context or conscientiousness in accounting or administration departments. Indeed, Schyns and Sanders (2007) found that when using different samples to examine the effect of followers' personality on the perception of transformational leadership, different personality traits proved relevant. The traits were exactly those that one would expect to be prominent in the respective context. This is line with Turner's (2005) argument that group identity is a precondition for leaders to gain power through persuasion, authority or coercion. Turner's argument is based on the self-categorisation theory which implies that people who share a common group identity expect to agree with each other in the interpretation of a given situation. Uncertainty arises when members of the same group, although they share a common identity, disagree. This is where power is granted to the leader and can be exerted to solve this disagreement. To put it in Turner's own words: "Leaders gain power not by possessing resources in the abstract but by standing for, representing, believing, working for something, or being perceived to do so, with which at least some others concur" (p. 20).

Similarly to this view, Giessner and van Knippenberg (2008) point out that those leaders who are perceived as prototypical for the group receive more favourable attributions in case of failure and thus will probably be granted more "followership". Duck and Fielding (2003) showed that the appraisal of a leader's fairness depends on social identity concerns, namely the categorization as in-group or out-

group leader. Irrespective of their behaviour, in-group leaders were evaluated more positively, whereas out-group leaders who favoured their own group were judged most critical. According to the Social Identity Theory (SIT), other personality characteristics (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, and ambiguity tolerance), values and implicit theories, or competences may be relevant in a specific situation or context. SIT also suggests that the set of relevant characteristics may not be restricted to personality in terms of static dispositions, but that similarity in general enhances the acceptance of a leader. However, one problem with arguing on the basis of SIT is that prototypicality does not necessarily mean that leaders are perceived as similar *and* as possessing characteristics conducive to transformational leadership. This, however, is a precondition for the effect assumed in the similarity hypothesis outlined above.

As we concentrate here on the followers' perception of leaders' personality rather than on independent or objective personality measures, we cannot rule out that leaders engage in impression management or act as "entrepreneurs of identity" (Reicher, Haslam & Hopkins, 2005) in order to convince followers that they are prototypical for the group they lead. Whether leaders are (1) actually similar to their followers, (2) only similar in a specific situation, or (3) just "pretend" to be similar to them, does not matter as the critical point is whether followers feel the leader to be 'one of us' (e.g., Haslam & Platow, 2001).

Social projection: Prior research (Schyns & Sanders, 2007) has argued that the effect of personality on the perception of transformational leadership in experimental studies can be explained by assumed similarity (Cronbach, 1955; Watson, Hubbard & Wiese, 2000). When little is known about the leader who is to be rated, for example, in experimental studies, participants project their own traits into the person they are rating. Keller (1999) used a similar approach when explaining the effects of personality on images of ideal leaders, stating that persons do not only prefer others that are similar to

themselves but also "project their own traits onto idealized leadership images" (p. 591). Both these explanations that have been used in prior research are comparable to social projection on a more general level (for overviews see Krueger, 1998; Krueger, 2007). According to Krueger (2007, p. 1): "People by and large expect that others are similar to themselves". This seems to be especially the case for in-group members (Clement & Krueger, 2002; Robins & Krueger, 2005). Murray, Holmes and Griffin (1996) found that in close relationships, persons rate their partners on the basis of their self-images rather than the actual characteristics of their partners. In addition, they idealised their partners which in turn predicted relationship satisfaction. Transferring this to the leadership area, we can assume that followers tend to project their own characteristics onto their leaders and are more satisfied when they perceive themselves to be similar to their leaders. Thus, followers perceive more transformational leadership and are more committed to their leaders when they posses personality traits that are characteristic for transformational leaders.

To sum up, there are strong arguments that support the assumption that followers similar to transformational leaders engage in transformational relationships. This may be either because of actual similarity with respect to personality characteristics conducive to transformational leadership, because of leader prototypicality (albeit only if characteristics conducive to transformational leadership are prevalent) or because of a projection of characteristics conducive to transformational leadership. While in this study we concentrate on transformational leadership, one could argue that similarity in terms of leader typical characteristics leads to the perception of leader-typical attributes in general and enhances the acceptance of leaders that fit the leader prototype. As mentioned above, we decided to focus on transformational leadership for two reasons: firstly transformational leadership has been in the focus of prior research in the area of perception of leadership, and secondly a current debate in literature examines whether the nature of the transformational relationship can be characterized by similarity or

completion. Prior research in this area has concentrated on personality and transformational leadership but the argument proposed here can be easily transferred to other leader-typical attributes that may be of relevance in a specific situation or context.

Acceptance of transformational leadership: Commitment to the supervisor

In contrast to experimental research, followers in the present study share real work experience with their leaders, and thus, commitment to the supervisor can be employed as a differentiated and theoretically grounded measurement for acceptance of the leader. Commitment to the supervisor reflects on the quality of the psychological bond between follower and leader (Cheng, Jiang & Riley, 2003; Clugston, Howell & Dorfman, 2000; Felfe, Schmook & Six, 2006; Stinglhamber, Bentein, & Vandenberghe, 2002). High affective commitment to the supervisor indicates that followers want to maintain cooperation with their leader because they appreciate the relationship with their leader. Continuance commitment to the supervisor, on the other hand, occurs if there are low alternatives or a change will cause too many costs. Normative commitment means that followers stay with their supervisor for reasons of obligation. They would feel guilty if they did not meet others' expectations or unwritten rules in the organisation.

Thus, in a field context, commitment to the supervisor (Clugston et al., 2000; Felfe et al., 2006; Stinglhamber et al., 2002) is considered a valid and relevant criterion for the acceptance of a leader. It is a well known concept within the body of commitment literature and has been found to be an important predictor for turnover intention and organisational citizenship behaviour (Stinglhamber et al., 2002). By linking followers' personality to supervisor commitment in a real organisational setting, the impact of the potential findings goes far beyond previous research as they contribute to the explanation of determinants for organisational effectiveness and success.

We assume that the relationship between follower characteristics and the perception of leader characteristics influence commitment to the supervisor. The extent to which followers perceive that they share characteristics conducive to transformational leadership with their leader will enhance mutual understanding and reinforcement, ultimately leading to higher commitment to an actual leader. Research into Social Identity Theory hints in the same direction: Ellemers and colleagues (e.g., Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002) argue that identity and commitment are closely related in many organisational contexts. Thus, we can assume that similarity in characteristics conducive to transformational leadership, through fostering a shared social identity, influences the relationship between follower and supervisor by enhancing the identification with the supervisor. Consequently, we propose that followers who perceive themselves to be similar to their leaders in terms of characteristics that are typical of transformational leaders develop higher affective commitment to their supervisor. They appreciate the cooperation to their supervisor, tend to develop an affective relationship and search to maintain it. In contrast, followers who are dissimilar to the characteristics of transformational leader, tend to build relationships that are based on reciprocity or dependency, and on the calculation of the gains, costs and risks. In these cases, followers stay with their leader either because they have no alternative or because they consider leaving their supervisor as too costly. Consequently, the relationship is based on continuance commitment. Therefore, we conclude that feeling similar to a transformational leader in terms of personality leads to affective commitment whereas perceived dissimilarity leads to continuance or calculative commitment to the supervisor.

Research model and hypotheses

In contrast to prior experimental research (Felfe & Schyns, 2006), but similar to Schyns and Sanders (2007), we conducted a field study allowing for direct face-to-face interaction and long-term experience with the leader. Our research model is displayed in Figure 1. The most important point

addressed by the study presented here is the following one: Although the effect of similarity served as an explanatory frame in both of the aforementioned studies, similarity has not been empirically tested. Instead the relationship between leader personality and transformational leadership, symbolized by arrow ("2") in our research model (see Figure 1), was based on findings of other studies (Bono & Judge, 2004; Crant & Bateman, 2000; House & Howell, 1992). Additionally, the postulated relationship between followers' and leaders' personality represented by arrow ("3") was based on theory and referred to research that found that extraverts prefer a charismatic leadership style (Keller, 1999). Consequently, in order to provide more evidence that similarity in terms of transformational leadership plays a crucial role in the perception and the acceptance of transformational leadership, it is necessary to include the perception of leaders' personality in the present study and examine the relationships it has with followers' personality and the perception of transformational leadership as well as commitment to the supervisor.

In line with prior research, we assume that followers' personality (high extraversion, agreeableness, openness and low neuroticism) is related to the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1 by the first arrow ("1"). Transformational leaders are supposed to be high in extraversion and low in neuroticism (Bono & Judge, 2004), which is symbolized by arrow ("2") in Figure 1 (in our case on the basis of followers' perception of leader personality), Felfe and Schyns (2006) concluded that similarity between followers' and leaders' personality may serve as an appropriate explanation for the enhancement of the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership. The assumed relationship between followers' and their perception of leaders' personality is symbolized by arrow ("3"). Rather than focusing on the actual similarity between followers' and leaders' personality, we focus on followers' perception of their leader's personality. This is in line with Schyns and Sanders (2007) argument of the effect of assumed

similarity (Cronbach, 1955; Watson, Hubbard & Wiese, 2000) on the perception of transformational leadership.

---- Insert Figure 1 here ----

In order to develop our hypotheses, we have to clarify which concept of personality we refer to. In line with prior studies, we define personality in terms of the Big Five (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness). Conscientiousness as the fifth dimension of the Big Five was not included in thus study as, whilst it is generally related to performance in the workplace (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen & Barrick, 1999), it is not specifically linked to leadership or transformational leadership (Bono & Judge, 2004). As transformational leaders are supposed to be high in extraversion, agreeableness, openness and emotional stability (i.e., low in neuroticism; Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge & Bono, 2000), followers high in extraversion, agreeableness and openness are assumed to perceive or attribute more transformational leadership and to show *more* affective commitment to their supervisors. They are expected to show *less* continuance commitment to the supervisor because their relationship to the supervisor is not based only on a lack of alternatives. In contrast, a misfit between supervisor and follower will be characterized by continuance commitment. For normative commitment, which is often highly related with affective commitment, no specific assumptions were made. Referring to the model presented in Figure 1 the following hypothesis are represented by arrow ("1").

H 1.1-1.3 Followers' extraversion (1.1), agreeableness (1.2) and openness (1.3) are positively related to the perception of transformational leadership and to the affective commitment to the supervisor, whereas the relationship with continuance commitment is negative.

Transformational leaders are also supposed to be high in emotional stability (i.e., low in neuroticism) (Bono & Judge, 2004). Although to a lesser extent than extraversion, agreeableness and openness, neuroticism has been found to be negatively related to the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership (Felfe & Schyns, 2006). According to our similarity assumption, followers who are high in emotional stability should perceive more transformational leadership. Since neuroticism means lower self-esteem and higher anxiety, followers who are high in neuroticism may avoid and withdraw when confronted with a transformational leader. Consequently, they are supposed to evaluate their leaders as less transformational and they develop only low levels of affective commitment but high levels of continuance commitment.

H 1.4 Followers' neuroticism is negatively related to the perception of transformational leadership and to the affective commitment to the supervisor, whereas the relationship with continuance commitment is positive.

Bono and Judge (2004) do not provide evidence as to whether transformational leaders are perceived as extraverted, emotionally stable etc. by their followers. For our study, however, in order to assess perceived similarity, it is important to examine in how far followers' perception of leaders' personality is linked to the perception of transformational leadership and commitment to the supervisor. Referring to the model presented in Figure 1, we assume that followers' perception of leaders' personality (high extraversion, high agreeableness, high openness and low neuroticism) is related to the

perception of transformational leadership and to affective commitment to the supervisor (see arrow ("2")). If this hypothesis is supported, one of the preconditions underlying the similarity assumption is fulfilled, namely, that the perception of leaders' personality is related to the perception of transformational leadership and affective commitment.

H 2.1 Followers' perception of leaders' personality (high extraversion, high agreeableness, and high openness and low neuroticism) is related to the perception of transformational leadership and to affective commitment to the supervisor.

In the next step, we have to show that leaders' and followers' personality do not function as two unrelated predictors of the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership. In order to support the assumption of similarity as an explanation for perception and acceptance, it is necessary that they are correlated. Similarity is shown when people scoring high on a personality trait that is linked to transformational leaders tend to evaluate their respective leader high on this dimension, and vice versa, when people who self-rate low on a personality dimension also perceive their leader to be low on this dimension. This relationship is represented by arrow ("3") in Figure 1.

Concerns may be raised about the appropriateness of our indicator for similarity. For example, if followers systematically rate themselves lower or higher than their leaders on the respective dimensions, then they will be different even though a high correlation may be found. Therefore whether means differ systematically has to be tested.[1]

Up to now we have considered each relationship in Figure 1 as isolated ("1, 2, 3"). The question must now be raised as to how the perception of leaders' personality is involved in the relationship

between follower personality and the perception and acceptance of leadership or, in other words, whether the relationship between followers' personality and their perception of transformational leadership can be explained by the perception of leaders' personality. This means that followers who rate themselves high on extraversion, agreeableness, openness and low on neuroticism are prone to perceive their leader to be more transformational and develop a stronger commitment also rate their respective leader high on extraversion, agreeableness, openness and low on neuroticism. In other words, the relationship between followers' personality and the perception of leadership can be explained by the leaders' personality, when it is perceived as similar and when personality is in line with transformational leadership. In contrast however, if similarity was unimportant for the perception of leadership, both followers' and leaders' personality would independently predict the perception of leadership. This theoretical assumption empirically means that the relationships between followers' personality and the perception of leadership and commitment are mediated by the perception of leaders' personality. Consequently, the influence of followers' personality on the perception of leadership will be empirically reduced by the perception of leader personality. This reduced relationship which is caused by common variance of followers' and leaders' personality in the prediction of perception and commitment, is represented by the thinner and interrupted arrow ("4") in Figure 1. Thus we expect:

H 2.2 The relationships between follower personality and the perception of transformational leadership and commitment to the supervisor are mediated by the perception of one's leader' personality.

At this stage, one might consider a different methodological approach, where similarity serves as a moderator rather than a mediator. A moderation (test of the interaction between one's own and perceived leader personality) would mean that we expect to find different slopes for different

perceptions of leaders' personality. For example, the relationship between followers' extraversion and perception of transformational leadership is high when the perception of leaders' extraversion is also high, but low when the perception of leaders' extraversion is low. However, this means that under the condition of low followers' extraversion and also low leaders' extraversion, we should find higher transformational leadership or commitment because they are similar than under the condition of low leader' extraversion but high followers' extraversion, which means, dissimilarity. Ideally, the relationship between followers' extraversion and perception of transformational leadership should be negative when the perception of leaders' extraversion is low. However, this is not what we hypothesise. In other words, a moderator analysis would test for a higher perception of commitment and transformational leadership in any case of similarity, no matter if extraversion was high or low. Rather, we want to prove that the degree of perceived transformational leadership and commitment depends on similar levels of followers' and leaders' personality traits but only when they are in line with characteristics aligned with transformational leadership (high extraversion, high agreeableness, high openness and low neuroticism). To use the extraversion example again, similar low extraversion is expected to results in lower perception of transformational leadership and lower commitment whereas similar high extraversion should lead to higher perception of transformational leadership and commitment.

Method

Sample and procedure

This study was conducted in a financial service company. Questionnaires were distributed at the workplace, and directly returned to the researcher. The participating employees were volunteers. Confidentiality was guaranteed. Participants were asked to indicate their personality as well as their perception of their direct supervisor's personality and his or her transformational leadership behaviour. In addition, they were asked to indicate their affective and continuance commitment to their respective

leader. Participants were 153 clerical workers of whom 75% were women. The mean age was 36.5 (*SD* = 9.3).

Measures

Followers' personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness) was assessed using a German short version of the NEO-PI developed by Borkenau and Ostendorf (1993), based on the instrument by Costa and McCrae (1985). The scales range from "1 = *not at all true"* to "5 = *completely true"*. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) for neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness were $\alpha = .83$, $\alpha = .79$, $\alpha = .69$, and $\alpha = .70$, respectively. Perceived **leaders' personality** was assessed using the same scales. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) for neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness were $\alpha = .78$, $\alpha = .80$, $\alpha = .79$ and $\alpha = .89$ respectively. All scales were optimized with respect to their factor structure and their reliability, leading to the exclusion of single items.

To assess **transformational leadership** a translated and modified version of the MLQ5X Short (Felfe, 2006, original: Bass & Avolio, 1995) was administered. Five transformational dimensions were distinguished: idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. The scales range from 1 = *never* to 5 = *almost always*. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) of the scales were $\alpha = .74$, $\alpha = .79$, $\alpha = .74$, $\alpha = .74$, and $\alpha = .75$, respectively. Due to high scale intercorrelations among the transformational subdimensions an overall measure was created and used in this study ($\alpha = .91$).

Commitment was measured by two scales for the assessment of commitment to the supervisor developed by Felfe et al. (2006) based on Stinglhamber et al. (2002). The affective commitment scale

contained six items (sample item: "I feel proud to work with my supervisor"). The continuance commitment scale (sample item: "I am so used to working with my current supervisor that it would be too difficult for me to change") consisted of four items. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) were $\alpha = .88$, and $\alpha = .71$, respectively.

Preliminary results

Before testing the hypotheses, we wanted to establish whether the assessments of follower personality and their perception of leader personality are independent. To this aim, we conducted four factor analyses, one for each personality trait, including follower personality and their perception of leader personality. The factor analyses yielded two-factor solutions (screeplot criterion). Forcing a two factor structure produced a clear differentiation between follower personality and their perception of leader personality for all four personality traits with high factor loadings on one and low factor loadings on the other factor. Consequently, when rating personality, participants clearly differentiated between two foci: their own and their leaders' personality. Detailed information on the factor analysis is available from the authors.

Results

In order to test H 1.1 – H 2.1 correlation analyses were conducted. As Table 1 shows, followers' extraversion and agreeableness were positively related to the perception of overall transformational leadership ($r = .20$, $p < .05$; $r = .25$, $p < .001$), and to affective commitment to the supervisor (r = *.19*, p < .05; $r = .23$, $p < .01$). As expected, the relationship between followers' extraversion and continuance commitment to the supervisor was negative ($r = -.16$, $p < .05$). However, agreeableness was not related to continuance commitment ($r = -.02$, *n.s.*). Thus H 1.1 and H 1.2 are mainly supported. Although correlations between openness and transformational leadership and commitment were in the expected

(positive) direction, they were only significant for continuance commitment to the supervisor ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$). Thus H 1.3 is only supported for continuance commitment to the supervisor. In line with H 1.4 followers' neuroticism was negatively related to the perception of transformational leadership and affective commitment, although not significantly ($r = -.11$, *n.s.*; $r = -12$, *n.s.*). A closer inspection of the subscales revealed a substantial correlation with the subscale individualized consideration ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$). As expected, neuroticism and continuance commitment to the supervisor were positively related ($r = .24$, $p < .01$), thus, H 1.4 is partly supported. Additional regression analyses revealed that extraversion and agreeableness also predicted the perception of transformational leadership after controlling for sex and age (see Table 2). Neuroticism predicted individualized consideration negatively. As expected in H 2.1 the perception of transformational leadership was positively related to perceived leaders' extraversion ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), openness ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), agreeableness ($r = .57$, $p < .001$), and negatively related to perceived leaders' neuroticism ($r = -.62$, $p < .001$). The correlations with affective commitment to the supervisor were $r = .56$ ($p < .001$), $r = .38$ ($p < .001$), $r = .55$ ($p < .001$), and $r = -.54$ ($p < .001$), respectively. Consequently, H 2.1 is supported.

---- Insert Table 1 here ----

In order to test H 2.2 hierarchical regression analyses and Sobel-tests were conducted. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation occurs when (1) an IV is significantly related to the mediator, (2) the IV significantly affects the DV in the absence of the mediator, (3) the mediator has a significant unique effect on the DV, and (4) the effect of the IV on the DV decreases with the addition of the mediator to the model. To test the first requirement, leaders' personality was regressed on followers' personality. The standardized betas for extraversion, neuroticism, openness, and agreeableness were: β

= .17, $p < .05$; $\beta = .17$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .16$, $p = .051$; and $\beta = .21$, $p < .01$, respectively. The second

condition was tested in the second step of the hierarchical regressions predicting the perception of

transformational leadership and affective commitment to the supervisor. As can be seen in Table 2, this

criterion was met both for extraversion and agreeableness. Followers' neuroticism only predicted

individualized consideration as a subscale of transformational leadership. The third condition was

fulfilled for all leaders' personality measures as there was a significant increase of explained variance

of the perception of transformational leadership and commitment when leaders' personality was

entered in the third step of the regressions. In line with the fourth condition, the effect of followers'

personality on criterion variables decreased upon the addition of leaders' personality as a mediator for

extraversion and agreeableness. Additional Sobel-tests indicated (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) that the

decrease was significant. For neuroticism, the decrease was only significant on the $p < .10$ level. Thus

H 2.2 is supported for extraversion, agreeableness and partly for neuroticism but not for openness. To

sum up, there is support for the mediation effect of extraversion and agreeableness, a tentative support

for neuroticism but no support for openness.

---- Insert Table 2 here ----

Since the value of correlations for an interpretation in terms of similarity might be limited,

additional analysis were conducted. As indicated previously, concerns may be raised that levels of

variables may be completely different even though their correlation is high. An inspection of means

and variation can help to estimate the probability of this potential flaw. As can be seen in Table 1,

means and standard deviations for followers' and leaders' scores were only moderately different.

Additional t-tests revealed no significant differences for extraversion $t (150) = 0.51$ ($p = .61$), and for

openness t (128) = 0.33 (p = .74). The difference for neuroticism was small but significant (dif = .23, t

(150) = 3.54, p = .01). For agreeableness, however, a considerable difference was found (dif = .44, t

(150) = 6.95, p < .001). An additional cluster analysis with two clusters revealed one cluster (N = 73)

with high extraversion, agreeableness, openness and low neuroticism both for followers' and leaders'

personality with a second cluster (N = 76) exhibiting the reversed pattern (see Table 3). All differences

between both clusters were significant (p < .001). These two clusters justify distinguishing between a

group of participants with a high level of self-rated extraversion and a similarly high level of perceived

leaders' extraversion. The same argument holds for the other traits. As also shown in Table 3, the group

high in extraversion, agreeableness, openness and low in neuroticism (cluster 1) perceived more

transformational leadership and is more committed to the supervisor (F(148) = 29.52, p < .001, and

F(148) = 31.54 p < .001, respectively). A closer inspection of the means also reveals that the significant

overall difference between follower and supervisor agreeableness results from the difference in cluster

2.

---- Insert Table 3 here ----

Discussion

There is no doubt that leaders and managers strongly influence the attitudes and behaviors of

their subordinates in terms of satisfaction, commitment, performance and turnover intentions.

Transformational leadership as a specific set of leader behaviours has proved to be effective with

respect to organizational outcomes by elevating followers' motives and values. Therefore,

organizations are interested in developing and improving managerial competences and specifically

transformational leadership skills of their managers. However, it is widely accepted that leadership is

an interactive process. Followers do not only react to leadership but exert influence on the leadership process in several ways. They allow their respective leaders to exert influence depending on how much a leader meets their expectations. The management and leaders on all levels should be aware of the active part that followers take in an interactive leadership process. Increasing interest in follower-centric research reflects the importance of a better understanding of the role of followers.

In addition, there are no objective measures to assess leaders' behaviours. Mostly leaders are assessed by follower ratings. Leadership evaluations may, however, be biased and the acceptance of a leader may depend on the type of follower. Previous studies have shown that examining followers' personality is a promising approach for a better understanding of how followers perceive and evaluate their leaders. Particularly in the field of transformational and charismatic leadership, there is an ongoing debate as to whether followers attribute charisma because their leaders seem to compensate their own deficits (e.g., followers with low self-esteem seek and prefer leaders with strong self esteem). It is obvious that transformational leadership would be a questionable concept if its functioning depended on this complementary relationship. However, there is growing empirical evidence based on different theoretical backgrounds that similarity in terms of characteristics conducive to transformational leadership (strong followers according to Klein and House, 1995) plays a crucial role in the transformational leadership process. As pointed out before, theoretical reasoning on the basis of similarity-attraction, social identity theory, and social projection converge in this point.

Thus adding to the body of follower-centric research, the aim of this study was to extend previous research on the relationship between of followers' personality and the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership. Specifically, we argued that the process leading to the relationship between follower personality and the perception of transformational leadership and acceptance in terms of commitment to the supervisor can be explained via perceived similarity with respect to characteristics conducive to transformational leadership. This means that perceived similarity rather

than complementarities in personality enhance the perception of transformational leadership and the development of a closer, affective-based relationship between leader and follower. It was the aim of this study to provide empirical evidence for this assumption as previous studies have proved the relationship between followers' personality and the perception of leadership but neglected the role of leaders' personality and the interplay between leader and follower personality.

Similar to prior studies (Felfe & Schyns, 2006; Keller, 1999; Schyns & Felfe, 2006), our results clearly indicate that the personality of followers is related to the perception of transformational leadership in real work settings. This is an important finding because one could argue that in prior experimental studies the effect of personality on the perception and acceptance of transformational leadership was overestimated due to projection.

As expected, we found that followers high in extraversion and agreeableness perceive more transformational leadership than their counterparts. For neuroticism we found a tentative negative relationship with transformational leadership. A closer analysis of the sub-dimensions of transformational leadership revealed a significant negative relationship between individualized consideration and neuroticism. Thus, followers high in neuroticism perceive less individualized consideration whereas followers high in emotional stability (low neuroticism) evaluate their respective leaders high on individualized consideration. Only for openness no clear relationship was found.

Prior studies reveal limited results for agreeableness (Schyns & Sanders, 2007); hence our results add to this research and produce a clearer picture for this personality trait. Personality traits that are particularly related to social interaction and communication, such as extraversion and agreeableness, appear to influence the perception of leadership. Reflecting on social identity theory, we can argue that this depends in part on the context. Schyns and Sanders (2007) assumed that sample characteristics, that is, traits that are especially salient in certain professions, could influence results. Within their

study, for example, they found that conscientiousness was related to the perception of transformational leadership in accountants. Further research is needed in this area.

This study also showed that followers' personality not only influences the perception but also the acceptance of the leader. The influence of agreeableness of the acceptance of transformational leadership identified by Felfe and Schyns (2006) was reinforced and extended in our study. The Felfe and Schyns (2006) study involved participants who only imagined cooperation with a described leader. In contrast, the evaluation in this study is based on real experience. Although in real life the relationship may be influenced by many other factors than followers' personality, extraversion and agreeableness were positively related to affective commitment to the supervisor. As assumed, the correlation is negative for neuroticism and positive for openness. However, the correlations were too low to become significant. The results showed that followers high in extraversion and agreeableness tend to develop more affective commitment to their supervisor, indicating a close relationship that is built on shared values, personal involvement and positive emotions. Therefore, these followers have a high interest in maintaining the relationship with their supervisor. Vice versa, followers low in extraversion do not only develop less affective commitment to their supervisor but also develop higher continuance commitment, indicating a relationship that is based on transactions. They consider investments that would be lost in case of a disruption of the relationship. A further reason for high continuance commitment is a perceived lack of alternatives. Whereas followers high in affective commitment stay with their supervisor because they want to, followers high in continuance commitment maintain the relationship because they have to. Openness is also negatively related to continuance commitment to the supervisor. In contrast, neuroticism is positively related to continuance commitment. Followers with high levels of anxiety and insecurity and low self-esteem primarily accept their leaders because they think they have to. These findings add to the commitment literature as they provide evidence that followers' characteristics specifically influence different components and foci of

commitment (e.g., Clugston et al., 2000; Felfe et al., 2006). In conclusion, followers who show personality traits similar to transformational leaders are more likely to perceive transformational leadership and to develop higher levels of committed to their leader.

But why do employees with specific personality characteristics perceive more transformational leadership and engage in more affective based commitment? How can this relationship be explained? Similarity has served as an explanation as to why followers high in extraversion and agreeableness but low in neuroticism perceive more transformational leadership and evaluate their leaders more positively. This explanation can be grounded in different social psychological concepts such as the similarity attraction paradigm, social identity theory, and social projection. These concepts explain why persons tend to perceive relevant others as similar to themselves and, on our case, more specifically are similar with respect to personality traits that are linked to transformational leadership (as indicated by Bono & Judge (2004). The results of this study close a gap in prior research as they clearly show the expected correlations between perceived leaders' personality and perception of leadership and commitment. Leaders who are perceived as transformational and with whom participants develop affective commitment are perceived as being high in extraversion, agreeableness, openness and low in neuroticism.

In order to provide evidence that similarity is directly linked to perception and commitment, a second step was proposed, namely that the relationships between followers' personality and the perception of transformational leadership and commitment are mediated by the perception of one's leader as similar. The assumption of mediation includes an overlap between followers' personality and perceived leaders' personality. With respect to the perception of leadership, the mediation effect is supported for extraversion, agreeableness and for neuroticism (the latter on the 10% level). For affective commitment, mediation is also found for extraversion and agreeableness. Addressing the concern that levels of variables may be completely different even though their correlation is high, we

showed that means and standard deviations for followers' and leaders' scores were only moderately different. In order to provide justification for our interpretation of the effect of a coherent pattern of personality traits a cluster analysis was conducted. As expected, we could identify a cluster high in extraversion, agreeableness, openness and low in neuroticism that perceived more transformational leadership and is more committed to the supervisor than the cluster with a reversed pattern.

To sum up, the results of this study provide further empirical evidence for the similarity hypothesis (Klein & House, 1995). Thus, the relationship between follower personality and the perception of transformational leadership and affective commitment to the supervisor can be explained in part by the perception of their respective leaders as similar *and* high in personality linked to transformational leadership. Thus leadership dyads that are similar at least in the eyes of the followers are more likely to cooperate successfully than dyads where leaders and followers are different with regard to relevant personality traits. In other words, in case of dissimilarity chances for a successful interaction are lower.

Implications

Our results have important consequences for the organisational practice. Taken together, the studies on follower personality and the perception of transformational leadership raise doubts on the validity of 360 degree feedback or similar kinds of evaluations of leaders undertaken by followers. Our results imply that this feedback may not be independent of followers' personality. Leaders can be advised that feedback from followers high in extraversion and agreeableness and low in neuroticism tends to be positively biased, and even more important, feedback from followers low in extraversion and agreeableness and high in neuroticism tends to be negatively biased. Leaders should be aware of this bias when receiving feedback. Feedback should not be attributed solely to leadership behaviour but must be regarded in the light of upward or downward bias. This is especially fundamental since over-attributing transformational leadership or an exaggerated perception of transformational leadership may

have negative consequences. Leaders may be confronted with unrealistic expectations that they cannot fulfil. In the long run, mutual misunderstanding and disappointment may result. In order to avoid these effects, qualitative feedback and face-to-face communication are required. Standardized feedback systems can only serve as a starting point for this. Leaders should not hesitate to discuss the results of leadership appraisals in team meetings and with individual followers in order to gain a better understanding of their followers' perceptions. In order to organize open and efficient group meetings, practitioners have developed specific schedules and rules that might be helpful in negotiating mutual expectations and thus establishing an appropriate way of leadership. The result of the dynamic negotiation process may vary and may depend on the specific situation and the context.

Furthermore, leaders may expect more support and commitment from extraverted and agreeable followers. Although we have not examined the relationship between similarity and performance, this link may be expected, especially as our results show a relationship between similarity and affective and continuance commitment to the leader. In terms of the selection of team members, this may be useful to take into account when building a team: Given that similarity explains perception and acceptance general managers or HR managers should consider the match between leaders and followers when building dyads or teams.

<div align="center">**Limitations**</div>

Due to the fact that our data is cross sectional, we cannot prove that the directions of the arrows in the model presented in Figure 1 are correct. For example, we cannot rule out that transformational leadership influences followers' self perception. This may work through feedback or identification. It is also possible that followers of transformational leaders tend to emulate their supervisors and therefore develop similar self-ratings. Also commitment may influence the attribution of personality and one's self concept. Longitudinal designs are required for the clarification of these questions.

As another limitation of our study, we have to note that the influence of personality characteristics examined in this study is limited. Many other factors influence the perception and acceptance of leadership besides followers' personality. Felfe and Schyns (2006) even raised doubts at to whether the effects of personality can be replicated in a real working context or whether they can only be found in the beginning of cooperation between leader and follower when there is little experience of cooperation. This study and the one undertaken by Schyns and Sanders (2007), however, show that considerable influence of followers' personality exists in "real life" settings.

We cannot rule out that future studies may find a stronger influence of personality characteristics when other dimensions are included. Although less typical of leadership in general and transformational leadership in particular, conscientiousness may be important, particularly in specific contexts (Schyns & Sanders, 2007). Other personality characteristics may be of interest, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and tolerance of ambiguity. SIT related research indicates the possibility of relevant characteristics besides personality in terms of static dispositions. Moreover, similarity may generally enhance the acceptance of a leader, and this effect can be extended to other styles or aspects of leadership.

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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Alphas, and Correlations

.	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1) Age	36.47	9.28																	
2) Sex			.26																
3) Neuroticism (f)	2.35	.63	-.01	.10															
4) Extraversion (f)	3.76	.60	-.05	.05	-.51														
5) Openness (f)	3.42	.60	.04	-.02	-.19	.35													
6) Agreeableness (f)	4.12	.43	.20	.21	-.23	.29	.15												
7) Neuroticism (l)	2.13	.58	-.01	-.07	.17	-.05	.05	-.28											
8) Extraversion (l)	3.72	.62	.07	.08	-.16	.17	.11	.18	-.49										
9) Openness (l)	3.45	.65	.19	.08	.01	.02	.16	.09	-.31	.64									
10) Agreeableness (l)	3.67	.76	.11	.15	-.15	.17	.08	.21	-.45	.56	.43								
11) IIa	3.53	1.00	.00	.12	-.03	.15	.03	.28	-.59	.58	.38	.57							
12) IIb	3.69	.72	.09	.13	.01	.13	.09	.21	-.40	.50	.48	.41	.66						
13) IM	3.68	.81	.12	.17	-.12	.24	.10	.21	-.54	.58	.48	.48	.69	.67					
14) IS	3.72	.76	.02	.07	-.04	.11	.06	.20	-.54	.46	.37	.43	.78	.67	.68				
15) IC	3.63	.87	-.04	-.02	-.26	.22	.09	.18	-.55	.49	.30	.50	.71	.56	.60	.72			
16) TL overall	3.65	.72	.04	.11	-.11	.20	.08	.25	-.62	.61	.46	.57	.90	.81	.84	.89	.84		
17) Com. to sup. aff.	3.20	.94	-.09	.02	-.12	.19	.11	.23	-.54	.56	.38	.55	.61	.64	.69	.70	.82	.82	
18) Com. to sup. cal.	2.36	.78	.01	.07	.24	-.16	-.22	-.02	-.18	.12	-.01	.21	.43	.20	.21	.31	.27	.34	.39

Note: (f) = followers' personality (l) = perceived leaders' personality; IIa = idealised influence attributed; IIb = idealised influence behaviour; IM = inspirational motivation; IS = intellectual stimulation; IC = individual consideration; Com. to sup. aff. = commitment to supervisor (affective); Com. to sup. cal. = commitment to supervisor (calculative); TL = Transformational leadership; N = 153, $r > .16 = p < .05$, $r > .21 = p < .01$, $r > .28 = p < .001$; Sex: male = 1, female = 2

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression on Perceived Transformational Leadership and Commitment to the Supervisor

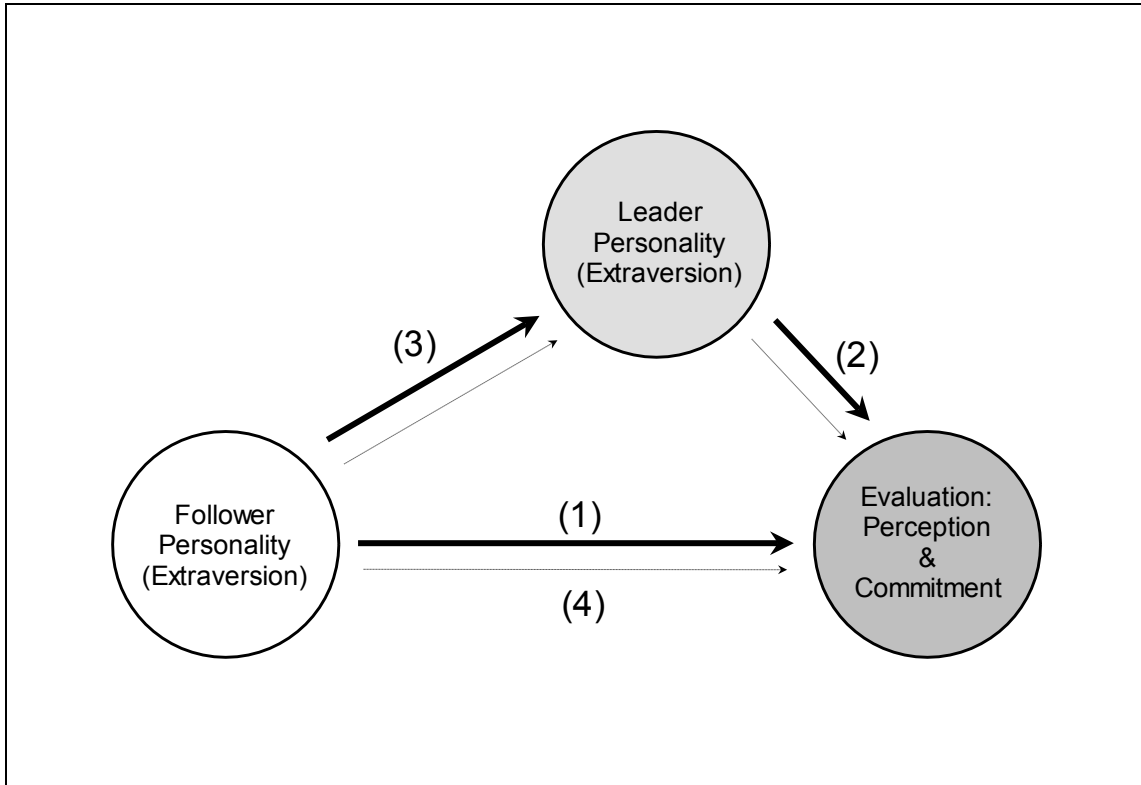|	Perceived transformational leadership								Commitment to supervisor (affective)							
	Neuroticism [3]		Extraversion		Openness		Agreeableness		Neuroticism		Extraversion		Openness		Agreeableness	
	beta	Δ R²	beta	Δ R²	beta	Δ R²	beta	Δ R²	beta	Δ R²	beta	Δ R²	beta	Δ R²	beta	Δ R²
Step 1		.01		.02		.02		.02		.02		.02		.02		.02
age	-.04		.00		.01		.00		-.12		-.12		-.12		-.12	
sex	.02		.14		.15"		.14		.08		.08		.08		.08	
Step 2		.05*		.04*		.03		.11***		.02		.04*		.02		.12***
age	-.05		.02		.01		-0.5		-.12		-.10		-.12		-.17"	
sex	.04		.13		.15"		.09		.10		.07		.09		.03	
Pers (f)	-.22*		.21*		.09		.34***		-.13		.20*		.13		.36***	
Step 3		.25***		.26***		.20***		.20***		.24***		.23***		.13***		.20***
age	-.04		-.01		-.07		-.07		-.11		-.13		-.18*		-.18*	
sex	-.01		.08		.13		.04		.05		.03		.07		-.03	
Pers (f)	-.14"		.11		.01		.27**		-.05		.11		.06		.25**	
Pers (l)	-.51***		.52***		.43***		.47***		-.49***		.49***		.37***		.47***	
R²	.30		.32		.20		.33		.27		.28		.16		.34	
Z	1.73"		2.19*		./.		.2.47*		./.		2.17*		./.		2.48*	

Note: Pers (f) = followers' personality, Pers (l) perceived leaders' personality; " p < .10,* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; [3] dependant variable is transformational leadership overall measure except for neuroticism which was only regressed on IC (individualized consideration); sex: male = 1, female =2

Table 3: Means of Cluster

.	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	F
1) Extraversion (l)	4.06	3.41	56.48***
2) Extraversion (f)	4.10	3.44	64.63***
3) Agreeableness (l)	4.11	3.25	66.93***
4) Agreeableness (f)	4.26	3.99	17.36***
5) Openness (l)	3.74	3.16	36.25***
6) Openness (f)	3.64	3.22	19.93***
7) Neuroticism (l)	1.91	2.33	22.25***
8) Neuroticism (f)	2.05	2.65	41.92***
9) TL overall	3.96	3.37	29.52***
10) Com. to sup. aff.	3.61	2.82	31.54***

Note: (f) = followers' personality (l) perceived leaders' personality

Figure 1: Followers' and leaders' personality affecting commitment and leadership

perceptions

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Footnotes

[1] An alternative way to measure similarity would be to calculate difference sores. High scores result from big differences whereas low scores indicate low differences. However this measure does not differentiate between low-low and high-high scorings (both will produce small differences). For our hypotheses, this differentiation is important as we do not assume that both cases result in high levels of transformational leadership and commitment. Instead, according to our model, people with similar low ratings should perceive low levels of transformational leadership and commitment whereas people with similar high ratings should have high levels of leadership and commitment. Thus we consider the correlation a tentative appropriate measure for similarity.