Leader-Image Compatibility: An Image Theory View of Leadership

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Data from a field study of employee attitudes and perceptions support an image compatibility perspective of leadership. Drawing from Beach's Image Theory (1990), the study compares a 6-item leader-image compatibility measure with an existing leadership instrument—Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). Results show the image theory approach compares favorably to LMX in predicting 5 job-related measures of subordinate attitudes and perceptions. Findings expand the scope of image theory applications and demonstrate that an image compatibility assessment of leadership is conceptually sound and statistically justified. Implications are discussed regarding the utility of an image theory perspective of leadership in an increasingly diverse workforce.

Image theory was initially developed as a descriptive model of decision-making (Beach, 1990, 1996; Beach & Mitchell, 1987; Mitchell, Rediker, & Beach, 1986). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that most research testing the theory has dealt with issues involved with choosing from among alternative courses of action (see Beach, 1998 for a review). However, Bissell and colleagues (Bissell & Beach, 1996; Richmond, Bissell, & Beach, 1998) have initiated a line of inquiry in which they apply image theory in a non-decision-making arena. Specifically, they employed an image theory framework to explain how deviations between images of ideal and actual supervisor behaviors correlated with subordinate dissatisfaction. The current study builds on their work by introducing an image compatibility measure of leadership, evaluating the measure's relationship with several work-related attitudes, and benchmarking the image compatibility measure against an already established leadership model; namely, Graen's theory of Leader-Member Exchange (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975).

BACKGROUND

In an increasingly visually-oriented society, images take on a significant role in motivating actions, influencing opinions, and conveying meaning. In the corporate arena, for example, image consultants tutor people on how to enhance careers by paying attention to the images created by their wardrobes (Bixler & Nix-Rice, 1997; Molloy, 1975; 1996; Seitz, 2000). In the political arena, candidates and office holders are advised to create and maintain public images that are compatible with images held by voters (Trent, Short-Thompson, Mongeau, Nusz, & Trent, 2001; White, 1982). In fact, the significance of images, and impact of image violations, have been highlighted by reactions to recent events at Enron (Dipasquale, 2002; Thomas, 2002), Arthur Andersen (Kahn, 2002), and even within the Catholic Church (Sheler & Ewers, 2002).

Images also play the central role in Beach's image theory (1990, 1998). Basically, the theory suggests that people create schematic knowledge structures, or images, which are used to help understand information and guide in choosing courses of action. These images provide a backdrop for interpreting and evaluating all manner of stimuli. Thus, for example, we have images of what is right and wrong. We have images of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, successful and less successful projects, desirable and undesirable ballplayers, and pleasant and unpleasant music. New stimuli are compared with our images, and through these comparisons we develop an understanding of the context in which we find ourselves.

To date, image theory has been applied, tested, and validated in multiple decision-making situations, including studies dealing with consumer preferences (Beach, Puto, Heckler, Naylor, & Marble, 1996; Nelson & Puto, 1998), resource allocations (Dunegan, 1995), job opportunities and job screening (Beach & Strom, 1989, Ordonez, Benson, & Beach, 1999), living accommodations (Potter & Beach, 1994; van Zee, Paluchowski, & Beach, 1992), corporate acquisitions (Rediker, Mitchell, Beach, & Beard, 1993), choices by auditors (Asare & Knechel, 1995), career selection (Stevens, 1998), even decisions about punishment (Dunegan, 1996). Recently, Schwartz and Te'eni (2001) used image theory as the basis for mapping how decision agents monitor and adapt to changing conditions. However, it is not the theory's capacity to illuminate decision-making that is of primary interest here. Instead, we are interested in whether a particular component of the theory, *image compatibility*, might be a useful addition to research on leadership. Given that as our objective, we will limit our review to the image compatibility segment of the theory. For a more comprehensive review of image theory, we suggest reading Beach (1990, 1996, 1998) or Beach and Mitchell (1987).

In a short vignette that opens Bissell and Beach's (1996, p.63) paper linking image theory with supervisor behaviors, Lisa (the subordinate in the vignette) laments the fact that Ruth (her supervisor)

> "...just did not seem to know her job. Ruth [was] ... always soliciting her people's opinions, always soft-spoken and polite, always making sure everyone understood 'the big picture.' It was ridiculous. What was needed ... was firmness, direction, and backbone."

The point of the vignette is simple, and yet consistent with virtually all contingency theories of leadership. Although many people *do* respond favorably to a supervisor who acts like Ruth, others may feel the very same actions are undesirable and inappropriate for someone in a supervisory position. Indeed, what constitutes "appropriate leadership" can be highly perceptual, and vary across situations and tasks (Foti, Fraser, & Lord, 1982; Jung & Avolio, 1999), cultures and geographic areas (Brodbeck et al., 2000; Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfman, 1999; Tollgerdt-Anderson, 1993; Yagoni, 2001), even between hierarchical levels of a single organization (Den Hartog, Koopman, & Van Muijen, 1998; Lord & Maher, 1991).

As pointed out by Lord and his colleagues (Lord & Maher, 1991; Phillips & Lord, 1981; Rush, Thomas, & Lord, 1977), people identify or label someone as a leader based on a fit between implicit prototypes they have of a leader and the characteristics exhibited by the person being observed. To the extent the observed person exhibits characteristics that are consistent

with the prototype, the observed person is "recognized" as a leader. Therefore, although Ruth, in the vignette above, may be the ideal supervisor for many people, she does not fit with Lisa's preferences. In image theory vernacular, Lisa's image of her supervisor is incompatible with her image of what a supervisor should be. This incompatibility is particularly relevant because, according to Beach's theory, people use images to evaluate whether current situations are congruent (e.g., compatible) or incongruent (e.g., incompatible) with their standards and expectations (Beach, 1996). When images of current or existing conditions are consistent with images of standards and expectations, equilibrium exists and people are inclined to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, when current and expected images are incompatible, the conflicting images produce a dissonance that people are motivated to act upon and try to resolve (Beach & Mitchell, 1987).

Applying the concept of image compatibility to an examination of subordinate/supervisor dyads, Bissell and Beach (1996) and Richmond et al (1998) found that incompatibility between current and expected images strongly correlated with dissatisfaction with the supervisor and dissatisfaction with the company for whom they worked. One of the more significant implications of their findings is that satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with a supervisor may not be based on what a supervisor actually does (or does *not* do) in an absolute sense. Rather, satisfaction with one's supervisor appears to be a function of whether the supervisor's actions *fit* with the subordinate's image of how the supervisor *should* act. Thus, a participative leader would only *satisfy* those subordinates who consider a participative style to be appropriate. If a subordinate's image of his/her ideal leader is someone who is firm, autocratic, directive, and highly task-oriented (like the vignette's depiction of Lisa's image), a participative leadership style, for example, would not be compatible and the subordinate is likely to be dissatisfied.

The current study pursues this line of investigation and builds on the work of Bissell and Beach (1996) and Richmond et al. (1998) it in several ways. First, we propose and evaluate an alternative measure of leader-image compatibility. In their studies, compatibility was assessed in two ways. In one approach, compatibility was measured by computing the difference between subordinate perceptions of 30 ideal- and 30 actual-leader-behaviors. As Richmond et al. (1998, p.45) indicate, however, evaluating compatibility in this manner can be "cumbersome and time consuming," requiring participant responses to 60 questionnaire items (30 ideal and 30 actual behavior questions). Obviously, being cumbersome is an undesirable characteristic for a questionnaire, especially in field studies where participant time constraints are an important consideration. The 60-item instrument is also somewhat limited in that it focuses only on behaviors (overlooking the possible effects of incompatible leader traits) and assumes the 30-behaviors measured to be a representative and fairly comprehensive inventory for all respondents. Similarly, the questionnaire used by Brodbeck et al. (2000) to assess perceptions of leadership prototypes was also quite long, asking for responses to 112 questionnaire items.

To streamline and simplify their approach, Richmond et al. (1998) also tested a single-item measure of leader-image compatibility and found that it produced results similar to those generated by the lengthier instrument. However, single-item instruments, while time-efficient, can be problematic in terms of reliability and accuracy (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Nunnally,

1978). As stated by Kerlinger (1986, p. 414), "With few items, a chance error looms large. ... [M]ore items increase the probability of accurate measurement."

Therefore, we propose and test a six-item measure that is less time consuming than the 60- or 112-item instruments, but which is more promising in terms of its psychometric properties than a single-item approach. The proposed instrument measures perceptions of leader-image compatibility using the same technique as Richmond et al. (1998), a technique that was drawn from studies linking image compatibility to decisions about resource allocations (Dunegan, 1993, 1995; Dunegan, Duchon, & Ashmos, 1995) and punishment (Dunegan, 1996). Specifically, the proposed instrument asks subordinates to cognitively construct two images: an image of their ideal leader and an image of their current leader. With these images in mind, subordinates respond to a series of questions about the similarity of the two images. Responses are then used to compute an image compatibility score between the two images (see appendix).

We also extend the work of Bissell and Beach (1996) and Richmond et al (1998) by examining relationships between image compatibility and several additional organizationally-relevant attitude/perception measures. As mentioned above, Bissell and colleagues looked at the relationship between compatibility and dissatisfaction with the supervisor and dissatisfaction with the organization. In the current study, we evaluate image compatibility's relationship with job satisfaction (Quinn & Staines, 1979), turnover intentions (Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis, & Camman, 1982), organizational commitment (Porter & Smith, 1970), role ambiguity and role conflict (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Given that Bissell and Beach (1996) and Richmond et al. (1998) found higher incompatibility correlated with higher dissatisfaction with supervisors and the organization, and given that satisfaction with supervisors has been linked with turnover (Vecchio & Norris, 1996) and turnover intentions (Shore, Newton, & Thornton, 1990), perceptions of managerial support (Seers, McGee, Serey, & Graen, 1983), and organizational commitment (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Katz & Kahn, 1978), we anticipate our measure of image compatibility will have a similarly "favorable" and organizationally-preferred relationship with the aforementioned measures. More specifically, we hypothesize:

> ***H1**: Image compatibility will be positively correlated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and lower ambiguity, and negatively correlated with turnover intentions and role conflict.*

Finally, the current study extends the work of Bissell and Beach (1996) and Richmond et al. (1998) in yet a third way. Although an integration of image compatibility and leadership has merit from a purely theoretical perspective, whether such integration can make a significant and unique contribution to our knowledge of dyadic relationships has yet to be determined. To the extent existing measures of leadership already capture the effects of leader-image compatibility, introducing yet another approach would be redundant and unnecessary. Therefore, to evaluate the utility of the proposed compatibility approach, we compare our findings with an already established model of leadership. Specifically, we evaluate the image compatibility approach with Graen's model of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX: Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975).

There were several reasons LMX was chosen for this comparison. First, Bissell and Beach (1996) refer to Graen's work on dyadic interactions to build a case for the relevance and theoretical grounding of their own study. Specifically, the quality of exchange between a leader and her/his subordinate influences the role expectations each has of the other. In high quality LMX relationships, role expectations will be more compatible and less likely to be in conflict with schematic images. Second, Graen's theory is based upon the assumption that leaders differentiate among their subordinates, adjusting behaviors to fit with varying subordinate needs (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Thus, to the extent a subordinate requires greater direction and guidance, the leader in a high quality LMX relationship is more aware of this need (Graen & Schiemann, 1978), and is more likely to invest the time and effort to provide it. Conversely, if the subordinate prefers greater autonomy and personal discretion, the leader in a high quality LMX relationship is more likely to recognize this preference and allow the subordinate to act independently (Liden & Graen, 1980; Scandura & Graen, 1984). Although untested, this sensitivity to subordinate expectations could also mean that leaders in high quality LMX relationships may be more aware of the images subordinates' have about what a leader should and should not do.

A third reason for choosing LMX for this study is because of its widespread application and reasonably consistent research support, a fact that has led Schriesheim, Neider, and Scandura (1998) to recommend using LMX as a baseline for comparison when developing other non-LMX approaches to leadership. Thus, since we are investigating an image theory perspective of leadership, incorporating LMX provides a benchmark for assessing how well the new approach works.

Moreover, LMX has already been applied in research examining perceptions and perceptual similarities. Previous studies report that in dyads with higher quality exchange scores, leaders and subordinates have similar perceptions of job needs and job problems (Cashman, Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1976; Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Liden & Graen, 1980), perceptions of internal work climate, management awareness and concern, supervisor work emphasis, and intergroup cooperation (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). In fact, given these findings and given that images are perceptual by definition, it is reasonable to expect perceptions of image compatibility will be higher in dyads with higher LMX. A significant relationship between image compatibility and LMX might also be expected because of the reciprocated effort and mutual adjustment that characterizes higher quality dyads (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Thus, we expect:

> ***H2**: Image compatibility will be positively correlated with LMX, such that dyads with higher LMX scores will also have higher leader-image compatibility scores.*

The final reason LMX was included as part of the study is because it provides a means by which to assess the *incremental* contribution of an image compatibility approach. Researchers have already established links between LMX and job-satisfaction (Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982; Liden & Graen, 1980; Scandura & Graen, 1984; Seers & Graen, 1984; Wayne & Ferris, 1990), organizational commitment (Duchon, Green, & Taber, 1986; Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994; Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Nystrom, 1990), turnover intentions (Major et al., 1995; Sparrowe, 1994; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997; Wilhelm, Herd, & Steiner, 1993), role conflict and role ambiguity (Dobbins, Cardy, & Platz-Vieno, 1990). In fact, these job-related

variables were chosen for this study precisely because they have already been linked to LMX. To the extent the proposed leader-image compatibility measure cannot establish an equally strong link with these variables, arguments for using it in future leadership investigations would not be as compelling.

METHODS

Sample

As part of a larger study on work-related attitudes and perceptions, data were collected from 193 members of the Professional Staff at a large Midwestern university. Missing data reduced the usable sample to between 177 and 187, depending on the analysis/comparison being reviewed. Of the 175 respondents providing complete demographic information, 124 were women (mean age 40.9; range 21-62) and 51 were men (mean age 43.8; range 23-60). Mean tenure at the university was 9.63 years for the women (range: .3-28 years) and 10 years for the men (range: .5-25 years).

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire distributed and returned through university mail. Participation was voluntary and respondents could maintain complete anonymity, if they chose, by returning the questionnaire without any identifying information. All participants were assured that individual responses would be kept confidential.

Measures

In addition to the LMX instrument, the questionnaire included five established measures of employee attitudes/perceptions (reliability scores from the current sample are shown in brackets):

- Quinn and Stains' (1979) 5-item "facet-free" measure of job satisfaction (a=.79). Higher scores represent *higher* levels of satisfaction.
- Seashore et al.'s (1982) 3-item measure of intentions to quit (a=.84). Higher scores represent *stronger* intentions to quit.
- Rizzo et al.'s (1970) 6-item measure of role ambiguity (a=.86). Higher scores represent perceptions of *lower* role ambiguity.
- Rizzo et al.'s (1970) 8-item measure of role conflict (a=.86). Higher scores represent perceptions of *higher* role conflict.
- Porter and Smith's (1970) 15-item measure of organizational commitment (a=.86). Higher scores represent *higher* levels of organizational commitment.
- Graen's 7-item LMX scale (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; a=.92). Higher scores represent *higher* quality exchanges between leader and subordinate.

Also included in the questionnaire was the proposed six-item image compatibility instrument (see appendix). Items for the compatibility instrument were developed from discussions in Beach's writings on the basic processes of image theory and the role played by image

compatibility within the theory (Beach, 1990; 1996; 1998). Previous measures of image compatibility (see Dunegan, 1995; 1996; Dunegan et al., 1995; Richmond et al., 1998) were also examined for guidance on the type of questions to include. Basically, items were chosen and worded so that responses, when examined together, would provide an indication of the perceived compatibility between a subordinate's image of his/her *current* leader and the subordinate's image of his/her *ideal* leader.

RESULTS

The first step in evaluating the leader-image compatibility measure was to determine the factor structure underlying the six items. Richmond et al. (1998) suggested that compatibility may involve at least two dimensions; one involving the compatibility of current leader-image to ideal-image, and one dealing with anticipated improvement of the current leader-image toward the more ideal leader-image. The second dimension they referred to as "hope". Although Richmond et al. (1998) present a rational argument for treating compatibility and hope separately, they do not report any empirical justification for doing so. Therefore, as an initial test of dimensionality, the six items from the proposed measure, which included the single-item compatibility measure and the single-item hope measure from Richmond *et al.*, were factor analyzed. Results did not support Richmond et al.'s position of multidimensionality, but instead indicated that the six items loaded together into a single-factor solution (see Table 1). The single factor explained 82% of variance in the six items, and, when summed together, produced a measure of leader-image compatibility with a Cronbach's a of .96.

TABLE 1
Results of Factor Analysis for Image Compatibility Items

Items[1]	Component Loading
IMG1	0.936
IMG2	0.899
IMG3	0.828
IMG4	0.900
IMG5	0.916
IMG6	0.961

As mentioned earlier, research has already established links between LMX and the job-related attitude/perception measures used in this study. Specifically, higher LMX scores have been shown to correlate with higher job satisfaction (Graen et al., 1982; Liden & Graen, 1980; Scandura & Graen, 1984; Seers & Graen, 1984; Wayne & Ferris, 1990), higher organizational commitment (Duchon et al., 1986; Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994; Major et al., 1995; Nystrom, 1990), perceptions of lower role ambiguity and role conflict (Dobbins et al., 1990), and lower intentions to quit (Major et al., 1995; Sparrowe, 1994; Wayne et al., 1997; Wilhelm

[1] See the footnote on the appendix page for an explanation of the item labels.

et al., 1993). Although replicating these relationships was not an objective of the current investigation, finding a similar pattern of correlations would lend credibility to our data. Thus, to test hypotheses H1 and H2, and check the relationship between LMX and the aforementioned attitude/perception measures, correlations among all measures were calculated. Results, along with other descriptive information, are shown in Table 2 and indicate:

- These data produced a similar correlation pattern between LMX and the attitude/perception measures as reported in previous studies; specifically, higher LMX was correlated with higher job-satisfaction and commitment, and lower ambiguity, conflict, and intentions to quit.
- Support for hypothesis H1; that is, image compatibility was positively correlated with job-satisfaction, organizational commitment, and lower ambiguity, and negatively correlated with turnover intentions and role conflict.
- Support for hypothesis H2; that is, image compatibility was positively correlated with LMX, such that dyads with higher LMX scores also had higher leader-image compatibility scores.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities

	Mean	Std Dev	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. LMX	26.31	6.26	*.92*						
2. Image	20.44	7.09	.81	*.96*					
3. Satisfaction	18.08	5.41	.46	.49	*.79*				
4. Intent to Quit	9.89	5.42	-.35	-.39	-.62	*.84*			
5. Ambiguity	30.35	7.69	.63	.62	.51	-.52	*.86*		
6. Conflict	30.57	11.25	-.45	-.50	-.44	.45	-.53	*.86*	
7. Commitment	68.07	15.12	.53	.47	.60	-.54	.54	-.49	*.86*

Notes: N=183 to 187 (due to missing data).
All correlations are significant @ p<.01, or better.
Reliabilities (Cronbach's α) are on the diagonal.

However, Table 2 also indicates that LMX and image compatibility (Image) have strikingly similar correlations with the five attitude/perception measures, raising concerns about multicollinearity. Therefore, to evaluate the relative strength of the two leadership measures (LMX and Image) and control for their potential redundancy, we performed a series of hierarchical regression analyses (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), in which we individually regressed the five attitude/perception measures on LMX as step 1, then added Image to the model as step 2. Results from these analyses are shown in Table 3. In addition, we statistically examined the potential problem of multicollinearity between LMX and Image by calculating the variance

inflation factor (VIF) between the two factors. According to several statisticians, multicollinearity should be considered a problem when the VIF statistic is greater than 10 (Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Wasserman, 1996; Pfaffenberger & Patterson, 1987). According to our findings, VIF between LMX and Image was only 2.92. Thus, at least in terms of explaining variance for these five variables, multicollinearity between LMX and Image does not appear to be a serious concern.

TABLE 3
Hierarchical Regression Results

Variable	Model	Independent Variables	β	R^2	Δ R^2
Satisfaction	Step 1	LMX	.457***	.209	
	Step 2	LMX	.166 *n.s.*	.253	.044
		Image	.359**		
Intent to Quit	Step 1	LMX	-.353***	.125	
	Step 2	LMX	-.104 *n.s.*	.157	.032
		Image	-.307**		
Ambiguity	Step 1	LMX	.630***	.397	
	Step 2	LMX	.379***	.430	.033
		Image	.309**		
Conflict	Step 1	LMX	-.449***	.201	
	Step 2	LMX	-.125 *n.s.*	.256	.055
		Image	-.399***		
Commitment	Step 1	LMX	.527***	.277	
	Step 2	LMX	.426***	.282	.005
		Image	.123 *n.s.*		

Notes: ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.

N = 177 to 179 (due to missing data).

Table 3 contains two notable findings. First, the image compatibility measure made a significant and unique contribution to explained variance in four of the five attitude/perception variables. That is, even after removing the shared variance associated with LMX, the addition of Image in step 2 of the regression analyses increased R^2 levels by 4.4% for Satisfaction, 3.2% for Intention to Quit, 3.3% for Ambiguity, and 5.5% for Conflict. Each of these increases is statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level or better. Commitment was the only attitude/perception variable for which Image did not produce a significant change in R^2.

Second, for three of the attitude/perception variables—Satisfaction, Intent to Quit, and Conflict—adding Image to the regression equations resulted in LMX becoming a nonsignificant variable in the models. In other words, LMX did not make a significant and unique contribution to explained variance after controlling for the variance explained by Image. In the case of the Ambiguity variable, both LMX and Image made significant and non-redundant contributions to explained variance.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to build on work initiated by Bissell and Beach (1996) and Richmond et al. (1998) to apply image theory concepts in a non-decision making arena. Specifically, this study continues their line of investigation by integrating image compatibility, a component of image theory, into research on leadership. The current study contributes to this line of research in several ways. First, we proposed and evaluated a 6-item leader-image compatibility measure using data collected in a field survey. The new measure provides an alternative mechanism for estimating the relative compatibility (or incompatibility) between a subordinate's image of his/her current leader and his/her image of an ideal leader. The new measure is not as administratively cumbersome as the 60-item behavioral questionnaire used by Bissell and his colleagues, but is more psychometrically rigorous than their single-item instrument. Factor analysis indicated that the six items of the proposed instrument all loaded on a single factor and had high internal reliability (a=.96).

Following factor analysis, the proposed leader-image compatibility measure was evaluated in comparative analyses with LMX and five job-related attitude/perception variables. Results from this phase of the study found that higher leader-image compatibility scores correlated with higher levels of job-satisfaction and organizational commitment, and lower levels of role ambiguity, role conflict, and intentions to quit. These findings supported hypothesis H1.

Leader-image compatibility was also found to be significantly correlated with LMX (r=.81, p<.001), as predicted in hypothesis H2. Thus, at least for this sample, subordinates who were successful in developing positive dyadic relationships with their leaders, as assessed by LMX, were also more likely to have images of their current leaders that positively correlated with images of their ideal leaders.

More importantly, hierarchical regression analyses (see Table 3) indicated that leader-image compatibility made a significant and unique contribution to explained variance in four of the five attitude/perception variables. Organizational commitment was the only variable where the incremental variance explained by leader-image compatibility was not significant. Conversely, when evaluated along with leader-image compatibility in regression analyses, the unique variance explained by LMX was statistically significant for only two of the five attitude/perception variables—role ambiguity and organizational commitment. Said differently, adding leader-image compatibility to regression models already containing LMX had a statistically significant impact in 80% of the cases (4 out of 5). If we were to have changed the order of variable entry and added LMX to a model already containing leader-image compatibility, the addition of LMX would have had a statistically significant impact in only 40% of the cases (2 out of the 5 attitude/perception variables).

We do not mean to imply that the leader-image compatibility measure is *better* than LMX, but only that the new measure does not appear to simply be a redundant "version" of the more established leadership instrument. Therefore, given that leader-image compatibility did tap into variance not being tapped by LMX, we believe our results make an empirically defensible case for continued investigation of the image theory approach as a supplemental tool in future leadership studies.

Favorable results notwithstanding, findings from the current investigation need to be viewed with cautious optimism by researchers interested in an image theory approach to leadership. Obviously, since the study was cross-sectional in design, no causal inferences can be made. That is, we cannot (and do not) imply that a more compatible leader-image causes higher satisfaction or higher organizational commitment. Establishing causal relationships is an important step in an evolving line of research, but such a step was not within the scope of the current undertaking. Future investigations using longitudinal designs would be useful in dealing with this issue.

Second, data used in the study were collected with a paper-pencil instrument and from single-source respondents. That being the case, there is always concern about results being methodological artifacts. Moreover, given the similarity and conceptual overlap among the variables examined, multicollinearity may be contributing to the uniformly favorable results. Nevertheless, this same research design and these same variables have been used in previous LMX investigations. Therefore, since one of our objectives was to compare the leader-image compatibility instrument with an established measure from the leadership field, it was necessary to demonstrate that the pattern of LMX-to-attitude/perception relationships in these data was similar to the pattern documented in previous studies. Thus, in order to minimize alternative explanations for the findings and to provide grounding within LMX's already established research base, replicating the research design used in previous studies was necessary.

Even with these limitations, however, findings from the current study are encouraging. Together with results of Bissell and Beach (1996) and Richmond et al. (1998), these results provide preliminary support and empirical justification for further research integrating the concepts of image compatibility and leadership. Research focusing on the refinement of our instrument, as well as research attempting to replicate our results, would be especially desirable. It would also be desirable for future research to expand the list of organizationally-relevant variables which might be related to our measure of leader-image compatibility (e.g., measures of performance, motivation, organizational misbehavior, adaptability and willingness to change, to name a few).

Perhaps one of the more important contributions of the study is that it introduces image compatibility as a potentially useful approach for assessing differences among diverse organizational populations. We know, for example, that perceptions of leadership vary across cultures (Brodbeck et al., 2000; Den Hartog et al., 1999; Tollgerdt-Anderson, 1993; Yagoni, 2001). Research is also demonstrating that perceptions of leaders may differ even within a single organization, such that the leadership characteristics expected from someone at the top of an organization's hierarchy may not be the same as those expected from someone at a lower level (Den Hartog, et al., 1999; Lord & Maher, 1991). In fact, studies suggest that even

within a fairly homogeneous group, individuals can differ significantly in terms of their attributions and perceptions of leaders (Keller, 1999; Offerman, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994).

Therefore, as the workforce becomes more and more diverse, and as organizations become more international in their operations, the methods we use for assessing leadership will have to reflect a greater sensitivity to individual variation. We cannot expect leadership theories and practices that are developed in a culturally homogeneous setting to be as effective in settings where the workforce exhibits greater heterogeneity (Hofstede, 1993; Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

This is not to suggest that established measures of leadership, like LMX, are no longer valid and shouldn't be applied in diverse populations. It is quite likely that certain aspects of established leadership theories do have a degree of universal application (Den Hartog et al., 1999). However, with the increase in workforce diversity, we are also likely to see an increase in the diversity of individual preferences toward leadership. By integrating measurement approaches that can tap into these individual preferences, like our measure of leader-image compatibility, we can supplement the explanatory (or predictive) powers of the established measures.

Results from the current study provide a good illustration of this. Even though the sample we used was from a single organization, and was certainly not culturally diverse, leader-image compatibility was able to account for additional variance in four of the five dependent measures. Although it remains for future research to verify, we expect that as diversity within an organization increases, the explanatory power of measures that tap into individual preferences toward leadership would also increase. Given our findings, we believe the leader-image compatibility measure shows promise in this regard, and that efforts to incorporate an image theory perspective to the study of leadership is warranted.

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APPENDIX

Leader-Image Compatibility Items[1]

Create a mental image of the person you would consider to be the "Ideal Supervisor". This person would have the characteristics, skills, and qualifications you would like to see in a supervisor. Compare this image with an image of your current supervisor. In your opinion ...

How close are the two images?

NOT VERY CLOSE VERY CLOSE

1 2 3 4 5

Would you say your supervisor is making progress toward this "Ideal Image"?

DEFINITELY NOT ABSOLUTELY

1 2 3 4 5

Do you think your current supervisor will ever be able to get close to this "Ideal Image"?

VERY LIKELY NOT VERY LIKELY

1 2 3 4 5 (reverse scored)

Compared to this "Ideal Image," how does your current supervisor stack up?

VERY FAVORABLY VERY UNFAVORABLY

1 2 3 4 5 (reverse scored)

Are the differences between your current supervisor and this "Ideal" supervisor ...

INSIGNIFICANT OVERWHELMING

1 2 3 4 5 (reverse scored)

If it were possible to put your current supervisor and this "Ideal" supervisor side-by-side, how similar would they be?

VERY SIMILAR VERY DISSIMILAR

1 2 3 4 5 (reverse scored)

[1] The six items were labeled img1-img6 for purposes running analyses.