# The X-Factor: On the Relevance of Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories for Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Agreement

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# The X-Factor: On the Relevance of Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories for Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Agreement

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## Abstract

While Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) research shows that leaders engage in different kinds of relationships with different followers, it remains somewhat of an enigma why one and the same relationship is often rated differently by a leader and the respective follower. We seek to fill that conceptual void by explaining when and why such LMX disagreement is likely to occur. To do so, we reconsider antecedents of LMX quality perceptions and outline how each party's LMX quality perception is primarily dependent on the perceived contributions of the other party, moderated by perceived own contributions. We then integrate the notion of Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories (ILTs and IFTs) to argue that the currencies of contributions differ between leaders and followers. This dyadic model sets the stage to explain that LMX disagreement can stem from (1) differences in both parties' ILTs as well as both parties' IFTs, but also from (2) differences in perceptions of own and other's behavior. We conclude by discussing communication as a means of overcoming LMX disagreement and propose an array of potential studies along the lines of our conceptualization.

# The X-Factor: On the Relevance of Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories for Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Agreement

For the last decades, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) research has successfully advanced its case that leadership effectiveness should be regarded as the result of the quality of the dyadic relationship between leader and follower. In a nutshell, the reasoning is that leaders engage with their followers in dyadic relationships of differing quality, where the quality of each leader-follower relationship depends on the reciprocation of contributions to that relationship. The experienced quality of the relationship motivates outcomes such as follower performance and satisfaction that are seen as indicative of leadership effectiveness (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Wayne & Stillwell, 1993; Mayfield & Mayfield, 1998; van Breukelen, Schyns, & LeBlanc, 2006).

However, whereas extant LMX research is predominantly built on the idea that relationships are experienced in a similar way by both members of the leadership dyad, meta-analytical findings show that the relationship is often rated differently by leaders and followers (i.e., Gerstner and Day, 1997, report a sample-weighted correlation between a leader's and a follower's LMX quality perception of .29, and Sin, Nahrgang, and Morgeson, 2009, report a true score correlation of .37). In other words, LMX agreement, that is, the similarity of leader and follower perceptions of their LMX relationship quality, is often very low despite the fact that both parties are part of and rate one and the same relationship.

While previous attempts set out to investigate correlates of LMX disagreement (e.g., Minsky, 2002; Paglis & Green, 2002; Sin et al., 2009), their disjointed results by

and large exemplify how little is known about antecedents of LMX agreement and how much variance is left unexplained even if individual aspects have been found to correlate. Evidence from further research suggests that LMX quality is likely to translate best into performance when the relationship is experienced similarly, that is, when LMX agreement is high (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Bass & Yammarino, 1991; Cogliser, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009; Wexley, Alexander, Greenawalt, & Couch, 1980). Given these findings, the observation that LMX agreement is often lower than one would expect, despite both parties rating the same relationship, raises an important challenge for LMX theory and research.

In the present study, we present a conceptual analysis of LMX agreement to address this issue. To do so, we revisit different lines of LMX and information processing research, which we extend and combine into a fully dyadic model to explain leaders' and followers' LMX quality ratings. This model then sets the stage to outline when and why LMX disagreement may arise. As a final point, we discuss what can be done about LMX disagreement in practice, as well as what research can do to capture the complex processes involved.

## Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Unlike leadership theories that contend that leaders have a predominant leadership style and tend to treat all their followers in a similar fashion, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (originally introduced as the Vertical Dyad Linkage model; Danserau, Graen, & Haga, 1975) asserts that leaders form unique exchange relationships of different quality with each of their followers. The role of the follower and the quality of the relationship itself are informally negotiated between followers and their leaders over time

(Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). While some followers develop a high quality exchange relationship with the leader which is characterized by mutual trust, respect, and liking (Dansereau et al., 1975), others are not considered to be part of that "inner circle" but also do not consider themselves to be part of it (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). To explain how these differences in leader-follower relationships develop and ultimately form stable units, as well as how the relationship is experienced by the involved parties, LMX research uses a social exchange perspective (Blau, 1964; Graen & Scandura, 1987).

Regarding the development of the relationship, leader-follower relationships are thought to be initiated through an initial "offer" from the leader which then is potentially reciprocated by the follower (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen, 2003; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). After this initial phase, in which the follower can "prove" him or herself, the relationship continues with a reciprocation of contributions, that is, a reciprocation of positive actions that foster the relationship by fulfilling the other party's needs. Put differently, depending on the leader's perception of the follower's contribution, the leader will feel more or less indebted to reciprocate with an own contribution until he or she perceives an equilibrium of contributions. At this stage, the follower perceives the contribution of the leader and has to decide whether he or she needs to adjust his or her own contribution, etc. As long as either of the parties still perceives that an equilibrium of contributions is not reached, the relationship is still dynamic, that is, it can either deteriorate (when a party perceives the other to contribute less than him- or herself and thus also lowers his or her own contributions), or it can thrive (when a party perceives the other to contribute more than

him- or herself and thus also increases his or her own contributions). Indeed, relationships are found to be more satisfying and thus stable when a party perceives the contributions to be almost equal or the other party to contribute more (Buunk, Doosje, Jans, & Hopstaken, 1993). Contrary, a lack of reciprocation by the other party will lead people to experience negative feelings, especially when they feel that they themselves have contributed a lot to the relationship (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Summarizing, the stability of a relationship depends on perceived reciprocation of one's own contributions by the other (Blau, 1964; Burgess & Huston, 1979) and the relationship can be considered stable when both parties perceive each other as contributing an approximately equal amount.

Related to the issue of relationship development, LMX theory further postulates that the main driver of the experienced relationship quality is the perceived contribution of the other party (e.g., Kim & Organ, 1982; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001; and similar results in other domains of leadership research such as self-sacrificial leadership, e.g., De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004; Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999). The more the other party is perceived to contribute, the more satisfied people are with the relationship (even though, as outlined above, from a dyadic perspective, it might not be stable). This direct relationship is furthermore moderated by people's perceptions of own contributions. In other words, the more people perceive themselves to contribute to the relationship, the more their experienced relationship quality will depend on the other party's contribution – for better or worse. Put more concretely, individuals who perceive themselves as contributing a lot to a relationship will be more dissatisfied with the relationship when they perceive the other party to contribute little than individuals

who perceive themselves as contributing little to the relationship. This interactive relationship is nicely illustrated in research by Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001), which demonstrates that while perceptions of contributions by the follower directly influence a leader's rating of LMX quality, there is also a moderating effect of the leader's own contribution, such that leaders who perceive themselves as investing a lot into the relationship evaluate the relationship more negatively when they perceive subordinate effort to be low in comparison to those leaders who perceive themselves as investing less. In short, each party's LMX quality rating is primarily dependent on the perceived other party's contributions, and this holds more strongly when the perceived own contribution to the relationship is higher.

In general, the quality of a leader-follower relationship will determine how both parties, leaders and followers, experience their work and engage in it – with perceived relationship quality consequently being positively related to organizationally relevant and desirable outcomes (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Research has, for instance, shown that followers in high quality LMX relationships work harder (Basu & Green, 1997; Duchon, Green, & Taber, 1986), perform better (Graen et al., 1982; Liden & Graen, 1980; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Mayfield & Mayfield, 1998; Vecchio & Norris, 1996), experience more satisfaction with the leader (Duchon et al., 1986; Lagace, 1990; Schriesheim & Gardiner, 1992), experience more job satisfaction (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen et al., 1982; Scandura & Graen, 1984), and are less motivated to leave the team or organization (Scandura & Graen, 1984; Vecchio, 1995; Vecchio & Norris, 1996). Moreover, such results have been repeatedly obtained in different countries and cultures (e.g., Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Erdogan, Liden, &

Kraimer, 2006; Schyns, Paul, Mohr, & Blank, 2005), thus suggesting that the effects of LMX are very robust.

## The Problem of LMX Disagreement

Despite early findings that suggest that own and other perceptions in work contexts are likely to differ (cf. Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988), extant LMX research is predominantly built upon the idea that relationships are experienced in a similar way by both members of the leadership dyad. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995, p. 237) even write that "expected agreement between leader and member reports is positive and strong and used as an index of quality of data". Because studies commonly only survey one party of the dyad, predominately the follower, such assumptions have long been left unchallenged (e.g., Gerstner and Day, 1997, found only 24 studies which surveyed both perspectives in a total of 84 studies on LMX).

More recent studies, however, explicitly focus upon the issue of LMX agreement. Paglis and Green (2002) find, for instance, a correlation of only .19 between both parties' assessment of LMX quality (across 127 leader-follower dyads). A meta-analysis by Gerstner and Day (1997) across 24 independent samples with a combined sample size of 3,460 dyads corroborates such findings in that they also find a mean sample-weighted correlation of only .29, and .37 when corrected for unreliability. The most recent meta-analyses by Sin et al. (2009) raises similar concerns, finding that overall LMX agreement across 64 samples with a combined sample size of 10,884 dyads was only moderate with $\rho = .37$.

While some researchers argued that disagreement in ratings of LMX does not warrant conceptual analysis because it merely reflects measurement error (Graen & Uhl-

Bien, 1995), a plethora of studies suggests otherwise, that is, despite heterogeneity in LMX assessments from various angles and with various scales, the finding that leaders and followers provide disagreeing accounts of LMX quality still persists (cf. Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2007; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). While measurement error is notoriously difficult to rule out as an explanation, there are further conceptual reasons to believe that LMX disagreement is not solely attributable to it. Indeed, Gerstner and Day (1997) argue that disagreement on ratings of LMX quality is a complex issue that is an interesting outcome variable in its own right.

In line with Gerstner and Day's (1997) call, previous studies set out to explain LMX disagreement. However, they by and large failed to coherently explain the driving force behind it. In her dissertation, Minsky (2002), for instance, only found feedback to be moderately related to LMX agreement (an issue we revisit later). Paglis and Green (2002), on the other hand, only found a correlation of agreement with lower levels of conflicts. Due to the correlational nature of both studies, these authors are, however, unable to ascertain whether feedback or lower levels of conflict are antecedents or merely consequences of LMX agreement. The same holds true for the most recent meta-analysis on LMX agreement (Sin et al., 2009). Although the amount of considered studies in this meta-analysis is impressive, the authors also only report correlational patterns without being able to confirm the implied causality. Nevertheless, their results are noteworthy because they, for instance, address some sampling issues (ad hoc versus a priori) that explain a small degree of variance in LMX disagreement. Further, although their results are not unambiguous when dissected along different dimensions of perceived LMX quality, they show that dyadic tenure as well as intensity of dyadic interaction

significantly moderate the relationship between followers' and leaders' perception of overall LMX quality. Despite such first promising results, their analyses also suggest that only little variance in LMX agreement is explained by these factors.

For the present theoretical consideration, we build upon these first endeavors, however, we also think that the largely disjointed picture with little variance explained can be illuminated by revisiting the specific aspect of social exchange in LMX, and in particular, by reconsidering what it is that leaders and follower exchange and how they do it. In contrast to empirical studies, our conceptualizations are not limited by data opportunity or feasibility of research designs which potentially unnecessarily restrain the conceptualization. However, to illustrate the testability of our model, we will describe concrete research designs at the end of this paper.

## Currencies of Exchange in LMX

Despite the fact that social exchange theory suggests that LMX relationships are governed by a reciprocity norm (cf. Cialdini, 1984; Gouldner, 1960; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003) which should motivate both parties to contribute evenly and thus to ultimately judge the quality of the relationship in the same way, empirical research has demonstrated that dyadic partners often have different perceptions of the relationship quality (Gerstner & Day, 1997) and different grounds for their ratings (Huang, Wright, Chiu, & Wang, 2008; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003). Such existence and persistence of disagreement about one and the same relationship cannot be explained within the basic rationale of social exchange theory. Rather we argue that we have to revisit the notion of contributions to fully grasp the issues at stake here.

There has been some debate in the literature regarding the way in which leaders

and followers should contribute to the relationship in order for both persons to benefit equally. While some have argued that equal benefits can only be reached when leaders and followers contribute in the same way (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Maslyn, 1998), others have argued that equal benefits can be reached when leaders and followers contribute to the relationship with different behaviors that are similar in perceived value (Tekleab & Taylor, 2003; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002). In line with the latter, and with research that argues that leaders and followers contribute to the relationship based on their unique roles (Blau, 1964; Dansereau et al., 1995; Dockery & Steiner, 1990; Day & Crain, 1992; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2002), we suggest that leaders and followers contribute to the relationship in different "currencies of exchange".[1]

To understand the issue of different currencies in LMX in more depth and specifically how different currencies relate to LMX (dis-)agreement, we use the next sections to elaborate on the notion of expectations, or so called implicit theories, for leaders and followers. The basic rationale is similar for both kinds of implicit theories: first of all, an individual behaves in a certain way. This behavior is perceived by the individual him- or herself as well as by the other party of the dyad. For both, the perceptual process is governed by implicit expectations about how this person should act within his or her leader or follower role. Behavior within the range of the expectations will be far more likely to be perceived as a contribution and thus it will be considered when judging relationship quality.

*Leaders' currency of exchange – Matching behavior to Implicit Leadership Theories*

We propose that both dyadic partners are likely to perceive the contribution each person makes to the relationship based on their expectations for the particular role of the

person (i.e., leader or follower). In the case of the leader, both dyadic partners will compare the leader's behavior to the expectations they have for a person in a leadership role. Such expectations for the leader role are captured by the concept of Implicit Leadership Theories (Lord, 1985; Lord, Foti, & de Vader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1991; Schyns & Meindl, 2005). ILTs represent cognitive schemas which specify the traits and behaviors that followers expect of leaders (Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Lord & Maher, 1991; Weick, 1995). Research in ILTs suggests that people hold such implicit assumptions because most people have been brought up and socialized in groups where leadership is a natural phenomenon (Lord & Brown, 2001; Lord & Maher, 1991). Abstracted from experienced leader exemplars, people eventually develop more elaborate knowledge structures on how a leader is (to be) like. Importantly in the context of leadership, these knowledge structures serve as an interpretational background which subordinates use as a basis for their evaluations of actual leaders, for instance, when judging a leader's qualification for the job. ILTs can thus be regarded as a means by which people make sense of and respond to the organizational world around them (cf. Weick, 1995).

When adopting this perspective, a leader's quality and his or her effectiveness are to a great extent determined by followers' perceptions and interpretations (i.e., "leadership is in the eye of the beholder", cf. Nye, 2002). Indeed, the follower-centric approach to leadership emphasizes the information-processing aspect in leadership dyads (Lord & Maher, 1991; cf. Meindl, 1995; Shamir, Pillai, Bligh, & Uhl-Bien, 2007). Through the follower-centric lens of ILT theory, leadership is not seen as directly related to a "true reality" (i.e., as a result of a leader's actual personality and behavior), but rather

to the perceiver's socially constructed reality – a mental representation of leadership that is as much informed by "objective" input from the environment (e.g., leader behavior and characteristics) as by the cognitive frame of reference through which leadership is understood (i.e., ILTs; cf. Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994).

Work by Lord (e.g., 1985) in developing leader categorization theory in particular has been instrumental in developing this perspective that can be roughly summarized as saying that ILTs are benchmarks that followers use to categorize the leader and eventually determine an adequate response towards the leader (Engle & Lord, 1997; Lord & Brown, 2004; Lord & Hall, 2003; Ritter & Lord, 2007). According to the theory's assumptions, followers compare their actual leader to their ILTs and any discrepancies that are derived from that comparison are assumed to affect the follower's impression of the leader. This will eventually also affect the follower's impression of the leader's contribution to the joint relationship and the subsequent perception of how this contribution should be reciprocated.

Although the leader categorization process is usually thought to be automatic, and therefore largely unconscious and implicit, cognitive theory (Bechtel & Abrahamsen, 2002) would suggest that leader categorization is also entrenched in controlled, that is, conscious and explicit, information processing. In that sense, ILTs govern individuals' judgment of others in both ways, automatic and controlled. Thus, regardless of whether the information is processed automatically or in a more controlled way, ILTs are a lens through which leaders and their behaviors are evaluated as either contributing to the relationship or not.

The more a leader displays what followers believe to be the characteristics of a

good leader (i.e., fit their ILTs), the more favorably followers respond to the leadership and the more they are willing to subordinate to it as part of an implicit "relationship agreement" (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kenney et al., 1996; Lord & Hall, 2003; Lord & Maher, 1991; see overviews in Schyns & Meindl, 2005; Shamir et al., 2007). Further research on ILTs and on leader categorization uses the concept of prototype (mis-)fit to explain, for instance, why some people are more likely to emerge as leaders, get promoted to (higher) leadership positions, and are viewed as legitimate leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Engle & Lord, 1997; Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992; Ridgeway, 2001; cf. Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Reaction time experiments have substantiated this reasoning in that they show that people find it harder to activate respective leader schema and behavioral scripts when they perceive discrepancies between an actual leader and their leader prototype (Lord et al., 1984; Scott & Brown, 2006).

In short, we argue that the more the leader is seen to match the ILT – both in terms of characteristics and in terms of behavior – the more the leader is seen to contribute to the LMX relationship. Or put differently, we propose that ILTs are the lens through which leader behavior is perceived and evaluated in terms of its contribution to the LMX relationship. This line of reasoning is supported by a recent study by Epitropaki and Martin (2005), who conducted two survey studies in which they found that a lower discrepancy between leader's actual behavior and follower's ILT lead to higher ratings of LMX quality by followers.

Not only followers hold ILTs, however – leaders do too. This was noted by Lord and Maher (1991), who suggested that implicit theories serve not only as a basis to interpret the behavior of the dyad partner, but also as a foundation for own behavior.

Leaders can thus be assumed to consciously or unconsciously rely on their ILTs to evaluate and generate own behavior, and the closer leaders perceive their behavior to be to their own ILTs, the higher they will perceive their own contribution to the LMX relationship.

By more firmly integrating insights from ILT research into LMX theory, we may thus extend our understanding of the currencies of exchange involved in LMX relationships, and ultimately increases our insights in the sources of LMX disagreement. When judging the followers' contribution to the LMX relationship, that is, the followers' currency of exchange, we suggest that a similar process takes place. However, the follower's contribution has to be judged along a different dimension. The leader categorization and ILT framework, while not directly identifying that dimension, does provide an extremely useful point of departure in this respect.

*Followers' currency of exchange – Matching behavior to Implicit Followership Theories*

In their seminal work, Lord and Maher (1991) already emphasized that leaders and followers alike rely on implicit theories to process social information and make social judgments. If the process of comparison between actual behavior and implicit leadership theory exists for leaders, it thus seems only plausible to assume that there is an equivalent implicit theory for the follower. Indeed, to pay full heed to the dyadic conception of leader-follower relationship, we suggest that both dyadic members have implicit theories for followers as well, to which they compare the follower's behavior, which we label *Implicit Follower Theories* (IFTs). Directly following from the above outlined logic for ILTs, we propose that leaders and followers also hold IFTs that capture expectations about the follower role and about appropriate follower contributions to the

LMX relationship. Accordingly, we further propose that both leaders and followers consciously and unconsciously assess followers' contribution to the LMX relationship using their IFTs as a benchmark, with more positive evaluations ensuing a greater match between IFT and perceived follower characteristics and behavior. In short, while leaders' contribution to the LMX relationship is judged in reference to ILTs, followers' contribution is judged in reference to IFTs.

Interestingly, Engle and Lord (1997) partly addressed this very issue when they pointed out that the choice of a particular category or schema for the evaluation of the other member of a dyad is likely to differ between leaders and followers. They argue that, similar to followers' ILTs, leaders develop prototypes of effective followers, which they called Implicit Performance Theories, and then compare follower performance to this prototype (cf. Borman, 1987; Sanders, 1999; Wernimont, 1971). The result of this comparison process is the labeling of followers as either effectively or ineffectively contributing to relationship, much like the results of the leader categorization process. However, Engle and Lord (1997) conceptualized such theories that would provide a standard for judgment of followers as in a sense restricted to performance – that is, Implicit Performance Theories. In contrast, we propose that much like ILTs, the cognitive schemata related to conceptualizations of the follower role are not restricted to mere performance but include a more diverse set of attributes that would reflect on the overall quality of the relationship (e.g., being honest, enthusiastic, or trustworthy). Accordingly, while we recognize the important foundations that have been laid by Engle and Lord (1997), we propose that IFTs are broader than Implicit Performance Theories and therefore better capture the range of behaviors and characteristics that followers may be

expected to contribute to the LMX relationship.

Similar to our reasoning regarding leader match to ILTs, we expect that the effect of the perceptions of follower-IFT match differs for each member of the dyad. From the leader's perspective, a match between perceived follower behavior and leader's IFTs will lead the leader to evaluate the LMX quality more favorably. From the follower's perspective, a match between own behavior and IFT will lead to the perception of higher own contribution to the relationship. Mirroring the moderating role of leaders' perception of their own contributions in terms of ILT match, followers' perception of own contributions in terms of IFT match will moderate the relationship between perceived leader ILT match and perceptions of LMX quality, such that this (positive) relationship is stronger the more followers perceive themselves to match the role expectations as captured by their IFT.

## A Dyadic Model of LMX Agreement

Our analysis up to this point provides the basic elements by which, we suggest, leaders and followers individually assess the quality of their LMX relationship. Summarizing this analysis and combining the insights into a dyadic model, we posit that (a) each party's perception of LMX quality is primarily determined by the perceived other party's contributions; (b) this positive relationship is moderated by the party's perceived own contributions; (c) leaders' contributions to the relationship are judged through the lens of ILTs, while follower contributions are judged through the lens of IFTs. These relationships are captured in Figure 1.

While our proposed model is firmly grounded in research on LMX and ILTs, it integrates and extends earlier research into a dyadic model that now allows us to identify

sources of LMX (dis)agreement that were not evident in earlier treatment of these issues, namely: (1) differences between a leader and a follower in ILTs or IFTs, and (2) differences in perception of own and other's behavior. In the following, we address these issues in more detail.

*Sources of disagreement 1: Differences in ILTs and IFTs*

We proposed that leaders and followers perceive their own and the other's behavior through the lens of their personal ILTs and IFTs. Only when congruence between a leader's and a follower's implicit theories exists do both parties base their behavior on the same guidelines and interpret each other's behavior in the same way (cf. Engle & Lord, 1997). As a consequence, congruence between implicit theories fosters agreement about *what* should be contributed and thus increases the similarity in both partners' judgments about their mutual contributions. Conversely, the more leader and follower differ in their ILTs and/or IFTs, the more the same behavior will be perceived differently in terms of the extent to which it contributes to the LMX relationship, and the more potential there is for LMX disagreement. Perfect congruence of ILTs and IFTs between leaders and followers, however, seems unlikely (as standard deviations in the development of leader prototypicality measures, for instance, already suggest), because ILTs and IFTs are subject to (a) different experiences with both roles, (b) different contextual saliencies, and (c) different goals.

Regarding the differences in experiences with either role, van Quaquebeke and Brodbeck (2008) argued that implicit theories should generally be considered to be idiosyncratic, that is, they are not only formed as part of a collective socialization processes but also through unique individual experiences inside and outside of work life

(cf. Keller, 1999; Lord & Maher, 1991) – with only a portion of such idiosyncratic implicit theories being socially shared, e.g., as part of national identities or cultural clusters (Brodbeck, Chhokar, & House, 2007; Gerstner & Day, 1994; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). While any similarity between leaders and followers in terms of socialization, such as having been raised in the same culture or having worked for the same company increases the congruence of ILTs and IFTs, perfect congruence of ILTs and IFTs is unlikely to occur in leadership dyads considering all possible socialization factors.

One evident source of different socializations is an individual's own experience in either role. While this perspective has received little research attention in the tradition of ILTs and IFTs, there is substantial research in other domains that shows that prior experience with a task influences a person's mental model of subsequent tasks and according strategies for these. In other words, when a task is similar to a task one has completed before, people tend to rely on their previously gathered knowledge about such tasks and use this knowledge to guide them to a solution (Pirolli & Anderson, 1985; Reed, 1987; Ross, 1984, 1987). This effect even persists when a new task is not exactly similar to a previous task, as long as this new task activates similar mental models (Catrambone & Holyoak; 1989; Glick & Holyoak, 1980; Holyoak & Koh, 1987). In line with this research, we can expect that previous experiences with tasks attached to either the leader or the follower role will influence people's knowledge structures about these roles, that is, their implicit theories. To make it more concrete: Most people are likely to have been in some kind of followership position themselves. In these positions, some might have found a very rigorous and accurate working style to be the best strategy to obtain good

performance ratings by their supervisors. Others, however, might have found that following the Pareto principle (i.e., the 80/20 rule) is the best strategy to obtain good performance ratings by their supervisors. For both, their experiences are likely to translate into their IFT concept, however, as their experiences differ, so will their IFTs. The same naturally should also hold true for experiences as a leader. Consequently, to the extent that the experiences two individuals have either as a follower or as a leader differ, there will also be differences in their ILTs and IFTs, that is, in the standards to which contributions to the relationship are compared.

With regard to experiences with the other's role, prior research on transference, for instance, shows that when people encounter a new leader who is similar to a previous leader, a mental representation of this previous leader is used to evaluate the new leader (Ritter & Lord, 2007). As leaders and their followers are likely to have experienced different leaders, it is thus likely that their exemplar-based ILTs differ. Hunt, Boal, and Sorenson (1990) argue along similar lines when suggesting that individual differences in ILTs may be a result of different childhood experiences. Specifically, they argue that different parents and parenting styles represent the core which people's later and more elaborate ILT conceptions are developed upon. In other words, parents provide anticipatory socialization about work, leadership, and communication and thus a blueprint for expectations about leader-follower interactions (Jablin & Krone, 1987). Hence, we can assume that the more a leader's and a follower's parents' parenting styles were different, the less congruent their ILTs will be in later life.

Similar factors that cause ILTs to differ will probably lead to differences in IFTs as well. Indeed, Lord and Maher (1991) suggest that leadership and followership are

constructed as an inseparable pair. Therefore we can presume that, although extant research has mainly focused upon factors influencing ILTs, these factors will influence IFTs in much the same way. Any socialization regarding leadership thus always involves a socialization regarding respective followership and vice-versa. In other words, personal ILTs and IFTs develop both at the same time, irrespective of the dyadic positions people are in. However, the specific content of these ILTs and IFTs will be individually determined by the experiences they acquire in these positions in their own roles as well as with their dyadic counterparts.

A second reason for differences in ILTs and IFTs apart from personal experiences can be found in the situational cues leaders and followers are subjected to. Research taking a connectionist approach to implicit theories (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001) suggests that no single implicit theory applies to all situations, but that the influence of contextual factors such as task or group characteristics, organizational routines, or even just the content in the daily stream of emails, determine which specific aspects of one's implicit leadership and followership theory will be activated. Indeed, one and the same behavior can be interpreted in quite different ways depending on the content of the activated category in the perceiver (Müller & Schyns, 2005). Considering a leader's and a follower's day at work, we can assume that they are subject to quite different contexts and routines. Indeed, while a leader might spend a lot of time in meetings to discuss strategies and the general development of the company, followers are likely to be occupied with getting their assignments done without thinking too far ahead. This implicit difference in temporal construal in daily activities affects in return the kind and scope of activities one regards as adequate for self and others in specific roles (Liberman,

Trope, McCrea, & Sherman, 2007). In other words, leaders might think that, like themselves, followers should also have an eye on the implications of their doing for the future of the company, while followers would like to see that, like themselves, leaders start to get their "hands dirty" by actually being involved in and finishing projects. To sum this part up, different organizational contexts for leaders and followers will highlight different aspects in implicit theories which will affect how leaders and followers evaluate own as well as other's actions – ultimately, at the detriment of LMX agreement.

Related to the above, a third reason why a leader's and a follower's ILTs as well as IFTs are likely to differ can be assumed to be tied to the specific objectives that are seen as attached to roles (cf. connectionist conceptualizations of ILTs in Lord et al., 2001). Such differences can be found when people, for instance, depending on the context of leadership, construct a mental image of a leader who is most adequate for that specific context. Indeed, Lord and colleagues (1984) showed that people's concepts of leaders differ across different domains such as sports, politics, and business. Such differences in representation are not only informed by the different exemplars people perceive in these domains, but also by the objectives that are attached to each of these domains (Barsalou, 1985; van Quaquebeke, Graf, & Brodbeck, 2007). While it can be argued that leaders and followers generally share the same context, and thus also the same objectives, that is only true on a higher level, that is, regarding domains. On a lower level, however, leaders and followers might not have an aligned understanding of the objectives that should be reached via leadership and the respective followership, that is, a leader might think that it is the objective of all employees to do anything in their power to ensure performance and drive up the stock price while a follower might think that all

employees should care for each other's well-being. Put differently, both leaders and followers probably have a tendency to conceptualize both roles anchored in own goals and needs. To the extent that these goals differ, a leader's and a follower's implicit theories are also likely to differ and thus their perceptions of contributions to the joint relationship (cf. Huang et al., 2008). Consequently, it is not the perception of the behavior per se that differs between followers and leaders – for instance, both can perceive that the leader does a lot to drive up the stock price – but it is the difference in perceptions how such behavior relates to one's goal definition (as part of one's implicit theory) that drives differences in perceived contributions (cf. Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988).

To recap, leaders' and followers' ILTs and IFTs will differ, (a) the more leaders and followers have had different experiences regarding both roles, (b) the more leaders and followers are subject to different contexts which provide different saliencies, and (c) the more leaders' and followers' goal definitions differ from each other. Consequently, one and the same behavior is often judged against different standards by a leader and a follower.

*Sources of disagreement 2: Differences in perception of own and other's behavior*

In addition to potential differences in ILTs and IFTs, leaders and followers have to establish an "exchange rate" between the different contributions. Such estimations about what constitutes a high value as opposed to a low value contribution are a different issue that influences the perceptions of LMX quality in addition to differences in the content of ILTs and IFTs. Even if a leader's and a follower's ILTs and IFTs would be exactly similar, that is, leaders and follower agree *what* each party should contribute,

leaders and followers can still differ in their perceptions concerning *how much* the other party contributes to the relationship and how much that is worth in own contributions. Here, disagreement is also likely as such assessments are subject to a) self-serving biases, b) biases in perceptions of others, as well as c) biases due to privileged access to information (cf. Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988).

Generally, people's considerations regarding conversion rates result in an assessment that favors the self (Taylor & Brown, 1988). More specifically, most people hold unrealistically positive views of the self, for instance, by judging positive traits as more characteristic of themselves than negative traits (Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1986), by recalling information related to their own successes better than information related to failure (Silverman, 1964), and by overestimating their own task performance compared to their peers (Crary, 1966; John & Robins, 1994). These biases occur in various contexts such as athletic contests (Brawley, 1984), group discussions (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 1999), problem solving tasks (Burger & Rodman, 1983), and academic projects (Ross & Sicoly, 1979). Moreover, such self-serving biases become even more pronounced when people rate themselves on criteria that cannot be easily compared to objective standards, like sensitivity, discipline, sophistication (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989), or morality (Allison, Messick, & Goethals, 1989). Further research on the endowment effect extends such insights in arguing that especially in the condition of an exchange of dissimilar resources (cf. currencies of exchange) people overestimate the value of their own resources as compared with those of the exchange partner and are therefore more conservative in contributing to the relationship (van Dijk & van Knippenberg, 2005).

However, susceptibility to such self-serving biases varies as a function of personality. Atwater and Yammarino (1997), for instance, provide an overview of personality factors that lead people to evaluate their own performance more accurately, such as internal locus of control, cognitive complexity, and self-awareness. In contrast, self-serving biases are especially prevalent in people who score high in narcissism (John & Robins, 1994). Interesting, research shows that narcissism is more prevalent among people in leadership positions (Deluga, 1997; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), which suggests that leaders may be more prone to overestimate their own contribution to the exchange relationship than followers. We may thus expect that such differences in personality between followers and leaders may influence the extent to which each of them falls prey to self-serving biases in their perceptions of contributions to the LMX relationship, and accordingly the extent to which there will be LMX disagreement.

Not only the perceptions of one's own contribution are subject to bias, the perceptions of others' contributions can be biased as well. Research has, for instance, repeatedly found that LMX quality is perceived more favorably when the other party is perceived as similar to oneself, for example, in demographic attributes (Duchon et al., 1986; Green, Anderson, & Shivers,1996; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992, Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) or in attitudes and education (Basu & Green, 1997). While such general similarity-attraction effects (cf. Byrne, 1971) are less of an issue for LMX agreement, they do become an issue when the involved parties disagree on their perceptions of similarity, for instance, when one party is conscious of age similarity while the other is conscious of dissimilarity in attitudes (cf. Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Hiller & Day, 2003; regarding the differentiation into surface-level similarity, such as demographics, and deep-level

similarity, such as values). On which level people (care to) perceive similarity depends on whether they see the respective dimension as meaningful for normative fit, in other words, as meaningful for their identity construal (Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991; Turner, 1987). A leader might perceive dissimilarity because the follower has not attended the same Ivy League university while a follower can be inclined to perceive similarity because his or her leader attended a game of the soccer club of which the follower is a fan. As a consequence, when evaluating their joint relationship, the follower's rating of the leader's contribution to the relationship is likely to be more positively biased than the leader's perception of the follower's contribution to the relationship.

Another aspect affecting the perception of others can be found in the degree to which people are able to take each other's perspective. Although there are individual differences in the development of this skill, research has shown that there is a general tendency for people higher in the organizational hierarchy, to be less inclined to take a lower-power individual's perspective (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). As perspective-taking can be seen as indicative of having a feel for how much the other is contributing (or trying to) as well as how one's own contributions are perceived by the other, a lack of perspective-taking can be related to a less exact and usually less favorable assessment of the other's contributions (similar to the effects of the self-serving bias discussed above). In other words, the power differential between leaders and followers makes differences in perspective-taking especially likely and thus affects LMX disagreement via differences in perceptions of contributions.

A third factor which feeds indirectly into biased perceptions of own and other's behavior is privileged access to information about behavior - either due to cognitive or to

physical access. Firstly, when considering each person's contribution, it is typically easier to recall one's own contributions than someone else's, because such information is differently encoded and stored than information about other people's contributions (Ross & Sicoly, 1979). The reasons for this are manifold; Own actions may distract from perceiving other people's actions, own actions are often rehearsed or repeated before being put into action and thus more deeply rooted in the cognitive apparatus (Carver, 1972), and own actions fit more likely into preexisting schema and are thus more likely to be retained (Bartlett, 1932, Bruner, 1961). Because the ease with which contributions come to mind is used as a proxy for actual contributions (Schwartz et al. 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), inflated views of own contributions are likely to occur. Secondly, some contributions to a relationship may take place outside of the awareness of the other party. A leader may, for instance, argue the case for a pay raise for the follower with the leader's own superior without the follower being aware of this, while the follower may work overtime to secure an important contract without the leader ever being aware of the extra effort invested by the follower. Simply put, one is aware of one's own actions but not necessary of those of the other party. As a consequence, biased perceptions of own and other's contributions may arise. While it might be argued that leaders and followers are equally subject to this privileged access to information issue and thus equally affected in their LMX quality ratings, it is likely that leader-follower relationship are often characterized by an information asymmetry. Specifically, it is within the leader's role to supervise and as such know much about their subordinates' doing, while a follower is only likely to witness a leader's actions for the relationship in direct contact and less so when they are, for instance, happening in the board room. Leaders may thus in practice

often have privileged access to information about their own behavior to a greater extent than followers. Accordingly, as perceptions of potential contributions are based on all information one has about one's own and the other's behavior that comes to mind, LMX quality perceptions are likely to differ between leaders and followers, with LMX disagreement as a consequence.

Summarizing this part, leaders and followers have different perceptions of how much each party contributes to the relationship based on, (a) differences in biased perceptions of own and other's contributions, (b) differences in perspective taking, and (c) differences in access to own and other's behavior. These factors relate to the extent to which leaders and followers think their standards for each role are met by the other as well as by themselves, and hence explain how disagreement can still persist in cases where these standards, that is, ILTs and IFTs, are the same.

## Towards a Fuller Understanding of LMX Agreement

In the previous, we reconsidered antecedents of LMX quality ratings at an individual level and combined them into a dyadic model. We outlined that each party's LMX quality rating is primarily dependent on the perceived other party's contributions moderated by perceived own contributions. We then went on to argue that both parties' behavior should not be equated with contributions, but that both parties interpret their own and the other party's behavior through the lens of Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories. The parties' currencies of exchange can therefore be argued to differ. This model eventually set the stage to explain that LMX disagreement can stem from (1) differences in both parties' implicit theories, and from (2) differences in perceptions of own and other's behavior. While the first refers to *what* should be

exchanged and thus governs *if* perceived behavior translates into perceived contributions, the second refers to people's estimations of *how much* is exchanged and thus governs the *magnitude* of perceived contributions. Based upon these propositions, it is clear that a match of ILTs and IFTs is an important precondition for LMX agreement, but also that biases in self and other perceptions can still interfere and thus render LMX disagreement likely. Both issues thus need to be addressed if LMX disagreement is to be overcome.

In general, we can assume that leaders and followers are largely unaware of their disagreement, because people have the tendency to suppose an implicit understanding. Discussing and making explicit what is implicit thus seems a good strategy to foster mutual agreement about contributions and, ultimately, also about the relationship quality. Indeed, we specifically predict reciprocal communication about mutual role expectations and values of contributions to have an effect on LMX agreement.

To begin with, the more both parties communicate about their mutual role expectations over time, the more each party should be able to understand *what* both are expected to contribute to the relationship. Additionally, the more both parties also specifically come to an understanding of the conversion rate (i.e., *how much* a follower's contribution is worth in leader contribution and vice versa), the better they should be able to balance their (perceived) contributions. Both acts of communication combined over time should thus enable both parties to fulfill a reciprocity norm (Cialdini, 1984; Uhl-Bien, 2003) which can be regarded as a precondition for reaching LMX agreement. As contexts can facilitate interaction (cf. Porter & McLaughlin, 2006), we suggest that in particular in contexts that allow for frequent and in-depth communication, leaders and followers will form more accurate perceptions of each other's contributions to the joint

LMX relationship. This should be especially true for settings in which leaders and followers can additionally observe each other's behavior, as these settings would allow for explicit communication and feedback about each person's behavior before it is assessed as a potential contribution. In this respect, a study by Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska, and Gully (2003) looks promising, because it shows that, at least for one side of the dyad, followers reporting frequent communication with the leader received more favorable job-performance ratings than did followers reporting infrequent communication. If expanded to both parties, these results can be brought in line with our prediction that communication allows for leaders and followers to exchange their mutual expectations better so that they can adjust their behavior accordingly and ultimately reach LMX agreement (cf. “feedback” in Minsky, 2002). Although Sin, Nahrgang, and Morgeson (2009) did not find a direct effect of communication frequency on the relationship between leaders’ and followers’ LMX ratings, they did find effects for dyadic tenure and intensity of dyadic interaction. In light of these findings, we argue that their data would hold the potential to find an effect of communication when it would, for instance, be interacted with relationship tenure or intensity of dyadic interaction. Indeed, we assume that the disjointed effects regarding tenure and a diversity of assessed communication processes (such as feedback, communication frequency, or interaction intensity) with regard to LMX agreement can be understood better when conceptualized in interaction with each other, that is, communication processes can be assumed to work best for aligning expectations (i.e., implicit theories) when they are enacted over longer periods of time. However, we are unaware of any study that attempted to find such more complex interaction patterns.

More specifically, we would be more confident that significant predictors of LMX agreement would be found if respective studies specifically assessed communication regarding mutual role expectations (i.e., ILTs and IFTs aka *what* should be contributed) as well as communication explicating what each party does for the relationship that is not visible in regular face-to-face interactions (i.e., *how much* is contributed). Merely investigating the frequency of communication does not yield any insights in changes in leader's and follower's awareness of the other's implicit theories or in their awareness of how the other perceives the division of contributions to the relationship (cf. research which found that leaders and followers typically do not communicate about their mental models when interacting; Hollingshead, 1998; van Ginkel, Tindale, & van Knippenberg, in press). Therefore, we suggest that positive effects of frequency of communication on agreement will only be found in cases where the communication explicitly concerns ILTs and IFTs or the contributions made by both partners to the relationship.

In conclusion, we posit that differences in ILTs and IFTs as well as differences in the perception of own and other's behavior cause LMX disagreement. While some of those differences are personality-based and thus less open for change, reciprocal communication about mutual role expectations as well as addressing issues related to information accessibility seem feasible strategies to overcome LMX disagreement.

Furthermore, but apart from the specific issue of LMX agreement, we would argue that our model also holds the potential to explain when and why consensus in follower perceptions of their leader is likely to occur – which is of equal concern in current reconsiderations of LMX theory (cf. Schyns & Day, 2009). Such research on consensus is interesting because it considers the variance in follower LMX perceptions as

meaningful information and thus broadens the single-dyadic perspective to a multi-dyadic one (van Breukelen, Konst, & van der Vlist, 2002). Schyns (2006), for instance, integrated the notion of consensus with Heider's balance theory (1958) and showed that higher follower consensus in perceived leader contributions to the relationship relate to higher follower job satisfaction as well as higher commitment. However, while such studies are able to show that consensus is relevant, there is little explanation on the mechanisms whereby consensus can arise. In this respect, we would argue that expanding our presently single-dyadic model into a multi-dyadic one can elucidate the issue a little. We can, for instance, assume that perceptions of a leader's contributions vary between different followers. However, they vary not necessarily as a function of the leader that is perceived (i.e., such as LMX would posit that leaders behave differently towards different followers), but because different followers' standards, that is, their ILTs, might vary. It is thus only under the condition of ILT similarity among followers that followers apply the same benchmark and that they can be posited to interpret a leader's contributions to the relationship similarly. However, under conditions in which intra-team heterogeneity increases (such as in intercultural teams), it seems likely that the same leader's behavior will be experienced differently by the individual team members. This difference in perceived contributions is then translated into different perceptions (i.e., non-consensus) of LMX quality. According to our model, consensus in follower perceptions of their leader can thus be argued to vary as a function of followers' differences in ILTs.

## Suggestions For Future Research

LMX research commonly focuses on follower perceptions only. However,

because LMX essentially reflects the relationship between leaders and followers, we believe that future research should concentrate on investigating LMX at the dyadic level (and pay appropriate heed to it in the assessment of LMX quality). Several authors issued calls for such a specification of level of analysis and for alignment of proposed theory and what is tested (Schriesheim et al., 1999; Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, & Yammarino, 2001). Next to such fundamental considerations, an additional array of potential studies directly flows from the model presented in the present paper, all of which have the potential to contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the dyadic nature of LMX relationships.

First of all, there is no measure to assess IFTs. To be able to test the model described in this paper, research should start with the construction of such an IFT measure. While some research already undertook some steps towards measuring leaders' expectations for followers in leadership dyads (e.g., Engle & Lord, 1997; Wernimont, 1971), we would recommend to construct a new measure in several steps that parallel the construction of ILT measurements (cf. Lord et al., 1984; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). To do this, supervisors and subordinates should firstly indicate traits and behaviors that they consider to be typical of and make for a good follower (potential dimensions might span from central followership behaviors such as productivity, rule following, and loyalty to peripheral followership behaviors such as creativity, organizational citizenship behavior, and critical thinking). Next, an independent group of leaders and followers should rate the prototypicality of these traits and behaviors for followers. Based on these ratings, the number of items should be reduced to form a scale of a reasonable length. Consecutive studies could reassess its factor structure over different work domains and

cultures.

While the development of an IFT measure already holds plenty of opportunities to compare followers' and leaders' IFTs with each other, we would recommend this topic to be reserved for a separate line of research in which not only leaders' and followers' freely recalled ILTs and IFTs are compared to each other but also in which leaders' and followers' indications on existing ILT measures and the new IFT measures are compared. A valuable extension would further lie in research that would address possible antecedents of leader and follower (dis-)agreement on ILTs and IFTs in either cross-sectional research (such as when comparing high reciprocal feedback leadership dyads with low ones, possibly interacted with dyadic tenure) or longitudinally (such as when comparing if and under which specific conditions leaders' and followers' ILT understanding as well their IFT understanding converge).

A different line of research could yet again employ standard ILT and IFT instruments and simply measure to what degree leaders and followers perceive each other to match the respective implicit theories. The resulting match scores could then be related to LMX quality perceptions much like we have outlined it in Figure 1 – essentially providing a test of the relationships proposed in our model. Moreover, when combined with the research questions above, one could assess whether LMX agreement is more likely to occur when the followers' and leaders' contents of ILTs and IFTs are congruent as opposed to when they are not.

Similarly, but related to general self-serving biases, one could assess precursors of self-serving biases such as narcissism, and investigate whether LMX agreement is affected by such tendencies. In dyads where the follower is fairly low in narcissism, we

would, for instance, posit that LMX disagreement is more likely to occur when the respective leader is highly narcissistic than when the respective leader scores low in narcissism – simply because a narcissistic leaders can be assumed to overestimate his or her own contribution.

Additionally, one could undertake experimental leadership dyad studies in which IFTs and ILTs are manipulated by, for instance, letting people read about great leaders or followers. Participants can then be asked to rate a confederate's behavior (which either fits with the manipulated ILTs or IFTs or not) as a more or less valuable contribution to the relationship. According to our model, we would expect a fit effect, in that behavior that is congruent (as opposed to incongruent) with the manipulation of the implicit theory will more likely be perceived as a contribution and ultimately translate into higher perceptions of relationship quality.

Finally, one could investigate the effects of mutual role expectation communication on LMX agreement. As briefly touched upon above, this could either be done cross-sectionally or in the lab, by, for instance, instructing one group of leadership dyads to explicitly discuss how they see a leader's and a follower's role concerning a specific task while depriving the other group of the chance to exchange such views (cf. van Ginkel & van Knippenberg, 2008). According to our model, we would predict to find that those leader-follower dyads that were able to communicate about their expectations beforehand are able to reciprocate each others contributions better and thus ultimately rate the relationship better compared to those dyads which were not instructed to talk about their mutual role expectations.

## Boundaries To The Model

While the presented model focuses mainly upon in-role behavior as specified in ILTs and IFTs, an obvious boundary lies in the fact that it does not account for every kind of extra-role behavior. Extra-role behavior that is accounted for in the present model is behavior that is expected but not necessarily to that degree, e.g., being an even more visionary leader or being an extremely enthusiastic follower. Extra-role behavior that is not accounted for is behavior that totally falls out of the scope of ILTs or IFTs, e.g., when a leader pays a home visit to his or her follower who just became a parent, or when a follower arranges a birthday party for his or her leader. While such unexpected events are not catered for in the present model, we would assume that the persons concerned rapidly process whether such behaviors are sufficiently congruent with their existing implicit theories regarding leaders and followers (cf. Lord et al., 2001), that is, ILTs and IFTs. Presumably, if they are, these behaviors will not only receive a positive valence but are also likely to be integrated in the respective ILT or IFT and will thus be part of the expectation for the next leader or follower. Conversely, if such unexpected behavior cannot be aligned with and extend existing knowledge structures, it is likely to be disapproved and potentially later used as a discriminant behavior, that is, as part of an anti-prototype.

A possible extension of our model, which goes beyond the scope of the current paper, is to take a closer look at the consequences of agreement and disagreement at various levels of LMX quality. Essentially, we would predict that once it becomes clear to both parties that they disagree about the quality of their relationship, this will be a starting point for future discussion about their relationship and thus ultimately the development of their relationship. For cases of LMX agreement, however, the

relationship dynamic is likely to be different and will depend on the level of LMX quality that is perceived and agreed upon. While our model explains how such situations may arise, the consequences of LMX agreement at different levels of LMX quality for the relationship dynamics are not covered by it and thus seem interesting to explore in their own right. An obvious starting point would seem to be the possibility that agreement about low-quality LMX might motivate changes in the leader-follower relationship more than agreement about high-quality LMX.

## In Conclusion

To summarize, our model illustrates the complexity of the processes underlying leaders' and followers' assessments of their LMX relationship, and invites fuller integration of research on LMX and ILTs as well as extension of this research with the concept of IFTs. By thus outlining the many potential sources for LMX disagreement we hope to have opened the door towards open communication in research about the divergent LMX findings regarding leaders and followers, but also between leaders and followers themselves so that they will engage in a dialogue to understand each other's perspectives better.

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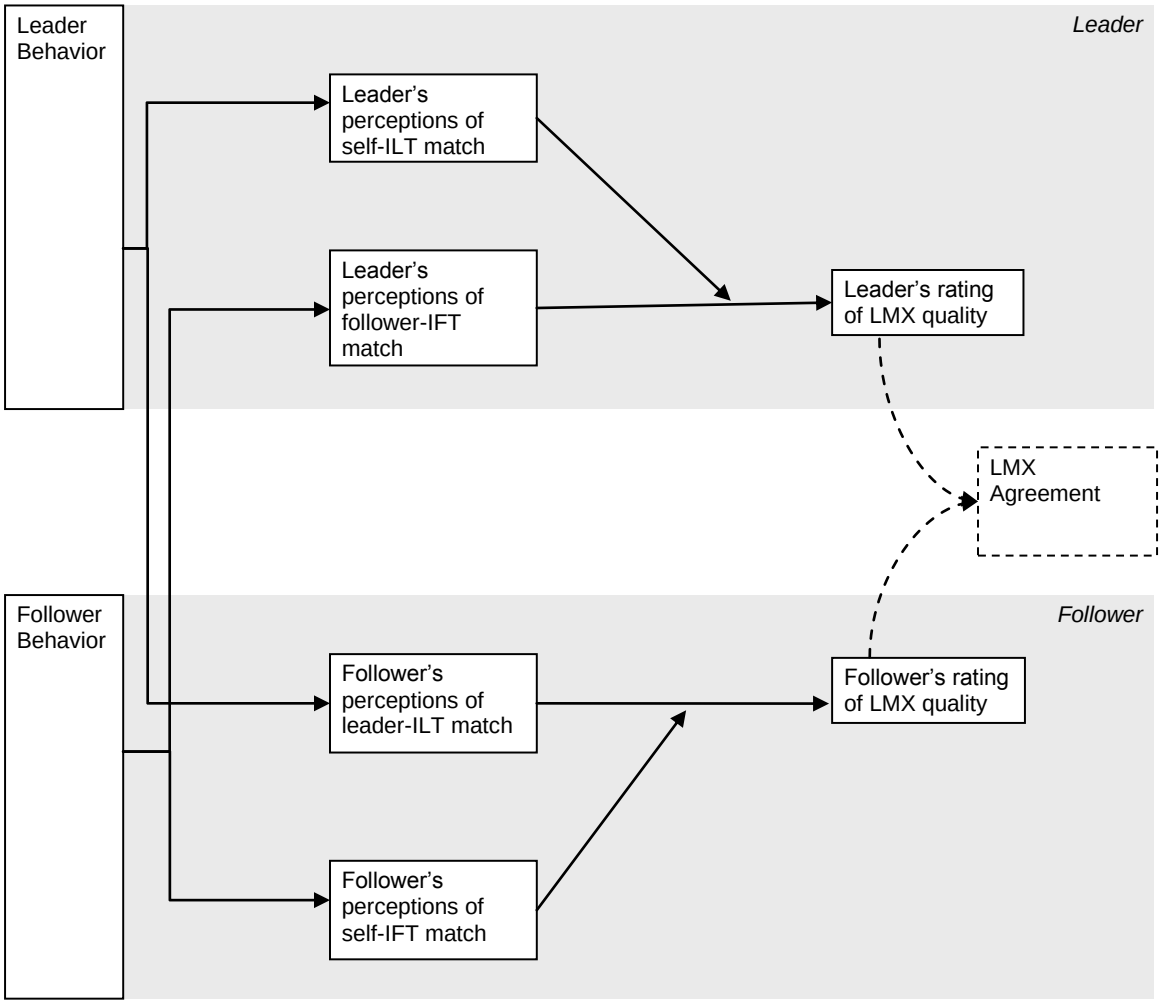
## Footnote

[1] Note that we follow a broader understanding of *currencies* and *contributions* in the present paper (cf. Schriesheim, Costra, & Cogliser, 1999) compared to some previous works (e.g., Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Specifically, we understand a contribution as something that is perceived as a valuable addition to the relationship and the reaching of mutual goals. Our understanding of contributions thus subsumes aspects which have previously been called currencies next to contributions, such as loyality, affect, or respect. In that sense, we also have a less restricted understanding of currency in that contributions can be made along the lines of Implicit Leadership Theories and Implicit Followership Theories – which we will elaborate in the coming sections.

Figure 1. Dyadic model of LMX agreement



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