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Published online: 24 Aug 2023.

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Follower-leader HEXACO personality fit and follower work engagement

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ABSTRACT

Based on person-supervisor complementary fit and job demands-resources theory, we examined if discrepancies between leaders' and followers' HEXACO personality traits are associated with followers' work engagement. We expected that when leaders score lower on emotionality compared to their followers, they are an important source of support, leading to increases in follower engagement. Additionally, we argue that discrepancies in follower and leader openness to experience – irrespective of the direction of this difference – constitute a hindrance to followers, resulting in decreased work engagement. Results from 130 matched follower-leader dyads using polynomial regression analyses supported our hypotheses. We additionally found that followers are more engaged in their work when their leader scores higher on emotionality than they do. These findings highlight the crucial role that the interaction of leaders' and followers' personality traits plays for followers' work engagement, which should be an important consideration for organizations when matching leader-follower dyads.

Engaged employees are an asset to organizations. Through their energy, enthusiasm, focus, and dedication, engaged employees perform their work well, stay healthy, help others, undertake proactive endeavours, and "infect" their co-workers to become more engaged in their work (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Halbesleben, 2010). Unsurprisingly, scientists and practitioners alike have been interested to learn more about ways to increase employee engagement. Using Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), research has convincingly shown that resourceful and challenging work environments with limited hindrances promote work engagement. While employees may be able to craft their own work environment in such a way that it fits their personal preferences (i.e., Bakker et al., 2012; Breevaart et al., 2014; Lu et al., 2014), leaders play an equally important role in creating circumstances that allow employees to thrive. Besides, leaders can be a resourceful, challenging, or hindering factor in followers' work environments themselves (e.g., Barnes et al., 2015; Breevaart et al., 2016; Tuckey et al., 2012).

Despite the fact that leadership is an interactive process between leaders and followers, knowledge on how the *dynamic* between leaders and followers relates to followers' work engagement is scarce (see Tummers & Bakker, 2021, for a systematic review). Integrating research on dispositional antecedents of work engagement with JD-R theory, we will examine how the *interplay* between leader and follower personality relates to followers' work engagement by arguing that follower-leader personality differences may be perceived as a resource or as a (challenging/hindrance) demand. Young et al. (2018) meta-analytically showed that employees' personality – especially positive affectivity, proactive personality, conscientiousness, and extraversion – is predictive of their work engagement. Yet, little is known

about the effects of follower-leader HEXACO personality fit on followers' work engagement.

Studying how follower-leader fit (also known as person-supervisor fit) in terms of their personality affects followers' work engagement is important because leaders have a major influence on how followers' feel and behave at work (e.g., Skakon et al., 2010). Moreover, personality is a relatively stable, dispositional characteristic, meaning that it is unlikely that personality will change much across time (Costa et al., 2019). As such, followers' and leaders' personality fit may have a long-lasting influence on followers' work engagement. It is therefore crucial to consider how leader and followers' personality relate to each other in the creation and maintenance of healthy and engaged followers, which might also have important practical implications for organizations, managers, and employees themselves. For example, findings about follower-leader personality fit can be used when matching leaders with followers in newly formed teams. In sum, our study extends the nomological network surrounding work engagement by focusing on follower-leader personality fit as an antecedent of followers' work engagement.

Leadership and follower work engagement

Engaged employees are vigorous, dedicated, and feel like time flies when they are working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Most research exploring the antecedents of work engagement focuses on job resources and/or job demands, showing that resourceful and challenging work environments, characterized by high job resources, such as autonomy and social support, high challenging demands, such as time pressure and work-

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load, and low hindrance demands, such as role ambiguity and role conflict, increase employees' enthusiasm, energy, and absorption in their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Additionally, research on employees' proactive efforts to create such an environment (i.e., job crafting) is thriving (e.g., Wang et al., 2016; Zhang & Parker, 2019). Drawing on the person-environment fit literature (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), research shows that employees who craft their resources and demands in such a way that they better fit their needs, for example by asking others for advice or by getting involved in a new project, are able to increase their engagement in their work. In the current study, we build on the idea that employees will become more engaged in their work when there is a better fit between themselves and the environment they work in. Specifically, we extend existing knowledge on antecedents of employee engagement by examining how person-supervisor (in this paper referred to as follower-leader) personality fit contributes to or hinders followers' engagement in their work.

Leaders are an important part of followers' daily work environment. That is, followers are dependent on their leader for access to important resources such as salary, promotions, social support, and guidance. As such, supervisors have a major influence on their followers' well-being at work (Skakon et al., 2010). Research indeed shows that leaders are able to stimulate their followers' engagement, for example by challenging them to think outside of the box, supporting them in their needs and empowering them to take independent actions (e.g., Breevaart et al., 2016; Schaufeli, 2015; Tuckey et al., 2012). Yet, knowledge about how leader's and follower's dispositional characteristics interact to predict followers' engagement is, to the best of our knowledge, largely non-existent. There is one notable exception: In 100 follower-leaderdyads, Yang et al. (2017) examined how follower-leader proactive personality fit related to follower engagement. Interestingly, using polynomial regression analyses, they showed that follower-leader similarity in proactive personality was positively related to followers' engagement, but also that followers were more engaged in their work when they had a more proactive personality than their leader rather than vice versa. In the current study, we contribute to the limited knowledge about follower-leader personality fit by examining how fit on the HEXACO dimensions is related to followers' work engagement.

HEXACO model of personality

Personality describes the set of relatively stable tendencies, traits, and mechanisms within individuals that determine one's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Larsen & Buss, 2005). Based on the lexical approach, which holds that personality differences are encoded in the language that we speak, personality is most commonly assessed with questionnaires based on the Big Five model (e.g., Goldberg, 1990). This model posits that personality can be described using five dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (versus Emotional Stability). However, increasing evidence from re-analyses of lexical data suggests that the sixth-dimensional HEXACO personality model provides a more accurate description of personality (e.g., Ashton & Lee, 2007, 2018). This model consists of six dimensions which together

form the HEXACO acronym: **H**onesty-humility, **E**motionality, e**X**traversion, **A**greeableness, **C**onscientiousness, and **O**penness to experience. The three dimensions extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience are almost identical to their Big Five counterparts of the same name, but HEXACO agreeableness and emotionality differ significantly from Big Five agreeableness and neuroticism, respectively. For example, HEXACO agreeableness contains (reversed) irritability and anger, content that is captured by Big Five neuroticism, whereas HEXACO emotionality contains sentimentality variance that is captured by agreeableness in the Big Five model. The honesty-humility dimension, which describes an individual's tendency to be genuine and fair in interpersonal interactions, is not sufficiently captured by the Big Five model (Ashton & Lee, 2018). The relations of the HEXACO traits with work engagement have not yet been systematically examined, but a few studies did examine some of these relations: Baer et al. (2016) found that extraversion correlates positively with work engagement ($r = .33$), and Bakker et al. (2015) demonstrated that openness to experience exhibits a positive correlation with day-level (study) engagement ($r = .22$).[1] The relations of the other HEXACO traits with work engagement have not been examined, let alone how follower-leader HEXACO personality fit influences followers' work engagement.

Person-supervisor fit

Person-supervisor fit has received relatively little attention within the broader person-environment fit literature (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Yet, within the specific area of person-supervisor *personality* fit, research on person-supervisor *personality* fit has mainly focused on the outcome(s) of *similarities* in followers' and leader's personality traits (e.g., Bauer & Green, 1996; Deluga, 1998; Strauss et al., 2001). Rooted in theories such as similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this so-called *supplementary* personality fit (Kristof, 1996) should increase interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971) and trust between individuals (Liden et al., 2016), and facilitate communication (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987) and interpersonal relationships (Kichuk & Wiesner, 1997). Evidence indeed supports the idea that employees are more attracted to organizations and people within these organizations when they are similar to them (Cialdini, 2001; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Selfhout et al., 2009; Strauss et al., 2001). Yet, the available evidence regarding the effects of follower-leader supplementary personality fit is mixed. For example, Deluga (1998) found that leaders rated their followers' behaviour more positively when they were more similar in terms of conscientiousness, whereas Strauss et al. (2001) did not find an effect of follower-leader similarity in conscientiousness on followers' performance rating by the leader. Similar contradictory findings have been found for follower-leader similarity in extraversion. That is, Bauer and Green (1996) found that this supplementary fit was positively related to follower performance, whereas Strauss et al. (2001) did not find a relation with follower performance.

Another way to look at person-supervisor fit is based on the idea that sometimes personality dissimilarity, rather than personality similarity, is preferable. This type of fit is referred to as

complementary fit (Kristof, 1996). Complementary fit in personality exists when the leader fulfils an important need of followers that may not be fulfilled when leaders and followers are similar. This idea is based on complementarity theory, which states that having similar personality traits may cause interpersonal tension (Kiesler, 1983; Winch et al., 1954). In support of the positive outcomes of complementary personality fit, Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) showed that highly extraverted employees were more attracted to their teams when other team members were more introverted and vice versa. In the current study, we try to shed some light on the importance of follower-leader personality fit by examining whether discrepancies in follower-leader personality, that is, being different, relate to followers' work engagement. Polynomial regression analyses (Edwards, 1994) with response surface analysis (Box & Draper, 1987) allows us to inspect how specific differences (i.e., higher vs. lower and vice versa) between follower's and leader's personality relate to followers' work engagement.

Although *perceived* (or assumed) follower-leader fit might sometimes be more important for psychological outcomes than fit based on followers' and leaders' self-ratings of personality (which is commonly called *actual* fit) (Montoya et al., 2008; Strauss et al., 2001), the latter has the major advantage that it is less prone to methodological limitations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although self-ratings of personality are still subject to social desirability (but such effects can be expected to be relatively weak in low-stakes situations and if participants are blind to the hypotheses), methodological limitations of studying perceived fit are even more worrisome because participants either explicitly rate the extent to which they perceive themselves to be similar to their leader or rate their own and their leader's personality. In both scenarios, methodological concerns, such as common method bias, and confounding variables, such as liking or similarity on other characteristics (e.g., age and gender), affect perceived similarity ratings, possibly creating a "halo effect". In other words, it is much more likely, compared to our approach, that perceived similarity ratings are artificially inflated because of methodological limitations of the measurement. This is particularly concerning because it renders the interpretation that engaged employees perceive themselves to be more similar to their leaders precisely because they are engaged much more likely. Our approach of relying on self-ratings of personality by both followers and leaders overcomes these limitations and is therefore methodologically stronger than studying perceived fit.

HEXACO personality fit and follower work engagement

We use JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) to explain whether discrepancies in follower-leader HEXACO personality dimensions relate to followers' work engagement. According to JD-R theory, characteristics of the work environment play an important role in explaining employee engagement. Specifically, employees feel more engaged in their work when their work environment is resourceful and challenging because these work environments help employees to focus their energy on what is important, help them to achieve their work goals, and allow them to successfully cope with work demands (e.g., workload, cognitive demands; Halbesleben, 2010). Additionally, employees will experience less work engagement when the work environment contains many hindering factors that solely consume energy (e.g., unresolved conflicts; Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Based on JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), we argue that l follower-leader dissimilarities in personality may be either a resource, challenge, or hindrance to followers and affect their work engagement accordingly.

We do not expect follower-leader dissimilarity in *all* HEXACO personality dimensions to relate to followers' work engagement. Specifically, we expect no relations for follower-leader complementary fit in honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness with followers' work engagement. First, regardless of their own honesty-humility and extraversion, followers generally expect their leaders to be sincere and fair (i.e., high honesty-humility) as well as outgoing and sociable (i.e., high extraversion; Keller, 1999). As such, regardless of their own degree of honesty-humility and extraversion, leaders scoring high on these traits will meet expectations and provide expected resources such as appreciation and support, whereas leaders scoring low on these traits will not. Second, agreeable followers are accepting of others and willing to compromise, which makes it likely that they work well with their leader regardless of their leader's personality, and as such their personality fit with the leader may not be a resourceful or a hindering factor in their work environment. Similarly, followers scoring low on agreeableness may have difficulties working with their leader and therefore, their leader will be a demanding hindering factor regardless of the others' personality because they tend to hold grudges and get angry easily.

Third, when conscientious followers work with a less conscientious leader, working together may consume followers' energy, hinder their goal achievement (i.e., be a hindrance), and negatively affect their work engagement because conscientious followers like to work in an organized and disciplined fashion. Yet, by helping their leader create structure and thinking things through, followers may create meaningful work for themselves, which may positively affect their work engagement (e.g., May et al., 2004; Vogel et al., 2020). Vice versa, when followers are not as conscientious as their leader, this may be a hindering factor because of the different ways of working (e.g., organized vs. sloppy), but followers may also be supported by their more conscientious leader, and provided with the structure and challenges they need. Together, these different mechanisms might cancel each other out, ultimately suggesting that follower-leader fit in conscientiousness might not actually affect followers' work engagement.

Previous research shows that followers' agreeableness and conscientiousness are unrelated to their preference for a specific type of leader (i.e., charismatic, relationship-oriented or task-oriented leader; Breevaart & de Vries, 2019). Additionally, Saltz (2004) found that follower-leader complementary fit in extraversion and conscientiousness were unrelated to followers' satisfaction with their leader and their commitment to the organization. Although we do not expect follower-leader personality fit on these HEXACO domains to relate to followers' work engagement, we will explore these

relations by including the follower-leader fit in all six HEXACO personality traits.

We do have clear expectations regarding the relations between follower-leader complementary fit in emotionality and openness to experience on the one hand and followers' work engagement on the other hand.

Emotionality

For emotionality, we expect that follower-leader discrepancy (i.e., complementary fit) is positively related to followers' work engagement, but only when leaders score lower on emotionality compared to their followers. That is, followers scoring higher on emotionality more easily experience negative emotions, such as anxiety and fear (Ashton et al., 2014), and therefore have a higher need for structure (De Vries et al., 2004) to help them to focus on their work. Leaders with lower scores on emotionality are likely to provide the needed structure to these followers as they are not easily stressed and can focus on the task at hand (De Vries et al., 2004). As such, leaders who score lower on emotionality are an important source of support to their more emotional followers (i.e., a job resource), which is an important requisite for employees to be engaged in their work (e.g., Halbesleben, 2010). Research indeed shows that the higher followers' score on emotionality, the more they prefer to work with task- and relationship-oriented leaders (Breevaart & de Vries, 2017). Followers scoring lower on emotionality are less emotional and more independent and distant in interpersonal relations (Ashton & Lee, 2018). For those followers, we expect that complementary fit (i.e., having a more emotional leader) does not affect their work engagement because they are independent and not easily stressed. As such, they need less support from their leader to help them deal with stressful situations.

Hypothesis 1: Follower-leader discrepancy in emotionality is positively related to followers' work engagement when followers score higher on emotionality compared to their leader.

Openness to experience

We expect that follower-leader discrepancy in terms of openness to experience (i.e., lower-higher and vice versa) is detrimental to followers' work engagement. The higher followers score on openness to experience, the more curious and open to change they are and the more unconventional ideas they have (Ashton et al., 2014). When these followers have a leader who scores lower on openness to experience, meaning that they have a leader who does not like change as much and who tends to shy away from unconventional ideas and people (Ashton et al., 2014), leaders may be a hindrance to followers, standing in the way of their need to engage in adventurous endeavours and to think outside of the box. As such, they may lose the energy and motivation to engage in their work (Christian et al., 2011). Similarly, when followers score lower on openness to experience compared to their leader, followers may be pressured to engage in situations and with people that they would

like to stay away from, hindering them in their need for a calm and stable work environment. In support of the idea that follower-leader complementary fit in openness to experience is detrimental to followers' work engagement, Breevaart and de Vries (2019) showed that followers' openness to experience relates positively to their preference for change-oriented leadership (i.e., charismatic leadership) and negatively to their preference for task-oriented leadership.

Hypothesis 2: Follower-leader discrepancy in openness to experience (i.e., high-low and low-high) is negatively related to followers' work engagement.

Method

Participants and procedure

Of the 189 dyads who signed up for the study, 139 followers and 145 leaders participated in our study. Of those who participated, we were able to match 130 unique follower-leader dyads. These dyads had been working together for 4.51 years on average ($SD = 5.19$). The follower sample consisted of 60 women (46.2%) and 70 men (53.8%) with an average age of 35.37 years ($SD = 12.96$). On average, followers had 15.05 years of work experience ($SD = 12.18$). Most followers had the Dutch nationality (84.6%). There were 45 women (34.6%) and 85 men (65.4%) in the leader sample with an average age of 43.57 ($SD = 11.95$). On average, the leaders had 22.53 years of work experience ($SD = 11.63$) and the majority had the Dutch nationality (86.2%). The dyads worked in a variety of industries, with the majority working in either the business sector (16.2%), the production industry (15.4%) or in wholesale or retail (11.5%). Other sectors that were represented included but are not limited to the cultural sector, the IT sector, the healthcare sector, and the educational sector.

Eight undergraduate students collected the data as part of their bachelor thesis in early 2020. The research was conducted in compliance with international ethical standards, including APA ethical standards and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The inclusion criteria for the dyads were (1) being 18 year or older, (2) being employed and (3) working together with a supervisor or supervising at least one follower. Participants could sign up by sending both their own and their leader's/ follower's email addresses to the students or by filling them out in the online sign-up questionnaire that was included in the invitation used by the students. The students recruited participants via their personal networks as well as via social media platforms such as LinkedIn, which increases the heterogeneity of our sample (Demerouti & Rispens, 2014). When leaders or followers signed up, the other party (i.e., the follower or the leader) received an email thanking them for their willingness to participate and informing them that they would receive another email with the link to the questionnaire at the start of the following week. Participants received this email the next Monday, with reminders on Wednesday and Friday, and provided informed consent before participating in the study. To ensure confidentiality, we assigned each dyad a code (A, B, C, etc.) and removed their email addresses from the data file. As

an incentive, participants could opt to receive a personality report including their scores and an explanation of the six personality dimensions by email.

Measures

To measure both the leader's and the follower's HEXACO personality traits, the HEXACO Personality Inventory – Revised (HEXACO-PI-R; Ashton & Lee, 2008; De Vries et al., 2009) was used. With 16 items each, this questionnaire measures the personality dimensions honesty-humility ($a = .81$ for leaders; $a = .76$ for followers), emotionality ($a = .81$ for leaders; $a = .83$ for followers), extraversion ($a = .76$ for leaders; $a = .76$ for followers), agreeableness ($a = .74$ for leaders; $a = .83$ for followers), conscientiousness ($a = .75$ for leaders; $a = .78$ for followers), and openness to experience ($a = .80$ for leaders; $a = .81$ for followers) on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Please visit www.hexaco.org for all items.

Followers indicated their own levels of work engagement using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). This questionnaire measures the three facets of engagement – vigour, dedication, and absorption – with three items each. Example items are: "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (vigour), "I am proud of the work that I do" (dedication), and "I get carried away when I'm working" (absorption). All items were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale had very good reliability with $a = .88$.

Strategy of analysis

To test our hypotheses, we used polynomial regression analyses (Edwards, 1994) with response surface analysis (Box & Draper, 1987). Polynomial regression analysis is a powerful technique to analyse how combinations of two predictor variables affect an outcome variable, especially if one is interested in the effects of the agreement or (the direction of) discrepancy between two predictors (Shanock et al., 2010). Compared to traditional analysis techniques, such as difference scores and moderated regression, polynomial regression with response surface analysis has more explanatory power (for an overview of the differences and the advantages see Shanock et al., 2010). Response surface analysis can be used to graphically represent the results of the polynomial regression analyses in a three-dimensional space (Edwards & Parry, 1993). Following recommendations by Shanock et al. (2010), we first centred the predictor variables around the midpoint of the scale (i.e., 3 for a 5-point scale). Next, we examined whether more than half of the scores were more than half a standard deviation above or below the mean, to check whether it makes sense to investigate discrepancies. As this was the case for all predictor variables, we continued to create the necessary new variables, namely the squared centred predictor variables and the cross-products of the centred predictor variables.

Response surface analysis provides four indices which also function as the input for the response surface plot. First, a_1 represents the slope of the line of perfect agreement and a_2 indicates the curvature along this line of perfect agreement. When a_1 is significant, it means that as both follower and leader scores on a personality dimension increase (or decrease), so does the outcome (i.e., work engagement). When a_2 is significant, it means that there is a non-linear relation between follower-leader agreement on a personality dimension and followers' work engagement. a_3 and a_4 indicate how discrepancy in follower-leader personality relates to followers' work engagement. When a_4 is significant, it means that work engagement increases or decreases as the discrepancy between follower-leader scores on a certain personality trait increases. Finally, a significant a_3 indicates that the direction of the discrepancy (i.e., leader scoring higher or lower compared to the follower) matters to follower's engagement. Following H1, we expect a_3 and a_4 to be significant, while for H2 we only expect a_4 to be significant.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations between followers and leaders' HEXACO personality traits and followers' work engagement. With the exception of followers' extraversion ($r = .240$, $p < .01$), followers' and leaders' personality traits are unrelated to followers' work engagement.[2]

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between follower-leader HEXACO personality dimensions and followers' work engagement.

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1. Age$_F$	35.37	12.96	-														
2. Gender$_F$	1.46	0.50	−.150	-													
3. Honesty-Humility$_F$	3.60	0.48	.250**	−.025	-												
4. Emotionality$_F$	3.01	0.57	−.186*	.498***	.065	-											
5. Extraversion$_F$	3.65	0.44	.075	−.011	.082	−.103	-										
6. Agreeableness$_F$	3.07	0.55	.059	−.171	.063	.038	.032	-									
7. Conscientiousness$_F$	3.71	0.48	−.047	−.030	.180*	.039	−.026	−.024	-								
8. Openness to Experience$_F$	3.19	0.60	−.058	.051	−.195*	−.141	.146	−.022	.004	-							
9. Honesty-Humility$_L$	3.81	0.50	.199*	−.037	.111	−.057	.011	.081	−.092	−.061	-						
10. Emotionality$_L$	2.85	0.54	−.138	.247**	−.010	.142	.074	−.072	−.063	.044	−.037	-					
11. Extraversion$_L$	3.80	0.42	.117	.047	.036	−.089	−.052	−.108	−.058	−.030	−.030	−.273**	-				
12. Agreeableness$_L$	3.05	0.44	−.075	−.017	.028	.091	−.216*	.122	.039	−.042	.113	−.147	.134	-			
13. Conscientiousness$_L$	3.71	0.44	.057	−.101	−.067	.013	−.261**	−.011	−.142	−.122	.166	.032	.142	−.067	-		
14. Openness to Experience$_L$	3.28	0.56	.218*	.109	.051	−.061	.082	.063	.143	.293***	−.049	.037	.029	.084	−.067	-	
15. Work engagement$_F$	3.80	0.62	.083	−.113	.116	−.032	.240**	.117	.053	.113	.028	−.102	.035	−.073	−.150	.025	-

Note: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. F = Follower; L = Leader. Gender: 1 = male; 2 = female.

Table 2. Results of polynomial regression analyses for emotionality and openness to experience.

	Emotionality			Openness to experience		
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
Centered_L	.002	.110	.987	−.160	.113	.155
Centered_F	−.014	.099	.891	.078	.106	.465
$\text{Squared}_L{}^2$	.312*	.129	.016	−.041	.146	.779
$\text{Squared}_F{}^2$	.034	.141	.811	−.299*	.130	.022
$\text{Centered}_L \times \text{Centered}_F$	−.426*	.185	.021	.437*	.198	.028
a_1	−.012	.135	.930	−.083	.139	.552
a_2	−.081	.230	.725	.097	.192	.614
a_3	.015	.160	.924	−.238	.170	.161
a_4	.772*	.301	.010	−.776*	.365	.033

Note. Reported estimates are unstandardized estimates. L= Leader, F= Follower.
*$p < .05$.

Table 3. Results of polynomial regression analyses for honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

	Honesty-humility			Extraversion			Agreeableness			Conscientiousness		
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
Centered_L	.225	.282	.424	−.381	.406	.349	−.106	.127	.407	.062	.347	.858
Centered_F	.174	.268	.516	−.366	.379	.333	.090	.098	.357	.254	.268	.343
$\text{Squared}_L{}^2$	−.115	.172	.505	.292	.201	.145	.017	.177	.921	−.191	.165	.245
$\text{Squared}_F{}^2$	.041	.161	.800	.440*	.208	.034	.095	.133	.473	−.033	.165	.840
$\text{Centered}_L \times \text{Centered}_F$	−.056	.198	.779	.224	.359	.532	.118	.219	.590	.126	.231	.584
a_1	.399	.412	.332	−.747	.678	.271	−.015	.152	.920	.316	.520	.544
a_2	−.130	.314	.680	.957	.492	.052	.230	.252	.361	−.098	.348	.778
a_3	.052	.365	.888	−.014	.396	.971	−.196	.169	.246	−.192	.337	.569
a_4	−.018	.308	.953	.508	.466	.276	−.005	.362	.988	−.351	.281	.211

Note. Reported estimates are unstandardized estimates. L = Leader, F = Follower.* $p < .05$.

Polynomial regression analysis

To test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2,[3] we created a model including the centred and squared follower-leader HEXACO dimensions as well as the cross-products (e.g., centred follower emotionality x centred leader emotionality) as predictors of followers' work engagement. Although we tested the fit in follower-leader personality dimensions for all HEXACO dimensions, we focus here on the findings for the hypothesized dimensions emotionality and openness to experience (see Table 2). In line with our expectations, no effects were found for follower-leader personality discrepancy (nor their agreement) in terms of honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (see Table 3). Within polynomial regression, only the a indices are interpreted, and those show discrepancy effects for both follower-leader emotionality and openness to experience fit on followers' work engagement (see Table 2). First, the results show that the higher the discrepancy between follower-leader emotionality, the more engaged followers are in their work. Surprisingly, the direction of this discrepancy did not matter (i.e., a_3 is not significant; see Table 2). This means that followers are more engaged in their work when they are higher in emotionality compared to their leader, which support our first hypothesis, but also unexpectedly when followers are lower in emotionality compared to their leader (see Figure 1). Next, in support of Hypothesis 2, we found that the higher the discrepancy between follower-leader openness to experience, the less engaged followers were in their work. That is, when followers are more open to new experiences compared to their leader, followers are less engaged in their work. Additionally, when followers score lower on openness to
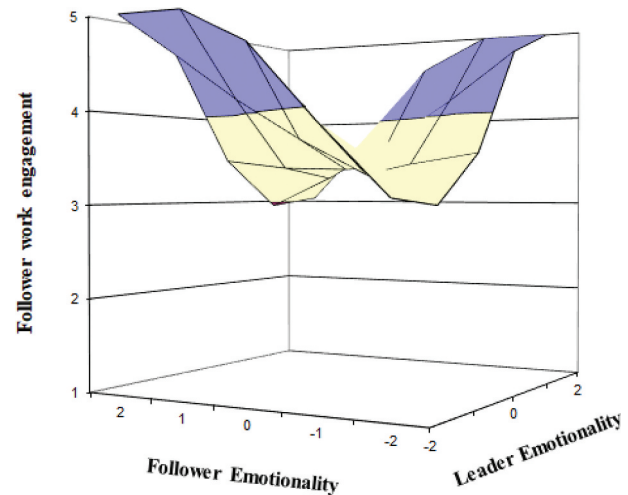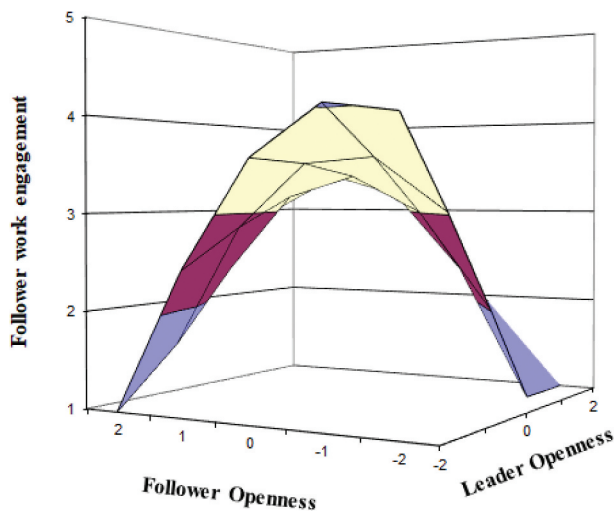

Figure 1. Response surface plot for the relation between follower-leader emotionality fit and follower's work engagement.

experience compared to their leader, followers are also less engaged in their work (see Figure 2). Both findings are in line with our expectations and therefore support Hypothesis 2. The model including the fit between all follower-leader HEXACO personality dimensions explained 28.7% of the variance in followers' work engagement.

Discussion

Based on person-supervisor complementary fit and JD-R theory, we examined if complementary follower-leader

Figure 2. Response surface plot for the relation between follower-leader openness to experience fit and follower's work engagement.

personality fit, which exists if there is a discrepancy in followers' and leaders' personality traits, on the HEXACO dimensions emotionality and openness to experience predicts followers' work engagement. In line with our expectations, we found that complementary fit in emotionality and openness to experience, but not in honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, were related to followers' work engagement. Specifically, complementary fit in emotionality is associated with increased work engagement, whereas complementary fit in openness to experience is associated with decreased work engagement among followers.

Our findings demonstrate that a discrepancy between followers' and leaders' emotionality is beneficial to followers' work engagement, irrespective of the direction of the discrepancy. In other words, followers are more engaged in their work when they score either higher or lower on emotionality compared to their leader. The former finding confirms our expectation, suggesting that leaders who score lower on emotionality are a source of support to their followers (i.e., a job resource), complementing their followers' higher levels of emotionality. We did, however, not expect to find that higher follower emotionality paired with lower leader emotionality is associated with higher levels of work engagement among followers. Possibly, working with an anxious, dependent leader who needs comfort from others (Ashton et al., 2014) provides a challenging opportunity for independent and fearless followers (Ashton & Lee, 2004) to exert some upward influence and gain important resources. Another explanation could be that emotional leaders seek emotional support from their emotionally more stable followers, through which these followers consider the work they do to be more meaningful, which is a well-known predictor of employee work engagement (Allan et al., 2019). Future research should corroborate this finding given that it was not hypothesized in the current study.

Exactly opposite to the findings for emotionality and in line with our expectations, we found that followers are less engaged in their work when there is a discrepancy between followers' and leaders' openness to experience in either direction. This finding supports our prediction that followers who are paired with leaders who score higher on openness to experience might feel overwhelmed by their leaders' desire to explore new possibilities and to pursue innovative goals. It seems that these followers instead prefer a calm and stable work environment. This mismatch may therefore be a hindrance demand, leading to reduced levels of employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Crawford et al., 2010). The opposite also holds true: If followers score higher on openness to experience compared to their leader, followers might feel hindered in their need to be creative and innovative in their job because their leaders do not appreciate or allow such behaviour, which subsequently relates negatively to followers' work engagement.

Theoretical implications

Our study adds to the limited knowledge about the HEXACO personality dimensions as antecedents of work engagement. Currently, the nomological network concerning the antecedents of employee work engagement mainly consists of situational factors within the work environment, such as employees' job resources and job demands, leader behaviours, and HR practices (Breevaart et al., 2021). Yet, a recent meta-analysis by Young et al. (2018) suggests that 48.10% of the variance in work engagement is explained by personality. In addition, we found that follower-leader complementary fit in personality explained 28.7% of the variance in work engagement. These numbers indicate that the role of dispositional factors, as well as their interaction with situational factors, in explaining employee work engagement should not be underestimated and deserves more research attention.

Our findings are in line with research on the relation between employee personality and employee work engagement (Young et al., 2018), showing that some, but not all, personality dimensions are important dispositional predictors of employees' work engagement. Whereas Young et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis showed that only extraversion and conscientiousness were predictive of employee engagement, we showed that only extraverted followers were more engaged in their work. More importantly, we showed that solely follower-leader complementary fit in emotionality and openness to experience predicted follower engagement. Together, these findings show that different personality dimensions are directly and interactively related to employee work engagement. Interestingly, leaders' HEXACO personality traits were unrelated to follower's work engagement in our study.

Second, our study is among the first to examine how follower and leader personality interactions are related to follower work engagement. Research taking a leader-centred approach has shown that leaders play a determinative role in their followers' engagement. Different types of leader behaviours, such as empowering followers and challenging them to think out of the box, relate to employee work engagement (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). In an attempt to include followers in the process, some studies also examined for whom (e.g., those who have a higher need for leadership), and under which circumstances these leadership influences are stronger (e.g., Breevaart et al., 2016). Our study is among the few to focus on the effects of

complementary fit in follower and leader personality characteristics. Unlike Yang et al. (2017), who found a positive effect of follower-leader similarity in their proactive personality, we did not find any similarity effects of follower-leader HEXACO personality dimensions on follower work engagement. Instead, we highlight the importance of follower-leader personality discrepancies in emotionality and openness to experience for followers' work engagement. While existing studies found little support for the effects of follower-leader complementary personality fit on attitudes and performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), we show that it does affect followers' work-related well-being (i.e., their work engagement). This is in line with findings by Yang et al. (2017) who showed that employees were more engaged in their work when they differed (i.e., scored higher) from their leader in proactive personality.

Taken together, these findings raise questions about the importance of studying follower-leader personality fit to understand a phenomenon such as employee work engagement. One interpretation of our findings could be that the impact of follower-leader personality fit on work engagement is limited considering that only complementary fit in two personality dimensions – emotionality and openness to experience – related to followers' work engagement. Yet, our study, as well as previous research (Young et al., 2018), shows that complementary fit in these personality predictors explain a substantial amount of variance in employee engagement, meaning that much can be gained by increasing (for emotionality and proactive personality; Yang et al., 2017) or decreasing (for openness) follower-leader complementary fit. This is especially noteworthy considering that there is much room for improving employee engagement as only 19% of employees in Europe consider themselves to be highly engaged (Schaufeli, 2018). The effects of engagement-enhancing interventions are also rather small (Hedges' g = .29; Knight et al., 2017), further emphasizing that capitalizing on the predictive validity of follower-leader complementary personality fit for work engagement can be promising. Future research should examine if our findings also apply to other outcomes, such as burnout or performance. Given that personality explains more variance in work engagement (Young et al., 2018) than in job performance (Lee et al., 2019; Pletzer et al., 2019), one could indeed expect that the effect of follower-leader complementary personality fit are stronger for motivational than for behavioural outcomes.

Practical implications

Overall, the current findings indicate that organizations need to take a more nuanced approach when matching leaders with followers, especially when the intention is to build long-lasting work relationships. One possibility would be to match leaders with followers based on their personality traits. For example, organizations could try to avoid matching leaders with followers who exhibit different scores on openness to experience. But follower-leader matching is admittedly not always possible in organizations and often, leaders and followers work in teams, rather than in dyads. Therefore, when composing and training teams, it is important to consider the role of personality and personality fit in a broader context. Our findings provide insights about when interpersonal differences between

a leader and a follower may negatively affect followers' work engagement (i.e., when there is a discrepancy in leaders' and followers' openness to experience). Organizations could create awareness of the effects of conflicting follower-leader traits among leaders in leadership training and development programs. Subsequently, leaders could be encouraged to adapt the expression of their own traits in a way that their leadership behaviour matches the needs of their followers. For followers who score higher on openness to experience compared to their leader, the leader could, for example, decide to put their follower's unconventional ideas (Ashton et al., 2004) to use in a project or context that the leader also feels comfortable with. Similarly, leaders who score higher on openness to experience need to consider the needs of followers lower in openness to experience by, for example, creating a calm and stable work environment.

Strengths, limitations and ideas for future research

Strengths of our study are the use of polynomial regression analyses, which have been scarcely used to study person-supervisor fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), and the inclusion of leader and follower ratings of their own personality, which limits common-method bias. Results may, however, be even stronger for *perceived* differences in personality. While research comparing self-rated with other-rated (i.e., perceived) personality similarity in an organizational setting is, to the best of our knowledge, virtually absent, findings from other fields indicate that the effects of perceived similarity and difference outweigh the effects of actual similarity and difference (e.g., for generational differences or when predicting friendship intensity; Lester et al., 2012; Selfhout et al., 2009). Future research should examine if perceived or actual complementary personality fit between followers and leaders exhibits stronger relations with work engagement, and whether what is good for the follower (e.g., higher follower emotionality and lower leader emotionality) is also beneficial to the leader (e.g., leader's work engagement) and/or the organization (i.e., performance effects).

The current study is the first to examine the effects of follower-leader HEXACO personality fit on followers' work engagement. Our results are promising and call for future research to further explore this relation. What are the underlying mechanisms that explain why follower-leader complementarity in emotionality and openness to experience is related to followers' work engagement? An obvious starting point would be to examine whether followers perceive complementary personality fit with their leader to be a resource, challenge, or hindrance as we propose in our study. For emotionality, it would be interesting to examine whether followers feel more supported by their leader when their leader scores lower on emotionality compared to them. Additionally, for openness to experience, future research could focus on the experience of hindrance demands such as pressure and conflict as an underlying mechanism to explain why followers who score lower on openness to experience compared to their leader (and vice versa) are less engaged in their work. It could also be that, depending on the directionality of the complementarity, leaders show different types of behaviours towards their followers. Specifically, we call for research that focuses not

only on personality traits, but also on the behavioural manifestations of those traits. For example, increased task-oriented behaviour of leaders low in emotionality could be responsible for the increased levels of work engagement among followers scoring high on emotionality. Future research therefore needs to examine why exactly complementary follower-leader personality fit relates to followers' work engagement, considering both the needs of the follower, such as the need for structure for those followers who are easily stressed (i.e., high on emotionality) and the behaviour of the leader, such as the provision of structure by leaders low on emotionality.

The current study is limited in that it was correlational in nature. As such, we can only rely on the conceptual trait-based causality inference which holds that personality is generally assumed to be relatively stable and therefore unlikely to be influenced by behaviours, but we do not exert (quasi-)experimental control to establish causality. An alternative interpretation of the current findings could, for example, be that highly engaged followers who score high on emotionality actively seek leaders with low scores on emotionality. Future research should therefore examine if such *situation selection* (De Vries et al., 2016) actually takes place among applicants or among job incumbents when changing jobs within organizations to rule out this alternative explanation of the current findings. Although we studied actual (and not perceived) fit, our findings are still based on self-reported data, which suffer from a variety of methodological limitations (e.g., social desirability bias, inability for introspection, etc.). Future research should therefore corroborate our results based on other-ratings or behavioural observations of personality and work engagement.

Conclusion

Most research either holds that leaders exert significant influence on followers' work-related well-being or that employees' individual differences predict their own well-being. Combining these two approaches, we demonstrated that it is crucial to examine the incongruence between leaders' and followers' personality traits. More specifically, we found that followers were more engaged when there was a higher discrepancy between their leaders' and their own emotionality, whereas they were less engaged when there was higher discrepancy between themselves and their leaders on openness to experience. Organizations can benefit from these findings by matching leaders with followers based on their personality traits to increase levels of work engagement.

Notes

1. For unpublished studies see, for example, De Villiers (2015) and Machiha and Brew (2019).
2. At the reviewers' discretion, we performed a CFA on our hypothesized variables. This model included leader and follower emotionality and openness to experience (4 factors with 4 indicators each) and follower work engagement (1 factor with 3 indicators). All indicators loaded significantly ($p < .001$) onto their intended factor and the model showed acceptable fit to the data ($\chi2 = 213.987^{***}$ (142); CFI = .871; RMSEA = .062; SRMR = .076).
3. We also ran our analyses with leader-follower relationship tenure as a control variable, which did not affect our results.

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