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MOOD AND THE EVALUATION OF LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

Research on the evaluation of leaders has shown that evaluation ratings are prone to several biases. The present study deals with one possible bias, namely, the relationship between mood and the perception or evaluation of a leader. The affect-as-information framework, which indicates that mood influences the response to certain kinds of questions, constitutes the theoretical background of the study. In the study, we ask students to indicate their mood, then to read a description of a leader (either transformational or transactional) and finally to evaluate the leader with respect to different leadership styles. The results indicate that mood is related to the perception of management-by-exception passive, but not others, e.g., transformational leadership. Reasons for these outcomes are discussed and implications for future research and organizational practice presented.

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INTRODUCTION

Subordinates evaluate their leaders on different occasions. Frequently their evaluation is used as the basis for the further development of the leader (Atwater & Waldman, 1998; Beehr, Ivanitskaya, Hansen, Erofeev, & Gudanowski, 2001). Several authors showed that the agreement between self and other ratings in this process is rather low (e.g., Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Brett & Atwater, 2001; Paul, Schyns, Wolfram, & Mohr, 2003; Yammarino & Atwater, 1997).

The disagreement might be related to different kinds of influences that play a role in the process of ratings. According to Harris and Schaubroeck (1988), different biases can be observed on the leaders' as well as the followers' side. Leaders, for example, may be subject to an egocentric bias when rating themselves (and, thus, indicate higher self-ratings in comparison to other ratings). Also, leaders and followers (just as actors and observers in general) have different observational opportunities and, therefore, may attribute behavior differently. In general, actors often attribute their behavior to unstable sources, such as situational influences, whereas observers frequently attribute behavior to stable causes, such as personality (Heider, 1958).

So far researchers have focused specifically on influences on the followers' side of evaluation or perception [1], referring to effects of either implicit leadership theories (Eden & Leviathan, 1975; Schyns & Felfe, 2003) or personality (Felfe & Schyns, 2003). Hence, there is some knowledge about stable characteristics of followers. Nonetheless, the effects of yet another factor that might affect evaluation, namely the mood of the evaluator, have received (relatively) little scientific attention. In this paper, we investigate how the mood of the evaluators of a leader affects their perception of the leader's leadership style. In the following section, we will describe how mood may affect the perception and evaluation of leaders.

LEADERSHIP

A model of leadership often used in research is Bass' (1985) full-range of leadership model. It comprises transformational leadership (with five subscales: idealized influence (attributed and behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), transactional leadership (contingent reward and management-by-exception active and management-by-exception passive), and laissez-faire leadership. The model ranges from exceptional (transformational leadership) to non-leadership (laissez-faire leadership).

According to Bass (1990: 53), "the transformational leader asks followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group, organization, or society; to consider their long-term needs to develop themselves, rather than their needs of the moment; and to become aware of what is really important." Transactional leadership refers to "the exchange relationship between leaders and followers to meet their own self-interests" (Bass, 1999: 10). In laissez-faire leadership (also known as non-leadership), leaders avoid displaying leadership whatsoever (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Empirical research has demonstrated that transformational leadership is positively related to performance and hence highly effective (see for a meta-analysis Lowe, Kroek, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). Transactional leadership can be considered effective as well, although the performance related to this leadership style is lower than the one related to transformational leadership (Hater & Bass, 1988). Laissez-faire leadership style is negatively related to performance and therefore not successful (Bass & Avolio, 1990).

Den Hartog, Van Muijen, and Koopman (1997) re-analyzed the instrument to assess the full-range of leadership model (the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire; Bass & Avolio, 1990). They found that a differentiation between active (transformational and transactional leadership: contingent rewards, management-by-exception active) and passive styles (laissez-faire and transactional leadership: management-by-exception passive) fitted their data better than the model assumed by Bass and Avolio (1990) although the active factor could be separated into subdimensions similar to transformational and transactional leadership. The subscales of their three-factor solution are called inspirational leadership, rational-objective leadership, and

passive leadership. Whereas the inspirational leadership is almost identical to transformational leadership, the rational-objective leadership subscale comprises mainly the transactional subscales of contingent reward and management-by-exception active. The passive factor was composed of management-by-exception passive and laissez-faire leadership. Van Muijen, Den Hartog and Koopman (1997) found a positive relationship between the active components of the MLQ and commitment and a negative relationship between the passive component and commitment.

For the purposes of our study, we will consider transformational leadership, contingent reward and management-by-exception active as active and effective leadership styles, whereas management-by-exception passive and laissez-faire leadership as passive are less effective leadership styles.

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MOOD AND ITS EFFECT ON EVALUATION AND PERCEPTION

In their pioneering study, Schwarz and Clore (1983) focused on the possible effects of mood on the response to questionnaires on life-satisfaction. They found that participants relied on their present mood when judging their life satisfaction.

Generalizing from their results, we expect that mood would have an impact on the evaluation of others. From research on politicians (e.g., Isbell & Wyer, 1999; Ottati & Isbell, 1996), we can infer that some people tend to judge others less positively when they are in a bad mood. Ottati and Isbell (1996) found that this effect is moderated by expertise: while the effect held true for political novices (e.g., persons with almost no knowledge about politics), it was different for "experts," who judged politicians more positively when they were in a bad mood than when they were in a good mood.

Similarly, in a study simulating an organization, Fried, Levi, Ben-David, Tiegs, and Avital (2000) found that raters with negative mood tend to rate performance low whereas raters with positive mood tend to rate performance high.

We can, therefore, expect from both theory and research (e.g., Ottati & Isbell, 1996; Isbell & Wyer, 1999) that, in the context of leadership questioning, employees' perception of the style of leadership is related to their present mood. In case of management-by-exception passive and laissez faire we expect the following relationship: The worse the mood, the more likely the perception of the leadership style as management-by-exception passive or laissez faire (H1a and b). The basis for these hypotheses is that management-by-exception passive and laissez faire were found to be less effective than transformational leadership or the active dimensions of transactional leadership. This was especially the case when employees' ratings (such as their satisfaction) were examined (Lowe et al., 1996). We therefore assume that transformational and transactional (contingent reward and management-by-exception active) are considered to be more positive than management-by-exception passive or laissez faire bringing our hypotheses in line with the results mentioned above. On the basis of the research cited above, we assume that the effect of mood on the perception of leadership is more pronounced for bad mood.

METHOD

Participants

Eighty-four Dutch students took part in the study (66 women and 13 men, five not reported) of whom 73 were psychology students and seven were Human Resources Management students; one person studied a related subject. The mean age of the participants was 20 years ($SD = 3.0$). The respondents had an average work experience of 2.7 years ($SD = 1.1$) and only three of them indicated they had no work experience at all (five not reported); 40.4% of all the participants had worked full time (either during the holidays or otherwise).

Procedure

The data reported here constitute a part of a larger experimental study on the perception of leadership. In the course of the study, we asked students receiving course credits to fill in a questionnaire at time 1 (t1) and then again two weeks later (t2). The current study is based only on the data gathered at t2. The design of the study was as follows: Students first had to indicate their mood. We then divided the students into two random groups and requested them to read a description of a leader (either transformational or transactional, depending on the group; for more details on the description see section instruments) and to rate the respective leaders with respect to leadership behavior. We decided against an induction of mood, as we wanted to have the mood aspect as close to a natural setting as possible. Consequently, "natural" variance of mood was assessed here.

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Measures

Vignette. Half of the participants read a description of a transformational leader, the other half of a transactional leader. The descriptions were based on descriptions by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996). The participants were placed in the context of an introduction to a traineeship. We told the students to image that the given leader would welcome them to a traineeship with the following speech: (1) "Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Today we are starting start our project 'Paper for People' that proposes an important challenge for BKC. With this product, we will establish a new standard with respect to the quality and protection of ecological resources. If we are successful — and I'm convinced we will be — this will be a milestone in our branch. Together we can be proud of this...." (transformational leader group); or (2) "Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Today we will start our project 'Paper for People'. The pilot of the project on which you are going to work will last about two months. I expect you to be ready for action, flexible, and dedicated. Of course, overtime is paid extra..." (transactional leader group). Hence, whereas the transformational leader emphasized distant goals and common effort, the transactional leader stressed the exchange aspect for what is done. Both groups received the same description of the project and related tasks.

Perception of Leadership [2]. We asked participants to rate the leaders described in the vignette using the transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire subscales of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass and Avolio, 1990; Dutch translation by Vinkenbunrg &

van Engen, 2002[3]). As the factor structure is not really clear (for different factor solutions see also Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Den Hartog, et al., 1997; Schyns, 2001), a Maximum Likelihood factor analysis was conducted in order to define the factor structure in the data set. The hypothesized five-factor structure for transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990) did not prove to be replicable. The items that were supposed to load on the same factor did not, and eight items would have had to be deleted due to low factor loadings or double loadings. We decided therefore to use a one-factor solution. Still, four items had to be deleted due to low factor loadings. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the remaining fifteen items of the combined scale was $\text{Alpha} = .89$. The answer categories ranged from 1 (almost always) to 5 (never). We recoded the items in a way that higher values mean higher transformational leadership. For contingent reward no interpretable factor structure emerged. Of the four items of this scale, only two loaded high on the first factor. Hence, the scale was not taken into account in the further analyses. For management-by-exception active, one of the four items had to be eliminated due to a low factor loading. The internal consistency was $.58$ for the remaining three items. For management-by-exception passive, the internal consistency was $.72$ for three items (one item deleted due to low factor loading). An internal consistency of $.66$ emerged for laissez-faire leadership. Again, items were recoded so high scores reflect a high value on the respective leadership style. All scores we used in our analyses were sumscores divided by number of items. The reported instruments had an internal consistency higher than necessary (see endnote 2).

Mood. The present mood of the participants was assessed using the Amsterdam Mood Scale (De Sonnevile, Schaap, & Elshoud, 1984). The scale contains ten subscales: depressive, frolicsome, shy, bad-tempered, angry, tired, conscientious, indifferent, arrogant, and terrified. In the introduction to the questionnaire, it was stressed that the items refer to the mood at the given moment and not to what one is like in general. For our analysis, we only took into account the subscales depressive and angry, as these seemed to best represent bad mood for which we expected a more pronounced effect (see above). Cronbach's alpha was $.87$ for depressive and $.86$ for angry. All mood subscales run from 0 (absolutely not) to 4 (very good). For the analyses, we added the scores (sumscores divided by the number of items) of the depressive and the angry subscales and used an additive score: The higher the score, the worse the mood of the participant.

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In Table 1 the means, standard deviation, internal consistencies of the scales and the intercorrelations of the scales are given.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistencies, and Intercorrelations of the Scales

	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4
1. TL	3.88	0.48	.88				
2. MBA	3.49	0.66	.58	-.25*			
3. MBP	2.49	0.92	.72	.10	.04		
4.	1.92	0.51	.66	-	-		

Laissez-faire				.58**	.02	.03	
5. Mood	0.43	0.55		.04	-.05	.26*	.13

Note: TL = Transformational leadership; MBA = Management-by-exception active; MBP = Management-by-exception passive; * $p < .05$ (2-tailed); ** $p < .01$ level (2-tailed).

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

We conducted t-tests to examine whether men and women differed with respect to any of the scales used in this study. As we conducted nine tests at the same time, an adjustment of the alpha-level was necessary ($0.05/9 = 0.0056$). Since none of the differences reached this alpha level, we assumed that men and women do not differ on these scales.

The same procedure was repeated for age. Since no correlation reached a significance level of 0.001, we concluded that age and the instruments used are not related. The same conclusion was reached for work experience.

Before testing our hypotheses, we tested in how far participants receiving the description of a transformational leader rated their leader more transformational than participants receiving the description of a transactional leader rated their leader. The means were higher for the rating of the transformational leader than for the rating of the transactional leader ($M = 3.98$ versus $M = 3.77$, $t(7) = -1.96$). The difference between the groups of participants, however, was not significant ($p = .053$).

We conducted the same analysis for differences in management-by-exception active, management-by-exception passive and laissez-faire. Here the group rating a transactional leader should have higher values than the one rating a transformational leader. Again, the differences did not become significant (M transactional leader group = 3.51, M transformational leader group = 3.48, $t(78) = 0.27$, $p = .79$). No significant differences emerged between the groups on management-by-exception passive and laissez-faire.

Having a look at the absolute value of bad mood (see Table 1), we can see that our participants were rather low in bad mood.

Test of Hypotheses and Exploratory Analysis

We conducted regression analyses to test H1a and b (see Table 2). In order to control for the effects of leader behavior on the perception of leadership, we controlled for the vignettes given. The results indicate support for H1a but not for H1b (the worse the mood, the more likely the perception of the leadership style as (a) management-by-exception passive or (b) laissez faire). For management-by-exception passive the beta-coefficient for mood became significant and is in the expected direction. For laissez-faire no significant effect emerged, but the effect is in the right direction.

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In addition, we conducted an exploratory analysis to assess whether negative mood was negatively related to perceptions of more effective leadership styles, transformational leadership and management-by-exception active. We also conducted a regression analysis to examine this point (see table 3). We could not conduct the analysis for contingent reward, as we could not confirm the scale in this study. Results show that there is no significant effect of mood on the evaluation of active leadership.

To conclude, we can infer that mood has an impact on the evaluation of one of the passive leadership styles (management-by-exception passive) but not on the evaluation of active leadership.

Table 2: Regression of Perception of Passive Leadership Styles on Negative Mood and Leader Behavior (H 1a and b)

	Management-by-exception passive				Laissez-faire			
	B	Beta	R	R_	B	Beta	R	R_
Constant	2.31		.26	.07	1.79		.20	.04
Vignette	-0.02	-.01			0.16	.16		
Mood	0.43	.26*			0.12	.12		

Note: * $p < .05$; leader behavior: 1 = transformational, 0 = transactional

Table 3: Regression of Perception of Active Leadership Styles on Negative Mood and Leader Behavior

	Transformational leadership				Management-by-exception active			
	B	Beta	R	R_	B	Beta	R	R_
Constant	3.75		.22	.05	3.54		.07	.01
Vignette	0.21	.22			-0.06	-.05		
Mood	0.02	.05			-0.06	-.05		

DISCUSSION

In the study, the impact of mood on the evaluation of leadership was tested. Informed by the

affect-as-information framework by Schwarz and Clore (1983) as well as the results of studies on politicians (Ottati & Isbell, 1996), we expected that mood would be related to the perception of leadership. As expected, we found that - in the case of management-by-exception passive - mood is related to the perception of leadership. We found this effect even after controlling for leader behavior as given in a vignette and while working with "every day" kinds of mood, that is, without inducing any extreme kinds of mood (e.g., through frustrating our participants). Therefore, the moods we assessed here can be seen as equivalent to the moods organizations usually have to cope with. As to the effects of leader behavior, they were exactly as expected although not significant: the participants confronted with a transformational leader rated transformational leadership higher than those confronted with a transactional leader. The opposite was true for the rating of management-by-exception active: here participants rating a transactional leader had higher ratings than those rating a transformational leader. No differences emerged between the groups for the rating of passive leadership styles (management-by-exception passive and laissez-faire).

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From our results, we can infer that - when it comes to more passive leadership styles - mood has an impact on the evaluation of leaders. Still, such an interpretation can be attempted only with some caution: normally a leader and his/her subordinates spend a lot of time together and interact on regular basis, which was impossible in our design. Therefore, it is possible that in an organizational context the influences of mood would be less pronounced. Nevertheless, there are situations in which leaders are evaluated that are comparable to our experimental setting: e.g., selection on the basis of documents (such as CVs), interviews or evaluation in assessment centers. Here, it could be important for companies to be aware of possible effects of mood.

Limitations and Future Research

Certainly, when interpreting the results we should take into account that our subjects were students and that the setting was not very natural. A possible effect of mood on evaluation of leaders should be tested in organizations as well. Still, this might be difficult to achieve, as employees may be suspicious of the reasons for which they have to state their mood. This in turn could lead to a high missing rate or to a response bias. It is also possible that people become more aware of their mood when they have to indicate it in an unusual situation. This could lead to an effect similar to the one found by Schwarz and Clore (1983), who found that making participants conscious of their mood (in their case by referring to the weather) could diminish the impact of mood on the evaluation of life satisfaction (at least in the case of bad mood). In the case of the evaluation of leaders, it is possible that followers become conscious of their mood and perhaps also of the reasons for that mood, and, therefore, avoid letting it influence their rating of a given leader. If this interpretation is correct, it should undoubtedly influence the design of subsequent studies. What we would recommend is: (a) Mood should be assessed as the last variable of a questionnaire on leadership, as an earlier assessment may change the influence mood would otherwise have had. This is in line with findings by other researchers who discovered that the order of questions has effects on the response to following questions (Osberg, 1985). (b) Mood should be assessed in non-reactive ways such as through observation.

Another limitation of our study is that the assessment of leadership was not based on

performance evaluation but on the evaluation of leader behavior. In addition, we manipulated leadership behavior using a description of leaders but manipulation check was not very convincing. Future research should try to make a stronger manipulation. Furthermore, using an assessment that is more related to performance of and / or the relationship with a leader (such as Leader-Member Exchange; Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) could lead to different results. Effects of mood could even be more pronounced in this case. Clearly, mood could be assessed in a more explicit way. In addition, the mean values of bad mood are not very high in our sample. We still found effects of mood but future research should assess in how far extreme kinds of mood relate to the rating of leaders.

In addition, the number of participants was rather low. Still, some effects we observed were reasonably large. It can be assumed that with larger sample sizes the impact of mood on the evaluation of leader should be replicable.

ENDNOTES

1. In this paper, the terms perception and evaluation of leaders are used interchangeably. Whereas leadership questionnaires, strictly speaking, refer to a description of a leader (and, therefore, to the perception of the followers), they are often used in feedback (i.e., evaluation) processes. In addition, one leadership style is frequently considered to be superior (in this case, transformational leadership is considered to be superior to transactional leadership). Thus, leadership questionnaires contain an evaluative component.
2. We compared the empirically found internal consistencies to the necessary internal consistency using a formula by Marcel Croon (personal communication, 4th of December 2002). In order to assure a middle correlation between the items of $r = .25$ the number of items is taken into account. The formula reads: $\alpha = m / m + 3$.
3. Credit line = Research Edition Translation performed by Claartje Vinkenbunrg and Marloes van Engen date June 27, 2002. Translated and reproduced by special permission of the publisher, MIND GARDEN, Inc., Redwood City, CA, 94061, USA www.mindgarden.com from Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Copyright 1995, 2000 by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio. All rights reserved. Further reproduction is prohibited without the Publisher's written consent.
4. These papers can be obtained from the first author.

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AUTHORS' NOTE

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