

DAAN STAM

# Managing Dreams and Ambitions

A Psychological Analysis of Vision Communication



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by

Daan Stam



# **Managing Dreams and Ambitions**

## **A psychological analysis of vision communication**

**Het managen van dromen en ambities: Een psychologische analyse van visiecommunicatie**

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## PREFACE

“The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one often comes from a strong will, and the other from a strong won't.” *Henry Ward Beecher*

After four years of hard work I managed to finish this dissertation and I could not have done this alone: The support of many has been vital for the production of the very pages you are reading now. Although I cannot thank everyone who deserves it (this would require a complete book, I fear; maybe even a whole series), I would like to mention at least some.

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## CONTENTS

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>                                    | <b>11</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 2: Focusing on followers</b>                           | <b>21</b>  |
| Introduction  | 21         |
| Study 1: Follower-focused visions and chronic regulatory focus    | 28         |
| Study 2: Follower-focused visions and contextual regulatory focus | 34         |
| General discussion  | 40         |
| <b>Chapter 3: Regulatory fit and visionary leadership</b>         | <b>47</b>  |
| Introduction  | 47         |
| Study 1: Visionary appeals and chronic regulatory focus           | 55         |
| Study 2: Visionary appeals and contextual regulatory focus        | 61         |
| General discussion  | 63         |
| Appendix: Visions   | 70         |
| <b>Chapter 4: When the going gets tough</b>                       | <b>73</b>  |
| Introduction  | 73         |
| Study 1a: Visions expression when the going gets tough            | 80         |
| Study 1b: Vision perception when the going gets tough             | 84         |
| Study 2: When the going gets tough, the tough get going           | 89         |
| General discussion  | 92         |
| <b>Chapter 5: An image of who we might become</b>                 | <b>97</b>  |
| Introduction  | 97         |
| A conceptual model of vision communication                        | 101        |
| Discussion  | 113        |
| <b>Chapter 6: General discussion</b>                              | <b>119</b> |



|                                 |            |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Nederlandse samenvatting</b> | <b>129</b> |
| <b>References</b>               | <b>137</b> |
| <b>Biography</b>                | <b>152</b> |

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” *Dwight Eisenhower*

“A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be.” *Rosalynn Carter*



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The study of leadership is popular and seemingly always has been. In the last decades a large number of scholars has emphasized leadership as an essential part of organizational behavior (Bass, 1985; Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1988, 1998; Yukl, 2000), but long before them philosophers already wrote about how and why men (should) lead men (for instance, Hobbes' 'Leviathan', Plato's 'Politeia', or Montesquieu's 'De L'esprit des lois'). One reason for the continuing popularity of leadership as a scientific endeavor may be that society is getting ever more organized and leaders fulfill crucial linking functions within organizations (Yukl, 2000). A more romantic explanation may be that 'common people' love heroes (and villains) and leaders make excellent champions of good (or evil). Indeed, Meindl's theory appropriately termed the romance of leadership argues that leaders are often attributed much more successes (and failures) than is realistic (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987). Therefore, it seems no coincidence that right after two World Wars academia witnessed a surge in leadership research (Chemers, 2000). After experiencing the destruction that one man could accomplish (or, as Meindl would ask, could he?), more and more scholars dedicated time and effort to understand how leaders could influence followers so dramatically. Sixty three years after the Second World War we know much more about leadership, yet we still face many questions. This dissertation aims to answer some of those.

***Leadership effectiveness.*** Through the years researchers have focused on a variety of different measures of leadership effectiveness. All of them seem related to effects of leadership on subordinates, often called followers. This has led Yukl (2000) to identify influence as the essence of leadership. In the 1980's research started to emphasize leadership outcomes in terms of intrinsic motivation and inspiration of followers (Bryman, 1992; Chemers, 2000; Yukl, 2000). This so called 'new leadership' movement (Bryman, 1992) aimed to explain how leaders could make followers genuinely concerned about collective interests because such a concern might cause followers to

regulate their own behaviors without leaders having to provide continuous guidance. Similarly, this dissertation focuses on intrinsic motivation and subsequent behavioral regulation of followers as key outcomes of leadership behavior.

**Leader behaviors.** The first post-war studies of leadership assumed that the traits and characteristics of individuals potentially made them great leaders, but it appeared that no set of traits could reliably predict leadership success (Stogdill, 1948) and soon research emphasized behaviors as key independent variables in the regression of leadership (Chemers, 2000). Since then many effective behaviors have been identified, like initiating structure (Halpin & Winer, 1957), resource deployment (Chemers, 2000) and relationship development (Chemers, 2000). More recently, research has focused on a set of leader behaviors called charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, 1998) and transformational (Bass, 1985) leadership behaviors. Especially one behavior, vision communication, is viewed as a crucial predictor of follower intrinsic motivation (Bryman, 1992). However, although vision communication is widely acknowledged as essential for effective leadership, research on vision communication is scarce and many aspects of vision communication remain mysterious (Beyer, 1999, Shamir, 1999). In this dissertation I try to solve the mystery of vision communication. Therefore, the research question that is a common thread in this work is:

*How can vision communication affect follower (intrinsic) motivation and subsequent behavior?*

### **Vision Communication**

In an organization setting, vision communication refers to the communication of a future image of an organization. In recent years visions are increasingly viewed as key tools to influence followers. Books on leadership identify the ability to communicate inspirational visions as one of the differences between great leaders and ‘mere’ managers (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Websites of companies tend to display visions explicitly. A Google search on leadership and vision leads to almost 4.000.000 hits (as opposed to leadership and charisma, almost 400.000 hits and leadership and motivation, almost 600.000 hits). In other words, visions are ‘hot’. However, vision communication is not a

new concept, but has been explored for decades. Most notably, Max Weber (1947) and George MacGregor Burns (1978) used the notion in their very influential leadership theories.

***Weber and the charismatic vision.*** In the early 20th century ongoing formalization and specialization lead Max Weber to write famous works on organization and the bureaucracy (Lindholm, 1990; Riesenbrodt, 1999). His beloved bureaucracy was a highly hierarchical and efficient organization based on the rules of logic. Authority within the bureaucracy was based on hierarchy (and therefore was logical). However, Weber also defined other forms of leadership, like authority based on tradition (which he seemed to regard as a crude form of hierarchy and logic), and most notably authority based on charisma (which literally means gift of grace). Weber's charismatic leaders were extraordinary men; revolutionary forces that destroyed the existing social structures and created crisis. Weber seemed to have based many of his writings about charismatic leaders on the ideas of Sohm, who studied leadership in the early Christian church and concluded that leadership in that (rather informal) organization was based on being able to directly talk to God (Riesenbrodt, 1999). Indeed, prophets appeared not to have any other instrument to demand obedience than their visions of God's will: Their gifts of God. These visions were glimpses of the (often doomed) future; gifts of a higher being with the purpose of righting a wrong in society. Charismatic leaders gathered following by proclaiming the future via revolutionary visions and tried to dramatically change society and social structures through them.

***Burns and the transforming vision.*** Years later, in 1978, Burns wrote his seminal work on political leadership. Political leadership had been preoccupied with the legitimization of power (Burns, 1978). Power denotes the potential to influence another: The possibility to use more 'force' to influence someone, than that person can muster to go against your will. Burns sharply contrasted his 'leadership' with power wielding. He argued that leaders should not force followers to do what leaders wanted, but rather should focus on making followers want what leaders needed them to want. He described two ways of accomplishing this. Transactional leaders offered something in exchange for a service or deed. These leaders used exchange to motivate individuals (externally) to do what they wanted. In contrast transforming leaders aimed to elevate the needs and wants

of individuals to suit theirs. These transforming leaders were moral individuals that aimed to defend universal values. They transformed those around them to be more moral and ethical and motivated them to go beyond self-interest. In order to accomplish this, transforming leaders used visions of the future that were idealistic and ethical and that appealed to the morals of their followers. In a way these visions were moral guidebooks for both the leader and his followers.

***New leadership and the charismatic/transformation vision.*** After a period of little theoretical development, organizational psychologists borrowed a lot from Weber and Burns to stimulate their research of organizational leadership (Bryman, 1992). They developed theories of leadership that emphasized intrinsic motivation and that focused on collective interest. Their charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, 1998) and transformational (Bass, 1985) leaders were exceptional (like Weber's charismatics) and inspired individuals to go beyond self-interest (like Burns' transforming leaders). Moreover, the theories heavily leaned on inspirational appeals and vision communication as a means to influence followers (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). However, the ideas about visions of Weber and Burns appeared inappropriate in an organizational context and therefore organizational psychology developed somewhat more diluted versions of these ideas. Their visions were innovative ideals that challenged the status quo (instead of being revolutionary which did not seem to fit the organizational context) and focused on collective norms and values (instead of focusing on universal morals and ethics which again did not seem to fit the organizational field).

***Visions in this dissertation.*** I simply view visions as images of the future. I note that I do not use phrases like innovation or collective values, which makes this definition more general than the ones often employed in charismatic and transformational leadership research, and also less normative. I believe this is important because in determining what makes vision communication effective one should take care not to define visions in a way that already implies effectiveness so as to avoid a tautology. In other words, maybe a focus on (collective) values makes visions more effective (I will argue this is the case in a later chapter), but that doesn't mean that all visions per definition focus on values (if anything it actually entails that visions do not per definition focus on values).

***Followers and Vision Communication***

Research on leadership has paid a lot of attention to what leaders do and has generally understudied the role of followers in leadership (Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004). Lately there has been a shift in this regard. More and more scholars acknowledge the critical position that followers fulfill in the leadership process and especially the role of follower self-concepts (Brown & Lord, 2001, 2004; Shamir et al, 1993; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). The self-concept refers to a network of knowledge, ideas, feelings, etc. regarding the self and its relation to others and the outside world (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). Although the self-concept is quite stable on the long run, it can be influenced by outside forces (Markus & Kunda, 1986) opening the door for leadership to affect follower self-concepts (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Such an influence would be worthwhile because the self-concept has profound effects on people's behavior, cognitions, and emotions (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). Moreover, Shamir and colleagues (1993) propose that the follower self-concept mediates the influence of charismatic leadership (including vision communication) on follower motivation and behavior, suggesting that vision communication may affect the way followers perceive themselves and their relation to their co-workers and the organization, subsequently influencing their motivation and behavior (Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1994). I take a similar perspective on the role of follower selves, although in some chapters more explicitly than in others.

***The Role of Regulatory Focus***

Ever since Fiedler's (1967) work on contingency models of leadership, research has widely accepted that the effectiveness of leadership may be dependent on environmental factors. An important category of such factors is follower characteristics (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Howell & Shamir, 2005; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). With regard to vision communication I argue that especially one specific individual difference variable is an important moderator of vision effectiveness: Regulatory focus. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997) posits that human self regulation can be established through two different strategies. One strategy, named promotion focus, is to aim for gains and rewards. Another strategy, named prevention focus, is to aim for



security and avoiding losses. Not unlike the self-concept (Markus & Kunda, 1986), regulatory focus is quite stable on the long run (chronic regulatory focus), but can also change due to environmental stimuli (contextual regulatory focus; Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004). Regulatory focus refers to strategies to accomplish end states, while visions incorporate strategies to accomplish end states. Therefore (and for other reasons that will become clear shortly), I focus on follower regulatory focus as a key variable in the vision communication process.

### ***Overview of the Dissertation***

This dissertation consists of several chapters. Most of these chapters (chapters 2-5) are stand alone research articles and as such can be read in isolation. Be that as it may, the separate chapters also form one coherent story. Three of the chapters are empirical in nature, while one is conceptual. The conceptual chapter follows the empirical chapters because it is much broader and because this is the chronological order in which the studies were conducted and written. Since I have developed the following chapters in cooperation with co-authors I will use ‘we’ instead of I from now on when I (we?) refer to the author(s).

***Chapter 2: Focusing on followers.*** In this chapter we focused on the mediating role of follower (future) selves in vision communication and the moderating role of follower self regulatory focus. Specifically, we had a (imaginary) professor give one of two speeches about innovative management to students: One speech emphasized the importance of innovative management for these students personally and another emphasized the importance of innovative management for students in general. We also measured (Study 1) and manipulated (Study 2) the regulatory focus of the students. We argued that focusing on the importance of innovation for these students personally would lead the students to think of themselves in the future as innovative managers more than focusing on the importance of innovation for students in general because the students would feel more personally involved. This should also lead to better performance on a task related to innovation. Furthermore, we proposed that such an effect would be especially strong for students with a (strong) promotion focus because they tend to focus on ideals and ambitions (which is what this speech was all about).

**Chapter 3: Regulatory fit and visionary leadership.** In the next chapter we took a more in depth look at the moderating role of regulatory focus. We investigated whether the congruence between vision content and follower regulatory focus could affect follower performance on tasks related to the vision. We again showed students one of two speeches about innovative management, communicated by a professor. One speech advocated becoming an innovative manager because this way the students could obtain several beneficial outcomes. Another speech promoted becoming an innovative manager because this way the students could avoid several harmful outcomes. We also measured (Study 1) and manipulated (Study 2) regulatory focus of the students. We predicted that a speech emphasizing gains and benefits would lead to better performance for (more) promotion-focused students because they were highly attentive to potential gains. In contrast, we argued that a speech emphasizing avoiding losses would lead to better performance for (more) prevention-focused students because they were highly attentive to potential losses.

**Chapter 4: When the going gets tough.** In this chapter we took two new steps in developing our research. First, we investigated what factors might cause the communication of more ‘promotion’- or more ‘prevention’-oriented speeches. Specifically, we investigated the role of leader strategies and the existence of crisis. We asked students to write a speech as though they were the leader of a certain company. Just before this task, we manipulated the strategies of the students to be either promotion-focused or prevention-focused and also manipulated the company to be in crisis or to prosper. We thought that when a company was prosperous leader strategies would not be emphasized in vision communication, but when a company was in crisis (a more uncertain and emotionally confusing situation) students with promotion strategies would write clear promotion-oriented speech, while students with prevention strategies would write clear prevention-oriented speech. Second, we looked at the role of crisis in vision evaluation. To do this we had students evaluate a visionary speech of the CEO of a company as though they were employees of this company. We first manipulated the situation of the company to represent times of crisis or prosperity. Then we showed the students either a promotion-oriented speech or a prevention-oriented speech. We

predicted that in times of crisis students would prefer a promotion-oriented speech, while in times of prosperity they would prefer a prevention-oriented speech.

**Chapter 5: *An image of who we might become.*** In this chapter we developed an individual level conceptual framework of vision effectiveness. Based on earlier chapters as well as research on identity development we argued that vision communication may be effective if it leads to the creation of possible selves based on the vision by followers. Furthermore, drawing from persuasion research we identified several categories of moderators of this process. We used the framework to integrate prior research on vision communication and also to generate new hypotheses for future research.

**Chapter 6: *Conclusion.*** This chapter summarized the findings of the previous chapters and aimed to relate and integrate them in order to come to some comprehensive conclusions. Because I have already discussed a more general integration of previous literature of vision communication in chapter 5, the conclusions in this chapter will be fairly specific and concise. The added value is in the integration of the findings of the previous four chapters.

### ***So Why Should You Read This Dissertation?***

Reading this dissertation may be interesting for various reasons. For practitioners the research included in this book may be especially appealing because it focuses on relatively specific leadership behaviors. Much of the research in leadership concerns leadership styles (e.g. Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). These styles are such broad conglomerates of behaviors that it is often difficult to understand which specific behaviors may lead to which specific effects. In our studies we focus on behaviors rather than styles and therefore it may be relatively easy to transfer the findings of our research to practice. For instance, it may be easier to train or select on the basis of specific behaviors than on the basis of ambiguous styles. Furthermore, the underlying principles that we present are based on very fundamental findings in social psychology and may be applied in a wide range of practical situations. Much of the research on leadership focuses on the existence of certain relations between leadership styles and specific outcomes without explicitly investigating the processes underlying these relations. One of the reasons for this may be that many deem such underlying processes not relevant for

leadership practice. In contrast, from an academic perspective it seems evident that understanding *how* phenomena take place may be more important than simply knowing that they take place because knowledge of processes is more adaptable and less context dependent than knowledge of effects. This is especially important for leadership because there may be no one best leadership practice and therefore leaders may need to adapt their behaviors to specific conditions. This implies that an understanding of underlying processes may be more important than simple input-output relations.

For leadership researchers this dissertation may also be interesting. Most directly, chapter 6 presents a new theoretical model for understanding vision effectiveness. This framework provides a multitude of possibilities for new research and also for the application of theories from other disciplines to vision communication. Maybe less prominent, but not less important is the development of a new paradigm to study vision communication. Specifically, in chapters two and three we use a specific experimental design to test hypotheses about vision communication. This design offers a lot of possibilities to investigate a wide range of ideas about vision communication and as such may be very relevant for vision researchers.



## CHAPTER 2

### FOCUSING ON FOLLOWERS\*

*Vision communication is considered to be essential for leaders to mobilize followers, but knowledge of how and why vision communication may influence followers is scarce. We argue that visions may invite followers to create an ideal self (an idyllic and desired image of the self). Subsequent considering of this ideal self may activate motivational processes in the followers aimed at making the ideal self (and thus the vision) reality. Furthermore, we propose that visions that focus on followers (by addressing followers personally and involving them in the vision) are more likely to lead to the creation of an ideal self and hence to higher follower performance than visions that do not focus on followers. Moreover, we propose that this effect is especially strong for followers with a promotion self-regulatory focus, a focus on reaching ideals and ideal selves, because promotion focus causes sensitivity to the presence or absence of ideals (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). The results of two experiments support our predictions.*

## INTRODUCTION

Many scholars argue that communicating an inspiring vision of the future is essential for leaders to mobilize followers (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Indeed, research shows that vision communication may lead to improved follower motivation and performance (Baum, Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). However, empirical research that sheds light on why this is the case and under which conditions is scarce. This has led to several calls for more knowledge of processes that underlie the effectiveness of vision communication (Beyer, 1999a, 1999b; House, 1999; Shamir, 1999).

Based on studies of leadership and the self-concept (Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Lord & Emrich, 2000; Shamir et al., 1993; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004) we propose that one of the

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\* This chapter is based on Stam, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg (in press a)

reasons why some visions may be more motivating than others is that they lead to the creation of an ideal possible self (one's most desired image of the self) by followers. A few scholars have pointed to the potential role of possible selves in leadership processes and in vision effectiveness in particular (Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Lord et al., 1999; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). However, the current study is the first to empirically address this issue and to identify some of the contingencies of leaders' ability to inspire followers to create ideal possible selves through the communication of a vision.

Specifically, we argue that visions that focus on followers, by addressing followers personally and involving them in the vision, are more likely to lead to the creation of an ideal self by followers than visions that do not focus on followers. Moreover, we propose that this effect is especially strong for individuals with a promotion self-regulatory focus, a focus on reaching ideal selves, because promotion focus causes sensitivity to the presence or absence of ideals (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). We test these ideas in two experiments using different operationalizations of self-regulatory focus.

### ***Visions and Ideal Selves***

Visions are defined as ideal, future-oriented images that focus on values and norms (Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001; Shamir et al., 1993). Communicating an inspiring vision is a central element of some of the most influential leadership theories of the last decades (Bryman, 1992; Yukl, 2002), such as charismatic leadership theories (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Weber, 1947) and transformational leadership theories (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Vision communication may cause followers to be more efficacious, identify more with the organization, and may provide a sense of meaning and purpose in daily work (Bryman, 1992; Shamir et al., 1993; Yukl, 2002). Importantly, vision communication may also improve follower and company performance (Baum et al., 1998; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). The evident importance of vision communication has led many scholars to call for a research focus on *what* makes visions effective, and *why* (Beyer, 1999a, 1999b; House, 1999; Shamir, 1999).

The few studies of vision communication that have been conducted give some idea of what might make one vision more effective than another. Baum and colleagues

(1998), for instance, content-coded the visions of CEOs and related them to venture growth. They concluded that vision attributes (including vision desirability) and vision content (growth imaginary) positively predicted venture growth. Mio, Riggio, Levin, and Reese (2005) found that US presidents who made more use of metaphors in vision communication were considered to be more charismatic than presidents who made less use of metaphors. They argued that metaphors made visions more vivid and understandable for followers. Emrich, Brower, Feldman, and Garland (2001) showed that the use of image-based rhetoric, which refers to the use of words that “quickly and easily arouse a sensory experience such as a mental picture or sound” (p. 529), was positively associated with presidential charisma and presidential greatness. They reasoned that image-based rhetoric easily invoked a mental picture of a vision, which made the vision more real and appealing to followers. Thus, by communicating a desirable vision using specific rhetoric (like metaphors and image-based words) a leader may make a vision more appealing to followers, leading them to think about and involve themselves in the desirable picture of the future. This in turn may result in greater vision effectiveness.

This line of reasoning emphasizes the role of followers in the vision communication process, but there is little research that contains measures of follower process variables. Therefore, we argue that in order to understand vision effectiveness research should concentrate more on followers (cf. Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Shamir et al., 1993), and specifically on their self-concept (cf. Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Lord et al., 1999; Lord & Emrich, 2000; Shamir et al., 1993; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). The self-concept refers to a dynamic interpretive system that consists of images, thoughts, schemas, prototypes, theories, goals, and tasks, etc., related to the self (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The self-concept has profound effects on people’s perception, behavior, and motivation (Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Thus, if leaders are able to influence the self-concept of followers they may indirectly influence their perception, behavior, and motivation (for an overview see van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Shamir and colleagues (1993) argue that vision communication may be a tool to influence followers’ self-concepts, because by providing a vision for followers leaders essentially try to align the self-concepts of followers with the values and identities communicated by that vision.



Because visions per definition concern the future, we argue that in order to explain vision effectiveness one should focus on that part of the self-concept that deals with the future, called the “possible self” (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves are images, thoughts, and ideas of who a person *could be*, the “cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals, and threats” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Possible selves may be important for explaining how vision communication mobilizes followers, because possible selves are shown to be closely related to motivational and self-regulatory processes, such as identity formation, long term regulation of behavior, and social comparison processes (Dunkel, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004; Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

Higgins (1987, 1996, 1997) differentiates between ideal possible selves and ought possible selves. The former concern positive ideal future images that an individual aspires to become. The latter refer to responsibilities and duties that an individual believes he/she has to live up to. Especially ideal possible selves may be relevant for explaining vision effectiveness, because visions per definition concern ideal, possible futures. Furthermore, ideal possible selves are closely related to self-improvement motivation (Bannaji & Prentice, 1994). If a leader’s vision causes the creation of an ideal possible self based on this vision, it might activate motivational processes in followers aimed at making the ideal self (and thus the vision) reality. In sum, the reason why some visions are effective could be that the ideal future image which is communicated by leaders becomes an ideal, personal future image for followers.

### ***Follower-Focused Visions***

We propose that those visions that are able to make followers create ideal selves are more motivating for followers than visions that are unable to do so. But how can leaders facilitate the creation of possible selves? Sashkin (1988, p. 132-133) made the following observation:

“A final theme common to effective visions is a focus on people... Only when people are part of the vision in these ways, can they take charge of the vision and make it their own. If, in contrast, a vision remains identified as the ‘property’ of the leader and is never ‘owned’ by the organization’s members, it is not likely to

be carried out effectively.”

Sashkin suggested that, if followers are to imagine their future in terms of the vision, the vision needed to focus on them and involve them. Orit Gadiesh, the successful vice chairman of Bain & Co., provides an example of a follower-focus in a speech to employees:

“I’ve asked you to listen to what people say about the power of what you do. I’ve asked you to look at each other and not take for granted what others envy us for... Each and every one of us is an ambassador of our company. Each and every one of us is part of the team. Whether you are in the administrative staff convincing someone to apply for a job, or helping a colleague get through a bad day. Whether you are a consultant or an associate consultant, striking up a conversation or on a plane or celebrating your friends’ successes in your area. Whether you are talking to a potential employee or client, or working with your team, who you are and what you believe comes through. You can only say what you believe. You can only project what you feel” (as cited in Conger & Kanungo, 1998, p. 182-183).

Gadiesh addressed her followers personally using the word “you” often. In this way she involved them in her vision and directly encouraged them to think about the vision. Testifying to the effectiveness of follower-focused visions, Den Hartog and Verburg (1997) found in a qualitative study that successful business leaders specifically addressed the audience they were talking to and made an effort to involve them in their vision. We argue that by focusing on followers (e.g. specifically addressing followers and asking them to think about their part in the vision) leaders can enhance the likelihood that followers create an ideal self based on the vision, which subsequently may lead to improved follower motivation and performance.

*Hypothesis 1: Follower-focused visions motivate higher follower performance than visions that are not follower-focused.*

*Hypothesis 2: The effect of a follower focus in leader visions on follower performance is mediated by follower ideal self.*

### ***Regulatory Focus***

If the creation of ideal selves indeed plays a role in explaining why some visions are more motivating than others, then factors that influence the creation of such ideal selves may also be important in predicting vision effectiveness. Higgins (1987, 1996, 1997), for instance, argues that as a function of their self-regulatory focus, people differ in their tendency to emphasize and create ideal selves. Specifically, Higgins distinguishes between two regulatory foci: a promotion focus and a prevention focus. A promotion focus is a tendency to approach desired end states, while a prevention focus is a tendency to avoid undesired end states. These different tendencies affect many cognitive and behavioral processes. For instance, individuals with a promotion focus are more creative than individuals with a prevention focus (Friedman & Förster, 2001). Likewise, individuals with a promotion focus are more motivated by a goal that emphasizes gains or by a role model that embodies excellence than by a goal that emphasizes losses or by a role model that embodies failure, while the reverse is true for individuals with a prevention focus (Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002; Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998).

More importantly, individuals with a promotion focus are sensitive to the presence of ideals and ideal selves, while individuals with a prevention focus are sensitive to the presence of duties and responsibilities (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). Because individuals with a promotion focus are especially likely to create ideal selves, we propose that the effects of a focus on followers in vision communication (which encourages the creation of ideal selves) will be greater for followers with a promotion focus than for followers without a promotion focus.

*Hypothesis 3: The effect of a follower focus in leader visions on follower ideal self are stronger for followers with a promotion focus than for followers without a promotion focus.*

### ***The Current Research***

In the current research we test these ideas in two experiments that use different operationalizations of regulatory focus, namely chronic and contextual regulatory focus

(Keller & Bless, 2006). This two-study method is employed often in the regulatory focus literature, because it enables the replication of findings using different operationalizations of regulatory focus and therefore enhances the robustness of findings (for instance, Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lockwood et al., 2002).

Chronic regulatory focus indicates stable individual differences in regulatory focus. Chronic regulatory focus changes relatively little over time and is often the result of childhood experiences (Keller & Bless, 2006). For instance, children that are raised with an emphasis on their duties and responsibilities may develop a chronic prevention focus, while children that are raised with an emphasis on their personal ambitions and dreams may develop a chronic promotion focus (Higgins, 1997). Measures of chronic regulatory focus usually assess both prevention focus and promotion focus, and often find the two dimensions unrelated (for instance, Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lockwood et al., 2002). In Study 1 we investigate the effects of chronic regulatory focus using a measure translated from Lockwood and colleagues (2002), which measures both participants' prevention focus and participants' promotion focus. In this design we expect that the effects of a follower focus on follower's ideal selves will be stronger for participants with a high score on chronic promotion focus than for participants with a low score on chronic promotion focus.

Contextual regulatory focus designates situationally induced differences in regulatory focus. Contextual regulatory focus is brought about by the individual's environment and can change swiftly from situation to situation. For instance, a task in which individuals can earn money may induce a promotion focus, while a task in which individuals can lose money may induce a prevention focus (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997, Study 4). Contextual regulatory focus is usually manipulated to be either a promotion or a prevention focus (for instance, Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lockwood et al., 2002). In Study 2 we investigate the effects of contextual regulatory focus using a manipulation based on Higgins, Bond, Klein, and Strauman (1986), which induces either a promotion or a prevention focus in participants. In this design we expect that the effects of a follower focus on follower ideal self will be stronger in the promotion condition than in the prevention condition.

## STUDY 1: FOLLOWER-FOCUSED VISIONS AND CHRONIC REGULATORY FOCUS

### *Method*

**Participants and design.** The participants of this study were 105 first and second year students, enrolled in business or economics (65 male, 40 female; Mean age = 19.33, SD = 2.23). Only students that held a (part-time) job were selected to participate in this study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two possible vision conditions (Vision: follower-focused or control). We measured chronic promotion and prevention focus and added them to the design.

**Procedure.** Participants were placed inside a cubicle where a computer was prepared for them. All questions were asked and answered using this computer. First the participants filled out a questionnaire which assessed their chronic regulatory focus. Thereafter, participants were told that a business leader would give them a speech on an important subject for managers. We opted to create a speech about management because this topic is genuinely important for our participants (business and economics students). This was essential, because the effectiveness of follower-focused visions depended heavily on the extent to which participants were interested in the topic of the vision. The leader was introduced as an authority on management and an intellectual leader of future managers, and as such provided a leader figure for the participants. In reality, an audio sample was played in which an actor gave one of two possible speeches (follower-focused or control). During the speech, the text was simultaneously presented on the screen. In both speeches the actor focused on innovative management, a form of management that emphasized creativity and innovative behavior. We incorporated elements in the speech that are considered essential for organizational visions (cf. Shamir et al., 1993): The vision was future-oriented (the leader told participants what he believed to be important for future managers), promoted a positive end-state (it promoted the image of the innovative manager as a positive end-state) and talked about norms and values (it presented innovative management as a good form of management and focused on how to behave in order to become an innovative manager).

After the speech had ended, the participants answered questions assessing the

extent to which the innovative manager had become an ideal self for the participants. We then measured performance with an idea generation task, which was introduced as a task that measured the participants' creativity. First, participants read a cover story, which related the task to the leader's vision. The cover story was based on a cover story by Brunstein and Gollwitzer (1996). Participants were told that creativity was a very important skill for innovative managers. Specifically, participants read the following:

*“Research on innovative management showed that creativity is an important predictor of innovative management behavior. Creativity is very important for innovative managers. Making innovative decisions and solving problems innovatively requires tremendous creative ability. Moreover, creativity is regarded as one of the most important qualities necessary to solve complex problems in innovative ways. Studies show that innovative managers distinguish themselves from other managers by having the ability to be creative. Managers that are pointed out as innovative managers without exception score high on creativity tasks.”*

We then administered the idea generation task. After the experiment, participants were debriefed, thanked and paid 10 euro (approximately USD 13) for their participation.

**Vision manipulation.** We manipulated the extent to which the leader's vision focused on followers. In the follower-focused condition, the leader talked to the followers directly and tried to make them think about their role in the vision. An excerpt of the personal vision is:

*“...You can develop your innovative management potential. If you try to approach problems from different angles, if you take the time to go beyond the obvious, if you actively and consciously harness creativity, then you can develop yourself as an innovative and successful manager...”*

In the control condition the speech was written in the third person. The participants were not personally addressed and they were not encouraged to think about their role in the vision. An excerpt of the control vision is:

*“...People can develop their innovative management potential. People who try to approach problems from different angles, who take the time to go beyond the obvious, who actively and consciously harness creativity can develop themselves*

as innovative and successful managers.”

The two visions had the same content and were of exact equal length (they only differed in their appeal to the participant’s self).

We conducted a pilot study with 32 business students (23 male, 9 female; Mean age = 18.81,  $SD = 1.09$ ) to test whether our vision manipulation affected the extent to which participants felt that the vision focused on them. The participants were randomly assigned to the different vision conditions. After the vision manipulation, we asked participants two questions to assess to what extent they felt personally addressed by the speech and whether they had reflected on the vision (e.g. “The leader talked to the listeners personally in his plea for innovative management”;  $M = 4.84$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ). A t-test revealed that participants in the follower-focused condition felt more personally addressed and had reflected more on the vision ( $M = 5.36$ ) than participants in the control condition ( $M = 4.18$ ),  $t(30) = -2.81$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Self-regulatory focus measure.** To assess chronic self-regulatory focus we used the promotion/prevention focus questionnaire developed by Lockwood et al. (2002). Nine questions were used to assess the chronic prevention focus of the participants (e.g. “*I am anxious that I will fall short of my responsibilities and obligations*”,  $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .83$ ,  $\alpha = .68$ ). Nine questions were used to assess the chronic promotion focus of the participants (e.g. “*I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations*”,  $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = .65$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ). A principal component analysis with varimax rotation yielded a two component structure for these measures. There was no correlation between prevention and promotion focus,  $r = .02$ . Furthermore, t-tests with the vision manipulation as independent variable and subsequently promotion and prevention focus as dependent variables showed that the mean score of both scales did not differ over conditions  $t(103) = -.29$ ,  $p = ns.$  and  $t(103) = -1.87$ ,  $p = ns.$ , respectively.

**Ideal self.** We measured ideal self with three items ( $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ,  $\alpha = .68$ ). We based these items on Markus and Nurius’ seminal article (1986) on possible selves. Markus and Nurius described three items that measured future possible selves. These items assessed the existence of possible selves, the perceived desirability of these possible selves, and the perceived feasibility of these possible selves. The items we used corresponded to these aspects: “During the speech I pictured myself in the future as an

innovative manager” (existence), “I believe that this vision of innovative management would suit me well” (desirability), and “I think that in the future I will become an innovative manager” (feasibility).

**Performance.** To measure performance we used the idea generation task developed by Friedman & Förster (2001). We opted for an idea generation task because we wanted participants to think we were interested in their creative ability in order to make the cover story more compelling. Indeed, idea generation task have sometimes been used for the purpose of measuring creativity (Friedman & Förster, 2001; Rietzschel, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2007). In line with other previous research, however, we used the task to measure performance (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987, 1991; Paulus & Yang, 2000; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Specifically, we gave participants three minutes to come up with as many uses for a brick as they could and to type in these answers. A rater who was blind to the experimental conditions then simply counted the number of responses each participant generated (responses that were incomprehensible or unfinished were not counted). The final score equaled the number of valid ideas each participant had typed in ( $M = 13.12$ ,  $SD = 6.55$ )<sup>1</sup>.

## **Results**

**Ideal self.** We conducted hierarchical regression analysis with ideal self as a dependent variable. In step 1, centered scores of promotion focus, prevention focus and Vision were entered as independent measures. In step 2, the interaction between Vision and promotion focus and the interaction between Vision and prevention focus were also entered as independent variables.



Table 2.1: *Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting ideal self, study 1 (N = 105)*

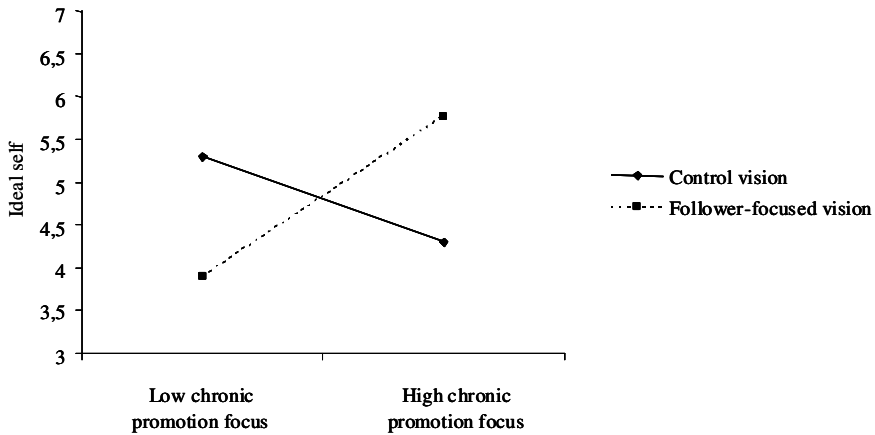
| <i>Variable</i>           | <i>b</i> | <i>SE b</i> | <i>β</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Step 1                    |          |             |          |
| Vision manipulation       | 0.49     | 0.19        | 0.03     |
| Chronic prevention focus  | -0.11    | 0.11        | -0.09    |
| Chronic promotion focus   | 0.30     | 0.14        | 0.20*    |
| Step 2                    |          |             |          |
| Vision manipulation       | 0.02     | 0.18        | 0.01     |
| Chronic prevention focus  | -0.06    | 0.11        | -0.06    |
| Chronic promotion focus   | 0.22     | 0.14        | 0.15     |
| Vision * Prevention focus | -0.29    | 0.22        | -0.13    |
| Vision * Promotion focus  | 0.71     | 0.28        | 0.25*    |

Note.  $R^2 = .05$  for Step 1 ( $p < ns$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .07$  for Step 2 ( $p < .05$ ).

\* $p < .05$ .

In step 1, the results showed a significant main effect of promotion focus,  $t(101) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .04$  (See Table 2.1), but no significant main effects of Vision or prevention focus. The higher a participant's promotion focus, the stronger his or her ideal self. In step 2 the results showed a significant interaction of Vision and promotion focus,  $t(99) = 2.57$ ,  $p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$  (see Figure 2.1), but no other significant effects (See Table 2.1). We then performed simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) to test whether the slopes of the interaction were significantly different from zero. This analysis showed that in the case of a high promotion focus the slope was positive and significant (a follower-focused vision led to a higher score than a control vision),  $t(99) = 2.39$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\beta = .50$ . The slope for participants with a low promotion focus was also significant, although in the reversed direction (participants scored lower after being presented a follower-focused vision than a control vision),  $t(99) = -2.21$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\beta = -.48$ .

Figure 2.1: *Ideal self as a function of vision content for participants with high and low chronic promotion focus (Study 1).*



**Performance.** We used a similar linear regression to test the effects on performance. The results showed no significant effects.

### Discussion

The results of this study confirmed Hypothesis 3. A focus on followers in vision communication increased the likelihood of ideal self creation, but only when participants had a high chronic promotion focus. The study also showed some results we did not expect. Participants with a low chronic promotion focus were actually less likely to create an ideal self when being presented a follower-focused vision than a control vision. One way to explain this finding is that participants with a low chronic promotion focus, who tended not to think about ideals much, may have felt coerced by the follower focused vision to think of themselves as innovative managers. Hence, for these participants a focus on followers may actually have hindered ideal self creation. This effect is similar to what is called reactance in persuasion research (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Reactance points to a situation in which a persuasive message backfires and actually makes individuals more opposed to the message because it makes them feel restricted in

their freedom to make up their own mind. A focus on followers may have caused a similar effect for participants with a low promotion focus.

Other hypotheses were not confirmed. For instance, we found no main effect of the vision manipulation on ideal selves. Analysis of remarks by participants could explain this. Although most participants noted that they had deemed the speech interesting and the study fun, some participants also noted that more examples in our vision could enhance their ability to imagine themselves as innovative managers. This may have been important, because we wanted to influence the extent to which participants saw themselves as innovative managers. We remedied this in Study 2 by providing more practical examples of innovative management in the visions. Furthermore, we found no evidence that Vision or promotion focus influenced task performance. A reason for this may have been that our task was not tailored to our design. Several participants noted that the task we used, in their eyes, had nothing to do with innovative management. To remedy this, in the next study we used a task which was more directly related to innovative management.

## **STUDY 2: FOLLOWER-FOCUSED VISIONS AND CONTEXTUAL REGULATORY FOCUS**

### ***Method***

***Participants and Design.*** The participants of this study were 70 second and third year students enrolled in business or economics (43 males, 27 females; Mean age = 21.31, SD = 1.58). We used a 2 (Regulatory Focus: promotion focus vs. prevention focus) X 2 (Vision: personal vs. control) factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to the different conditions.

***Procedure.*** The procedure of the second experiment was similar to the procedure of the first experiment, except as stated below.

***Vision manipulation.*** The vision manipulation was similar to the one used in Study 1: One vision specifically focused on followers, while the other did not. To enhance the extent to which participants could imagine themselves as innovative managers, we used more examples of innovative management in our visions than we did

in Study 1. For instance, the leader discussed how the communication of a vision of innovation might positively influence follower creativity (“...The best way to stimulate innovation is to communicate a creative vision about the work-group or organization...”) and how creating support for innovation might be important (“...Creating support for a collective future image of creativity is the most important tool in the hands of the innovative manager...”).

We conducted a pilot study with 22 business students (9 males, 13 females; Mean age = 18.59,  $SD = .50$ ) to test the validity of our vision manipulation and to investigate whether our manipulation indeed affected participant’s creation of ideal selves. The participants were randomly assigned to the different vision conditions. Similar to the pilot study in Study 1, we used two items to measure to what extent participants thought the speech focused on them and computed the mean of these two items ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ,  $\alpha = .64$ ). Just as in Study 1, we used three items to measure ideal selves ( $M = 5.41$ ,  $SD = .83$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ ). A  $t$ -test revealed that the participants in the follower-focused vision condition felt more personally addressed and reflected more on the vision ( $M = 5.85$ ) than participants in the control condition ( $M = 4.17$ ),  $t(20) = -3.08$ ,  $p < .01$ , indicating that our manipulation was a success. Also, the participants in the follower-focused vision condition scored higher on the ideal selves measure ( $M = 5.70$ ) than participants in the control condition ( $M = 5.00$ ),  $t(20) = -2.07$ ,  $p = .05$ , indicating that indeed the vision manipulation was able to influence the creation of ideal selves.

***Self-regulatory focus manipulation.*** We manipulated the self-regulatory focus of the participants using a translation of the manipulation by Higgins and colleagues (1986). Participants in the promotion focus condition were asked to type in what kind of person they would ideally want to be in the future, which five characteristics they would want to possess, and how their ideals and aspirations had changed over the last years. Participants in the prevention focus condition were asked to type in what kind of person they thought they ought to be in the future, which five characteristics they thought they should possess, and how their duties and responsibilities had changed over the last years. Two coders who were blind to the experimental conditions content-coded the answers of 59 participants (due to a computer error the answers on these questions of 11 participants were not saved, although the answers of all other measures were saved correctly for all

participants) as either concerning ideal selves or concerning ought selves. Initially they responded the same on 54 out of 59 cases, and in all of these cases the coding was congruent with the experimental condition. After discussion the 5 remaining cases were resolved.

***Ideal self.*** Just as in Study 1 we measured ideal self with three questions ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ,  $\alpha = .74$ ).

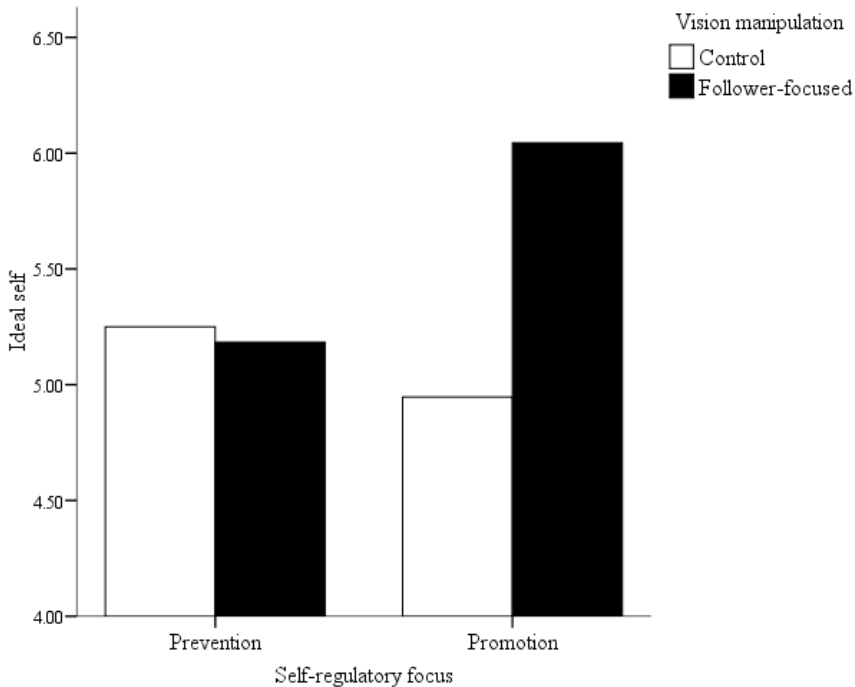
***Performance.*** We again used an idea generation task to measure performance. To relate the task to innovative management, we asked participants to generate ideas about the differences between innovative managers and non-innovative managers. Similar to Study 1, we used a cover story that communicated to the participants that this idea generation task measured their creativity and that creativity was an important predictor of the ability to become an innovative manager. Indeed, generation of ideas about the relation between two constructs, like differences or similarities, has sometimes been used to measure creativity (for instance, Runco & Okuda, 1988; Wallach & Kogan, 1966). In line with other research we use idea generation to measure performance (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987, 1991; Paulus & Yang, 2000; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Specifically, we gave participants three minutes to come up with as many ideas as they could and type in their answers. An independent coder who was blind to the experimental conditions counted the number of ideas each participant had typed in (incomprehensible and unfinished answers were not counted). The final score was the number of valid responses that a participant had given ( $M = 13.12$ ,  $SD = 6.55$ ).

## ***Results***

***Ideal self.*** We conducted a 2 (promotion vs. prevention) X 2 (follower-focused vision vs. control vision) analysis of variance with the ideal self measure as dependent variable. We found a significant main effect of Vision,  $F(1, 66) = 5.19$ ,  $p = .03$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ . In the follower-focused vision condition participants scored higher ( $M = 5.61$ ) than in the control vision condition ( $M = 5.10$ ). We also found a significant interaction effect between Regulatory Focus and Vision,  $F(1, 66) = 6.62$ ,  $p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$  (see Figure 2.2). As expected, simple main effects showed that in the promotion focus condition participants scored higher after hearing the follower-focused vision ( $M = 6.00$ )

than after hearing the control vision ( $M = 4.95$ ),  $F(1, 66) = 11.43$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .15$ . In the prevention focus condition there was no difference between participants who heard the follower focused vision ( $M = 5.18$ ) and the control vision ( $M = 5.25$ ).

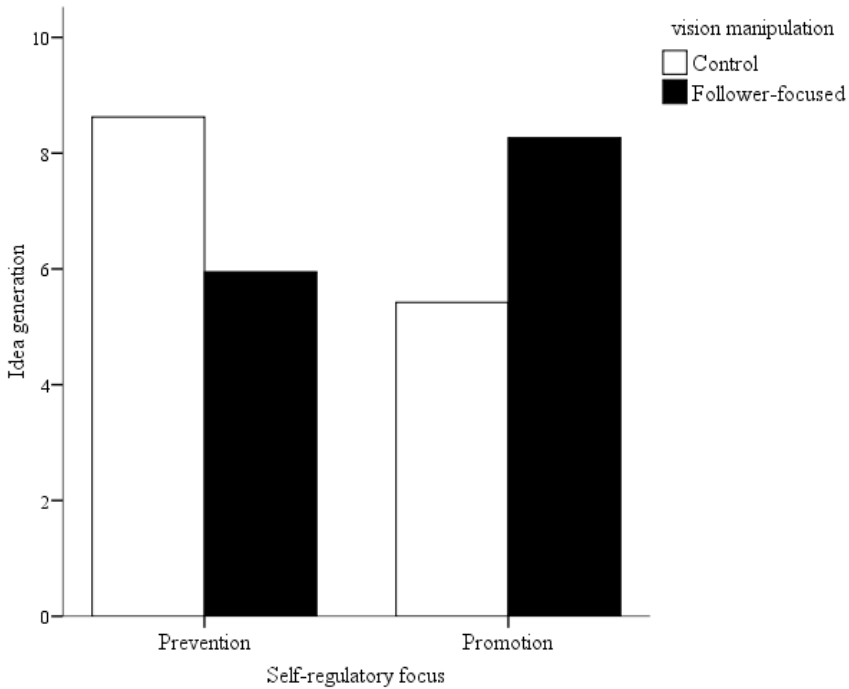
Figure 2.2: *Ideal self as a function of vision content for participants with contextual promotion focus and contextual prevention focus (Study 2).*



**Performance.** We then conducted a 2 (promotion vs. prevention) X 2 (follower-focused vision vs. control vision) analysis of variance with performance as dependent variable. We found no significant main effects, but we did find a significant interaction effect between Regulatory Focus and Vision,  $F(1, 66) = 10.90$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .15$  (see Figure 2.3). Simple main effects analysis showed that in the promotion focus condition participants performed better after hearing a follower-focused vision ( $M = 8.27$ )

than after hearing a control vision ( $M = 5.42$ ),  $F(1, 66) = 6.05$ ,  $p = .02$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ . In contrast, in the prevention focus condition participants who heard the follower-focused vision scored lower ( $M = 5.95$ ) than participants who heard the control vision ( $M = 8.63$ ),  $F(1, 66) = 5.66$ ,  $p = .02$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ .

Figure 2.3: *Idea generation as a function of vision content for participants with contextual promotion focus and contextual prevention focus (Study 2).*



**Mediation analysis.** We then investigated whether ideal self mediated the relationship between the interaction (between Regulatory Focus and Vision) and performance. Following Yzerbyt, Muller, and Judd (2004) we controlled for the mediating variable by adding ideal self as a covariate in an analysis of (co)variance. We found that the effect of ideal self on performance was significant,  $F(1,65) = 6.58$ ,  $p = .03$ ,

partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ . Moreover, the interaction effect of Vision and Regulatory Focus on performance diminished (although it stayed significant)  $F(1, 65) = 7.146, p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .10$ . A Sobel test confirmed that the ideal self measure significantly mediated the interaction effect of our manipulations on the idea generation task  $z = 1.71, p = .05$  (one-sided). Furthermore, simple main effects analysis showed that, when controlling for ideal self in the promotion focus condition there was no longer a difference between those participants hearing the follower-focused vision and those hearing the control vision,  $F(1, 65) = 2.14, ns$ . A second Sobel test confirmed that the ideal self measure significantly mediated the effect of Vision on performance in the promotion condition,  $z = 2.20, p = .03$ . In the prevention focus condition however, there still was a significant difference between participants who heard the follower-focused vision ( $M = 6.08$ ) and the control vision ( $M = 8.69$ ),  $F(1, 65) = 5.72, p = .02$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ . Based on these results we may conclude that ideal self mediates the relationship between Vision and performance, but only in the promotion condition (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986).

### ***Discussion***

Although we found no main effect of a focus on followers on performance, we did find the expected main effect on ideal self. A vision that focuses on followers is more likely to cause followers to create an ideal self. We also found support for Hypothesis 2 and 3. The beneficial effects of follower focused visions were only present for promotion-focused participants and not for prevention-focused participants. Furthermore, we found that for promotion focused participants, ideal self mediated the effect of follower-focused visions on performance.

Surprisingly, we found the opposite effect of follower-focused vision for prevention-focused participants. Prevention-focused participants actually performed better after seeing the control vision than the follower-focused vision (although they do not score higher on ideal self). Although this finding does not threaten the conclusions we reached based on the findings for promotion-focused participants, it does require an explanation. The control vision, as opposed to the follower-focused vision, emphasized the importance of innovation for *all* managers (instead of emphasizing the individual). This may have created a focus on the importance of innovation for the collective rather



than the individual. Research on regulatory focus has established that regulatory focus and levels of self-construal are related (Lee, Gardner, & Aaker, 2000). This research showed that promotion focus is related to independent self-construal, that is, people with a promotion focus are more likely to focus on themselves as unique individuals, differentiated from others. In contrast, prevention focus is related to interdependent self-construal, that is, people with a prevention focus are more likely to see themselves as related to other individuals and groups. Perhaps individuals with a prevention focus perceive collectives and groups as units that describe normative behaviors. As we discussed earlier, especially prevention-focused participants emphasize responsibility and duty (Higgins, 1987), and they thus may be particularly affected by group norms. This would mean that prevention-focused individuals, when confronted with a vision statement that emphasizes the importance of certain qualities for everyone, may feel like they have the duty to acquire these qualities. In sum, we believe that the fact that prevention-focused individuals reacted more positively to the control vision may be explained by the fact that the control vision suggested that innovation was important for all managers, which caused the perception of innovation as a responsibility and duty more than as an ideal.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Understanding the effects of vision communication is one of the greatest challenges for leadership scholars (Beyer, 1999a; Shamir, 1999; Yukl, 1999). This study is one of the first to focus on the motivational processes underlying vision effectiveness. We argued that one of the reasons why some visions may be more effective than others may be that these visions lead to the creation of an ideal possible self by followers, and furthermore that regulatory focus might moderate this effect. In the current set of studies, we found that when a vision focused on followers by addressing them personally and encouraging them to think about their role in the vision followers were more likely to create an ideal possible self based on this vision and subsequently were more motivated to perform, but only when they had a tendency to focus on ideals and aspirations (a promotion focus).

First, the findings of this study underline the importance of the role of possible selves in vision effectiveness and in doing so also point to the potential role of possible selves in leadership and organizational behavior in general. Much of the research that has used the notion of possible selves was conducted in the area of educational or developmental psychology (for instance, see Dunkel 2000; Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman & Markus, 1990). However, some studies have investigated the way in which possible selves provide opportunities for employees to experiment with different work-roles (Ibarra, 1999) and the role that possible selves play in social comparison (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). This exemplifies that, although still in its early stages, the concept of possible self may be pivotal for organizational behavior in the coming years.

Second, by providing empirical evidence of the role of regulatory focus in vision effectiveness, this study substantiates arguments that self-regulatory focus provides a promising new framework for studying organizational behavior in general and leadership specifically (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). In social comparison research, regulatory focus is known to play an important role due to the close connection to possible selves (Lockwood et al., 2002). This suggests that in those areas in which possible selves might prove important, regulatory focus might also play a part. However, the important role of regulatory focus is also evident from research in the area of creativity (Friedman & Förster, 2001) and goal setting (Shah et al., 1998).

In addition to the effects of follower-focused visions for promotion-focused followers, we also found in Study 2 that followers with a prevention focus actually performed best after being exposed to the control vision. We argued that the emphasis of the control vision on the importance of innovation for all managers may have communicated that innovation is more a responsibility or duty than an ideal. Hence participants with an induced prevention focus (and thus with a heightened focus on responsibilities and duties) may have been more motivated by the control vision than by the follower-focused vision. Furthermore, only in the promotion focus condition were the effects of vision on performance mediated by ideal self. As a consequence, we must conclude that for prevention-focused participants performance may be influenced by visions through other processes than ideal self creation. One likely process is the creation of ought selves by followers. Ought selves are images of the self one believes one should

become or has the responsibility to become (Higgins, 1987, 1996). While ideal selves motivate individuals because they provide a positive self-image to approach, ought selves motivate individuals because individuals are afraid to fall short of this self-image. Such a process is in line with our argumentation that the control vision may have communicated responsibilities and duties more than ideals. Furthermore, research in self-regulatory focus has shown that indeed prevention-focused people are prone to focusing on and creating ought selves (Higgins, 1986, 1996, 1997). Future research may aim to substantiate our reasoning with empirical findings.

### *Limitations*

Of course, this research is not without its problems and limitations. The experimental nature of the current studies and the use of student samples have several limitations that can be specified as general and study-specific. A general concern with experiments is generalizability from the simplicity of a laboratory experiment to the complexities of 'real life'. In this respect we agree with the notion that experimental research does not prove that certain dynamics exist outside of the experimental laboratory, but rather that they *could* exist, and that this is important in its own right (Goodwin, Wofford, & Boyd, 2000). Furthermore, the use of student samples may influence generalizability as well. Therefore, although we have no reason to believe that the fundamental processes we focused on should be different for non-student populations (cf. Brown & Lord, 1999; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; Dipboye, 1990; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005; Wofford, 1999), a next logical step would be to replicate these findings with a different (non-student) sample. Specifically, we would enthusiastically welcome any field research on the topic as it would boost the generalizability of our findings.

A study-specific limitation is that the visions we used were not constrained to one particular organization. We chose to have the vision focus on innovative management as opposed to on a specific organization because we deemed it more important that the content of the vision was relevant for our participant's occupational future than that the visions explicitly concerned an organizational future. Furthermore, one could claim that the leader in our experiments was no leader in the traditional sense because there was no

long term relation between participants and leader and there was no formal authority. We tried to counterbalance this by portraying the leader as a 'real' leader and introducing him as a 'manager of managers' and an 'intellectual leader'. Therefore we believe that the situation we described does indeed represent leadership. Another study-specific limitation is the external validity of the dependent variables. The dependent measures in this study were laboratory measures of performance. The advantage of these measures is that they are behavioral rather than perceptual. However, it may be unclear to what extent the effects on these measures translate to typical organizational tasks. Taking these study-specific limitations in consideration we again stress the importance of replicating the current findings in an organizational setting.

### ***Future Research***

The current research offers several starting points for future research. First, many of the field studies on vision communication focus on how (perceptions of) visions influence followers' views of leaders or organizational performance (Baum et al., 1998; Emrich et al., 2001; Mio et al., 2005). The current study suggests that field research should also investigate the extent to which employees feel involved in the organizational vision as well as the extent to which employees create a possible self based on the vision. In this respect, we recommend assessing both ideal self images as well as ought self images because both may play an important role in motivating and mobilizing followers.

Second, the current research focused on the individual level of the self-concept of followers. However, leaders and followers do not interact in a social vacuum. They are part of a larger group and group membership is an important factor in the leadership process (Shamir et al., 1993; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). This argues for models of visionary leadership on a group level. It is argued that leaders, through vision communication, act as entrepreneurs of collective identity (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). Similar to the role of follower individual ideal selves in the current study, follower ideal possible selves of the organization may also be influenced by vision communication. By communicating a vision that focuses on ideals, norms, and values of the organization a leader may presents followers with an ideal future organizational identity. We expect that those followers that feel involved in this future group identity are

more likely to create an ideal possible image of their organization and are also more likely to identify with this organizational ideal.

Third, the current research investigated the cognitive aspects of the fit between regulatory focus and vision content. However, emotional processes are likely to play an important role in organizational behavior and in visionary leadership (Lord, Klimoski, & Kanfer, 2002). Effective visionary leaders are able to inspire followers by displaying specific emotions (cf. Awamleh & Gardner, 1998; Damen, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, in press; Lord & Brown, 2004; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, van Kleef, & Damen, in press). Furthermore, promotion and prevention focus are associated with different emotions (Higgins et al., 1986). For instance, prevention focus is associated with fear and relaxation, while promotion focus is related to sadness and joy. Therefore, self-regulatory focus may play an important moderating role in emotional transfer. For instance, prevention-focused followers might be more sensitive to emotional displays of the leader that are related to prevention focus, like anxiety or relief. Similarly, promotion-focused followers might be especially sensitive to emotional displays that are related to promotion focus, like dejection or joy.

### ***Implication for Practice***

Although we should be careful not to base too far-reaching conclusions on the present study, the findings of this research may be important for managerial practice. The current study suggests that involving followers in an ideal vision message may be important for mobilizing promotion-focused followers. To our surprise, the results also suggest that not involving followers personally may be perceived as emphasizing the responsibilities and duties of the individual in respect to the collective, and this may subsequently be important for mobilizing prevention-focused followers. This argues that leaders should focus on followers and ideals when confronting promotion-focused followers and they should focus on the good of the whole and on responsibilities when confronting prevention-focused followers.

This knowledge may be particularly helpful in practice when leaders confront followers that share the same regulatory focus. There are compelling reasons to believe that such situations may indeed occur in organizational practice. For instance, Brockner

and Higgins (2001) suggested that organizations may have promotion-oriented or prevention-oriented organizational cultures. Research has indeed shown that within groups people tend to conform in terms of regulatory focus (Levine, Higgins, & Choi, 2000). When interacting, the members of a group tend to polarize to either promotion or prevention-oriented regulation. Similarly, Dragoni (2005) argues that companies may have organizational (or work-group) climates that foster either employee approach (prevention) or employee avoidance (promotion) orientations. The organizational environment is another potential source of influence on regulatory focus. For instance, employees of a fast growing company may be collectively oriented on gains and a positive future (promotion-focused), while the employees of a company in distress may collectively worry about possible job loss and other problems (prevention-focused). Therefore, we would advise leaders to pay attention to cultural tendencies and environmental events when articulating an organizational vision.

In conclusion, the current research adds to a growing body of research that demonstrates that the self-concepts and specifically the possible selves of followers are important for explaining leadership influence (Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Lord et al., 1999; van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Shamir et al., 1993). It also confirms suggestions that self-regulatory focus theory is important for understanding leadership (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). Understanding the role of follower regulatory focus and possible selves may be pivotal for revealing the mechanisms of effective vision communication.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Even though the explicit performance goal was quantity of ideas generated, one may wonder about the quality of ideas generated. Previous research using highly similar idea generation tasks has shown that idea quality and quantity are highly correlated (in the  $r = .90$  range; e.g. Diehl & Stroebe, 1991). Therefore, we opted not to analyze the quality of ideas.

### CHAPTER 3

#### REGULATORY FIT AND VISIONARY LEADERSHIP\*

*It is generally argued that leader visions motivate followers by focusing on reaching desirable end states. However, it has also been suggested that visions may motivate followers by focusing on avoiding undesirable situations. In this paper we investigate the effects of appeals that focus on preventing an undesirable situation (i.e., prevention-appeals) as well as appeals that focus on promoting a desirable situation (i.e., promotion-appeals). We argue that the effectiveness of promotion- and prevention-appeals is contingent on follower regulatory focus. In two experiments we show that prevention-appeals lead to better performance than promotion-appeals for more prevention-focused followers, while the reverse is true for more promotion-focused followers. We find this pattern for a dispositional measure of follower regulatory focus (Study 1) as well as for a manipulation of follower regulatory focus (Study 2).*

#### INTRODUCTION

Former vice-president of the United States Al Gore won a Nobel Prize for his efforts to warn the world against global warming and its catastrophic consequences. His visionary message has stirred up global debate about the environment and has successfully attracted the attention of the public and the media. The fact that his vision, that emphasizes the negative consequences of global warming for the future, is so successful challenges most theories of vision communication, because they generally argue that the most effective way to motivate followers is to draw the picture of a positive, desirable future (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Bass, 1985; Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1994; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Yukl, 2002). Such positive appeals aim to promote an attractive end state to followers (hence we use the term promotion-appeal). In contrast, another way to motivate subordinates, exemplified by Al Gore's story, is to communicate a vision that stresses the undesirability

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\* This chapter is based on Stam, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg (in press b)



of the status quo or the current course of events (Brymen, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999). Such an appeal aims to warn followers of an unattractive situation (therefore we use the term prevention-appeal). This prompts the question whether, and under which conditions, promotion- or prevention-appeals are effective.

Unfortunately, most research has emphasized the effects of promotion-appeals and neglected the potential effects of prevention-appeals. Lord and Brown, for instance, state that “Leaders can motivate subordinates by articulating hoped-for possible selves, but in some instances it may be more effective to emphasize avoiding feared selves. This is an area in which there is so little research that no clear recommendations are possible.” (Lord & Brown, 2004, p. 31). In an attempt to fill this void in the literature, the current study focuses not only on the effects of visions that emphasize promotion-appeals, but also on the effects of visions that emphasize prevention-appeals. Moreover, we will investigate the conditions under which promotion- and prevention-appeals motivate individual followers.

Specifically, we argue that the effectiveness of promotion- and prevention-appeals is contingent on follower self-regulatory focus (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). Self-regulatory focus seems especially important for predicting the effectiveness of promotion- and prevention-appeals, because it distinguishes between a prevention motivation strategy, which is based on a motivation to avoid failures and fears, and a promotion motivation strategy, which is based on a motivation to reach successes and ideals (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). We propose that a prevention-appeal will be more influential than a promotion-appeal for more prevention-focused followers, because they are especially focused on avoiding feared situations. In contrast, a promotion-appeal should be more influential than a prevention-appeal for more promotion-focused followers, because they are especially focused on reaching desired end states.

We test these ideas in two experiments, using different operationalizations of regulatory focus and follower performance. These experiments have the benefit of being able to establish causality (Goodwin, Wofford, & Boyd, 2000) and therefore nicely complement the existing literature on vision communication that generally uses field studies (see for instance, Baum, Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1998; Den Hartog & Verbarg,

1997; Emrich, Brower, Feldman, & Garland, 2001). The current study aims to contribute to the literature of vision communication by a) focusing on the effectiveness of not only promotion-, but also prevention-appeals, b) investigating the specific conditions that are conducive to the effectiveness of promotion- and prevention-appeals, and c) providing empirical, experimental evidence to support our claims.

### ***Leadership and Visions***

In an organizational context visions are often described as images of the future of an organization. According to Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996, p. 37) they are “transcendent ideals that represents shared values”. Although visions and goals are in some ways similar, because both are essentially standards to strive for, visions are more abstract and global than goals, and unlike goals they are not necessarily meant to be fully achieved (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). Instead, visions provide abstract guidelines and values that may direct the behaviors of organizational members. In other words, *visions* are ideals of the future that concern norms and values (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir et al., 1993). *Vision communication* refers to the expression of a vision with the aim of convincing others (usually followers) that the vision is valid. Such communication is an appeal from a leader to followers to endorse a visionary message.

It has been argued that leaders may communicate visions as a means to stimulate individual as well as collective follower performance (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Moreover, vision communication may cause followers to identify more with the collective, to be more efficacious, to perceive their work as more meaningful and their leaders as more charismatic, and to be generally more motivated to perform well in their work (Brymen, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Shamir et al., 1993; Yukl, 2002). Corroborating these ideas, several empirical studies showed that communicating a vision may indeed enhance a leader’s effectiveness (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Baum et al., 1998; Hunt et al., 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996).

Much of the research on vision communication has focused on the communication process and has neglected the influence of the content of vision communication (Bass, 1999; Beyer, 1999a, 1999b; House, 1999; Shamir, 1999, Yukl, 1999). Overall, the

scholarly work that has focused on vision content is divided in its emphasis on the effectiveness of presenting a positive future to strive for (promotion-appeal), or a negative situation to avoid (prevention-appeal).

Many scholars argue that effective vision communication focuses on a positive future, is optimistic in nature, and emphasizes future successes (Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001; Shamir et al., 1993; Shamir et al., 1994). These promotion-appeals are successful because the future they propagate is attractive for followers. A good example of a promotion-appeal is Kennedy's "Man on the moon" speech, in which he discussed space travel and announces that it is "time for this nation to take a clear leading role in space achievement, which in many ways may hold the key to our future on earth." In this speech Kennedy paints the picture of a desirable future where the United States are pioneers in space exploration. In an empirical study, Berson and colleagues (2001) found that the most important characteristics of visions communicated by successful leaders were optimism and confidence in a positive future. Wood, Owens, and Durham (2005) found evidence that when United States presidents were more optimistic about the economy in their communication to the public, the subsequent economic growth was higher than when they were less optimistic. In sum, presenting the image of a positive future can be vital for vision communication effectiveness.

Other scholars suggest that visions communication may also be successful when it warns against a negative status quo or probable course of events (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). These prevention-appeals are successful because they provide an alternative for a situation that is highly unattractive. Indeed, one of the founders of charismatic leadership theory, Max Weber, modeled charismatic leaders after religious authorities like prophets and priests (Lindholm, 1990; Riesebrodt, 1999). Many of these prophets claimed that their visions originated from divine intervention (their charisma was a "gift of god") and often these visions were grim stories of doom and the end of the world. A more modern example of vision communication that is based on avoiding disaster is that of Al Gore, mentioned earlier. Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl (2004) compared the speeches of President Bush before and after September 11, 2001. They found that after September 11, when his job approval rates jumped up with 35%, his speeches exaggerated discontent more and concentrated to a larger extent on hardship and the intolerable nature of the current

situation than before September 11. Bruch, Shamir, and Eilam-Shamir (2007) also argue that there are times and circumstances under which a focus on avoiding further breakdown might be more appropriate than a focus on reaching ideals. Likewise, Fiol and colleagues (1999) propose that leaders can use both positive and negative motivation to bring about social change. Leaders may offer ideals to approach (positive motivation), but they may also point to failures and feared events to avoid (negative motivation).

Thus, it appears that both appeals that focus on an undesirable situation to avoid (prevention-appeals) as well as appeals that focus on a desirable situation to approach (promotion-appeals) may successfully motivate followers. This leaves unanswered the question under which conditions prevention- and promotion-appeals could successfully motivate followers. We propose that follower regulatory focus may determine the effectiveness of prevention- and promotion-appeals.

### ***Regulatory Focus***

Regulatory focus theory posits that two distinct and independent self regulatory strategies play an important role in directing behavior (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). A promotion focus points to a strategy aimed at reaching an end state because the end state is positive and attractive. The driving force of a promotion focus is the approach of pleasure. People with a promotion focus are eager to achieve, will emphasize ideals, and focus on advancement. A prevention focus denotes a strategy aimed at reaching an end state because of a fear of the alternative. The driving force of a prevention focus is the avoidance of pain. People with a prevention focus are vigilant and careful not to lose, will emphasize fears, and focus on avoiding those.

Although the driving forces of promotion and prevention focus are approach and avoidance motivation, both promotion and prevention denote strategies to attain a specific end state (Higgins, 1997). Promotion end states are closely related to ambitions and positive ideals that an individual *wants* to attain. Prevention end states are closely related to responsibility or security that an individual thinks he/she *needs* to attain. The role of end states sets regulatory focus theory apart from other theories that differentiate between approach and avoidance motivation, because these generally discuss the role of avoidance motivation only in avoiding end states, and not in attaining end states (for a

comprehensive discussion see Carver & Scheier, 1998). It is this property of a regulatory focus that makes it a likely candidate for moderating the effects of prevention- and promotion-appeals, because like promotion and prevention focus both prevention- and promotion-appeals focus on attaining an envisioned end state.

Research has shown that if an individual's activities are congruent with an individual's regulatory focus he/she will experience regulatory fit (Avnet & Higgins, 2006; Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004). The result of regulatory fit is that the individual will be inclined to engage more strongly in these activities (Cesario et al., 2004). Similarly, we propose that followers will be inclined to engage more strongly in a vision that fits their regulatory focus than in one that does not fit their regulatory focus. Moreover, we argue that engaging in a vision that emphasizes reaching ideals (a promotion-appeal) would fit a promotion-focused individual, because this individual is more sensitive to information that fits his/her promotion focus (e.g., reaching ideals). Engaging in a vision that emphasizes avoiding feared events (a prevention-appeal) would fit a prevention-focused individual, because this individual is more sensitive to information that fits his/her prevention focus (e.g. avoiding fears). In other words, we argue that regulatory fit may enhance vision effectiveness.

The general idea that leadership behavior should fit followers to be optimally effective is supported by several studies. For instance, Benjamin and Flynn (2006) showed that the fit between leadership style and self-regulatory mode might enhance follower motivation and elicit more positive leader evaluations. More specifically, they found that followers with more of a locomotion mode (who focus on movement from one state to another) were more motivated by leaders with a transformational leadership style than followers with more of an assessment mode (who engage in comparisons before acting). They argue that this is the case because transformational leadership fits a locomotion mode, since both are focused on movement and change. Ehrhart and Klein (2001) showed that follower values and personality can be used to predict followers' preference for either relationship-oriented or task-oriented leadership, while Damen, van Knippenberg, and van Knippenberg (in press) showed that a match between leader emotional displays and follower positive affect leads to increased leadership effectiveness.

Similarly, we argue that when the appeals used in vision communication fit the regulatory focus of a follower, he/she will be more motivated by the vision. Promotion-appeals should especially motivate followers with a promotion focus, because promotion-oriented followers focus on reaching positive situations. Prevention-appeals should especially motivate followers with a prevention focus, because prevention-oriented followers focus on avoiding negative situations. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis: Regulatory focus moderates the relationship between appeal and follower performance such that the effects of promotion-appeals on follower performance are stronger for more promotion-focused followers, while the effects of prevention-appeals on follower performance are stronger for more prevention-focused followers.*

### ***The Current Research***

We report two studies that use different operationalizations of regulatory focus, namely chronic and contextual regulatory focus (Keller & Bless, 2006). Chronic regulatory focus indicates stable individual differences in regulatory focus. Chronic regulatory focus changes relatively little over time and is often the result of childhood experiences (Keller & Bless, 2006). For instance, children that are raised with an emphasis on their duties and responsibilities may develop a chronic prevention focus, while children that are raised with an emphasis on their personal ambitions and dreams may develop a chronic promotion focus (Higgins, 1997). Measures of chronic regulatory focus usually assess both prevention focus and promotion focus, and often find the two dimensions unrelated (for instance, Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lockwood et al., 2002).

Contextual regulatory focus designates situationally induced differences in regulatory focus that overwrite chronic regulatory foci. Contextual regulatory focus is brought about by the individual's environment and can change swiftly from situation to situation. For instance, a task in which individuals can earn money may induce a promotion focus, while a task in which individuals can lose money may induce a prevention focus (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997, Study 4). Because contextual regulatory focus is induced by strong influential environmental stimuli (in order to

overwrite chronic regulatory foci) in experimental research it is usually manipulated to be either a promotion or a prevention focus (for instance, Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lockwood et al., 2002); that is, situational influences would not be expected to induce the absence of a regulatory focus.

Although chronic and contextual regulatory focus are conceptually different and have different antecedents, they have similar effects (for instance, Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lockwood et al., 2002). Therefore, a multiple-study method, including studies with measures of chronic regulatory focus and studies with manipulations of contextual regulatory focus, is employed often in the regulatory focus literature because it enables the replication of findings using different operationalizations of regulatory focus. This enhances the robustness of findings (for instance, Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lockwood et al., 2002).

The relationship we investigate in this research (fit between leader vision and follower regulatory focus leads to enhanced follower performance) is fundamentally causal in nature. Furthermore, because there is no evidence yet that congruence between vision communication and followers influences vision effectiveness it is imperative that the current research proves causality. Therefore, the current research consists of two experimental studies because experiments have the benefit of being able to establish causality (Goodwin, Wofford, & Boyd, 2000). Testing these causal relations in a correlational (field) research would be problematic because it would generate correlational evidence, which cannot establish causality. Furthermore, in the field naturally occurring visions would often differ in many aspects in addition to promotion-versus prevention-appeal, and controlling for all these differences may be a less realistic goal. Fortunately, laboratory experiments provide tools to establish causality and validly manipulate vision communication and therefore nicely complement the existing literature on vision communication that generally uses field studies (see for instance, Baum, Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1998; Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997; Emrich, Brower, Feldman, & Garland, 2001).

This research employs speeches as a tool to communicate visions. Speeches are often used by leaders as a means to communicate their vision. Indeed, most studies on visions and visionary leadership focus on speeches (Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997;

Emrich et al., 2001; Miller & Stiles, 2006; Mio, Riggio, Levin, & Reese, 2005; Shamir et al., 1994; Spangler & House, 1991).

## STUDY 1: VISIONARY APPEALS AND CHRONIC REGULATORY FOCUS

### *Method*

**Participants and design.** The participants in this study were 87 business and economics students aged between 18 and 26 ( $M = 20.1$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two vision conditions (41 in the prevention condition vs. 46 in the promotion condition). We added measures of promotion and prevention focus to this design. Participants were paid 10 euro (approximately USD 13) for their participation.

**Procedure.** Participants were seated in individual cubicles and completed the study via a computer. Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire on their view on life, which was actually the promotion/prevention focus questionnaire used by Lockwood and colleagues (2002). The participants rated to what extent several statements were true for them, using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true for me) to 7 (completely true for me). Nine statements were used to evaluate the chronic prevention focus of the participants (e.g., “*I am anxious that I will fall short of my responsibilities and obligations*”,  $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .72$ ,  $\alpha = .60$ ). Nine statements were used to evaluate the chronic promotion focus of the participants (e.g., “*I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations*”,  $M = 5.49$ ,  $SD = .61$ ,  $\alpha = .71$ ). A confirmatory factor analysis, using Lisrel 8.7, confirmed that a 2-factor solution ( $\chi^2(134) = 245.07$ ,  $p = .00$ , RMSEA = .098) fitted the data better than a 1-factor solution ( $\chi^2(135) = 318.98$ ,  $p = .00$ , RMSEA = .13) and that this difference was significant ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 73.91$ ,  $p = .00$ ), supporting the use of a 2-factor solution. There was no significant correlation between prevention and promotion focus,  $r = -.09$ . Furthermore, t-tests with the vision manipulation as an independent variable and subsequently promotion and prevention focus as dependent variables showed that the mean score of both scales did not differ over conditions  $t(85) = -.16$ , *ns.*, and  $t(85) = 1.13$ , *ns.*, respectively.

**Vision manipulation.** Instead of focusing on the future of a specific organization,



we opted to create a visionary speech about something that is of importance to the future of business and economics students, just like organizational visions are of importance to organizational members. This is crucial, because we want to show the different effects of prevention- and promotion-appeals, which heavily depend on the extent to which participants are interested in the vision, and involved in it. The speech therefore focused on innovative management.

Specifically, participants were told that a business leader would deliver a speech on an important subject for managers. The leader was introduced as an authority on management and as an intellectual leader of future managers. Subsequently, an audio sample was played in which a male actor delivered one of two possible speeches. During the speeches, the text was simultaneously presented on screen. In both speeches the actor focused on innovative management. The visions were future-oriented (they focused on what was important for future managers) and emphasized attaining an end state (they promoted the image of the innovative manager as an end state). However, in one condition the speech communicated a promotion-appeal by emphasizing the positive consequences of becoming an innovative manager. In the other condition the speech communicated a prevention-appeal by emphasizing the negative consequences of not becoming an innovative manager (for the complete speeches see Appendix). Both speeches were of equal length.

We performed a pilot study with 32 business students aged between 16 and 21 ( $M = 18.91$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) to test whether our vision manipulation was perceived as intended. The participants were randomly assigned to the different vision conditions. As a manipulation check we designed a scale to assess the extent to which participants felt the speech reflected a focus on reaching an ideal or a focus on avoiding a failure ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ). The items of this scale were: “The speech presented innovative managers as ideals for future managers”, “The speech presented passive, non-innovative managers as undesirable examples for future managers” (reverse-coded), and “The leader argued that innovativeness is a positive trait for future managers”. Furthermore, we asked seven questions to assess the quality of the speech (e.g., “I think the speech was convincing”, “I think the speech was inspiring”,  $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ) and six questions to assess the participants’ opinion about the leader (e.g., “I think the leader is

charismatic”, “I think this is a motivating leader”,  $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ). An analysis of variance showed that, as expected, participants in the promotion-appeal condition scored significantly higher ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = .31$ ) on the manipulation check than participants in the prevention-appeal condition ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .29$ ),  $F(1, 31) = 20.67$ ,  $p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .41$ . However participants did not differ significantly in their perception of the speech,  $F(1, 31) = .01$ , *ns.*, or the leader,  $F(1, 31) = .92$ , *ns.* This shows that our manipulation, as intended, only affected perceived promotion or prevention appeal and not other perceptions of the speech or the leader.

**Dependent measure.** We then introduced the task, a concentration task, to the participants. We extensively indicated to participants that the task that they were about to perform was of critical importance for innovative managers. Participants read the following before starting the task:

*‘Research on innovative management showed that concentration is an important predictor of innovative management behavior. Concentration is very important for innovative managers. Making innovative decisions and solving problems innovatively requires tremendous mental concentration. Indeed, concentration is regarded as one of the most important qualities necessary to solve complex problems in innovative ways. Studies show that especially innovative managers distinguish themselves from other managers by having the ability to concentrate well. Managers that are pointed out as innovative managers without exception score high on concentration tasks.’*

This procedure was modeled after Brunstein and Gollwitzer (1996). In their study they showed that participants that were highly motivated to become physicians scored higher on a concentration task when it was presented as critical for physicians, but not when the task was presented as irrelevant for physicians. Thus, like Brunstein and Gollwitzer, we expect participants who are more motivated to become innovative managers to perform better on the concentration tasks.

Directly after reading the instructions, participants proceeded with the task, which was a computerized version of the d2 concentration task by Brickenkamp (1981) as used by Brunstein and Gollwitzer (1996). Participants were presented a line of d’s and p’s with either none, one, or two apostrophes. They were asked to click with their mouse only on the d’s with two apostrophes. The participants were given 8 seconds per line to complete

this task and were presented with 18 consecutive lines. Our dependent measure was the number of d's with two apostrophes clicked upon, averaged over the 18 rows. Participant's scores could range from 0 (no correct responses) to 7 (since there were 7 d's with two apostrophes in each line). After completing the task participants were carefully debriefed, paid, and thanked.

Table 3.1: *Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting performance on the concentration task in study 1 (N = 87)*

| <i>Variable</i>           | <i>b</i> | <i>SE b</i> | <i>β</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Step 1                    |          |             |          |
| Vision manipulation       | 0.08     | 0.18        | 0.05     |
| Chronic prevention focus  | 0.09     | 0.13        | 0.08     |
| Chronic promotion focus   | -0.02    | 0.15        | -0.01    |
| Step 2                    |          |             |          |
| Vision manipulation       | 0.05     | 0.17        | 0.03     |
| Chronic prevention focus  | 0.11     | 0.12        | 0.10     |
| Chronic promotion focus   | -0.10    | 0.14        | -0.07    |
| Vision * Prevention focus | -0.69    | 0.24        | -0.30*   |
| Vision * Promotion focus  | 0.71     | 0.28        | 0.26*    |

Note.  $R^2 = .01$  for Step 1 ( $p < ns$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .17$  for Step 2 ( $p < .05$ ).

\* $p < .05$ .

## Results

We used hierarchical regression analysis to test our hypothesis. In step 1, centered scores of promotion focus, prevention focus, and the vision manipulation (dummy-coded, prevention-appeal = -1, promotion-appeal = 1) were entered as independent variables. In step 2, the interaction between the vision manipulation and promotion focus, and the interaction of the vision manipulation and prevention focus were also entered as predictors.

In step 1, the results showed no significant main effects of the vision manipulation, promotion focus, or prevention focus. In step 2, the results did show significant effects of the interactions of the vision manipulation with both promotion focus,  $t(81) = 2.52, p = .01$ , and prevention focus,  $t(81) = -2.90, p = .01$  (see Table 3.1).

Figure 3.1: *Score on the concentration task as a function of vision content for participants with high and low chronic promotion focus (Study 1).*

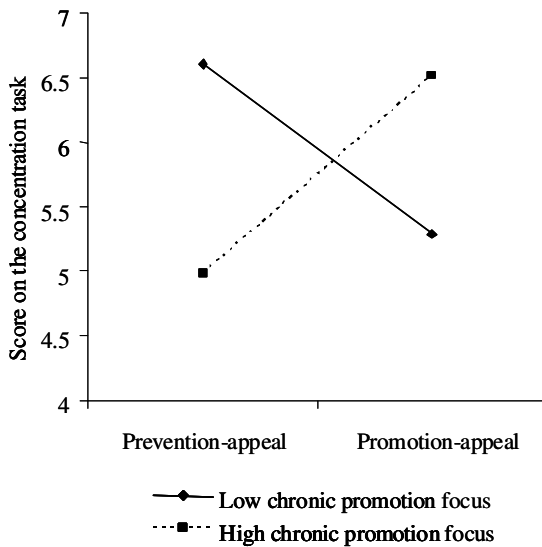
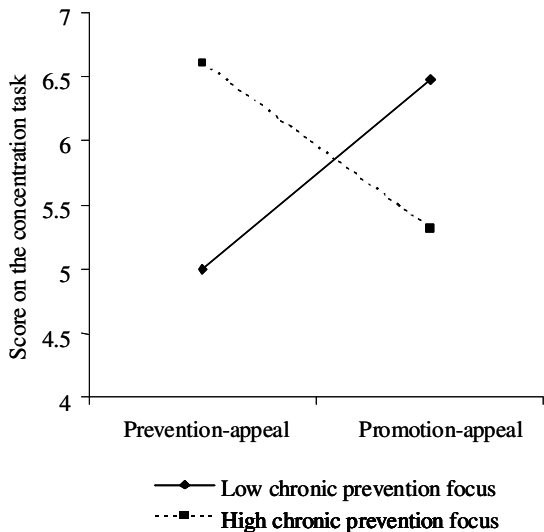


Figure 3.1 shows the results of the interaction between the vision manipulation and promotion focus. It suggests that, as expected, for those participants high in promotion focus the promotion-appeal seems more influential than the prevention-appeal, while this pattern seems to reverse for participants low in promotion focus. Figure 3.2 shows the results of the interaction between the vision manipulation and prevention focus. It suggests that, as expected, for those participants high in prevention focus the prevention-appeal seems more influential than the promotion-appeal, while this pattern seems to reverse for participants low in prevention focus.

Figure 3.2: *Score on the concentration task as a function of vision content for participants with high and low chronic prevention focus (Study 1).*



**Discussion**

The results confirm our hypothesis. Visions that emphasize reaching positive end states seem to lead to better performance than visions that emphasize avoiding negative situations for followers who are high on promotion focus, while the reverse seems true for followers who are high on prevention focus. However, the results also suggest that if followers are low on promotion focus, visions that emphasize avoiding negative situations lead to better performance than visions that emphasize reaching positive end states. Likewise, if followers are low on prevention focus, visions that emphasize reaching positive end states seem to lead to better performance than visions that emphasize avoiding negative situations. This shows that not only the existence of a high regulatory focus (promotion or prevention) may matter in vision effectiveness, but also the *lack* of a high regulatory focus.

This is all the more interesting since chronic promotion and prevention focus are independent constructs, both in theory and in this study (we found no correlation between chronic promotion and chronic prevention focus). This implies that these findings cannot be explained by the relation between promotion and prevention focus. Other studies on regulatory focus have found similar effects. For instance, Förster and Higgins (2005) studied the effects of chronic promotion and prevention focus on global perception (perceiving objects as wholes) and local perception (perceiving objects in terms of their parts). They found not only that, as predicted, promotion focus was positively correlated with global perception and prevention focus with local perception, but also that promotion focus was negatively correlated with local perception and that prevention focus was negatively correlated with global perception.

## **STUDY 2: VISIONARY APPEALS AND CONTEXTUAL REGULATORY FOCUS**

### ***Method***

***Participants and design.*** The participants in this study were 88 second and third year business and economics students, aged between 18 and 20 ( $M = 18.8$ ,  $SD = .84$ ). We used a 2 (Regulatory Focus: promotion focus vs. prevention focus) X 2 (Appeal: promotion vs. prevention) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to the different conditions, and paid 10 euro (approximately USD 13) for their participation.

***Procedure.*** The procedure of the second experiment was similar to the procedure of the first experiment, except for the operationalization of self-regulatory focus and the dependent measure.

***Self-regulatory focus manipulation.*** We manipulated the self-regulatory focus of participants using of a priming task based on the regulatory focus manipulation of Higgins and colleagues (1986). Participants in the promotion focus condition were asked to describe what kind of person they would ideally want to be in the future. This task primes ideal-related cognitions and hence induces promotion focus. Participants in the prevention focus condition were asked to describe what kind of person they would not

want to become in the future. This task primes fear-related cognitions and hence induces prevention focus. To check the validity of this manipulation, two raters who were blind to the experimental conditions coded the responses of the participants as either desired future or feared future. With the exception of one case, the responses of both raters were 100 % congruent with each other and the experimental conditions. In the one mentioned case, one rater could not place the response in any category. The response of the other rater was congruent with the experimental conditions.

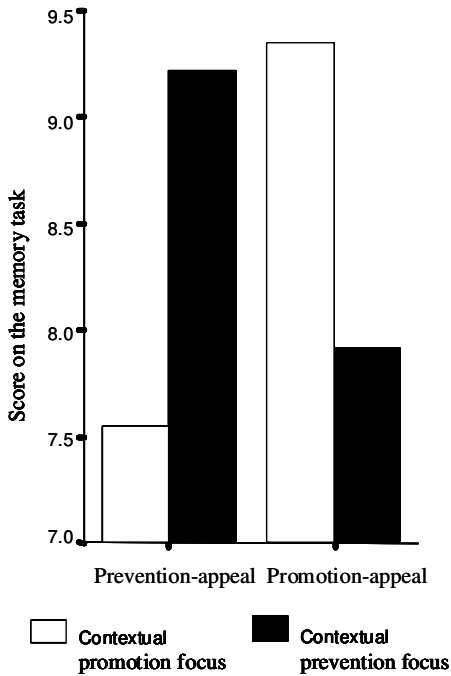
***Vision manipulation.*** The vision manipulation was the same as the one used in Study 1.

***Dependent measure.*** As our performance measure we used a memory task. Participants saw 16 words consecutively on the computer screen. Each word was on the screen for two seconds. There was a pause of one second between words. Subsequently, participants had one minute to type in as many words as they could remember. The score on this task represented the number of words remembered correctly. Similar to our first study we used a cover story that communicated to the participants that this memory task measured their memory capacity and that memory capacity was an important predictor of the ability to become an innovative manager.

## ***Results***

To analyze the results on the memory task we used an analysis of variance with the vision manipulation and the self-regulatory focus manipulation as independent variables. We found no significant main effects, but we did find a significant interaction effect of self-regulatory focus and appeal,  $F(1, 84) = 12.95, p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .13$  (See Figure 3.3). As expected, simple main effects analysis show that in the promotion focus condition participants performed better after hearing promotion-appeals ( $M = 9.35$ ,  $SD = .45$ ) than after hearing prevention-appeals ( $M = 7.55$ ,  $SD = .43$ ),  $F(1, 84) = 8.34, p = .005$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Furthermore, in the prevention focus condition, participants performed better after hearing prevention-appeals ( $M = 9.21$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) than after hearing promotion-appeals ( $M = 7.91$ ,  $SD = .42$ ),  $F(1, 84) = 4.78, p = .03$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ .

Figure 3.3: *Score on the memory task as a function of vision content for participants with contextual promotion focus and contextual prevention focus (Study 2).*



## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Studies on vision communication support two views on the content of effective visions. On the one hand, and most often, it is argued that effective visions should focus on reaching positive, desirable situations (promotion-appeals). On the other hand, it is argued that effective visions may also focus on avoiding negative, undesirable situations (prevention-appeals). The current study investigated under which circumstances promotion- and prevention-appeals could be effective. The results of two experiments



fully support our claim that promotion-appeals lead to better performance of individuals with a promotion focus, while prevention-appeals lead to better performance of individuals with a prevention focus.

This knowledge is important for theory on leadership and visions, because it provides evidence that, given certain circumstances, vision content may indeed influence vision effectiveness. Studies of vision content are generally seen as underrepresented in the literature (Bass, 1999; Beyer, 1999a; House, 1999; Shamir, 1999). By showing that the content of a vision can, under certain conditions, positively predict individual follower performance this study demonstrates the merit of a focus on vision content. We strongly believe that studies of vision content, like the one presented here, can substantially enrich the literature on vision communication.

Furthermore, we find that the effects of vision content are contingent on follower regulatory focus. This adds to the growing evidence that regulatory focus theory may be highly relevant for leadership (for overviews see Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). More generally, this testifies to the validity of follower-centered views of leadership and vision effectiveness (for instance, see Lord & Brown, 2004; Meindl, 1995; Shamir, Pillai, Bligh, & Uhl-Bien, 2007). The fact that in this study follower regulatory focus moderated the effects of vision content on follower performance clearly demonstrates the importance of understanding followers if one aims to understand leadership processes.

Our findings also add to ideas about charismatic and transformational leadership. Some theories of charismatic and transformational leadership propagate the use of promotion- and prevention-appeals in vision communication, but do not distinguish between the effects of promotion- and prevention-appeals (for instance see Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1988). These theories are therefore unable to predict when promotion- or rather prevention-appeals are more effective. For instance, charismatic and transformational leadership theories emphasize that crisis situations facilitate the emergence of charismatic leadership (Bligh et al., 2004; Shamir & Howell, 1999; Weber, 1947), but do not make different prediction for the effects of promotion- or prevention-appeals in such a situation. Using the findings of this study, it could be argued that one of the factors that may make charismatic leaders especially effective when a crisis arises is

that they make use of prevention-appeals that communicate how such a crisis can be avoided or stopped (cf. Bruch et al., 2007). This could be crucial because times of crisis may induce a prevention focus in followers that makes them more open to such a prevention-appeal.

### ***Limitations***

Of course this research has its strengths and weaknesses. The current research used experimental designs with student participants. Although we argue that experiments provided us with the validity and causal evidence we were looking for, a next logical step would be to replicate these findings in the field. Indeed experimental research does not prove that certain effects exist outside of the experimental laboratory, but rather shows that these effects *could* exist (Goodwin et al., 2000). Furthermore, many studies show that findings of experimental studies are often replicated in the field (Brown & Lord, 1999; Dipboye, 1990; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005; Wofford, 1999). Therefore, we recommend the use of other research designs in order to investigate the generalizability of our findings.

Another important issue is that of unit of analysis. In the current research we were interested in how prevention- and promotion-appeals might influence individual followers. In contrast, in field settings visions are often communicated to large groups of followers. It is not self-evident that the findings of the current research can be applied to groups. Furthermore, on a group level other processes may play a role than on an individual level, like social contagion processes and social categorization processes. However, groups consist of individuals. Therefore, processes on an individual level are bound to at least influence results on a group level. Furthermore, research has shown that within groups people tend to conform to each other in terms of regulatory focus (Levine, Higgins, & Choi, 2000). When interacting, the members of a group tend to polarize to either promotion or prevention focus. This suggests that an audience might be more promotion or prevention-oriented in general and hence offers a possibility to apply the regulatory fit idea on a group level. Therefore, we highly recommend the use of multilevel research designs that may replicate the findings of the current research on an individual as well as a group level.

### ***Future Research***

The findings of the current research may generate new research questions. For instance, we argue that visions should *fit* followers in order to be effective. Similarly, others argue that leadership behaviors should be congruent with existing values and goals of followers in order to be really successful (Howell & Shamir, 2005; Shamir et al., 1993). In contrast, it is also suggested that visions should *change* followers. For instance, Kark and Van-Dijk (2007) argue that charismatic leaders in essence communicate a promotion orientation. In doing so, they may influence the regulatory focus of their employees and slowly make them more promotion-oriented. We have not assessed regulatory focus of participants after vision communication. Therefore, although the results do not suggest such an influence, we cannot dismiss the idea based on the current data. This raises the question whether leader behavior is more effective when it fits followers or when it changes followers.

Of course, fit and change might not be as mutually exclusive as they appear to be. A fit between leader behavior and followers may enhance the influence of this leader behavior on followers (Benjamin & Flynn, 2006; Damen, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, in press; Howell & Shamir, 2005). In other words, fit may enhance change. Congruence and change, fit and transformation then should maybe not be seen as opposite and exclusive, but rather as inherently related in leadership processes (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Bobbio, 2008). The current study seems to illustrate this point. We showed that regulatory fit may enhance the influence of a visionary message about innovation. In other words fit in terms of regulatory focus may enhance change in terms of message acceptance. Future research may clarify the dynamics behind such a process and may also uncover on which dimensions vision should be congruent with followers and which dimensions may be changed.

Furthermore, we have argued that, given certain conditions, emphasizing either prevention- or promotion-appeals in a vision may lead to enhanced vision effectiveness. But why not use *both* prevention- and promotion-appeals in one vision in order to make sure that the vision fits prevention- as well as promotion-focused followers and hence could be effective regardless of conditions? Indeed, many theorists advocate using both

prevention- and promotion-appeals in the same speech (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir et al., 1993). Furthermore, there are examples of successful vision communication that used both appeals. For instance, in his 'I have a dream' speech Martin Luther King Jr. depicted a world in which black and white children play together and where there is no racism or discrimination, which is very much a promotion-appeal. However, in the same speech he agitated against a situation in which black people were discriminated and regarded as second-rate citizens, which is very much a prevention appeal.

However there are also reasons why using both promotion- and prevention-appeals in the same speech may not be wise. First, in Study 1 we found that the effects of promotion-appeals were stronger for *low* prevention-focused followers, and the effects of prevention-appeals were stronger for *low* promotion-focused followers. In other words, we found not only that regulatory fit positively influenced vision effectiveness, but also that regulatory misfit negatively influenced vision effectiveness. Using both promotion- and prevention-appeals in one vision may lead to both fit and misfit between this vision and followers, and thus may not enhance motivation optimally. Second, it could also be that visions that use both promotion- and prevention-appeals are not really perceived as either promotion- or prevention-oriented, because they do not emphasize one over the other. If a vision is not perceived to be promotion- or prevention-oriented it is hard to imagine how it could still fit follower regulatory focus.

Based on the results of the current study we cannot make a valid claim either way. In order to investigate this, future research should independently manipulate promotion-appeal (high and low) and prevention appeal (high and low). However, such a design would have several problems. First, the vision in the promotion *and* prevention condition would be longer than the promotion, the prevention, or the no prevention no promotion conditions. This would confound vision content with vision length. Second, the promotion and prevention condition would always oppose promotion vs. prevention arguments. Opposition is a known rhetoric device (see Den Hartog & Verbarg, 1997) and therefore it would be unclear whether the effects would be caused by this rhetoric device or our intended manipulation. Third, in opposing promotion and prevention it might be important which of the two would be presented first. Indeed, the first appeal presented may be more influential due to its position (primacy effect) or rather less influential

(recency effect). Finally, the promotion and prevention condition would be awkward because it would present redundant information (do something because it is good *and* because it is not bad). However, a research design using multiple studies and various intricate designs may overcome these difficulties and, if it would, would contribute greatly to the literature on vision communication.

Finally, we have focused on the role of regulatory fit in vision communication, emphasizing long term, abstract goals. However, leaders frequently communicate concrete task goals as opposed to visions and congruence between communication content and follower regulatory focus may also be relevant for these more concrete goals. Future research may uncover whether indeed regulatory fit may enhance performance in task goal setting.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Although we should be careful not to base too far-reaching conclusions on the present study, the current findings are potentially relevant for leadership practice. Especially the findings of contextual regulatory focus and appeals may be interesting for practice because environmental influences may overwrite chronic regulatory focus and because such influence may affect several people at once. For instance, industries or organizations with promotion-oriented or with prevention-oriented cultures could potentially benefit from the findings of this research. The existence of such cultures has been suggested by Brockner and Higgins (2001). Based on the current research, we might argue that prevention-appeals could lead to better results than promotion-appeals in organizations with a prevention-oriented culture, while the reverse may be true for organizations with a promotion-oriented culture.

Furthermore, specific events may influence the regulatory focus of all followers in an organization similarly. For instance, the CEO of a fast growing company, with employees oriented towards gains, could focus on a bright future in his or her speeches. However, the CEO of a company in distress, with employees worrying about possible job loss, might better discuss how to avoid bankruptcy. Therefore it is crucial for leaders to identify the effects of the environment on subordinates in order to be able to choose the optimal strategy to motivate them.

Interestingly, leaders can also influence their environments. By making more promotion or prevention-related objects salient leaders may influence the regulatory focus of a crowd. For instance, before talking about the danger of global warming, one could adorn the environment where one is to give a speech with posters of the terrible consequences of global warming. These posters would send a prevention-oriented message, and thus induce a more prevention-related regulatory focus. This in turn could enhance the effects of a speech on global warming. On the other hand, such effects may wear off rather fast.

The implementation of our findings of chronic regulatory focus (i.e., individual differences in regulatory focus) for vision communication is more difficult since an audience could consist of people with different chronic foci (and since situational stimuli may overwrite chronic regulatory focus). What works for one person, might not work for the other. Therefore it could be a solution to communicate visions not only to large groups, but also one on one so that these differences could be controlled for. In this way a leader could mold vision communication to fit a person more easily. This would suggest that, although the traditional manner to spread a vision through mass communication remains important, one on one communication of visions might also be important.

In conclusion, the current research shows that promotion-appeals as well as prevention-appeals may positively affect vision effectiveness, depending on the follower regulatory focus. We firmly believe that this has both theoretical as well as practical relevance. It is our sincere hope that more researchers will focus on the role of vision content and regulatory focus in leadership, and test the ideas that flow from this framework in studies in the field.

## APPENDIX: VISIONS

### *Promotion-appeal*

A subject that is particularly important for young managers is so called innovative management. Nowadays, there are books full of articles on innovative management and innovative entrepreneurship, and more than a few of them are nonsense, but this still says something. Innovativeness and creativity are important in businesses.

Think about your own situation. If you want to be able to be flexible under fast changing conditions; if you want enthusiastic, creative subordinates that are able to cope with the complex problems of today; if you're willing to take risks to reach excellence, then you understand how important innovation and creativity are for businesses. If you want to be a manager like this, you should think about this...

But despite the fact that a lot has been written on innovation, there is less work on how to manage innovation. Of course there are those cynics that claim that innovation and creativity are not manageable at all, that it is all a matter of letting go, of giving space: *Laissez-faire*. But the facts show that creativity and innovation really are manageable, that managers should pay extra attention to coping with innovation and creativity.

You can manage innovation in your company by detailed observation, by trying to understand what's going on in the areas of customers, technique, the market etc. You can enhance creativity by challenging people to think about problems and to come up with solutions. Try to think what will happen to your (future) work unit if you manage like this, actively coping with innovations.

The most important thing in stimulating innovation is communicating a vision! Managers should focus on the future; tell people how they see themselves and their subordinates in the future. Creating support for a collective image of the future is the most important tool in the hands of an innovative manager!

Tell your subordinates what you want to reach; give them an ideal image of your work unit or company and its potential to be innovative and creative. Provide your employees with something to dream about, something to aspire, personally as well as collectively. The innovative manager holds the future!

***Prevention-appeal***

A subject that is particularly important for young managers is so called innovative management. Nowadays, there are books full of articles on innovative management and innovative entrepreneurship, and more than a few of them are nonsense, but this still says something. Innovativeness and creativity are important in businesses.

Think about your own situation. If you don't want to be inflexible and slow under fast changing conditions; if you don't want conservative and bored subordinates that are not able to cope with the complex problems of today; if you don't want conform to procedures just to play it safe, than you understand how important innovation and creativity are for businesses. If you don't want to be a manager like this, you should think about this...

But despite the fact that a lot has been written on innovation, there is less work on how to manage innovation. Of course there are those cynics that claim that innovation and creativity are not manageable at all, that it is all a matter of letting go, of giving space: Laissez-faire. But the facts show that creativity and innovation really are manageable, that managers should pay extra attention to coping with innovation and creativity.

You can't manage innovation in your company if you keep your eyes closed, if you don't try to understand what's going on in the areas of customers, technique, the market etc. You cannot enhance creativity if you do not challenge people to think about problems and to come up with solutions. Try to think what will happen to your (future) work unit if you manage like this, passively coping with innovations.

The most important thing in stimulating innovation is communicating a vision! Managers should focus on the future; tell people how they see themselves and their subordinates in the future. Creating support for a collective image of the future is the most important tool in the hands of an innovative manager!

Tell your subordinates what you want to avoid; give them a frightening image of your work unit or company and its inability to be innovative and creative. Provide your employees with something to push away from, something to avoid, personally as well as collectively. The innovative manager holds the future!





## CHAPTER 4

### WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

*In three experiments we investigated the influence of crisis on leader vision communication. Prior research suggests that crises may prompt leaders to exhibit charismatic leadership behaviors, like communicating inspirational visions. We extend these ideas by proposing that crisis causes leaders to more clearly communicate their strategies for change in their visions. Indeed two studies (1a and 1b) confirm the hypothesis that in the presence of a crisis the differences between the visionary appeals of leaders with different strategic goals are clearer than in the absence of a crisis. Furthermore, prior research also suggests that crises may influence the perception of charismatic leadership behaviors, like inspirational vision communication, by followers. We extend this reasoning by suggesting that times of crisis may cause followers to be more inspired by more promotion-oriented strategic appeals (appeals focused on ideals) as opposed to prevention-oriented strategic appeals (appeals that focus on security). In line with these ideas two studies (1b and 2) confirm the hypothesis that crisis causes followers to deem more promotion-oriented appeals more inspiring.*

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership research argues that truly inspirational leaders often emerge in times of crisis (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; Weber, 1947). Many scholars hold that such leaders may be especially effective partly because they are able to motivate followers to commit to a vision that promises a desirable future without hardship or trouble (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998). Indeed inspirational vision communication by leaders may be especially likely as well as effective in times of crisis. Reasons for this may be twofold (Pillai & Meindl, 1991). On the one hand crises may facilitate the expression of inspirational visionary appeals by leaders. On the other hand crises may also positively influence the perception of these appeals by followers. Unfortunately, although knowledge about how leaders communicate visions in times of crises and how

these visions affect followers may be crucial for theories of vision communication as well as leadership practice, such knowledge is scarce. Therefore, in this study we investigate how crisis may influence a) the *expression* and b) the *perception* of vision communication in a series of three experiments.

First, we argue that crises may cause leaders to more clearly express their strategic goals for change when communicating a vision. This suggests that in times of crisis more than in times of prosperity leaders communicate clear strategies for change. The literature on vision communication differentiates between *promotion-oriented strategies*, which focus on the promotion of a desirable image, emphasizing the positive qualities of the envisioned future (Baum, Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1998; Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001) and *prevention-oriented strategies*, which focus on the prevention of an undesirable image, emphasizing the negative qualities of the current course of events (Bruch, Shamir, & Eilam-Shamir, 2007; Fiol, Harris, & House 1999). We argue that, depending on the dominant strategy that of a leader, times of crisis may enhance the clarity of expression of promotion or prevention strategic goals, resulting in especially prominent differences in communicated strategies between the visions of leaders with promotion and prevention strategic goals. Second, we suggest that, although communicating promotion- and prevention-strategies may both be effective, times of crisis may induce a longing for hope and a positive future in followers (cf. Shamir & Howell, 1999) that is prominently embodied by more promotion-oriented strategies, subsequently increasing the effectiveness of communication of these strategies.

In sum, the current study aims to contribute to the literature of leadership by a) investigating *how* crisis may affect vision communication, b) focusing not only on the *communication* but also on the *perception* of promotion- and prevention-oriented appeals, and c) providing experimental evidence to support our claims.

### ***Crisis, Leadership, and Vision Communication***

Emergence and success of inspirational leaders are proposed to be especially likely in times of crisis and turmoil (House, Spangler, & Woycke 1991; Pillai & Meindl, 1991, 1998). For instance, Simonton (1986a, 1986b, 2001) shows that number of war years, which seems closely related to crisis, is one of the main predictors of perceived

presidential greatness. Beyer and Browning (1999) present the case of Robert Noyce, a successful and inspiring CEO in the semiconductor manufacturing industry, whose ability to inspire only became apparent when a crisis emerged. Unfortunately, the reasons why crises foster the emergence and success of inspirational leaders are not yet fully understood, leading Beyer (1999) to issue a call for studies that focus on the role of crises in leadership.

One leader behavior that is argued to be an especially effective tool to inspire followers in times of crisis is vision communication (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Indeed, Beyer and Browning (1999) argue that an important element of Robert Noyce's ability to inspire others in times of crisis was his radical vision. Visions are defined as images of the future (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Vision communication refers to the expression of a certain vision aimed at persuading others to endorse the vision. Leaders may communicate visions to stimulate individual and collective performance (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997) because it may lead followers to identify more with the collective, to be more efficacious, to perceive their work as more meaningful and their leaders as more charismatic, and to be generally more motivated to perform well in their work (Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1994; Yukl, 2002). Corroborating these ideas, empirical studies showed that vision communication may indeed enhance leadership effectiveness (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Baum et al., 1998; Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996).

Vision communication may be crucial in times of crises. Specifically, in times of crisis successful leaders may be able to motivate followers to commit to a vision that promises a desirable future without hardship and trouble. Supporting this line of reasoning, Hunt and colleagues (1999) showed that in times of crisis visionary leadership and emphasizing future images of an organization were indeed highly effective and furthermore that this effectiveness was also very long-lasting (Boal & Bryson, 1988).

This prompts the question what makes visions especially effective in crisis situations. It is argued that crises may affect leadership effectiveness through two distinct processes (Pillai & Meindl, 1991, 1998). First, times of crisis may facilitate expressions of specific behaviors, like communicating inspirational visions, by leaders. For instance,

Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl (2004) investigated the speeches of US President George W. Bush before and after the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and concluded that in comparison to before, among other things, his speeches emphasized the hardship of the current situation more than after the crisis. Second, crises may also influence follower perception of leader behaviors. For instance, research showed that groups of students deemed the charisma of individuals more important for selecting leaders when experiencing a crisis than when no crisis was apparent (Pillai & Meindl, 1991).

Building on these ideas we argue that crisis may impact upon the tendencies of leaders to communicate specific visions, as well as affect the extent to which these visions inspire followers. In the following we first focus on the influence of crisis on the expression of visions by leaders. We continue with a discussion of the effects of crisis on the perception of these visions by followers.

### ***Crisis and the Communication of Visionary Appeals***

Research on vision development suggests that leaders formulate visions after reflecting on goals, strategies, and causes (Strange & Mumford, 2002, 2005). Visions seem to reflect the strategic goals that leaders hold after such reflection. The suggestion that crises may activate specific behaviors to inspire followers for change (Pillai & Meindl, 1991) implies that visions from the same (or similar) leader(s) may differ depending on whether a company is in crisis or not. One explanation for this may be that the negative affect and uncertainty that is associated with crisis situations creates an urge for change, which subsequently produces a necessity for the clear expression of change strategies. Consequently, in times of crises leaders may emphasize change strategies in their vision communication to demonstrate followers how to overcome the current crisis. On the contrary, in times of prosperity and stability changes may not be as appealing as in times of crisis because the current course of events is appealing already. This pattern of changing when facing crisis or losses and not changing when facing prosperity or winnings is in line with research in strategic cooperation in which the “win-stay/lose-shift” strategy is used to explain cooperative behavior in social dilemmas (Macy, 1995).

Thus, we propose that times of crisis may induce an urge for change that creates a necessity for leaders to explicitly and clearly communicate change oriented strategic

goals to followers. Specifically, we argue that times of crisis may put an emphasis on change which causes leader to more clearly communicate strategic goals that are related to change than they would in times of stability. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Times of crisis cause leaders to express their strategic goals for change more clearly.*

### ***Crisis and the Perception of Visionary Appeals***

Now we turn to the influence of crises on follower perceptions of visionary appeals. If crises cause leaders to communicate more clearly their strategic goals for change, the question remains how this clearer communication influences followers. We argue that this depends on the type of change strategy that leaders emphasize.

The literature on vision communication suggests that two types of strategic appeals may motivate followers for change (Fiol et al., 1999). One appeal focuses on the promotion of a desirable image, emphasizing the positive qualities of the envisioned future (Baum et al., 1998; Berson et al., 2001). We call this a promotion-oriented appeal. Vision communication utilizing promotion-oriented appeals are successful because the futures they propagate are attractive for followers. Corroborating to the success of promotion-appeals, Berson and colleagues (2001) found that the most important characteristics of visions communicated by successful leaders were optimism and confidence in a positive future. Also, Wood, Owens, and Durham (2005) found evidence that when United States presidents were more optimistic about the economy in their communication to the public, the subsequent economic growth was higher than when they were less optimistic.

Another type of strategic appeal focuses on the prevention of an undesirable image, emphasizing the negative qualities of the current situation and the probable course of events (Bruch et al., 2007; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Fiol et al., 1999). We call this a prevention-oriented appeal. Vision communication utilizing prevention-oriented appeals are successful because they clarify how to avoid a situation that is highly unattractive. Indeed, Fiol and colleagues (1999) propose that leaders can use positive, but also negative motivation to bring about social change. Leaders may offer ideals to approach

(positive motivation), but they may also point to failures and feared events to avoid (negative motivation).

Crises are associated with negative affect and feelings of uncertainty. Prevention-oriented appeals in times of crisis emphasize the negative nature of the crisis situation and the current course of events in order to motivate individuals for change. Promotion-oriented appeals emphasize a desirable, positive future in order to motivate individuals for change. The literature of vision communication suggests that during times of crisis followers are especially open to visions that focus on hope and faith in a positive future (cf. Shamir et al., 1993; Shamir & Howell, 1999). The intolerableness of the crisis situation activates a longing for a positive future in followers which makes visions that emphasize such positive futures particularly inspiring. This would suggest that in crisis situations followers may be more inspired by more promotion-oriented appeals because these appeals focus more on positive future and as such provide a sense of hope.

This is in line with research in mood management which suggests that individuals may produce mood incongruent judgments and behaviors when the extremity of an experienced mood is high enough in order to restore internal affective balance (Baumeister et al., 2007; Ciarrochi & Forgas, 1999; Forgas, 1995; Forgas, Johnson, & Ciarrochi, 1998). This suggests that extreme negative events such as crises may activate a focus on positive signals, like more promotion-oriented appeals. Indeed, research has shown that effective leadership amongst firemen, who regularly face dire and uncertain situations, is to a large extent based on the ability of leaders to induce positive affect in followers (Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008). In sum, we suggest that the negative nature and uncertainty associated with times of crises may induce a preference for positive messages, which subsequently makes more promotion-oriented appeals more inspiring. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: Times of crisis cause followers to deem promotion-oriented appeals more inspirational than prevention-oriented appeals.*

### ***The Current Research***

The current research aims to investigate the influence of crisis on a) the clarity with which leaders communicate strategic goals in their visionary appeals and b) follower perceptions of leader visionary appeals. We investigated these questions using three experiments. In Study 1a we focused on leader vision expression in times of crisis. In an experiment the participants played the role of the head of a company. We manipulated the company to be in crisis or to prosper. We also manipulated the strategic goals of the participants to be promotion strategic goals or prevention strategic goals. We then asked participants to write a visionary speech and subsequently we had two experts content-code these speeches to assess their promotion- and prevention-orientation. In this way we could assess whether times of crisis caused leaders to communicate their strategic goals, be they prevention- or promotion-oriented, more clearly. We expected that in times of prosperity there would be no clear difference between the promotion- and prevention-orientation of visionary appeals of leaders with promotion strategic goals and leaders with prevention strategic goals, but that in times of crisis clear differences would appear.

In Study 1b we showed a subset of the speeches generated in Study 1a to other participants in order to be able to investigate the extent to which the speeches inspired participants and also to replicate the findings of Study 1a. This time the participants played the role of the employee of a company. They were asked to read and evaluate a speech from their leader. These speeches were a subset of speeches generated in Study 1a. We then asked participants to rate the content of the speech in terms of promotion- and prevention-orientation and to assess how inspiring the speech was.

Finally, in Study 2, we examined the influence of crisis on the perceived inspirational ability of promotion- or prevention-oriented appeals in a completely experimental set-up. Similar to Study 1b participants played the role of an employee of a company. They read a speech of their leader and were asked to rate how inspiring they deemed this speech. However, in Study 1b we did not manipulate crisis and regulatory-orientation of speeches independently of each other and consequently we could not make causal claims about the relation between crisis and the effectiveness of promotion- and prevention-appeals. Therefore, as opposed to Study 1b, this study orthogonally



manipulated organizational situation (crisis or prosperity) and visionary appeal (promotion-oriented or prevention-oriented) in order to be able to make causal claims.

## **STUDY 1A: VISION EXPRESSION WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH**

### ***Method***

***Participants and design.*** The participants of this study were 89 second, third, and fourth year business and economics students from a Dutch University (50 males, 39 females; Mean age 20.85,  $SD = 2.00$ ). We used a 2 (Crisis: crisis versus prosperity) X 2 (Strategic Goal: promotion versus prevention) factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to the different conditions.

***Procedure.*** Participants were placed in front of a computer. They were told to imagine being the head of a big department of a transportation company. They received some information about this department which included the crisis and strategic goal manipulations and were then told that they were expected to give a speech in which they were to share their vision of the department with their employees. They were then asked to write this speech. Afterwards participants were debriefed, thanked and paid 10 euro (approximately 15 USD) for their participation.

***Crisis manipulation.*** We manipulated the situation of the department by providing the participants with several pieces of information. In the crisis condition participants were told that the department had lost several projects and clients, that turnover had decreased, and that several positions within the department had been lost. Furthermore, we told them that in general the department was in crisis. In the prosperity condition participants were told that the department had gained several projects and clients, that turnover had increased, and that several new positions within the department had been created. Furthermore, we told them that in general the department was prospering. As part of the manipulation we had participants reflect on the situation of their department for several minutes.

***Strategic goal manipulation.*** Manipulations of promotion and prevention strategic goals have been developed in prior research (see for instance, Friedman & Förster, 2001; Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997). For example, Higgins and colleagues

(1997) formulated promotion strategic goals by promising participants 1 dollar extra pay (5 instead of 4 dollars) if they performed well on a task (above 70<sup>th</sup> percentile), creating a focus on gains. They formulated prevention goals by telling participants they would lose 1 dollar pay (4 instead of 5 dollars) if they performed badly on a task (below 70<sup>th</sup> percentile), creating a focus on avoiding losses. We manipulated the strategic goals of participants by manipulating the framing of several goals that they were to imagine being theirs. In the promotion condition participants were told that their four main goals were to develop new projects, to attract new clients, to increase turnover and to create new positions within the department (e.g., focused on reaching gains). In the prevention condition participants were told that their four main goals were to avoid losing existing projects, to avoid losing clients, to avoid a decrease in turnover and to avoid losing positions within the department (e.g., focused on avoiding losses).

**Manipulation checks.** As a manipulation check for crisis we asked two questions about the valence of the information of the company on a three-point scale ( $\alpha = .99$ ). An item of this scale was “The results of the company over the last year were:” with possible answers being “negative”, “neutral”, and “positive”. A higher score on this measure indicated that the participants deemed the situation more prosperous. As a manipulation check for strategic goal we asked two questions about the focus of the goals given on a three-point scale ( $\alpha = .72$ ). An item of this scale was “The goals were:” with possible answers being “focused on avoiding losses”, “not focused on avoiding losses or on reaching gains”, and “focused on reaching gains”. A higher score on this measure indicated that the participants deemed the goals more promotion-oriented (as opposed to prevention-oriented).

**Ratings of strategic orientation.** To assess the clarity of the expression of strategic goals in the speeches we measured the strategic orientation of the speeches. We had two expert raters who were blind to the experimental conditions content-code the speeches based on the two questions: “To what extent did the speech focus on promoting a desired end state?” and “To what extent did the speech focus on preventing an undesired end state?” (reverse-coded). The raters answered on a seven-point scale. We averaged the scores of the raters over these two items (rater 1:  $\alpha = .85$ ; rater 2:  $\alpha = .90$ ; inter-rater reliability:  $r = .71$ ). A higher score on this measure ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) indicated that

the speech was more promotion-oriented because it emphasized a positive future to a greater extent and less prevention-oriented because it emphasized a negative future to a lesser extent.

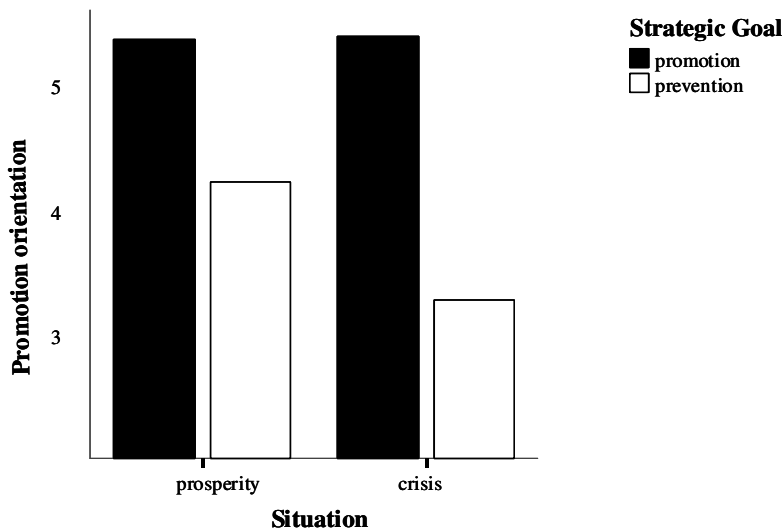
### **Results**

For all analyses we used analysis of variance with the crisis manipulation, the strategic goal manipulation, and their interaction as independent variables.

**Manipulation checks.** Results showed that in the prosperity condition participants scored higher on the crisis manipulation check ( $M = 3.00$ ) than in crisis condition ( $M = 1.02$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 7525.29$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .99$ . Furthermore, in the promotion condition participants scored higher on the strategic goal manipulation check ( $M = 2.69$ ) than in prevention condition ( $M = 1.42$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 179.17$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .69$ . No other effects were found, suggesting that the manipulations were successful.

**Ratings of strategic orientation.** We found that speeches were more promotion-oriented in the prosperity situation ( $M = 4.77$ ) than in the crisis situation ( $M = 4.31$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 4.16$ ,  $p = .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ , and also more in the promotion condition ( $M = 5.34$ ) than in the prevention condition ( $M = 3.74$ )  $F(1, 85) = 51.21$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .38$ . A significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 85) = 4.66$ ,  $p = .03$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$  (See Figure 4.1) showed that although even in the prosperity condition participants in the promotion condition ( $M = 5.33$ ) wrote more promotion-oriented speeches than those in the prevention condition ( $M = 4.21$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 13.54$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ , this difference between participants in the promotion condition ( $M = 5.34$ ) and the prevention condition ( $M = 3.26$ ) was more prominent in the crisis condition,  $F(1, 85) = 40.25$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .32$ .

Figure 4.1: *Promotion-orientation of speeches as a function of situation and strategic goals (Study 1a).*



### *Discussion*

In the current study we found that in times of crisis the difference between the visions of leaders with promotion and prevention strategic goals were clearer than in times of prosperity. Apparently, crisis brought out a tendency to more clearly communicate strategic goals, as was evident in a clear distinction between visionary appeals of leaders in the promotion and prevention strategic goal conditions. This confirms Hypothesis 1.

The results show that the various speeches differed in terms of their regulatory content but they make no suggestion about the effectiveness of promotion-oriented or prevention-oriented speeches in times of crisis. Therefore, in the next study we used an experiment in which we provided participants with one of a selection of speeches generated in Study 1a. We had these participants rate the promotion-orientation of the speeches as well as indicate how inspiring they thought the speeches were. This allows us

to investigate the extent to which promotion-orientation caused speeches to be perceived as more inspiring during crisis *and* at the same time replicate the findings of Study 1a, concerning the promotion-orientation of the speeches in times of crisis.

## STUDY 1B: VISION PERCEPTION WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

### *Method*

**Participants and design.** The participants of this study were 89 second, third and fourth year business and economics students from a Dutch university (56 males, 22 females; Mean age = 20.92, SD = 2.21). We showed participants one of a selection of speeches generated in Study 1a. This selection of speeches consisted of three speeches from each of the four conditions in Study 1a, which used a 2 (Crisis: crisis versus prosperity) X 2 (Strategic Goal: promotion versus prevention) factorial design.

**Procedure.** Participants took part in an experiment using a computer. The story was similar to the story in Study 1a, with the exception that the participants were told to imagine that they were an *employee* (and not the *head*) of a big department of a transportation company. They read some information about this company and were then shown a speech in which the leader of the company was to share his/her vision of the department with the employees of the department. They read the text of the speech and were then told that it was their task, as an employee of the company, to assess this speech. Afterwards the participants were debriefed, thanked and paid 5 euros (approximately 7.5 USD) for their participation.

**Experimental manipulations.** In this study we wanted to see the effects of the speeches generated in Study 1a on our participants. For reliability reasons we wanted to show each speech to several participants. Using all 89 speeches would require enormous amounts of participants. Hence, we selected three speeches from each of the four conditions of Study 1a (crisis-promotion, crisis-prevention, prosperity-promotion, and prosperity-prevention) that scored closest to the average score on the strategic orientation rating in their corresponding condition to show to the participants (see Study 1a). We reasoned that because these speeches scored close to average on the promotion-orientation rating in a specific condition, they were quite representative of all speeches in

this condition. We showed each participant one of these 12 speeches. The specific speech to which a participant was exposed in effect placed the participants in one of the four experimental conditions (e.g., exposure to one of the speeches generated in the crisis-prevention conditions of Study 1a placed the participants in the crisis-prevention condition of Study 1b).

To ascertain that these speeches were representative, we tested for each condition whether the average score of the expert ratings of strategic orientation of the selected speeches was significantly different from the average scores of the other speeches generated in Study 1a. Using analysis of variance, we found that in none of the conditions the average score of the three selected speeches significantly differed from the average score of the other speeches. Therefore, we conclude that the selected speeches were representative for all speeches generated in Study 1a. We note that because we selected speeches that scored average on the regulatory content rating (as opposed to using more extreme cases) we conduct a relatively conservative test of our hypotheses.

**Crisis.** In order to see whether participants could recognize the situation the department was in based on the text of the speech they read, we measured crisis perceptions with a single item using a seven-point Likert scale ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 2.09$ ). The item was ‘The departmental results of the last few years were positive’. A higher score on this item indicated that the participants deemed the situation more prosperous.

**Perceptions of strategic orientation.** In order to assess the strategic orientation of the speeches we used a four item scale using a seven-point answer format ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ). Sample items of this scale were ‘The speech focused on reaching a positive future’ and ‘the speech focused on avoiding a negative future’ (reverse coded). A higher score on the scale indicates that participants deemed the speech more promotion-oriented (and less prevention-oriented). As expected, this measure correlated significantly with the ratings of promotion orientation (as opposed to prevention orientation) from Study 1a ( $r = .41$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

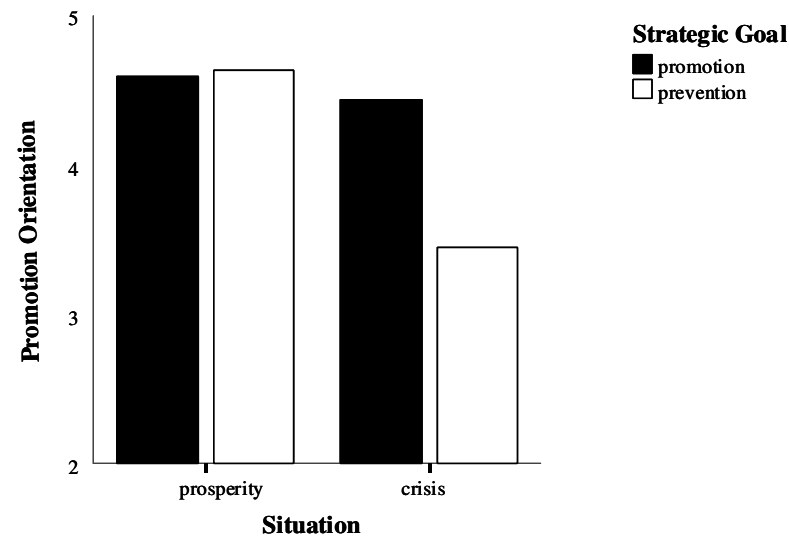
**Speech evaluation.** The participants rated how inspiring the speech was with five items on a seven-point scale ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ). Sample items of this scale were ‘I think the speech was inspiring’ and ‘I think the speech was motivating’. A higher score on the scale indicates that participants deemed the speech more inspiring.

**Results**

For all analyses we used analysis of variance with the crisis manipulation (see Study 1a), the strategic goal manipulation (see Study 1a), and their interaction as independent variables.

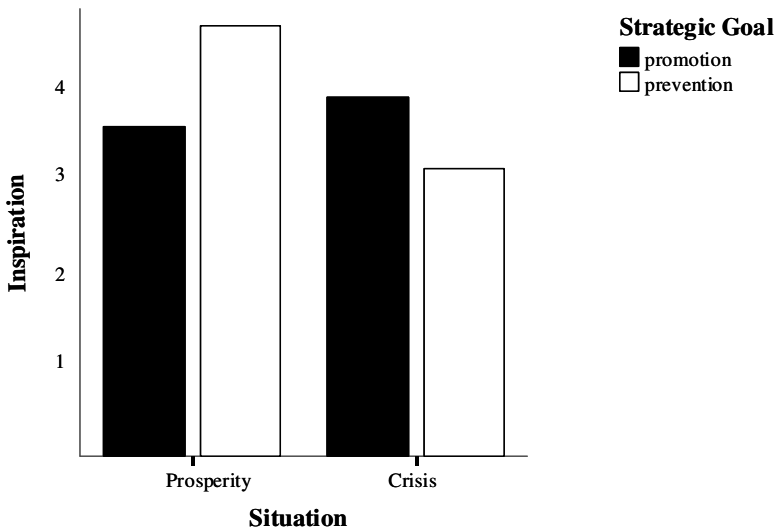
**Crisis.** The results showed that participants deemed the situation of the company more positive in the in the prosperity condition ( $M = 5.98$ ) than in the crisis condition ( $M = 2.56$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 185.00$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .69$ . No other effects were found, suggesting that participants could clearly distinguish between crisis and prosperity conditions.

Figure 4.2: *Promotion-orientation of speeches as a function of situation and strategic goals (Study 1b).*



**Perceptions of strategic orientation.** Participants deemed the content of the speech more promotion-oriented in the prosperity condition ( $M = 4.27$ ) than in the crisis condition ( $M = 3.37$ )  $F(1, 85) = 15.40, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .15$ . This difference was classified by a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 85) = 6.75, p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$  (See Figure 4.2). In the prosperity condition we found no significant differences between the promotion condition ( $M = 4.10$ ) and the prevention condition ( $M = 4.44$ ), but in the crisis condition, participants rated the speech to be significantly more promotion-oriented in the promotion condition ( $M = 3.79$ ) than in the prevention condition ( $M = 2.94$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 7.48, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .08$ .

Figure 4.3: *Inspiration as a function of situation and strategic goals (Study 1b).*



**Speech evaluation.** Participants deemed the speech more inspiring in the prosperity condition ( $M = 4.00$ ) than in the crisis condition ( $M = 3.46$ )  $F(1, 85) = 4.46, p = .04$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ . This difference was classified by a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 85) = 10.42, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .11$  (See Figure 4.3). In the prosperity condition participants deemed the speech more inspiring in the prevention condition ( $M = 4.61$ )



than in the promotion condition ( $M = 3.52$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 6.67$ ,  $p = .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ . In the crisis condition, however, participants deemed the speech more inspiring in the promotion condition ( $M = 3.84$ ) than in the prevention condition ( $M = 3.08$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 3.84$ ,  $p = .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ .

**Mediation analysis.** To investigate whether perceptions of strategic orientation of speeches influenced the extent to which the speech inspired participants we conducted a mediation analysis. Following Yzerbyt, Muller, and Judd (2004) we controlled for the mediating variable by adding it as a covariate in the analysis of (co)variance on speech evaluation. We found that the effect of the perceptions of strategic orientation on perceptions of inspiration of the speech was significant,  $F(1, 84) = 203.78$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .71$ . Moreover, the interaction effect of the vision manipulation and the goal manipulation became non-significant. A Sobel Test confirmed that ratings of regulatory focus significantly mediated the interaction effect,  $z = 2.56$ ,  $p = .01$ . Based on these results we may conclude that perceived strategic orientation of the speeches mediated the effect of the manipulations on perception of inspiration of the speech (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986).

## **Discussion**

The results of this study confirm the findings of Study 1a. Participants only perceived differences in strategic orientation between speeches of leader with promotion and prevention strategic goals in the crisis condition. This again confirms Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, participants deemed more promotion-oriented speeches more inspiring. However, because differences in promotion-orientation of speeches were apparent in times of crisis but not in times of prosperity, we may only conclude that in times of crisis participants viewed promotion-oriented speeches as being more inspiring than prevention-oriented speeches. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that participants could clearly perceive when the company was in crisis or not. In other words, the study suggests that in crisis people prefer speeches that are more promotion-oriented.

However, even though in the prosperity condition (as opposed to the crisis condition) participants actually rated the speeches of leaders with prevention goals to be more inspirational than speeches of leaders with promotion goals, we cannot conclude that

times of crisis *caused* participants to consider more promotion-oriented appeals more inspiring than more prevention-oriented appeals because we did not independently manipulate crisis and strategic orientation of the speeches. We need such independent manipulations in order to test Hypothesis 2 which states that a crisis *causes* the preference for more promotion-oriented appeals. Therefore in the next study we will investigate subjective ratings of speeches using an experimental design that orthogonally manipulates crisis and strategic orientation of the speeches.

## STUDY 2: WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET GOING

### *Method*

**Participants and design.** The participants of this study were 111 second, third, and fourth year business and economics students from a Dutch university (56 males, 55 females; Mean age = 21.98, SD = 2.25). We used a 2 (Crisis: crisis versus prosperity) X 2 (Vision: promotion-oriented versus prevention-oriented) factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to the different conditions.

**Procedure.** The procedure of this study was similar to Study 1b, with the exception that in the story of this study we manipulated the situation of the department and we also manipulated the content of the speeches. Afterwards the participants were debriefed, thanked and paid 5 euros (approximately 7.5 USD) for their participation.

**Crisis manipulation.** We manipulated crisis by providing the participants with some information about the company. In the prosperity condition participants received information that their company was doing very well and that in the last few years there had been a massive increase in clients and profit. In the crisis condition participants received information that their company was not doing well and that in the last few years there had been a massive decrease in clients and profit. As part of the manipulation we had participants reflect on the situation of their department for several minutes.

**Vision manipulation.** We manipulated the visions to be more promotion- or prevention-oriented. The promotion-oriented vision focused on the challenges that lay ahead and that could turn out very profitable (reaching gains). An excerpt of the promotion speech is:

*“We have to aspire to do our work as good as we can, always looking for excellence, always aiming to stand out. In this way we can conquer the whole of Asian market and be a better and more beautiful company in the future!”*

The prevention-oriented vision focused on the threats that lay ahead and that could decrease profits considerably (avoiding losses). An excerpt of the prevention speech is:

*“We have to aspire to avoid errors in our work, always being careful. In this way we can avoid losing the Asian market and all the problems that this may bring for the future!”*

In all other respects the speeches were exactly the same.

**Manipulation checks.** We used the same item as in Study 1b to measure the extent to which participants thought the company was in crisis or not ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ). We used the same four items as in Study 1b to measure the extent to which participants thought the speech was promotion-oriented ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Speech evaluation.** We used the same five items as in Study 1b to measure the extent to which participants thought the speech was inspiring ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

## Results

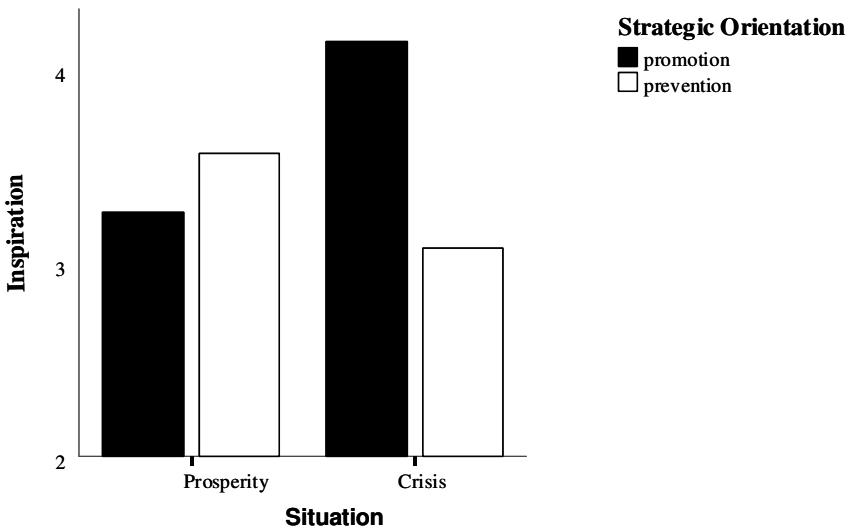
For all analyses we used analysis of variance with the crisis manipulation, the vision manipulation, and their interaction as independent variables.

**Manipulation checks.** We found only a main effect of the crisis manipulation on the manipulation check of crisis. Participants evaluated the situation to be more positive in the prosperity condition ( $M = 4.53$ ) than in the crisis condition ( $M = 1.95$ )  $F(1, 107) = 124.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .54$ . We found only a main effect of the vision manipulation on the manipulation check of vision. Results showed that participants evaluated the speech to be more promotion-oriented in the promotion condition ( $M = 5.21$ ) than in the prevention condition ( $M = 3.39$ ),  $F(1, 107) = 83.56$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .44$ . These results suggest that the manipulations were successful.

**Evaluation of the speech.** We found no main effects, but we did find a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 107) = 7.81$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$  (See Figure 4.4). Simple main effects analysis showed that in the prosperity condition prevention-oriented

speeches ( $M = 3.57$ ) were deemed more inspiring than promotion-oriented speeches ( $M = 3.26$ ), although the difference was not significant. In the crisis condition, however, participants deemed the speech significantly more inspiring in the promotion condition ( $M = 4.15$ ) than the prevention condition ( $M = 3.08$ ),  $F(1, 107) = 9.88$ ,  $p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ .

Figure 4.4: *Inspiration as a function of situation and strategic goals (Study 1b).*



### Discussion

This study confirms the findings of Study 1b. In times of crisis people find promotion-oriented speeches more inspiring than prevention-oriented speeches. Moreover, the results show that in times of prosperity people do not find promotion-oriented speeches more inspiring than prevention-oriented speeches, confirming Hypothesis 2 which states that times of crisis *cause* followers to be more inspired by more promotion- than more prevention-oriented appeals.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although it is generally argued that crisis situations facilitate the expression and success of inspirational visions, there is hardly any research that investigates *how* crisis may influence vision communication (Beyer, 1999; House, 1999; Shamir, 1999). This research focuses on the role of promotion- and prevention-oriented strategic appeals in this process, from the perspective of leaders as well as from the perspective of followers. We have argued and shown that times of crisis caused leaders to more clearly express their strategies for change, be they promotion-oriented strategies or prevention-oriented strategies. Furthermore, we showed that followers deemed more promotion-oriented appeals (as opposed to prevention-oriented appeals) more inspiring in crisis situations, but not in prosperity situations. These findings have several theoretical implications.

### *Theoretical Implications*

For instance, the current research investigated the influence of crisis on leadership processes. Prior research on the role of crisis on leadership has shown that crisis may facilitate endorsement of charismatic leaders (Pillai & Meindl, 1991) and enhance charisma attributions of leaders (House et al., 1991). The current research enhances this knowledge in several ways. First, by focusing on specific leadership behaviors as opposed to more general leadership styles we are able to pinpoint how crises affects these specific behaviors. This is important because charismatic and transformational leadership are multifaceted and complex behavioral styles (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987) and therefore their relation with crisis may be driven by a host of different behaviors and processes. By focusing on specific behaviors we are able to be more specific in our conclusions. Second, by focusing not only on perception of leadership behavior but also on actual displays of these behaviors we substantiate theoretical arguments that crises may influence *perception*, but also *expression* of certain leadership behaviors (Pillai & Meindl, 1991). Third, by specifying the processes through which crisis may affect leadership we show not only that crises may impact leadership, but also *how* this may happen. Indeed, by proposing that crises causes leaders to more clearly express strategic goals in their visions as well as proposing that followers prefer promotion-oriented

appeals in crises situations we emphasize very specific mechanisms that may partly drive the more general findings that crises facilitates the development of charismatic relations.

Furthermore, the current study provides evidence that substantiates and extends theoretical claims that vision content can make a difference in how visions and leaders are perceived (Beyer, 1999; Shamir et al., 1993). Specifically, by investigating vision content in terms of perceived strategic orientation we were able to show that vision content indeed may affect follower perceptions of leaders. This is important because much research on vision communication seems to concern framing of messages and communication style rather than content of messages (Beyer, 1999).

Finally, although leader characteristics have been related to transformational and charismatic leadership behaviors (for instance see Bono & Judge, 2004) this is the one of the first studies to focus on the effects of the specific goals that leaders hold on vision communication (for exceptions see Strange & Mumford, 2002, 2005). Furthermore, this is the first empirical study to emphasize leader strategic goals in terms of promotion and prevention orientation. The reason why we have focused on promotion and prevention strategic goals as a driver for leadership behavior is that these goals are strongly related to strategy selection and hence to the expression of visionary appeals. However, due to the fundamental nature of these differences in motivational strategies they may also be important for other leader behaviors. Such influences have been suggested by theoretical papers (for instance see Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Dragoni, 2005; Kark & Van Dijk, 2008), and the present research extends these suggestions with more specific theoretical argumentation as well as empirical findings.

### ***Limitations***

Of course, this research is not without its problems and limitations. Our research consisted of several experiments with a student sample. We did our best to make the samples as representative as possible. Therefore our participants were business and economics students who had already studied businesses or economics for several years. Furthermore, in several years from now the majority of these students will probably work as leaders in different companies. Be that as it may, we agree with the notion that experimental research does not prove that certain effects exists outside of the

experimental laboratory, but rather that these effects *could* exist, and that this is important in its own right (Goodwin, Wofford, & Boyd, 2000). Thus, although we are confident that the results of this study could be applicable in the field, we would enthusiastically welcome any field research on the topic.

Furthermore, with the exception of Study 1b, the manipulation of crisis was independent of vision communication. In reality the two can be much more intertwined. Indeed, although information about organizational and departmental functioning may be gathered from sources independent from organizational management, often this information is communicated by management and therefore carefully selected, spinned, and framed to make management appear more competent. The current research does not take such a dependency into account and rather argues from a situation in which information that a company is in crisis is abundantly available and relatively objective. However, it could well be that in situations where such objective information is not available followers may feel especially uncertain and worrisome, actually enhancing the effects that we have shown in the current studies.

### ***Future Research***

The findings of this research may also inspire new alleys of research. For instance, one interesting finding in Study 1b was the fact that in times of prosperity prevention-oriented appeals were more inspirational than promotion-oriented appeals. Likewise, we found the same pattern in Study 2, although it did not reach significance. We may explain these findings by arguing that the recent organizational gains that defined our prosperity condition might have led to a focus on security because followers do not want to lose what they have won. In a way employees of a company that prospers may not want to change a winning team and may therefore become more conservative in their judgments, making them especially susceptible to more prevention-oriented appeals.

In the current research we have focused on situations in which an organization or department has recently lost (or gained) assets. However, what happens before and after the blows are struck? For instance, Fink (1986) distinguishes between various chronological phases of crises: a) a warning phase, b) an acute phase in which a crisis erupts, c) a chronic phase in which the crisis endures, and d) a resolution phase in which

the crisis ends. We have focused mainly on the chronic phase (and arguably on the acute phase) in which a crises came up and endured. However, the question arises whether our findings would hold in warning or resolutions phases. While our results do not allow us to come to any definite conclusion, we may speculate about this. For instance, while an acute or chronic phase might be associated with extreme negative affect and uncertainty that leads to a longing for promotion-oriented appeals, a warning phase may arouse less extreme negative feelings that hence induce less longing for such appeals. Similarly, in the resolution phase, the negative affect of the crises may still linger but less extreme than during the crisis.

### ***Practical Implications***

Although we should be careful not to base too many implications on this experimental research one could conceive of several possible implications. For instance, and most straightforward, we would argue that managers in practice should pay attention to the current situation of their company. In crisis leaders would be wise not to become too grave themselves, but to focus on a better future and to provide hope for their followers.

Furthermore, top management may use these findings to train or select crisis-managers. Interim managers are often brought in an organization to resolve a problem or (potential) crisis. Our results suggest that especially during crises the individual and organizational inclinations for promotion- or prevention-strategies may be influential. Specifically, leaders with promotion goals may be especially fit to motivate followers during times of crises. Such knowledge may be important for selection to the extent that tendencies to emphasize promotion goals are chronic in nature (for overviews of such chronic tendencies see Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). Alternatively, top-management may provide interim-managers with promotion goals or train them to formulate promotion goals in order to ensure a promotion-orientation.

Finally, in this study we manipulated crisis and prosperity with information on gains or losses of the company. However, in practice a leader could actually influence perceptions of crisis or prosperity up to a certain limit. For instance, after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 President Bush was quick to emphasize that the US would beat the



terrorists no matter what it would take. However, the same president also communicated time and again the hardship and the intolerable nature of the current situation (Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004), making sure that everyone knew the country was in crisis.

### ***Concluding Remark***

Concluding, we have investigated how crises may influence both the expression and perception of visionary appeals. We sincerely hope that more research will focus on how crises may affect various leadership behaviors and their effectiveness with specific attention for the role of promotion- and prevention-oriented appeals. Although we acknowledge that the leadership literature is not in a (theoretical) crisis, we still hope that this vision of the future of leadership literature, promotion-oriented as it is, will be motivating and encouraging.

## CHAPTER 5

### AN IMAGE OF WHO WE MIGHT BECOME

*We present a model of leader vision communication effectiveness. Drawing from theories of identity, persuasion, and leadership, we discuss how leaders may influence follower self-concepts by communicating a vision. Most theories of vision communication have emphasized how visions affect follower actual selves, images of who a follower is. In contrast, we focus on follower possible selves, future images of who a follower could become. We argue that follower possible selves play a key role in the regulation of follower behavior and motivation, and furthermore that knowledge of the functioning of possible selves may lead to new insights in vision communication effectiveness. Building on this we also argue that the effort that individuals exert in processing visions and creating possible selves based on these visions is a key variable to explain vision communication effectiveness. This allows us to identify classes of moderator variables of vision communication effectiveness. We discuss how the proposed model can be used to explain previous findings of vision research and identify potential paths for future research.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the field of leadership, vision communication holds a special place as being one of the most crucial but at the same time mysterious aspects of leadership. Vision communication refers to motivating followers by communicating images of the future (Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). If followers internalize a visionary message, they become intrinsically motivated to make the vision reality (Bryman, 1992; Yukl, 2000). Vision communication is crucial because it affects a host of fundamental leadership outcomes (Awamleh & Gardner, 1990; Baum, Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1998; Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001; Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997; Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1994) and it is mysterious because the processes that underlie these relationships are as of yet not unraveled (Beyer, 1999).

Various authors argue that follower identity processes play a critical mediating role in vision effectiveness (Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). These scholars emphasize how visions may affect follower *actual selves*, images of who a follower is. Visions are images of the future however, and therefore, in contrast to this earlier work, we focus on follower *possible selves*, future images of who a follower could become, and we discuss how a possible self perspective on vision communication leads to important new insights in vision effectiveness.

Specifically, we argue that followers may be inspired by visions to create possible selves based on these visions, or put differently, internalizing a vision means creating a future image of the self as part of that vision, which may subsequently play a key role in the regulation of follower behavior. Furthermore, extending the proposition that it is follower internalization of the vision that lies at the core of vision effectiveness, we build on insights of research in persuasive communication (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and propose that the extent to which followers engage in in-depth processing of vision content (i.e. a predictor of internalization; Chaiken et al., 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) is a key factor in vision effectiveness. Building on this proposition we identify important sets of moderator variables that influence the depth of processing of vision content. In the following sections, we first give an overview of prior research on vision communication. Second, we present a new model of vision effectiveness and outline how it helps interpret findings of the research in vision communication and how it may lead to important new insights in the determinants and contingencies of vision effectiveness.

### ***Research on Vision Communication: State of the Art***

Visions are defined as ideal future images that emphasize norms and values (Berson et al., 2001; Shamir et al., 1993). Vision communication refers to the expression of a vision with the aim of convincing others (often termed followers) that the vision is valid. Classic examples of vision communication are Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I have a dream' or Kennedy's 'Man on the moon'. Many argue that the communication of a vision may be crucial for leaders to mobilize and motivate followers (Bass, 1985; Bryman,

1992; Burns, 1978; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; Shamir et al., 1994). Indeed, empirical studies on vision communication confirm the effectiveness of a host of vision communication-related variables like a charismatic communication style (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996), specific vision themes (Baum et al., 1998; Den Hartog & Verbarg, 1997; Awamleh & Gardner, 1999), certain vision attributes (Baum et al., 1998; Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2005), rhetoric devices (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Den Hartog & Verbarg, 1997), image-based rhetoric (Emrich, Feldman, Brower, & Garland, 2001; Naidoo & Lord, 2008), metaphors (Mio, Riggio, Levine, & Reese, 2005), and a focus on followers (Den Hartog & Verbarg, 1997; Sashkin, 1988; Stam, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, in press a; Tichy & Devanna, 1986). These vision elements are related to outcomes in terms of follower perceptions of leader charisma (Emrich et al., 2001; Mio et al., 2005), follower perceptions of leader effectiveness (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996), follower attitudes and change in attitudes (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999), follower performance (Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996), venture growth (Baum et al., 1998), international involvement of organizations (Den Hartog & Verbarg, 1997), and media responses to the vision (Bligh et al., 2005).

However, this prior research is hard to interpret for several reasons. First, the various studies focus on so many different input variables, influence mechanisms, and output variables that it is difficult to find a common thread. Second, most of the studies conducted show the existence of a 'main effect'. Evidence of mediating or moderating variables is scarce. Knowledge of mediators and moderators is important because it provides insight in the processes that underlie vision communication. Paradoxically, one of the reasons why knowledge of underlying processes of vision communication is scarce may be that prior research emphasizes too much that *leaders* influence followers and ignores the fact that *followers* themselves play an important role in vision communication (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004). Focusing more on the role of followers in vision communication may help identify the processes underlying vision communication.

Indeed, in the last two decades scholars have emphasized how leaders influence follower motivational and self-regulatory processes, with much research emphasizing

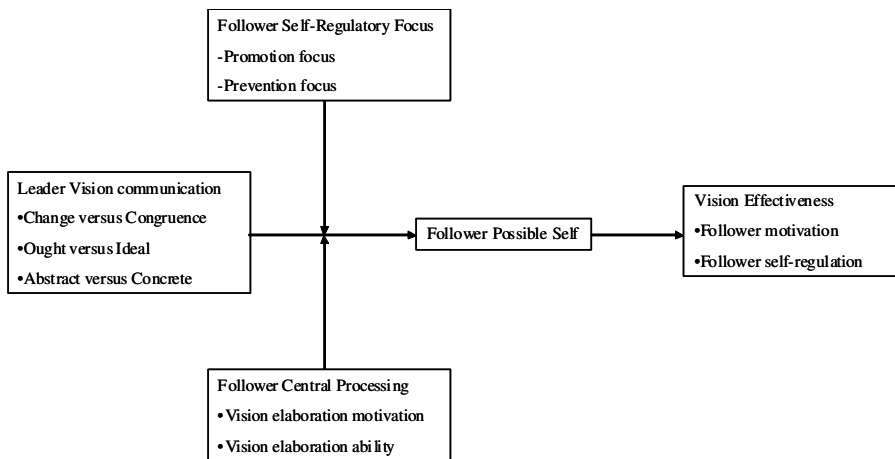
follower self-identities. Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins (2005) have even dubbed leaders “entrepreneurs of identity”, highlighting leaders’ role in affecting follower identities. Others emphasize the self-regulatory functions of follower identity focusing on so called self-concepts (Lord & Brown, 2001, 2004; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Shamir et al., 1993; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). The self-concept is a dynamic interpretive system that consists of images, thoughts, schemas, prototypes, theories, goals, etc., related to the self (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The self-concept has profound effects on people’s perceptions, behavior, and their motivation (Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Markus & Wurf, 1987). For instance, individuals who identify strongly with an organization and see themselves strongly connected to the organization are more motivated to exert themselves on behalf of the organization and to contribute to organizational goals and missions than individuals that identify less with the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Likewise, individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy usually outperform less self-efficacious individuals (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, follower selves may influence what information gets attention from the individual (Grossberg, 1999) and how that information is interpreted (Markus & Wurf, 1987). As a consequence follower self-concepts may create top-down constraints for goal emergence and goal activation, enhancing the likelihood of the emergence and activation of those goals that are in line with the self (cf. Lord & Levy, 1994).

Therefore, if leaders are able to influence the self-concepts of followers, they may indirectly affect follower’s behavior and motivation (for an overview, see van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Vision communication may be a key tool to accomplish this objective. For instance, Shamir and colleagues (1993) argue that vision communication may cause followers to hold more positive self-views (self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy) and to focus on a collective level of self-construal (through personal and social identification). However, research has so far focused on how visions affect actual self-concepts, images of who one *is now*. In contrast, since visions pertain to the future and aim to convince followers to accept a certain future, in the following section we argue that emphasizing the *future* part of the self-concept, the possible self, is crucial for theory development in vision communication.

## A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF VISION COMMUNICATION

Figure 5.1 shows an overview of the conceptual framework of vision effectiveness that we present. The framework emphasizes follower possible selves as a central factor in vision communication. In the following we discuss in depth the various factors and relations between these factors that make up the model.

Figure 5.1: *Overview of the conceptual framework.*



### *The Role of Follower Possible Selves in Vision Communication*

Possible selves are images, thoughts, and ideas of who a person could be; the “cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals and threats” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). They are future-oriented parts of the self. For instance, being an Olympic champion could be a possible self for a young athlete, while being a failure could be a possible self for an anxious lawyer. Similarly, visions, as images of the future, may provide a basis for follower to develop possible selves.

Possible selves may be crucial to explain vision effectiveness for two reasons<sup>1</sup>. First, possible selves play a key role in changing identity (Dunkel, 2000; Ibarra, 1999). Possible selves as opposed to actual selves are not rooted into the current reality and are therefore not constrained by it, offering more opportunity for the existence of

discrepancies between self image and reality, and thus more opportunity for creating new identities that deviate from reality (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Kunda, 1986). For example, it would be hard to persuade a beginning runner that she *is* a world class athlete, but it is much easier to persuade her that she *could become* a world class athlete. Second, possible selves function as elaborate, self-relevant standards to approach (Markus & Nurius, 1986). As such they are the foundation of self-improvement motivation (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). Possible selves provide a direct link between the self-concept and motivation and subsequent self-regulation. Therefore, if leaders aim to influence follower self-concepts through vision communication (Shamir et al., 1993), possible selves may provide a great opportunity to do so because they are relatively adaptive and function as a source of motivation to change the self. In making sense of a leader's vision, followers may translate the vision into a basis for dynamic self-regulation aimed at creating their future identities (cf. Dunkel, 2000; Ibarra, 1999). These future identities may subsequently influence context-specific motivational and behavioral processes.

*Proposition 1: The effects of vision communication on follower motivation and self-regulation are mediated by follower possible selves.*

In general there are several ways in which knowledge of the functioning of possible selves may be relevant for vision communication. First, if vision effectiveness is partly dependent on vision-consistent possible self creation by followers, then vision effectiveness is also dependent on the success of the possible self in motivating followers. Therefore, knowledge of how and why possible selves are effective in influencing individuals' motivation and self-regulation may be crucial to understand how visions may effectively influence follower motivation and self-regulation. Second, if vision effectiveness partly depends on the extent that they engender the formation of vision-consistent possible selves, then knowledge of how possible selves are constructed and maintained may be relevant for vision communication in order to understand how visions may enhance the chances that followers create vision-consistent possible selves. We start with a discussion of the implication of knowledge of how and why possible selves influence motivation and self-regulation for vision effectiveness. We continue with a

discussion of the insight that knowledge of possible self creation may provide for vision effectiveness.

### ***Effective Possible Selves and Vision Communication***

***Change and congruence.*** Possible selves may motivate individuals, because they embody what an individual is not (yet) but may become (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Therefore, possible selves may be motivating because of the discrepancy between the possible and the actual self. Indeed, self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), proposes that the discrepancy between a possible self and an actual self is a key determinant of an individual's affective state. In this respect, individuals may become motivated to pursue positive affect and to avoid negative affect (Markus & Nurius, 1986), suggesting that not just possible selves, but rather the discrepancies between the possible and the actual self may determine motivation. At the same time however, the power of possible self derives from their relationship with the self. Possible selves are, per definition, images of the self and as such they need to embody essential features of the self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Indeed, possible selves are influential to the extent that they relate the (actual) self to the future. This suggests that consistencies between possible and actual selves may be as influential as discrepancies. Indeed, self-concordance theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) poses that goals that reflect people's important values and ideas are more intrinsically motivating for them than goals that do not. Bono and Judge (2003) have even shown that self-concordance may mediate leadership effects.

The insight that possible selves are motivating to the extent that they are different from actual selves while they at the same time incorporating essential features of the (actual) self, may be important for vision communication. There seems to be debate in the vision literature whether visions should emphasize change or focus on congruence. Some theorists argue that effective visions contrast the future with the current situation (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), suggesting that the difference between a desirable future and a grim current reality determines vision effectiveness. Others argue that effective visions show how the future is related to the current situation (Shamir et al., 1994; Shamir et al., 1993) and that in order to be effective leaders of change, leaders need to be agents of self-continuity (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Bobbio, 2008). The insights from the



possible self literature suggest that to be effective, visions need not only suggest an attractive future image of self that is clearly different from actual self, but at the same time instill a sense of continuity between actual and possible self.

*Proposition 2: Emphasizing discrepancies while at the same time emphasizing consistencies between possible selves and actual selves in vision communication enhances vision effectiveness.*

**Ambitions and responsibilities.** Research in possible selves distinguishes between different types of possible selves. Specifically, Higgins (1987) differentiates between ideal possible selves and ought possible selves. *Ideal possible selves* reflect the ambitions and desires of an individual; the future images the individual would want to accomplish. In contrast, *ought possible selves* reflect the responsibilities and duties of an individual; the future images the individual thinks (s)he should accomplish. Ought and ideal possible self may be more or less motivating for individuals depending on their regulatory focus (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). Specifically, Higgins reasons that individuals with a promotion regulatory focus, the propensity to focus on ideals and gains, are especially susceptible to the motivating effects of ideal possible selves, while individuals with a prevention regulatory focus, the tendency to focus on security and the avoidance of fears, are especially susceptible to the motivating effects of ought possible selves.

These insights may be important for vision communication because vision researchers differentiate between strategies that leaders use in their vision communication that are closely related to ought and ideal possible selves. One type of strategy focuses on gains and ideals, sometimes called positive motivation strategies (Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999), approach strategies (Dragoni, 2005), or promotion-oriented leadership (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). Another type of strategy focuses on avoiding losses and on reaching security, sometimes called negative motivation strategies (Fiol et al., 1999), avoidance strategies (Dragoni, 2005), or prevention-oriented leadership (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). This raises the question which strategy to emphasize in vision communication. Indeed some researchers advocate emphasizing ideals and gains (Berson et al., 2001; Shamir et al., 1994; Wood, Owens, & Durham, 2005), while others argue that emphasizing fears

and security may also motivate followers (Bruch, Shamir, & Eilam-Shamir, 2007; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Lord & Brown, 2004).

Insights from the possible self literature suggest that congruence between follower regulatory focus and envisioned possible self may enhance vision effectiveness. Indeed a study by Stam, van Knippenberg, and van Knippenberg (in press b) showed that vision communication that focused on reaching a positive state (an ideal self) led to better task performance for promotion-oriented individuals than prevention-oriented individuals, while the reverse was true for vision communication that focused on reaching an end state needed to avoid a negative future (an ought self). These findings imply that congruence between followers' strategic inclination and the type of possible self emphasized in visions may enhance vision effectiveness.

Importantly, regulatory focus is not only regarded as a stable individual difference, but may also be induced by stimuli in the environment (Higgins, 1987, 1996, 1997). For instance, regulatory focus is closely related to emotions and affect (Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986) opening the possibility for leaders to influence follower regulatory focus through communicating emotions. Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, and Tellegen (1999) distinguish between two dimensions of affect: Positive activation and negative activation. They argue that self-reported positive activation, including feelings ranging from depression to joy, is associated with a promotion motivational system, while negative activation, including feelings ranging from anxiety to relaxation, is associated with a prevention motivational system. Higgins argues that actual-ought discrepancies relate to negative activation affect, while actual-ideal discrepancies relate to positive activation affect. Especially since non-verbal aspects of vision framing like the display of emotions (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Damen, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, in press) as well as verbal aspects of vision framing like the use of specific words (Emrich et al., 2001; Naidoo & Lord, 2008) can influence follower affect, we argue that the communication of emotions that are congruent with envisioned possible selves may create a fit between vision and follower that enhances vision effectiveness.

Similarly, environmental influences may induce a preference for change and promotion and thus for ideal possible selves, or rather a preference for conservation and

prevention and thus for ought possible selves in followers. For instance, organizational culture may reflect promotion or prevention foci relating to a preference for ideal or ought possible selves (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Likewise, times of stress and crisis may induce a focus on positive affect (cf. Forgas & Ciarrochi, 2002; Forgas, Johnson, & Ciarrochi, 1998) that may activate a susceptibility to the influence of ideal possible selves. Indeed, a study by Stam, van Knippenberg, and van Knippenberg (2008) showed that in times of crisis followers were especially receptive to a vision focusing on ideal possible selves.

*Proposition 3: Congruence between follower regulatory focus and the type of possible self communicated in a vision enhances vision effectiveness.*

**Abstractness and concreteness.** Possible selves represent long-term abstract self-relevant end-states. However, the influence of possible selves partly depends on the existence of not only abstract end-states, but also more concrete roadmaps that explain how to reach these end-states in specific contexts (Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004). The existence of concrete strategies to get from the present to the possible futures enhances the centrality of the possible self, subsequently improving its motivating function. For instance, Oyserman and colleagues (2004) found that not just the existence of future academic possible selves, but more so the existence of strategies to accomplish these possible selves predicted academic achievement in young children. This may be important for leadership research because there seems to be some discussion in the leadership literature concerning the abstractness or concreteness of effective communication.

Some scholars argue that visions should concern abstract collective values and end-states (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; Berson et al., 2001; Shamir et al., 1994; Shamir et al., 1993). Abstract values and end-states transcend specific situations and time frames so they can be applied in various contexts and over long periods of time (Lord, Hall, Naidoo, Selenta, & Medvedeff, 2005; Schwartz, 1999) which has become increasingly important now organizations become more complex (Marrion & Uhl-Bien, 2001) and leaders need to communicate the same visions to many different followers in

many different contexts. Others argue differently. For instance, path-goal theory (House, 1971, 1996) focuses on leader behaviors that emphasize communication of concrete, contextual goals. Likewise, literature on organizational change emphasizes the need to inform subordinates on the specifics and relevance of change processes and goals in order to increase acceptance of the change (van Knippenberg, Martin, & Tyler, 2006). Similarly, it is found that legitimization of a merger (why is the merger necessary and how will it be accomplished) may facilitate merger acceptance for groups that a priori tend to view the merger more negatively (Giessner, Viki, Otten, Terry, & Tauber, 2008).

Insights from the possible selves literature suggest that, although abstract end-states of possible selves are crucial for vision communication because they could be relevant for a wide range of followers in a wide range of environments, followers may not be able to readily see how to live up to these possible selves or how these possible selves are relevant for their personal daily work. Communicating concrete strategies to reach abstract possible selves may foster feelings of efficacy and personal relevance that may increase vision effectiveness.

*Proposition 4: Emphasizing abstract possible selves while at the same time emphasizing concrete strategies to reach these possible selves in vision communication enhances vision effectiveness.*

### ***Possible Self Development and Vision Communication***

The literature on vision communication that focuses on follower self-conception often emphasizes the role of visions in making specific parts of the self more salient, like emphasizing the collective self or the positive and efficacious self (Shamir et al., 1993). In contrast, it is suggested that because possible selves are cognitive structures, a cognitive, effortful process involving the development of possible selves may provide a more effective tool to change the self-concept, than processes that are more automatic in nature (Dunkel, 2000; Ibarra, 1999). Individuals, who develop a possible self, think about the merits of a possible self for them and subsequently accept it become intrinsically motivated to accomplish the possible self. This suggests that effortful processing of information is crucial for possible self development and subsequent striving to reach the

possible self.

Although vision communication has paid scant attention to the role of effortful processing in vision effectiveness, the emphasis on effortful processing as a way to develop possible selves is very much in line with research in persuasion. This research is largely based on the proposition that individuals may process information in two different ways (Chaiken, 1987; Chaiken, 1989; Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). One informational processing system is based on effortful and careful scrutiny of issue-relevant information. This process is cognitive and conscious in nature and is often referred to as *central processing* (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Persuasion effectiveness for central processing is determined by argument quality of the persuasive communication (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The better the arguments, the more effective the persuasion attempt. A second system is based on effortless, quick-and-dirty processing of available information. This processing is more emotional and subconscious in nature than central processing, and is often referred to as *peripheral processing* (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Persuasion effectiveness for peripheral processing is determined by feelings, heuristics, and rules of thumb (Chaiken et al., 1989).

Studies on persuasion have found that all else being equal, to the extent that they effectuate attitude change, persuasion attempts that are centrally processed usually lead to longer lasting persuasion effects that are more robust to counterarguments than persuasion attempts that are peripherally processed (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). We argue that a similar effect occurs in vision communication. In other words, central vision processing by followers may be crucial for vision effectiveness because it leads to the creation of more robust and longer lasting vision-congruent possible selves than peripheral processing.

*Proposition 5a: Visions advocating possible selves are more effective when they are processed more centrally by followers.*

This also implies that those factors that feed into vision elaboration (i.e., central processing of vision information) may also influence vision effectiveness. Research shows that individuals process information centrally (as opposed to peripherally) to the

extent that they are able and motivated to assess the merits of a persuasion attempt (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Elaboration motivation denotes a motivation to hold accurate attitudes about a topic, and thus causes effortful scrutiny of message information in order to be able to come to an accurate conclusion. Although different motivations to process messages have been identified, only elaboration motivation is directly related to a preference for central processing (Chaiken et al., 1989; Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Elaboration ability refers to the capacity to think about the central merits of a certain appeal. If this ability is undermined, individuals will be unable to perform effortful scrutiny of the focal message. Elaboration ability may, for instance, be influenced by time constraints (Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 1991), knowledge about the subject at hand (Wood, Rhodes, & Biek, 1995), or distraction (Petty, Wells, & Brock, 1976). Individuals need to be both motivated and able to elaborate upon issue relevant information in order to be likely to process the information more centrally (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This suggests that vision elaboration motivation in combination with vision elaboration ability may increase the likelihood of central processing.

*Proposition 5b: Visions advocating a possible self are more effective for followers who are more motivated and able to elaborate on the vision because they process the vision more centrally.*

In the following section we discuss the role of vision elaboration motivation and ability in vision communication more in depth. Although vision research has not focused on follower elaboration motivation or ability directly, it does provide some ideas of what variables may influence follower vision elaboration motivation and ability. We give some examples of these variables in terms of vision framing, follower characteristics, and environmental stimuli.

**Vision elaboration motivation.** Elaboration motivation is positively related to the extent to which individuals are involved in the issue at hand (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, 1984). The more involved the individuals, the more motivated they are to use cognitive resources to think about the central merits of that appeal (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). This suggests that if followers are more involved in a vision, they may be more

motivated to elaborate on it and subsequently create vision-consistent possible selves. For instance, in a qualitative field study Den Hartog and Verburg (1997) found that the speeches of successful business leaders explicitly addressed the audience they were talking to and made an effort to involve and engage them in their vision. Stam et al. (in press a) found that individuals who were exposed to a vision that directly addressed them were more likely to develop a possible self based on this vision (and subsequently perform well) than individuals who were exposed to a vision that did not specifically address them. More generally, vision framing that explicitly involves followers in the vision may enhance follower vision elaboration motivation.

Also, some individuals may be chronically more involved in issues regarding 'their' organization than others. Specifically, those individuals who identify strongly with the organization and who are extraordinarily committed to the company may be especially involved in organizational issues like organizational visions. Organizational identification denotes self-definition in terms of the membership in the organization and reflects a sense of unity between self and organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994; van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). When the organization becomes an integrated part of an individual's self-concept, the individual feels included in and part of the organization, and will be more perceptive and responsive to organizational needs and wants, fostering a greater involvement in the organization that induces a motivation to hold accurate opinions about organizational issues like visions (Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, & Turner, 1990). For instance, van Knippenberg et al. (2006) show that individuals who identify strongly with an organization are more interested in information about a merger process concerning the organization than individuals who identify less strongly with the organization.

Furthermore, research has emphasized the presence of an organizational crisis as a facilitator of the effectiveness of inspirational leadership behaviors like vision communication (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Shamir & Howell, 1999). One factor that may explain why visions are particularly effective in crisis situations is that in times of crisis followers may be especially open to visionary appeals (cf. Shamir & Howell, 1999). Specifically, the hardship and intolerableness associated with times of crisis may foster a longing for change. Self-engaging visions offer an opportunity for such change.

Therefore, times of crisis may increase feelings of involvement with a message of organizational change and subsequently lead to an increase in vision elaboration motivation. The US 2008 elections are a good example of this. Many US citizens seem to feel that their country has entered a time of crisis, economically as well as in terms of homeland security. The consequence of this is unparalleled media coverage and attention for new presidential candidates, and especially those that emphasize change.

Thus, assuming that followers are able to elaborate on the vision, if followers are more involved in vision communication, either because the vision focuses on followers, because the followers identify strongly with the organization, or because the organization has entered times of crisis and uncertainty, they are more likely to process the vision centrally and subsequently to create robust and long-lasting possible selves based on the vision.

***Vision elaboration ability.*** Vision elaboration ability of messages is high if these messages are adapted to the level of comprehension of the individuals processing the message (Eagly, 1974). At least two strategies to accomplish this in vision communication can be identified. The first is the use of metaphors - “A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison” (American Heritage Dictionary). Charteris-Black (2005) for instance, argues that one of the functions of metaphors is to get access to a domain of knowledge that is easily understood by the audience, in order to make an argument more logical. A second strategy to influence follower elaboration ability is the use of imagery or image-based rhetoric (Emrich et al., 1999), which refers to rhetoric that “quickly and easily arouses a sensory experience such as a mental picture or sound” (Friendly, Franklin, Hoffman, & Rubin, 1982, p. 376). Image-based rhetoric is concrete and easy to comprehend, which may enhance the ability of followers to elaborate on the vision, and thus enhances vision effectiveness (cf. Emrich et al., 1999; Naidoo & Lord, 2008).

Furthermore, individuals’ ability to elaborate on visions is closely related to general intelligence or being knowledgeable about the specific topic that the vision discusses (Wood et al., 1995). Various factors may be instrumental in predicting how knowledgeable subordinates are about organizational issues (discussed in visions). First,



tenure may be important because organizational members who have worked at the organization for a longer period of time have had more opportunity to gather information about the company and may therefore have created a more refined schema about the company. Second, hierarchical position within the company may prove important because higher positions often provide organizational members with more information about the central strategies and workings within the company. Third, education level may be influential because it is related to the general and field-specific cognitive capabilities of organizational members, which may prove beneficial for understanding and processing the vision (Eagly & Warren, 1976).

Environmental influences may also impact upon the ability of organizational members to scrutinize vision information. For instance, central processing more than peripheral processing requires attention (Grossberg, 1999). Thus, organizational members need to pay attention to a specific vision, and more frequent exposure creates more opportunities to draw attention. Indeed, persuasion research shows that moderate repetition of messages may enhance the impact of such messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Political leaders, like presidential candidates, use this to their advantage when they aim to attract attention through a host of messages using a wide range of media, like newspapers, television, and recently internet. Also, distractions may reduce elaboration ability because they redirect attention (Petty et al., 1976). Therefore, distractions during vision processing like incoming emails, chatting colleagues, etc., decrease the likelihood of central vision processing. Time pressure is another known inhibitor of elaboration ability (Petty et al., 1976) because central processing takes more time than peripheral processing (Chaiken et al., 1989; Smith & DeCoster, 2000). This suggests that organizational members require time to think about the presented organizational vision in order to be able to process it centrally.

Thus, assuming followers are motivated to elaborate on the vision, if followers are better able to comprehend vision communication, either because the vision incorporates metaphors and image-based rhetoric, or because followers are more knowledgeable about the organization, and if followers also have the time and the opportunity to scrutinize the vision they are more likely to process the vision centrally and subsequently to create robust and long-lasting possible selves based on the vision.

## DISCUSSION

We have presented a new model of vision effectiveness. This model, based on a possible self framework, proposed that vision communication is an attempt by a leader to persuade followers that a certain vision may be important for the future of these followers in their organizations. We argued that, when leaders persuade followers to create possible selves based on their visions, they also influence follower motivation and behavior. This framework may prove to be important for vision research and practice for several reasons.

First, the implications of an emphasis on follower possible selves in vision communication may be important for research on leadership and visions. For instance, while scholars debate whether visions should emphasize change or congruence, we explained that leaders should highlight discrepancies between the actual and possible self, while at the same time emphasizing consistencies between the actual and the possible self. Also, whereas researchers dispute whether visions should be abstract or rather concrete, we explained that leaders should focus on abstract possible selves, while simultaneously communicating concrete strategies to accomplish abstract possible selves. Furthermore, whilst some scholars debate whether communicating ideal possible selves or ought possible selves is more effective, we show that communicating ideals selves is especially effective if followers are promotion-focused, while communicating ought selves is especially effective if followers are prevention-focused.

Second, the model suggests that possible selves are key constructs in the vision communication process. Unfortunately, there are few studies that focus on the content of follower self-concepts, let alone of specific possible selves (for an exception see Stam et al., in press b). This is especially unfortunate because follower possible selves may be crucial for long-term vision effectiveness or vision effectiveness in times of uncertainty. In contrast, most studies focus on outcomes like short-term leader attributions and short-term performance, and although these may be important, the robustness and longevity of these effects are not self-evident. Indeed, long-term regulatory functions of vision communication are hardly ever investigated, nor are motivations to accomplish a vision, while these may dramatically influence performance in the long-term or during times of

crisis. The development of vision-congruent possible selves may be crucial for enduring effectiveness of vision communication. The proposed framework, due to its focus on possible selves, emphasizes insights in vision communication that may be especially effective on the long-term or during times of crisis.

Third, the model emphasizes the role of effortful, central vision processing. First, this emphasis suggests that peripheral influences may not affect new identity development directly as much as central processing. Although such peripheral influence may prime specific parts of an identity, these effects are short-lived and not robust (Smith & DeCoster, 2000). This is important, because much of the research on vision communication uses measures that may capture this short-term influence instead of more essential identity changes. Second, an emphasis on central processing suggests that various factors may impact vision effectiveness directly by enhancing the validity of a visionary message, but also indirectly by affecting vision elaboration ability and vision elaboration motivation. This provides a nice integrative framework for many effects (including the aforementioned short-term priming effects) that prior research has found. Third, because the model that we construed is congruent with major models in the persuasion research, it opens the door for many findings in the persuasion research to be integrated in vision communication research.

### ***Future Directions and Potential Boundary Conditions***

Our conceptual model of vision communication is broad-ranging, but certainly has its boundary conditions. For instance, the model is based on individual level psychological theories of self-identity and information processing. It focuses on how leader visions are processed by individual followers and integrated in their self-identities. We have neglected theories of collective action and collective information processing. Even though possible selves can function on a collective level as well as on an individual level because a collective possible self may be compared to the images of other collectives creating an emphasis on social identity that subsequently may cause organizational members to define themselves in term of the collective possible self, such processes, although emphasizing the collective, are fundamentally individual in nature. However, we do recognize that social contagion (Pastor, Meindl, & Mayo, 2002) and

other group-level processes may significantly influence leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, we argue that our model can directly be extended to explain effects on the group level.

For instance, social contagion models of leadership effectiveness argue that leadership perceptions function in a context of social networks which may explain why groups of followers often have convergent attitudes towards (inspirational) leaders (Pastors et al., 2002). Indeed, relational proximity between followers may over time lead to convergence of ideas and attitudes and also of leadership attributions. Although our framework does not explicitly discuss social contagion processes, such processes can easily be related to the proposed framework.

Relational proximity between followers leads to communication amongst them, which may have several influences according to our proposed framework. For instance, the communication amongst organizational members about a vision may directly feed into the perceived validity of a vision because organizational members may use the opinions of colleagues as arguments in favor of or against the validity of a vision. The communication amongst organizational members may also affect vision elaboration motivation because it may imply a social norm that vision elaboration is wanted within the organization or because organizational members directly motivate each other to scrutinize the vision relevant information. Furthermore, communication may affect vision elaboration ability because organizational members have more opportunity to be confronted with the visions or because organizational members may help each other to scrutinize the vision relevant information. The fact that our framework suggests multiple distinct ways in which proximity may influence vision effectiveness may even extent theorizing in this area. Thus, although the currently presented model should not be seen as one that is able to comprehensively explain all processes involved in vision communication, but rather as a clarification of individual level processes, it seems suitable for extending to group-level processes.

Furthermore, although the current model explicitly views followers as active information processors, it does not discuss the active role of followers in creating the vision's content. This may be important because theories of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), research on shared leadership (Carson, Tesluk, & Maronne, 2007; Pearce &

conger, 2003), as well as theories of justice (Tyler, 1999) emphasize the importance of follower participation in leadership. We speculate shortly about some influences of follower active participation in developing visions. For instance, the current model would suggest that followers who are involved in the creation of visions may be more motivated and able to process these visions more centrally. For example, U.S. presidential candidate's skillful use of the internet to gather preferences (and financial resources) from followers may, in part, be a means to permit their involvement in vision creation. Furthermore, when followers help create the vision's content, it may reflect more of the followers' ideas and ambitions, facilitating congruence between followers and vision, which increase the perceived validity of the vision for followers. On the other hand, it may well be that such consultation also leads to visions that, although very congruent with follower current selves, may not be very new and therefore less change oriented. Future research may shed a light on this issue.

### ***Practical Implications***

We should be careful to note that even though our propositions are well-grounded in empirical research, they are as yet largely untested. This provides an important caveat to their application in leadership practice. Even so, the present propositions may be translated into a series of clear guidelines for effective vision communication.

***Emphasize the future and the now.*** The effectiveness of vision communication depends on the linkages that the leader can make between the current organizational identity and the proposed possible organizational identity. On the one hand, the envisioned possible self should confirm central values of the current identity of the organization. On the other hand, the envisioned possible self should significantly differ from the current organizational identity. Balancing between a focus on change and a focus on self-continuity may be crucial for successful leadership.

***Be abstract and be concrete.*** In order to inspire individuals from different parts of the organization leaders need to focus on aspects of possible future identities that are abstract enough to possibly be relevant for all of them. Values suit this role perfectly. At the same time, leaders do not want to be accused of just throwing around hollow phrases. Leaders need to be able to put values into a specific context, to show subordinates how

they could apply values in their jobs, and why they should.

***Focus on followers.*** Not every organization is the same and times tend to change. Visions that fit the times and the people are more effective than those who do not. Envisioned possible selves that focus on ideals and desires may be very effective in an environment that stimulates growth and fosters dreams and ambitions. However, in organizations that focus on sticking to the rules and that emphasize security, leaders may be better off focusing on possible selves that emphasize duties and responsibilities.

***Inspire message elaboration.*** Visions are most effective if subordinates put effort in thinking about them. In order to make followers think about and elaborate upon the envisioned possible self, a leader may have to motivate them to actually do so. Involving followers in a vision is a good way of accomplishing this by, for instance, focusing on how the possible self may be important for the followers. Getting attention also is a crucial step in vision communication.

***Enable message elaboration.*** At the same time, involving followers has no influence if follower cannot understand what a leader is talking about. A leader should make sure that a envisioned possible self is comprehensible, by using language that is appropriate for the audience. The use of metaphors is an especially effective way of accomplishing this because often people can easily understand the most complex issues if a good metaphor is provided.

### ***Concluding Remark***

In conclusion, we propose a model of vision communication in which follower possible selves are the key components. Several interesting new directions flow from the use of this model. Given how central leader visions are to leadership effectiveness, and especially to leaders' ability to engender change, pursuing these directions in future research may be highly instrumental in advancing our understanding of leadership effectiveness. Therefore, our vision of the field in vision communication is that one day every leader and every researcher will recognize that possible selves are crucial for leaders to motivate their following for change.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> We note that although prior research has not emphasized the role of possible selves, but rather looked at the role of self-construal and self-evaluations (Shamir et al, 1993; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004), this does not imply that a view focusing on possible selves is incompatible with this prior research. On the contrary, possible selves are closely related to self-construal and self-evaluation. For instance, possible selves can be construed on a personal (viewing the future self in terms of a unique personal identity, in terms of “I”) as well as a collective level (viewing the future self in terms of the membership of a group or organization, in terms of a more inclusive “we”). Furthermore, similar to actual self identities, future identities can also be evaluates as more or less self-efficacious, or low or high on self-esteem or self-worth. Therefore, a possible self perspective on vision communication does not argue against views and findings emphasizing self-evaluations and self-construal as mediating mechanisms, but rather complements them.

## CHAPTER 6

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Vision communication is arguably one of the most central aspects of inspirational leadership (Bryman, 1992). Vision communication is emphasized as an important part of charisma (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) and has been shown to potentially improve a host of aspects of leader effectiveness, like follower performance (Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996) and venture growth (Baum, Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1998). Despite this, research in vision communication is scarce and unable to explain comprehensively *how* and *when* leaders are able to inspire followers through the communication of visions (Beyer, 1999). This dissertation aimed to shed some light on this issue. Through three empirical chapters and a conceptual chapter we have attempted to provide insights that may clarify and extend prior ideas of vision effectiveness. First, we will discuss the contribution of the separate chapters to the literature on vision communication. Second, we discuss the added value of this dissertation as a whole to vision research and practice and provide some directions for future research.

#### *Summary of Main Findings and Contributions of the Studies*

**Chapter 2: Focusing on followers.** The research in this chapter contributes to the literature of vision communication in at least three ways. First and foremost, the main focus of this chapter was to investigate the proposed mediating role of follower ideal possible selves creation in vision communication. In two experiments we showed that when leader vision communication caused the creation of ideal selves by followers it subsequently led to enhanced follower motivation and performance. These results confirm suggestions that possible selves may be crucial in visionary leadership (Lord & Brown, 2004; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004) and extend them by specifying *how* they might be important. Second, we manipulated visionary appeals to either directly address followers or to address a general audience. We found that, all else being equal, directly addressing participants stimulated them to



create ideal possible selves and enhanced their performance more than addressing a general audience. These findings corroborate ideas by Sashkin (1988) and Den Hartog and Verburg (1997) stating that involving and directly addressing followers (focusing on followers) may positively affect vision effectiveness, and extend these ideas by showing that a focus on followers affected follower performance through follower creation of ideal possible selves. Third, we found that follower regulatory focus (Higgins, 1996) moderated the effects of follower-focused visions on follower ideal selves. Specifically, when experiencing follower-focused visions, followers with more of a promotion focus were more prone to creating ideal possible selves based on vision communication. This is important because it substantiates ideas that regulatory focus may be important for leadership (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Kark & van Dijk, 2007) and enriches them by theoretically and empirically relating regulatory focus to vision communication through follower ideal possible selves.

***Chapter 3: Regulatory fit and visionary leadership.*** This chapter further investigated the effects of regulatory focus that we found in chapter 2. We showed that a fit between vision content and follower regulatory focus enhanced vision effectiveness. Specifically, we found that followers with a promotion focus were more inspired by promotion-oriented appeals, which emphasized the promotion of a desirable end-state, than by prevention-oriented appeals, which emphasized the prevention of an undesirable end-state. Importantly, we found the opposite pattern for followers with a prevention focus. The leadership literature seems to assume that inspirational appeals are more successful in influencing promotion-focused followers than prevention-focused followers (Benjamin & Flynn, 2006; Kark & van Dijk, 2007). In contrast, we showed that different inspirational appeals may be successful in influencing followers with different regulatory foci. Similarly, the leadership literature is divided in its emphasis on promotion-focused appeals as being effective (Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2002; Baum et al., 1998) or prevention-focused appeals as being effective (Bruch, Shamir, & Eilam-Shamir, 2008; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). We provided valuable insights for this debate by showing that both promotion- and prevention-oriented appeals may be effective contingent on follower regulatory focus.

***Chapter 4: When the going gets tough.*** In this chapter we aimed to extend our

findings of the previous chapter in two ways. First, we investigated how crisis, generally recognized as important for the emergence and success of inspirational leadership, affected the perception of promotion- and prevention-oriented appeals by followers. We found that in times of crisis followers were more inspired by more promotion-oriented appeals. This is important because, although the leadership literature has always emphasized the role of crisis in charismatic and transformational leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Pillai & Meindl, 1998; Shamir & Howell, 1999), this is the first study to show that crisis also affects vision perception. Furthermore, our research specified the leadership behaviors and processes underlying vision effectiveness in times of crisis contributing to an understanding of *how* crisis affects vision effectiveness. Second, there is hardly any research on how leaders formulate visions. Therefore, we examined antecedents of the expression of promotion- and prevention-oriented strategic appeals. We proposed and showed that leaders express promotion and prevention strategies in visionary messages more clearly in times of crisis than in times of prosperity. This knowledge is vital because it confirms ideas that leader strategies influence leader vision communication (Strange & Mumford, 2002, 2005) and extends these ideas by showing that times of crisis facilitates the clear expression of these strategies in vision communication.

***Chapter 5: An image of who we might become.*** In this chapter we presented a conceptual framework of vision effectiveness. In this chapter we provided at least two insights that contribute to the vision communication literature. First, we argued that, although emphasizing the mediating role of follower actual selves has led to many innovative ideas about leadership and vision effectiveness, emphasizing the role of follower possible selves might be as crucial for understanding how vision communication influences follower motivation and self-regulation. We showed how a model of vision communication using follower possible self development indeed provided solutions to several debates in the vision literature. Second, flowing from a possible self's perspective, we argued that effortful (central) processing of vision communication might also be a key variable in explaining vision effectiveness. This idea implies that those factors that feed into effortful processing moderate the relation between vision communication and follower possible self creation. This led us to identify two groups of

moderator variables: Variables affecting vision elaboration motivation and variables affecting vision elaboration ability. We showed that this moderation model indeed explains many effects found in the vision communication literature and that it also generates ideas about new moderator variables.

### ***Theoretical and Practical Implications***

Having established the value of the previous chapters separately for the field of visionary leadership, the question remains how this dissertation as a whole contributes to the theory and practice of vision communication. I identify four distinct contributions.

***The follower self-concept.*** By emphasizing the role of possible selves, explicitly (Chapters 2 and 5) or more implicitly (Chapters 3 and 4), we extended ideas about leadership and identity. In theories of leadership and identity the focus has primarily been on linking follower identity and organizational identity (organizational identification) and on making the views of followers about themselves and their company's identity more positive (personal and collective self-esteem and self-efficacy). We extended these ideas in three ways. First, we argued and showed that, although focusing on *collective* identities may be effective, emphasizing *individual* identities may also be an effective way of inspiring followers. Moreover we proposed it may actually be crucial that leaders, in addition to communicating aspects of collective identities, also express how these aspects may be relevant for follower individual identities. Second, the current research showed that in addition to emphasizing positive *actual* self images, leaders may also express positive *future* self images to inspire followers. Even if it may be unrealistic to focus on positive actual self images because such an emphasis would be hard to believe for followers, a focus on positive future images may still be credible and thus motivating for followers. Third, we showed that, although focusing on reaching *positive* identities may be effective, it may also be effective to focus on preventing *negative* identities, depending on follower regulatory focus.

Together these insights demonstrate that self-conceptual models of (visionary) leadership prove ever more useful for explaining and predicting leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, these insights may also be important in practice because they provide leaders with a better understanding of vision communication as well as with a more

sophisticated and specific set of tools to better inspire their following. For instance, the current research clarified when promotion- and prevention-oriented appeals are more or less effective and also demonstrated that leaders need to emphasize not only what they want to change in their communication to followers, but also what they intend to keep the same.

***Contingency model of vision communication.*** The current research provided strong evidence that vision effectiveness is contingent on environmental influences and follower characteristics. Contingency models of leadership have been used for over five decades (for instance, Fiedler, 1967), but for some reason research on charismatic and transformational leadership in general, and specifically and most dramatically research in vision communication, has neglected that leadership effectiveness might be bound by certain conditions. Even though early theories of charismatic and transformational leadership emphasized the necessity of crisis and uncertainty for the development of charismatic relations (Burns, 1978; Weber, 1947), ‘new’ leadership scholars loosened this assumption in favor of a more diluted version of this idea that states that, although charisma may be especially crucial in times of crisis, it is always important and effective. Subsequently, research seems to have abandoned studies investigating the role that crises (or any other variable) play in leadership. Therefore, studies of vision communication primarily demonstrate the existence of general direct effects of aspects of vision communication on follower perception and behavior, implicitly assuming that such effects are stable over various conditions.

The current research showed that the effectiveness of specific vision communication may differ depending on the existence of organizational crisis and individual differences between followers in terms of regulatory focus. This evidence argues in favor of contingency models of vision effectiveness and also specifies what variables (follower regulatory focus and crisis) may create especially important boundary conditions of vision effectiveness. This knowledge is also important for practice, because it shows that there is no ‘one best practice’ if one wants to inspire followers through communicating visions. Furthermore, the current research clarified under which condition specific visions might be especially effective. For instance, we showed that in times of crisis and uncertainty it may be more effective to emphasize promotion-oriented than

prevention-oriented appeals.

***Fundamental motivational structures.*** The research reported in this dissertation stressed the role of regulatory foci in leader vision communication. Regulatory foci are fundamental structures underlying motivation and self-regulation. Because leadership research is principally interested in how leaders may effectively influence follower motivation and self-regulation it seems evident that such fundamental motivational structures are crucial for understanding leadership. However, research has largely ignored the role of regulatory focus in leadership (for an exception, see Brockner & Higgins, 2001).

The few studies that do emphasize regulatory foci in leadership (e.g. Benjamin & Flynn, 2006; Kark & van Dijk, 2007) are very different from the current research. For instance, Benjamin and Flynn (2006) emphasized the match between leadership style (transformational versus transactional) and follower regulatory mode (assessment versus locomotion), showing that followers with a locomotion mode preferred transformational leadership over transactional leadership, because these followers preferred movement and change over contemplation. However they used a different categorization of regulatory strategies than the current research, leading to very different processes and arguments as well. Kark and van Dijk (2007) argued that regulatory focus of leaders might determine their leadership style. Promotion-focused leaders tend to be more transformational while prevention-focused leaders tend to be more transactional. However, they did not discuss how *follower* regulatory focus might influence leadership effectiveness, and neither did they empirically test their ideas. Furthermore, by focusing on general leadership styles as opposed to specific leader behaviors both researches obscured more specific processes underlying their model as well as specific practical implications. The current research therefore is the first to provide evidence that indeed follower regulatory focus may influence leadership and especially vision effectiveness.

***Experimental designs and vision communication.*** The presented research primarily consists of experimental laboratory studies. In Chapters two and three we have utilized a novel research paradigm for assessing vision communication in an artificial setting. This is important, because most of the research of vision communication is conducted in field settings and, although field research is very important and informative,

in contrast to experimental research it is not able to establish causality. Therefore, being able to study vision communication in laboratory settings seems very important.

Furthermore, most experimental designs using vision communication make use of actors pretending to be leaders who communicate their visions about an experimental task (e.g. Benjamin & Flynn, 2006; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). Although such designs have many good qualities they do suffer from some limitations too. For instance, it is very hard to keep actors' behavior exactly the same across participants, only changing their behavior in terms of manipulations between conditions. This may create confounds within the manipulations that may affect internal validity. Second, these actors can be heard by the participants, but can also be seen, felt, smelled, etc., making it difficult to conclude exactly what leader behavior (speech, movement, pitch, etc.) caused particular effects. Such designs may be suited for investigating broad leadership styles, but less so for specific leadership behaviors. Third, the assumption of this research is that participants actually are involved in the communicated visions. Although monetary rewards that participants get for participating in the study may create some involvement, it seems clear that this may be very different from the involvement of organizational members in an organizational vision.

The research design we developed does not have these limitations. Our manipulation consisted of only a text and recorded voice, eliminating the chances of unwanted differences across participants or conditions. This greatly enhanced the internal validity of our conclusions. Furthermore, our manipulation focused on a topic that is highly relevant for business students: innovative management. This made our participants more involved in the vision than if the vision would have only concerned a laboratory task. These qualities may make the paradigm we developed very suitable for vision research.

### ***Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research***

The four studies in this book use a broad range of perspectives and focus on many leadership behaviors, follower reactions, and environmental factors, but like any research the current research is bound by certain conditions. These boundary conditions, however, may also offer opportunities to expand the current research. I will discuss four such

opportunities.

***Extending the self.*** In this dissertation we have focused on the role of possible selves in visionary leadership, defining possible selves as future parts of the self-concept. However, the self-concept is not limited to the now and the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Indeed, one could imagine thinking of the person one was or could have been, indicating that selves may also be construed as past selves. This may be highly interesting for vision research. Indeed, Shamir and colleagues (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993) argue that effective organizational visions incorporate past successes of the organization. The consequence of communication positive past selves may be, for instance, that followers become more confident that a similar positive future self may be attainable even if the current situation would not suggest this, because they have already attained it in the past. It is also conceivable that emphasizing the discrepancies between a negative past self and a current self demonstrates to followers the progress that has been made, subsequently making followers more confident that a positive future self is attainable even if the discrepancy between current and future self is big. Thus, the incorporation of past selves in our model of vision effectiveness means that both discrepancies between past selves and current selves (progress) and discrepancies between past selves and future selves (possibilities) may also be included in this framework. This is an interesting area that future research may shed more light upon.

***Vision-follower congruence.*** The research in this book has led us to conclude that congruence between vision content in terms of promotion- and prevention-orientation and follower motivational strategies in terms of regulatory focus enhanced vision effectiveness. This also suggests that in general the idea that a fit between follower and vision may be important for vision effectiveness. We have focused on the fit between vision content and follower regulatory focus, because regulatory focus was the most logical moderator of the effects of promotion- and prevention-orientation on follower possible self creation. However, there is no reason why other types of congruence might not enhance vision effectiveness as well.

For instance, visions are often distinguished from task goals because they are more abstract than goals and temporally more distant. This prompts the question to what extent vision should be abstract (as opposed to concrete) and concern the distant future

(as opposed to the proximal future). This may well depend on follower characteristics. Indeed, research showed that a promotion focus fits abstract language, while prevention focus fits concrete language (Semin, Higgins, de Montes, Estourget, & Valencia, 2005) and similarly that a promotion focus fits temporal distant goals, while a prevention focus fits more temporal proximal goals (Pennington & Roese, 2003). This suggests that promotion-focused followers may be more inspired by abstract visions that concern the distant future, while prevention-focused followers may be more inspired by concrete visions that concern the proximal future.

Interestingly, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) have developed a measurement of what they call individual differences in time perspective. They argue that individuals may chronically differ in their focus on the past, the present, and the future. They also relate this temporal dimension to valence, claiming that specific individuals may be more focused on negative pasts or positive futures, for instance. From a contingency approach to vision communication, one could argue that a fit between follower chronic temporal orientation and vision content in terms of temporal distance and valence might enhance vision effectiveness. There are probably many more unknown yet influential types of follower-vision content congruencies. Therefore, these congruencies may be especially appealing for future research to investigate.

***Focal behaviors and desired outcomes.*** The aim of this dissertation was to investigate how leader vision communication could influence follower motivation and self-regulation. This limited the research in this dissertation to investigating independent variables in terms of vision communication and outcomes in terms of follower motivation and performance. However, vision communication is not the only leader behavior that affects follower motivation and followers are not the only individuals that are confronted with vision communication. The findings in this research may inspire ideas about the effectiveness of other leader behaviors besides vision communication or about the effects of vision communication on other outcomes besides follower motivation and subsequent behavior.

For example, providing and explaining task goals are important parts of leadership. If we transfer the idea of vision-follower congruence to these areas, we might hypothesize that congruence between task goals and follower regulatory focus might



enhance the effects of these goals. This is especially appealing since the relation between regulatory focus and goal setting is a strong one (Brendl & Higgins, 1996). Promotion focus is related to setting and striving for maximal goals, goals relating to maximal expected performance, while prevention focus is related to setting and striving for minimal goals, goals related to minimal expected performance. This would suggest that providing maximal goals may enhance the performance of promotion-focused individuals, while providing minimal goals may enhance the performance of prevention-focused individuals.

Furthermore, followers are not the only people that are confronted with vision communication. Customers, shareholders, partners, banks, and competitors can all read information about a company's vision on the internet. The current research has focused on follower motivation to make the vision reality, but these other constituents may be important for the company in other ways. For instance, if a vision appeals to banks it might motivate them to loan money; if a vision appeals to partners it might motivate them to cooperate; visions may motivate customers to buy products and shareholders to back up management. It would be very interesting to see how knowledge from the field of vision communication could be applied to fields of marketing, strategic management etc.

### ***Concluding Remark***

In this dissertation I set out to answer the question '*How can vision communication affect follower (intrinsic) motivation and subsequent behavior?*' I found that if vision communication caused followers to create future images of themselves based on the vision, it subsequently made them more intrinsically motivated to make the vision reality and improved their performance. Furthermore, I discovered different ways in which vision communication might enhance the likelihood that followers create possible selves. I also identified various boundary conditions for the different effects described in the previous chapters. This leads me to conclude that I have at least partly answered my research question. I sincerely hope that others will build on these findings to fill in the gaps in the vision literature that are still very much existent.

## NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Het communiceren van inspirerende visies is het sine qua non van veranderinggericht leiderschap. Visies zijn beelden van de toekomst. Visiecommunicatie duidt op het uitdragen van een visie met de bedoeling anderen (veelal aangeduid met volgers) te overtuigen van de aantrekkelijkheid van de visie. Visiecommunicatie is een essentieel onderdeel van de meest invloedrijke leiderschapstheorieën, zoals charismatisch leiderschapstheorie (Conger & Kanungo, 1987) en transformationeel leiderschapstheorie (Bass, 1985). Wanneer leiders aan volgers een inspirerend beeld van de toekomst van een bedrijf communiceren, kan dit hen motiveren om een dergelijk beeld te verwezenlijken. Onderzoek naar visiecommunicatie laat inderdaad zien dat het communiceren van inspirerende visies tot gevolg kan hebben dat volgers zich meer identificeren met de organisatie, dat zij zich beter in staat achten om bepaalde taken uit te voeren, dat zij hun leidinggevendenden als meer charismatisch en meer capabel beoordelen, en dat zij over het algemeen het idee hebben dat hun dagelijks werk meer betekenis en waarde heeft (Bryman, 1992; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Yukl, 2002).

Echter, onderzoek naar visiecommunicatie is schaars. Het gevolg hiervan is dat nog niet helemaal duidelijk is hoe visiecommunicatie inspirerend kan zijn. Enkele onderzoeken tonen aan dat bepaalde communicatietechnieken, zoals het gebruik van metaforen (Mio, Riggio, Levin, & Reese, 2005) of het gebruik van beeldspraak (Emrich, Brower, Feldman, & Garland, 2001), de communicatie van visies in de ogen van volgers meer inspirerend kan maken, maar het is het nog onbekend welke inhoud visies moeten aanstippen om volgers optimaal te motiveren en is het bovendien niet helder welke onderliggende processen hierbij een rol spelen. Dit bracht Beyer (1999) ertoe om te pleiten voor meer onderzoek naar visiecommunicatie met een nadruk op visie inhoud en op onderliggende processen. Dit proefschrift sluit naadloos aan bij dat pleidooi, omdat het zich richt op de vraag hoe een visie volgers kan motiveren. De onderzoeksvraag die centraal staat in dit proefschrift luidt dan ook:

*Hoe kan visiecommunicatie de (intrinsieke) motivatie en het daaropvolgende gedrag van volgers beïnvloeden?*

### ***De Onderliggende Processen***

Dit proefschrift verschaft twee belangrijke inzichten in visiecommunicatie. Het eerste inzicht is dat het creëren en overdenken van mogelijke zelftoekomstbeelden (possible selves) door volgers een belangrijke rol kan spelen in visiecommunicatie. Het tweede inzicht is dat fundamentele structurele dimensies van motivatie, zoals regulatiefocus van volgers, van invloed kunnen zijn op het interpreteren van visies door volgers.

***De rol van toekomstbeelden.*** Onderzoek naar visiecommunicatie benadrukt dat visiecommunicatie zelfbeelden van volgers kan beïnvloeden die vervolgens motivatie en prestaties van volgers kunnen verhogen (Shamir et al., 1993). Visiecommunicatie kan er bijvoorbeeld toe leiden dat volgers hun zelfbeeld meer definiëren in termen van de organisatie of dat zij een positiever zelfbeeld vormen. Echter, visies zijn beelden van de toekomst. Het ligt daarom voor de hand dat visies ook invloed kunnen hebben op zelfbeelden van de toekomst van volgers. Op basis van de beelden van de toekomst die leiders schetsen in hun visies kunnen volgers ideeën over hun eigen toekomst ontwikkelen. Wanneer deze ideeën hen aanstaan, kunnen volgers vervolgens gemotiveerd raken om de visie te verwezenlijken, omdat zij dan tevens deze aan de visie gerelateerde ideeën over hun eigen toekomst kunnen realiseren. Met andere woorden, de creatie van zelftoekomstbeelden door volgers zou een belangrijke *mediator* kunnen zijn van de relatie tussen visiecommunicatie en intrinsieke motivatie.

***De rol van regulatiefocus.*** Mensen streven naar het beleven van plezier en het vermijden van pijn. Deze twee vormen van motivatie liggen volgens Higgins (1987, 1996, 1997) ten grondslag aan verschillende strategieën die individuen gebruiken om doelen te verwezenlijken. Een promotiefocus duidt op een strategie om idealen en ambities te verwezenlijken en is sterk gerelateerd aan het streven naar het beleven van plezier. Een preventiefocus duidt op een strategie gericht op het verkrijgen van veiligheid en het nakomen van verantwoordelijkheden en is sterk gerelateerd aan een streven naar het vermijden van pijn. Het onderscheid tussen promotie en preventie kan van belang zijn

voor visiecommunicatie, omdat volgers met verschillende strategische focussen (promotie of preventie) zich richten op verschillende zelftoekomstbeelden. Promotie leidt tot een focus op het bereiken van positieve, ideale zelftoekomstbeelden terwijl preventie leidt tot een focus op het vermijden van negatieve, schrikwekkende zelftoekomstbeelden (en het bereiken van veiligheid). Dit suggereert tevens dat volgers met verschillende strategische focussen ook meer of minder gemotiveerd kunnen raken door andere soorten visies (bijvoorbeeld visies die zich richten op ideale zelftoekomstbeelden of veiligheid zelftoekomstbeelden). Met andere woorden, de regulatiefocus van volgers zou een belangrijke *moderator* kunnen zijn van de relatie tussen visies communicatie en intrinsieke motivatie.

### ***De Onderzoeken in Deze Dissertatie***

In deze dissertatie hebben we getracht om meer inzicht te krijgen in de bovenstaande processen: De mediërende rol van zelftoekomstbeelden van volgers en de modererende rol van volger regulatiefocus. De dissertatie bevat, naast een inleiding en een conclusie hoofdstuk, vier inhoudelijke hoofdstukken (2-5) die, hoewel ze zeer goed los van elkaar te lezen zijn, sterk aan elkaar gerelateerd zijn. Drie hoofdstukken (2-4) zijn empirisch en beschrijven enkele experimentele studies. Één hoofdstuk (5) is conceptueel en beschrijft een nieuw model van visiecommunicatie.

***Hoofdstuk 2: Focusing on followers.*** In dit hoofdstuk maakten we een begin met het verkrijgen van inzicht in de mediërende rol van zelftoekomstbeelden van volgers en de modererende rol van volger regulatiefocus. In een tweetal experimenten kregen studenten bedrijfskunde een toespraak te horen van (zogenaamd) een professor in de bedrijfskunde. Deze professor gaf zijn visie op de toekomst van managen. Meer specifiek propageerde hij het gebruik van meer innovatie en creativiteit in management, iets wat hij innovatief management noemde. Er waren twee verschillende toespraken en elke proefpersoon kreeg een van deze toespraken te lezen. In een toespraak sprak de professor de proefpersonen persoonlijk aan. In de andere toespraak sprak de professor de proefpersonen niet persoonlijk aan, maar hield hij de toespraak meer algemeen. Het was onze verwachting dat wanneer proefpersonen persoonlijk aangesproken werden zij meer geneigd zouden zijn om een positief, ideaal, zelftoekomstbeeld met betrekking tot

innovatief managen te creëren dan wanneer de toespraak meer algemeen zou blijven. Echter, mensen verschillen in de mate waarin zij zich oriënteren op positieve idealen. Des te meer promotie georiënteerd mensen zijn, des te meer zij zich richten op idealen. Daarom verwachtten we tevens dat het effect van persoonlijk aanspreken op het creëren van een ideaal, zelftoekomstbeeld groter zou zijn des te meer proefpersonen promotie georiënteerd zouden zijn. Twee experimenten, één waarin we promotie oriëntatie van proefpersonen maten en één waarin we promotie oriëntatie van proefpersonen manipuleerden, bewezen inderdaad dat proefpersonen meer geneigd waren om een positief, ideaal, zelftoekomstbeeld over innovatief managen te creëren wanneer de professor hen meer persoonlijk aansprak, maar alleen wanneer zij sterk promotie georiënteerd waren. Bovendien bleek dat wanneer proefpersonen een positief, ideaal, zelftoekomstbeeld creëerde, zij beter presteerde op een taak die gerelateerd was aan innovatief managen dan wanneer zij niet een dergelijk toekomstbeeld creëerde.

Deze uitkomsten zijn belangrijk om een aantal redenen. Ten eerste is dit het eerste onderzoek dat aantoonde dat visiecommunicatie kan leiden tot het creëren van zelftoekomstbeelden door volgers die vervolgens een motiverende functie kunnen uitoefenen. Dit levert bewijs voor de mediërende rol van volger toekomstbeelden in visiecommunicatie. Ten tweede laat dit onderzoek zien dat volgers persoonlijk aanspreken in visiecommunicatie kan leiden tot een sterkere neiging bij volgers om zelftoekomstbeelden te creëren. Dit geeft leiders in de praktijk specifieke gereedschappen om volgers te motiveren door middel van het communiceren van een visie. Ten derde bewijst dit onderzoek dat volger regulatiefocus een belangrijke moderator is van het proces van toekomstbeeld ontwikkeling door volgers op basis van visiecommunicatie. Dit weerlegt het weerbarstige idee dat inspirerende visiecommunicatie altijd en voor alle volgers even inspirerend is.

**Hoofdstuk 3: Regulatory fit and visionary leadership.** In dit hoofdstuk werkten we het idee dat volger regulatiefocus de effectiviteit van bepaalde visies kan beïnvloeden verder uit. In het vorige hoofdstuk vonden we dat visies die relateren aan positieve, ideale, zelftoekomstbeelden vooral motiverend waren voor volgers met een sterke promotiefocus. De algemene opvatting binnen het visie onderzoeksveld is dat visies vooral motiverend zijn als ze zich richten op een positief toekomstbeeld (Baum,

Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1998; Shamir et al., 1993). Onze bevindingen laten zien dat dit alleen geldt voor volgers met een sterke promotiefocus en niet voor volgers met een sterke preventiefocus. Regulatiefocus theorie poneert dat zelftoekomstbeelden die te maken hebben met veiligheid, verantwoordelijkheid, en het vermijden van pijn motiverend zijn voor mensen met een sterke preventiefocus. Dit suggereert dat visies die relateren aan toekomstbeelden met betrekking tot veiligheid en het vermijden van pijn vooral motiverend zijn voor volgers met een sterke preventiefocus. Inderdaad zijn er aanwijzingen dat zulke visies soms ook effectief kunnen zijn, hoewel nog onduidelijk is wanneer en hoe dat komt (Bruch, Shamir, & Eilam-Shamir, 2007). Wij opperen dat deze visies effectief zijn als volgers sterk preventie georiënteerd zijn.

We onderzochten deze ideeën in twee experimenten. In één daarvan maten we promotie en preventie oriëntatie van proefpersonen en in één manipuleerde we promotie en preventie oriëntatie van proefpersonen. Net zoals in het vorige hoofdstuk kregen proefpersonen een toespraak te horen van een professor in de bedrijfskunde die vertelde over innovatief managen. Wederom waren er twee toespraken. In één toespraak probeerde de professor proefpersonen te overtuigen dat innovatief managen belangrijk was door hen te vertellen welke positieve resultaten behaald konden worden met innovatief managen. Deze toespraak richtte zich op het behalen van plezier (goede resultaten) en zou daarom vooral motiverend moeten zijn voor proefpersonen met een sterke promotie oriëntatie. In de andere toespraak probeerde de professor proefpersonen te overtuigen dat innovatief managen belangrijk was door hen te vertellen over de negatieve gevolgen wanneer men niet innovatief zou managen. Deze toespraak richtte zich op het vermijden van pijn (negatieve gevolgen) en zou daarom vooral motiverend moeten zijn voor proefpersonen met een sterke preventie oriëntatie. Inderdaad vonden we dat proefpersonen met een sterke promotiefocus beter presteerde op een taak die gerelateerd was aan innovatief managen na het horen van de toespraak die de positieve aspecten van innovatief managen benadrukte dan na het horen van de toespraak die de negatieve aspecten van het niet innovatief managen benadrukte, terwijl dit patroon voor proefpersonen met een sterke preventiefocus juist andersom was.

***Hoofdstuk 4: When the going gets tough.*** Dit hoofdstuk ging verder in op de antecedenten en gevolgen van promotie en preventie in visiecommunicatie. In het vorige

hoofdstuk vonden we dat het communiceren van idealen vooral motiverend was voor volgers met een sterke promotiefocus, terwijl het communiceren van angstbeelden vooral motiverend was voor volgers met een sterke preventiefocus. In dit hoofdstuk bekeken we de invloed van crisis, waarover in de leiderschapsliteratuur veel wordt gespeculeerd (bijvoorbeeld Pillai & Meindl, 1991, 1998), op zowel de neiging van leiders om ideaalbeelden (promotie) of angstbeelden (preventie) te communiceren als op de mate waarin volgers de communicatie van promotie visies en preventie visies inspirerend vinden. We formuleerden hierover twee verwachtingen. Allereerst verwachtten we dat in tijden van crisis leiders hun strategieën voor verandering (in termen van promotie en preventie) duidelijker zouden communiceren, omdat tijden van crisis vragen om verandering en daarom ook om duidelijke strategieën voor verandering. Ten tweede verwachtten we, conform eerdere leiderschapstheorieën (Pillai & Meindl, 1991, 1998), dat tijden van crisis volgers meer gericht zou maken op hoop op een positieve toekomst en dat volgers daarom in tijden van crisis promotie visies meer inspirerend zouden vinden dan preventie visies.

We onderzochten deze verwachtingen in een aantal experimenten. In een scenario experiment speelden de proefpersonen de rol van het hoofd van een afdeling van een transport bedrijf. De taak die zij te doen kregen was het schrijven van een visionaire toespraak die zij aan hun volgers zouden voordragen. Voordat de proefpersonen deze taak kregen, manipuleerden we de situatie van het bedrijf (het bedrijf was in crisis of niet) en de doelen en strategieën van het bedrijf (promotie strategieën of preventie strategieën). Twee onafhankelijke experts codeerden de toespraken op de mate waarin de toespraken gericht waren op promotie en preventie. De resultaten lieten zien dat bij gebrek aan crisis van het bedrijf, de toespraken van proefpersonen die geconfronteerd waren met verschillende veranderingsstrategieën (promotie of preventie) niet verschilden in de mate waarin ze gericht waren op promotie en preventie. Echter, in tijden van crisis was dit verschil veel groter. Deze resultaten laten zien dat tijden van crisis inderdaad de neiging van leiders kan vergroten om duidelijk hun veranderingsstrategieën te communiceren. In een ander scenario experiment speelden proefpersonen de rol van een medewerker van een transportbedrijf. Deze proefpersonen kregen de visie van hun leidinggevende te horen in de jaarlijkse toespraak en kregen de taak om aan te geven hoe inspirerend ze deze

toespraak vonden. Wederom werd de situatie van het bedrijf gemanipuleerd (het bedrijf was in crisis of niet). Dit maal manipuleerden we ook de toespraken die de proefpersonen lazen (de toespraken communiceerden promotiestrategieën of preventiestrategieën). Uit de resultaten bleek dat proefpersonen in tijden van crisis de promotietoespraak meer inspirerend vonden dan de preventietoespraak, terwijl dit in tijden van voorspoed niet het geval was (en eerder andersom). Dit laat duidelijk zien dat volgers tijdens een crisis promotiegerichte visies meer inspirerend vinden dan preventiegerichte visies.

**Hoofdstuk 5: *An image of who we might become.*** In dit hoofdstuk presenteerden we een nieuw model van visiecommunicatie. Eerst gaven we een overzicht over de literatuur van visiecommunicatie en concludeerden dat deze literatuur zelftoekomstbeelden van volgers geen rol toebedeelt in visiecommunicatie terwijl een dergelijke rol erg voor de hand ligt, aangezien visies per definitie toekomstbeelden zijn. Vervolgens demonstreerden we hoe kennis over het ontwikkelen van zelftoekomstbeelden en kennis over hoe zelftoekomstbeelden individuen kunnen motiveren inzicht kunnen geven in visiecommunicatie. Zo beargumenteerden we dat visies om effectief te zijn tegelijkertijd de *verschillen* en de *overeenkomsten* tussen een toekomstbeeld en een huidige situatie moeten benadrukken. Tevens concludeerden we dat visies om effectief te zijn zowel abstracte eind doelen als concrete implementatiemethoden moesten overbrengen. Uiteindelijk beargumenteerden we dat wanneer volgers meer moeite doen om visiecommunicatie te overdenken en begrijpen dit de invloed van die visiecommunicatie groter zou maken. Dit betekent dat wanneer volgers meer gemotiveerd zijn om de visie te overdenken, bijvoorbeeld omdat zij meer persoonlijk aangesproken worden, en tevens beter in staat zijn om de visie te overdenken, bijvoorbeeld omdat de visie moeilijke taal vermijdt en goed te begrijpen metaforen gebruikt, de visie effectiever zal zijn.

### **Conclusie**

Dit proefschrift onderzocht hoe visiecommunicatie de motivatie van volgers kan beïnvloeden. Drie experimentele hoofdstukken en een conceptueel hoofdstuk lieten zien dat een perspectief op visiecommunicatie waarin volgers, en in het bijzonder volger zelftoekomstbeelden en volger motivatiestrategieën, een centrale rol krijgen waardevol



kan zijn voor de visiecommunicatie literatuur. Door middel van dit perspectief konden huidige ideeën over de effectiviteit van visiecommunicatie worden onderschreven en/of verklaard, zoals in het geval van persoonlijk aanspreken in visiecommunicatie (hoofdstuk 2) of in het geval van de invloed van crisis op visiecommunicatie (hoofdstuk 4). Tevens konden op basis van dit perspectief nieuwe ideeën en verwachtingen over visiecommunicatie worden geformuleerd, zoals de verwachting dat visiecommunicatie die zich tegelijkertijd richt op de verschillen als op de overeenkomsten tussen huidige situaties en toekomstbeelden effectiever zal zijn dan visiecommunicatie die zich niet hierop richt (Hoofdstuk 5). Gezien de centrale rol die het communiceren van inspirerende visies heeft in de leiderschapsliteratuur lijkt het daarom van groot belang dat onderzoekers in het visiecommunicatie veld volger zelftoekomstbeelden en volger motivatiestrategieën een prominente plaats geven in hun toekomstige onderzoeken.

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“I love it when a plan comes together.” Hannibal, *The A-Team*.





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**MANAGING DREAMS AND AMBITIONS****A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF VISION COMMUNICATION**

The communication of inspiring visions is arguably the sine qua non of change-oriented leadership. Visions are images of the future. Vision communication refers to the expression of a vision with the aim of convincing others (usually followers) that the vision is valid. Despite the fact that the merits of vision communication are widely acknowledged, research in vision communication is scarce and unable to explain comprehensively how and when leaders are able to inspire followers through the communication of visions. In this dissertation I set out to answer the question 'How can vision communication affect follower (intrinsic) motivation and subsequent behavior?'

The key insight of this dissertation is that, if vision communication stimulates followers to create future images of themselves based on a vision (so called possible selves), it may subsequently cause them to be more intrinsically motivated to make this vision reality. In this dissertation I develop a theoretical framework for the role of possible selves of followers in visionary leadership. Furthermore, I present the results of several experimental studies that investigate hypotheses derived from this framework. Ultimately, I identify various ways in which leader vision communication might positively influence follower motivation.

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