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The effectiveness of concern for oneself and for others in voluntary groups and work groups

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8. SUMMARY

This thesis assesses the effectiveness of concern for oneself and concern for others in voluntary groups and work groups. Self-concern is the degree to which group members are motivated to pursue their own goals, interests, and aspirations, whereas other-concern indicates the degree to which group members are motivated to actively help others to pursue their goals, interests and aspirations. Self-concern and other concern have previously been related to social information processing (Korsgaard, Meglino, and Lester, 1996), conflict behavior (Janssen and Van de Vliert, 1996; Van de Vliert, 1997), performance of experimental groups (Zander, 1971; Crown and Rosse, 1995), and bargaining and negotiation behavior in dyads (MacCrimmon and Messick, 1976).

This thesis attempts to build a bridge between these two experimentally validated concepts and the effectiveness of natural groups by providing a field validation. Aiming for broad generalizability of our findings, divergent samples were used; 748 members of 40 voluntary groups (intact Rotary clubs) and 1167 members of 64 work groups in a large gas and oil producing company. Following Hackman (1987, 1990), three criteria were adopted to assess group effectiveness, namely the degree to which goals are accomplished, interpersonal relations are well, and members' needs are satisfied.

In the first study, we found that, irrespective of the level of self-concern, Rotary clubs' effectiveness was positively related to other-concern. As an empirical bonus, we found that the degree to which group members perceive themselves as heterogeneous (a variable that was originally included as a control variable) qualified the effect of self-concern on effectiveness; self-concern had a detrimental effect on effectiveness only in heterogeneous groups. Furthermore, other-concern mediated between heterogeneity and effectiveness; the more homogeneous the group was, the higher other-concern was, and the higher effectiveness was.

In the field research in the gas and oil producing company, we included interdependence as a predictor, which expresses the degree to which group members are dependent upon each other to complete their tasks and attain their goals. This construct has previously been related to self-concern and other-concern (Pruitt, Rubin, and Kim, 1994). Other-concern was again positively related to effectiveness, and self-concern had a detrimental effect on groups in which the group members were relatively independent. This effect disappeared in highly interdependent groups. We also found that self-concern was positively related to the level of absenteeism (the higher self-concern, the higher absenteeism), and the level of interdependence again qualified this effect. Under condition of high interdependence, absenteeism was relatively high at all levels of self-concern, whereas under condition of low interdependence, low self-concern resulted in low absenteeism.

In both studies, we assumed self-concern and other-concern to be mutually independent, and to have separate effects. However, two previous theories that applied self-concern and other-concern, namely, the dual concern model (Van de Vliert, 1997) and social motives theory (McClintock, 1977), have adopted the assumption that self-concern and other-concern simultaneously codetermine conflict and negotiation behavior, respectively. This alternative paradigm, though less parsimonious, should be adopted if it provides a better explanation of reality (cf. Bobko, 1985). We adopted this alternative paradigm of self-concern in a secondary analysis of the data of both field studies, developing three new variables that blended self-concern and other-concern together. This alternative paradigm did not explain significantly more variance than our initial model. Another assumption that is sometimes applied, namely, self-concern and other-concern as two extremes on a bipolar continuum (e.g., Batson, 1989), has to be rejected too, since the two concerns were not related ($r = .19$, *n.s.* for study 1 and $r = .21$, *n.s.* for study 2). Thus, the first conclusion from this thesis is that self-concern and other-concern should be considered as mutually independent variables that have separate effects.

A second conclusion is that the three different criteria of group effectiveness all have the same relationship with self-concern and the same relationship with other-concern. This runs counter to the observation in the empirical literature about group effectiveness, that a potpourri of predictors exist that do not have a consistent relationship with the three criteria (e.g., Campion,

Medsker, and Higgs, 1993; Goodman, Atkin and Schoorman, 1983). We consistently found other-concern and self-concern moderated by heterogeneity and interdependence to be predictors of a diverse set of effectiveness variables in very different group settings.

Conclusion three is that, dependent upon the group characteristics, self-concern can hinder group effectiveness. Under conditions of high heterogeneity in study 1 and low interdependence in study 2, self-concern held a negative relationship with group effectiveness, which disappeared under conditions of medium to low heterogeneity and high interdependence, respectively. Practitioners should bear in mind that inducing high self-concern may turn out to be counterproductive in case of low interdependence.

Conclusion four is that, irrespective of the level of self-concern, other-concern uniformly fosters group effectiveness in both voluntary groups and work groups. Other-concerned group members support each others' attainment of goals, interests, and aspirations, which leads to goal accomplishment, productive interpersonal relationships and individual need fulfillment within the group. Though experimental studies found that the effect of other-concern is dependent upon the level of self-concern (e.g., Crown and Rosse, 1995, Janssen and Van de Vliert, 1996), it is just the main effect of other concern that really counts in these two field studies.

Taken together, the two field studies and the secondary analysis not only provide a validation of the concepts of self-concern and other-concern in natural groups. They also enrich theory building in (a) strengthening the assumption of mutual independence of both concerns, and (b) finding uniform relationships with the three effectiveness criteria, whereby (c) the relation between self-concern and effectiveness is dependent upon the levels of heterogeneity and interdependence, and whereby (d) the relation between other-concern and effectiveness is uniformly positive on all three effectiveness criteria.