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### When you can't follow the leader

*Inconsistency: Its antecedents and outcomes*

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## English Summary

### When you *can't* follow the leader Inconsistency: Its Antecedents and Outcomes

In order for leaders to respond flexibly to today's rapidly changing world, they must have a wide variety of behaviors at their disposal and be able to switch quickly depending on what the situation requires. At the same time, they are expected to behave consistently and predictably, something that seems problematic after the first statement. The solution to this problem seems to lie in distinguishing between *appropriate* and *inappropriate* variation. In the first variant, the reasons for variable behavior are clear (the new behavior fits the situation) or leaders explain why they exhibit certain behavior. However, not every leader is able and/or willing to demonstrate this behavior. In such cases leaders are perceived as inconsistent: they exhibit varying behavior without a clear reason in the eyes of the follower: *inappropriate* variation. While the positive side of behavioral variability has received a lot of attention in research, research into the negative, dark side is scarce. This justifies research into the construct of inconsistent leader behavior and its antecedents and outcomes.

In Chapter 2 we define the construct of inconsistent leader behavior, compare it to related constructs, and discuss the development of a scale to measure perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior. Four studies are discussed in this chapter. In the first study, we discuss the development and validation of the ILB-4, a four-item questionnaire to measure Inconsistent Leader Behavior (ILB). We test the validity and reliability of the scale, and test the relationship between inconsistent leader behavior and other leadership styles. Our scale is reliable and, as we expected, we find that our construct is positively associated with other dark forms of leadership and negatively with more positive leadership styles. In Studies 2 and 3, we discuss the development of two additional scales intended to measure more specific forms of inconsistency, namely inconsistency in initiating structure and in consideration. In these studies we test the reliability and validity of the specific scales. Furthermore, in these studies we test how the ILB-4 is related to the specific scales, we compare the relationship between ILB-4 and other constructs (both at leader and follower level) and that of the specific scales with these constructs. The specific scales are reliable and relate to other constructs in the expected manner. The correlations between the ILB-4 and other constructs are stronger than those of the specific scales. In the fourth and final study of this chapter, we study how perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior relate to constructs measured with the leader, in a so-called multi-source study. In this study, leaders rated their own level of narcissism and the

performance of their follower. Followers rated the quality of the bond with their leader and perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior. We find that perceptions of inconsistency are positively associated with narcissism and negatively with performance and the quality of the leader-follower bond. The results of the studies discussed in this chapter provide confidence in the developed scale and the scale provides a good starting point for further research into perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior.

Chapter 3 examines a predictor of perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior, leader narcissism. We find evidence for a positive relationship between leader narcissism and perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior. When we further include the gender of the leader in the analysis, we see that this positive relationship is stronger for female leaders. In this chapter we also look at follower performance as an outcome of perceptions of inconsistency and find that perceived inconsistent leader behavior is negatively related to follower performance. The quality of the bond with the leader plays a buffer role in this, in such a way that the negative relationship between inconsistent leader behavior and follower performance is strongest when the quality of the bond between leader and follower is poor.

Chapter 4 examines short- and long-term consequences of perceptions of inconsistency. In a large field study at a Brazilian bank, we find that perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior lead to a reduced sense of psychological safety, which in turn leads to more mental health-related absenteeism. Job autonomy can play a buffering role: the negative effect of perceptions of inconsistency on perceived psychological safety is reduced when followers experience a high degree of autonomy.

Chapter 5 looks at inconsistency from a different perspective: as decisions made by a referee that demonstrate inconsistency. In a scenario study we manipulate the consistency of decisions after two highly similar situations during a soccer match. We expected that inconsistency in decisions leads to anger and that anger is in turn positively related to both intentions for verbal aggression and actual aggressive behavior towards the referee. The favorability of the outcome (punishment or not) and the extent to which the participant identifies with the teams in the scenario (supporter or neutral spectator) are included as boundary conditions for the effect of inconsistency on anger. We find, as expected, that inconsistent decisions lead to anger and subsequently to (intentions for) aggressive behavior towards the referee. The strongest relationship between inconsistency and anger is found

among supporters in the unfavorable condition. The relationship between inconsistency and anger is weakest among supporters in the favorable condition.

In summary, this dissertation shows that inconsistent leader behavior is an important construct that shares overlap with, but is not identical to, other constructs on the dark side of the leadership literature. Our findings contribute to a better understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of perceptions of inconsistent leader behavior and provide insight into factors that strengthen or attenuate the relationships between antecedents, inconsistent leader behavior, and outcomes.



## Nederlandse Samenvatting

### Als je de leider *niet* kunt volgen Inconsistentie: De Oorzaken en Uitkomsten

Om als leider flexibel op de huidige, snel veranderende, wereld in te spelen moet je een grote variatie in gedragingen tot je beschikking hebben en snel kunnen schakelen afhankelijk van wat de situatie vraagt. Tegelijkertijd wordt van je verwacht dat je je consistent en voorspelbaar gedraagt, iets wat na het vorige problematisch lijkt. De oplossing voor dit probleem lijkt te liggen in het onderscheid tussen *gepaste* variatie en *ongepaste* variatie. Bij de eerste variant zijn de redenen voor variabel gedrag duidelijk (het nieuwe gedrag sluit aan bij de situatie) of leggen leiders uit waarom ze bepaald gedrag vertonen. Niet elke leider is echter in staat en/of bereid om dit gedrag te vertonen. Wat er dan gebeurt is dat leiders gezien worden als inconsistent: ze vertonen variërend gedrag zonder een voor de medewerker duidelijke reden, *ongepaste* variatie. Waar de positieve kant van variërend gedrag veel aandacht heeft gekregen in onderzoek, is onderzoek naar de negatieve, duistere, kant schaars. Dit rechtvaardigt onderzoek naar het construct ‘inconsistent leider gedrag’ en de voorspellers en gevolgen ervan.

In hoofdstuk 2 definiëren wij het construct inconsistent leider gedrag, vergelijken we het met gerelateerde constructen en wordt de ontwikkeling van een schaal besproken waarmee percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag kunnen worden gemeten. In dit hoofdstuk komen vier studies aan bod. In de eerste studie bespreken we het ontwikkelen en valideren van de ILB-4, een vragenlijst van vier items om *Inconsistent Leader Behavior (ILB)* te meten. We testen de validiteit en betrouwbaarheid van de schaal en testen de samenhang tussen inconsistent leider gedrag en andere leiderschapsstijlen. Onze schaal is betrouwbaar en zoals we verwachtten vinden we dat ons construct positief samenhangt met andere duistere vormen van leiderschap en negatief met meer positieve leiderschapsstijlen. In studie 2 en 3 bespreken we de ontwikkeling van twee extra schalen bedoeld om meer specifieke vormen van inconsistentie te meten, namelijk inconsistentie in het initiëren van structuur en in consideratie. In deze studies testen we de betrouwbaarheid en validiteit van de specifieke schalen. Verder testen we in deze studies hoe de ILB-4 samenhangt met de specifieke schalen, vergelijken we de samenhang tussen ILB-4 en andere constructen (zowel op leider- als medewerkerniveau) en die van de specifieke schalen met deze constructen. De specifieke schalen zijn betrouwbaar en hangen op de verwachte manier samen met andere constructen.



De samenhang tussen de ILB-4 en andere constructen is sterker dan die van de specifieke schalen. In de vierde en laatste studie van dit hoofdstuk bestuderen we hoe percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag samenhangen met constructen die bij de leider zijn gemeten, in een zogenaamde meerdere bronnen studie. Leaders beoordeelden in deze studie hun eigen level van narcisme en de prestatie van hun medewerker. Medewerkers beoordeelden de band met hun leidinggevende en de percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag. We vinden dat percepties van inconsistentie positief samenhangen met narcisme en negatief met prestatie en de kwaliteit van de band tussen leider en medewerker. De resultaten van de studies die in dit hoofdstuk worden besproken bieden vertrouwen in de ontwikkelde schaal en de schaal biedt een goed uitgangspunt voor verder onderzoek naar percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag.

In hoofdstuk 3 wordt een voorspeller van percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag onderzocht, narcisme van de leider. We vinden bewijs voor een positieve relatie tussen narcisme van de leider en percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag. Wanneer we verder het gender van de leider meenemen in de analyse, zien we dat deze positieve relatie sterker is voor vrouwelijke leiders. In dit hoofdstuk kijken we ook naar prestatie van de medewerker als uitkomst van percepties van inconsistentie. We vinden dat hoe meer inconsistent leider gedrag een medewerker waarneemt, hoe minder goed diens prestaties zijn. De kwaliteit van de band met de leidinggevende speelt hierin een verzachtende rol, op zo'n manier dat de negatieve relatie tussen inconsistent leider gedrag en prestatie van de medewerker het sterkst is wanneer de kwaliteit van de band tussen leidinggevende en medewerker slecht is.

In hoofdstuk 4 worden korte en lange termijn gevolgen van percepties van inconsistentie onderzocht. In een grote veldstudie bij een Braziliaanse bank vinden we dat percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag zorgen voor een verminderd gevoel van psychologische veiligheid, wat vervolgens leidt tot meer mentaal welzijn-gerelateerde absentie. Autonomie in het werk kan een verzachtende rol spelen: het negatieve effect van percepties van inconsistentie op de ervaren psychologische veiligheid is kleiner wanneer medewerkers een hoge mate van autonomie ervaren.

In hoofdstuk 5 wordt inconsistentie vanuit een ander perspectief bekeken: als inconsistente beslissingen van een scheidsrechter. In een scenariostudie manipuleren we de consistentie van beslissingen na twee gelijke situaties tijdens een voetbalwedstrijd. We verwachtten dat inconsistentie in beslissingen leidt tot woede en de woede vervolgens positief samenhangt met zowel intenties voor verbale agressie als daadwerkelijk agressief gedrag

jegens de scheidsrechter. De gunstigheid van de uitkomst (straf of niet) en de mate waarin de participant zich identificeert met de teams in het scenario (supporter of neutrale toeschouwer) worden meegenomen als randvoorwaarden voor het effect van inconsistentie op woede. We vinden, zoals verwacht, dat inconsistente beslissingen leiden tot woede en vervolgens tot (intenties voor) agressief gedrag jegens de scheidsrechter. De sterkste relatie tussen inconsistentie en woede vinden we bij supporters in de ongunstige conditie. De relatie tussen inconsistentie en woede is het zwakst bij supporters in de gunstige conditie.

Samenvattend laat dit proefschrift zien dat inconsistent leider gedrag een belangrijk construct is dat overlap vertoont met, maar niet gelijk is aan andere constructen aan de duistere kant van de leiderschapsliteratuur. Onze bevindingen dragen bij aan een beter begrip van de voorspellers en uitkomsten van percepties van inconsistent leider gedrag en geven inzicht in factoren die de relaties tussen voorspellers, inconsistent leider gedrag, en uitkomsten versterken of verzachten.



### **List of Authors**

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