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Communication Competence, Leadership Behaviors, and Employee Outcomes in Supervisor-Employee Relationships

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Abstract

Supervisor communication competence and leadership style were used to predict specific employee outcomes. In the study, 276 participants working in various industries completed measures of communication competence and leadership styles about their direct supervisor along with measures of their job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. As predicted, effective and appropriate communication were both positively related to satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. Furthermore, task- and relations-oriented leadership styles were both positively related to all three employee outcomes as well. Finally, regression analysis determined that effective communication and relations-oriented leadership were the best predictors of satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment.

Keywords

communication competence, leadership, job satisfaction, organizational commitment

A leader's behavior accounts for 25% of why people feel productive, motivated, energized, effective, and committed to their work (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Autocratic, directive, controlling, and dictatorial leadership styles have been found to be highly

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ineffective (Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008). Furthermore, effective communication is often cited as one of the most important attributes of a successful manager or supervisor (DiMeglio, 2007). Yet two thirds of American workers say that poor communication with management hinders them from doing their best work (Goleman, 1998). Specifically, Martin, Rich, and Gayle (2004) found that supervisors' communication style can encourage organizational citizenship behaviors. Richmond and McCroskey (2000) found that supervisor immediacy was related to employee motivation and job satisfaction. Consequently, a supervisor's behavior can have important ramifications both for the employee and the organization as a whole.

Communication competence and leadership styles are two perspectives through which we can examine supervisor behavior and its impact on employee outcomes. Specifically, how do leadership behaviors, which are enacted though communication, and communication competence influence employee outcomes such as satisfaction, motivation, and commitment? Furthermore, which leadership styles and aspects of communication competence seem to be most important at driving satisfaction, motivation, and commitment? Understanding these behaviors could help supervisors be more effective in their communication with employees, which could not only increase employee outcomes but could benefit the organization with increased productivity and reduced turnover.

The purpose of this study is to examine how supervisors (managers) engage in leadership behaviors and communication competence and the relationship of these two factors with the employee outcomes of satisfaction, motivation, and commitment. First, we will explore the idea of communication competence and the difference between effective and appropriate communication. Then we will explore task- and relations-oriented leadership styles. Finally, we will examine how competence and leadership style are related to the specific employee outcomes of satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, and explain how these findings can be applied for the training and development of future leaders and employees.

Literature Review

Communication Competence

Communication competence involves the quality of communication, which is commonly composed of the elements of appropriateness and effectiveness (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann & Kelly, 1981). Wiemann (1977) first argued that competent communicators accomplish their own interpersonal goals while helping their interactional partner pursue their goals. Spitzberg and Cupach (1981) stated: "Competent interaction can be viewed as a form of interpersonal influence, in which an individual is faced with the task of fulfilling communicative functions and goals (effectiveness) while maintaining conversational and interpersonal norms (appropriateness)" (p. 1). Cupach, Canary, and Spitzberg (2010) stated that competence is both about "getting ahead" while simultaneously "getting along." To be a competent communicator, one must attend to both the need to be effective and appropriate. Furthermore, these two

ideas are more complementary than they might appear, as fulfilling goals is often facilitated by meeting others' expectations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011).

Communication competencies are believed to be among the most central qualifications in the workforce (Curtis, Winsor, & Stephens, 1989; Hawkins & Fillion, 1999) and competence has been linked with occupational success (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Communication competence can be especially important in situations with disagreements or differing goals (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989), which are commonly found in the work environment. G. M. Johnson (1992) found that in the workplace, prosocial compliance gaining tactics used by a superior were rated as more competent than antisocial compliance gaining tactics. Furthermore, Berman and Hellweg (1989) found that perceived communication competence of a supervisor was related to the employee's satisfaction with the supervisor. Myers and Kassing (1998) found that a supervisor's communication competence was related to the level of organizational identification in subordinates. Finally, Madlock (2008) found that the perception of communication competence was related to employee satisfaction.

It is important to note, competence is a judgment or perception of a communication behavior (Spitzberg, 2000). Thus, it is not defined by a particular skill or behavior. It is a perception of an individual's communication appropriateness and effectiveness. However, Cupach et al. (2010) noted that the impression is unlikely to be arbitrary, as most of the time, "it will be predictable by the interactant's motivation, knowledge, skills, and certain aspects of the context in which the interaction is being evaluated" (p. 29).

The current study differs from previous work on communication competence in the workplace by measuring effectiveness and appropriateness separately. By doing this, we can measure the unique effects of effectiveness and appropriateness, as well as the interaction effect of the two. Furthermore, this work differs from previous work by examining multiple employee outcomes related to communication competence and leadership.

Leadership Styles

Northouse (2013) defined leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 5). Three key themes that emerge from the leadership literature define leadership as a form of influence (Hersey, 1984), the achievement of a common goal(s) (Bryman, 1992), and as symbolic, communicative behavior (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). These three themes intersect in Hackman and Johnson's (2013) definition of leadership: "Leadership is human symbolic communication that modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs" (p. 11). Furthermore, research has identified that leadership is dependent, in part, on the communication competence of the leader (Flauto, 1999). Therefore, communication is the primary way leaders achieve their goals and is a core element of leadership (de Vries & Bakker-Pieper, 2010).

The Styles Approach to leadership identifies leadership as being composed of two general kinds of behaviors: task and relationship behaviors (Northouse, 2013). More

recent studies have established theoretical and empirical support for this Styles Approach, though the specific terminology may differ (Carter & Greer, 2013; N. J. Johnson & Klee, 2007; Sherwood & DePaolo, 2005). For example, Burns (1978) identified the emphasis of task focus or relationship focus as transactional leadership (task focus) and transformational leadership (relationship focus; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). Hackman and Johnson (2013) identified these two orientations as task orientation and interpersonal orientation. Blake and McCanse (1991) classified leader behavior in terms of concern for production (which aligns with task) and people (which aligns with relational).

Yukl, Gordon, and Taber (2002) conducted a meta-analysis taxonomy of leadership behaviors across the research literature and found that leadership behaviors could be organized into three specific metacategories: task-oriented behaviors, relations-oriented behaviors, and change-oriented behaviors. This body of research provides a strong theoretical foundation for the task- and relations-orientations of leadership behavior, and provides a justification for why this leadership style is the focus of this present study.

Task-oriented leadership behaviors focus on goal accomplishment. These behaviors are intended to help employees achieve their goals and objectives, and are primarily focused on efficient uses of personnel and other resources (Yukl et al., 2002). Task-oriented behaviors can include a focus on the clarification of role expectations, monitoring the performance of team members, scheduling of work tasks, and an emphasis on the achievement of high reliability for services and operations (Stogdill, 1974; Yukl et al., 2002). With task orientation, leaders also can focus on production and the technical aspects of the job (Bowers & Seashore, 1966). In short, task leadership puts the emphasis on work procedures, activities, and goals.

While task-oriented leadership behavior is focused on efficiency and achievement of goals and tasks, the objective of relations-oriented leadership behaviors are to help and support subordinates by making them feel a part of the work group and to feel comfortable with the work situation. Relations-oriented leadership behaviors can include expressing encouragement to employees, increased levels of trust, respect, and camaraderie between the leader and the employees, and cooperation between employees (Stogdill, 1974; Yukl et al., 2002). Furthermore, relations-oriented leaders tend to take an interest in employees, giving special attention to their individual needs (Bowers & Seashore, 1966), empowering employees to take initiative, consulting employees for input when making important decisions, and providing recognition for achievements and contributions (Yukl et al., 2002). In short, relations-oriented leadership behaviors put an emphasis on treating employees with respect, building relationships, and making the work environment pleasant.

Each of these leadership behavior orientations has value to the function of an organization and for the personal and professional development of employees. However, similar to communication competence, it is argued that the most productive leadership approach is a combination of task- and interpersonal relations-leadership communication behaviors (Blake & McCanse, 1991). Blake and McCanse (1991) referred to this type of leadership as "Team Management" because it puts a strong emphasis on both

tasks and interpersonal relationships, and this leadership communication style has been associated with increased profits, productivity, and flow of communication between leaders and followers (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Additionally, Goleman's (2000) study of nearly 4,000 executives found that a blend of leadership approaches (coaching, affiliative, democratic, and authoritative) created the best climate and business performance; these four leadership approaches comprised differing levels of task- and relations-oriented communicative practices.

Although the Styles Approach has been supported in numerous research studies (Blake & McCanse, 1991; Blake & Mouton, 1985), the relationship with specific outcomes such as job satisfaction and productivity has been inconsistent (Bryman, 1992; Yukl, 1994). The strongest link has been that relationship focused leaders do have employees who are more satisfied.

Employee Outcomes

One problem confronting research in organizations is defining specific outcomes that can be readily examined and are of relevance to organizations and their leaders. Profit may not be a good outcome because various influences can have an effect on profit regardless of the productivity of the employees. Furthermore, employee productivity in most organizations is difficult to define and measure.

Research conducted in other disciplines has found consistent results on employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. Specifically, individuals who are satisfied with their job typically have higher quality work performance and productivity (Katzell, Thompson, & Guzzo, 1992; Parker et al., 2003). Furthermore, the effect of job satisfaction on productivity appears to be consistent across business type and business units and is also related to employee turnover (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Research on motivation has found similar results, in that employee motivation is directly related to performance and productivity (Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990; Parker et al., 2003). Finally, organizational commitment has a small but consistent relationship to productivity, but a larger relationship to variables like an individual's intention to leave and actual turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

These three employee outcomes are important due to the real consequences for an organization with unmotivated, dissatisfied, and uncommitted employees. Beyond the reduction in productivity and performance, employee turnover is greatly increased when employees are dissatisfied and uncommitted (Harter et al., 2002; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Given the expense of training new employees, increasing satisfaction, motivation, and commitment is a critical concern for most organizations.

Leadership, Competence, and Employee Outcomes

A supervisor engaging in both task- and relationship-leadership styles is desirable (Blake & McCanse, 1991). Furthermore, a supervisor being both effective and appropriate in their communication is also desirable (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Yet the

question remains, do these behaviors produce positive results for employees in the form of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment?

Hypotheses and Research Question

Employees need supervisors to be goal oriented in their communication so that employees can also accomplish their tasks at work. When supervisors are clear in their communication of expectations, objectives, and procedures, employees should be better able to perform their job-related tasks. Because employees can be more skilled in their work when supervisors communicate effectively, effective communication should be positively related to employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between effective communication and employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Similarly, employees need leaders to be task focused for employees to be successful in completing their work. Task-focused leaders help employees achieve their goals and help improve the proficiency of personnel (Yukl et al., 2002). Because task-focused leaders help employees improve their work performance and help meet work-related objectives, task-oriented leadership styles should be positively related to employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between task-oriented leadership and employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Employees want to be communicated with using the norms and expectations for a productive work environment. Furthermore, when supervisors communicate in a suitable way for the work environment, employees' organizational identification increases (Myers & Kassing, 1998). Because "getting along" with a supervisor is important in creating a positive work environment, appropriate communication should be positively related to employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between appropriate communication and employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Similarly, most employees should want to build positive relationships with their supervisor and work team. Furthermore, employees want to be treated with respect and dignity. Employees not only want to be encouraged in their work but also recognized for achievements and contributions (Yukl et al., 2002). Because treating employees with respect and building relationships is essential for making for a pleasant work environment, relations-oriented leadership should be positively related to employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between relations-oriented leadership communication and employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

For both communication competence and leadership style, it is assumed that the combination of approaches is needed to produce the best results. Specifically, to be a competent communicator, a supervisor must be both effective and appropriate. Furthermore, to be an effective leader, a supervisor must display both task- and relations-oriented leadership styles. Thus, we should see an interaction effect for both communication competence and leadership style.

Hypothesis 5: The interaction of effectiveness and appropriateness will be related to employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).
Hypothesis 6: The interaction of task- and relations-oriented leadership will be related to employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment).

Given the incomplete nature of the information about the influences of both leadership style and communication competence on job outcomes, we also wish to understand which of the variables is the best predictor of employee job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. Yukl (1994) found the most consistent link between leadership styles and satisfaction was that relationship-focused leaders have employees who are more satisfied. Furthermore, both Berman and Hellweg (1989) and Madlock (2008) found a connection between communication competence and employee satisfaction; yet in both cases they measured communication competence in a unidimensional way and did not account for both the effectiveness and appropriateness dimensions of communication competence. Given the uncertain nature concerning which variables are the best predictors of employee outcomes, a research question is most appropriate.

Research Question 1: Does task-oriented leadership, relations-oriented leadership, effectiveness, or appropriateness act as the best predictor of employee outcomes (job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment)?

Method

Participants

The participants ($N = 276$) were 144 male (52.2%) and 127 female (46.0%) employees from a range of organizations (5 individuals did not report their biological sex). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 75 years ($M = 32.56$ years, $SD = 10.92$). The length of the participants' employment at their current organization ranged from 2 months to 32 years ($M = 5.00$ years, $SD = 4.90$). The participants worked under their

current supervisor/manager between 1 month and 16 years (M = 3.23 years, SD = 2.99). Participants worked in a number of industries ranging from service (57.2%), education (16.7%), government (10.5%), manufacturing (5.8%), and high-tech (8.0%; 5 participants did not report on their industry). Participants had a wide range of educational backgrounds, with the majority (42.0%) holding a bachelor's (4-year) degree. The majority (81.2%) was Caucasian, 9.4% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.0% were Hispanic, 7.2% were Black/African American, 1.4% were Native American, and 0.4% were of other ethnic origins. These percentages add up to more than 100% because participants were instructed to check all applicable ethnicities.

Procedure

The participants were registered users of Amazon's Mechanical Turk website, specifically from the United States. Mechanical Turk has been an acceptable and high-quality source of data for research in the social sciences (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participation in the study consisted of a brief questionnaire (110 questions) designed to assess communication and leadership in the supervisor-employee relationship. We included an instructional manipulation check to reduce responses sets and inattentive participants (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). The study was in compliance with the university's institutional review boards policies. In exchange for participation, individuals who completed the questionnaire were awarded a small monetary award, which was deposited into their Mechanical Turk account at the end the survey. The questionnaire itself contained a series of close-ended, Likert-type questions along with important personal demographic information.

Measures

Leadership Style. Task- and relations-oriented leadership styles were measured using the Leadership Style Questionnaire (Northouse, 2013). The 20-item scale measures the dimensions of task- and relations-oriented leadership through the specific behaviors of a leader toward his or her followers. Task-leadership style items include "sets standards of performance for group members" and "provides a plan for how the work is to be done." Relations-oriented leadership style items include "acts friendly with members of the group" and "shows concern for the well-being of others."

Communication Competence. Canary and Spitzberg's (1987) communication appropriateness and effectiveness scales were used in the current study. Participants were asked to respond to the degree their supervisor engaged in behaviors related to being appropriate and effective in communicating with them. Examples of appropriateness items include "He or she said some things that should not have been said" and "Some of the things he or she said were embarrassing to me." Examples of effectiveness items include "He or she obtained her or his goal in the conversation" and "He or she lost control of the direction of the conversation." The scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity (see Canary & Cupach, 1988; Canary & Spitzberg, 1989).

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured using the Abridged Job In General Scale (Russell et al., 2004). The scale uses single words and short statements to reflect an employees' overall perception of their level of satisfaction with their job (e.g., good, better than most, enjoyable, etc.). Validity and reliability information can be found in Russell et al. (2004).

Employee Motivation. Employee motivation was measured using the five semantic differential items modeled by Richmond (1990) and utilized in Richmond and McCroskey (2000). The specific items were motivated-unmotivated, excited-bored, uninterested-interested, involved-uninvolved, and dreading it-looking forward to it.

Organizational Commitment. Organizational commitment was measured using Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian's (1974) measurement. The 15-item measurement assesses the degree to which an employee feels committed to the employing organization. Example items include "For me, this is the best of all organizations for which to work" and "I feel very little loyalty to this organization."

The scores on all scales had a theoretical range from 1 to 7, such that higher scores indicated a greater level of the variable. The scores on all multiple-item scales represented the mean of the items comprising that scale. Some items were worded positively and others negatively to mitigate response sets. Internal reliabilities, means, and standard deviations for all measures appear in Table 1.

Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that effective communication would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The analysis revealed that effective communication was significantly related to job satisfaction ($r = .48$, $p < .001$), motivation ($r = .45$, $p < .001$), and organizational commitment ($r = .49$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 1 was fully supported.

Hypothesis 2 specified that task leadership would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The analysis revealed that task leadership was significantly related to job satisfaction ($r = .37$, $p < .001$), motivation ($r = .39$, $p < .001$), and organizational commitment ($r = .42$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 2 was fully supported.

Hypothesis 3 asserted that appropriate communication would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The analysis revealed that appropriate communication was significantly related to job satisfaction ($r = .40$, $p < .001$), motivation ($r = .35$, $p < .001$), and organizational commitment ($r = .43$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 3 was fully supported.

Hypothesis 4 claimed that relations-oriented leadership would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The analysis revealed that relations-oriented leadership was significantly related to job satisfaction ($r = .48$, $p < .001$), motivation ($r = .44$, $p < .001$), and organizational commitment ($r = .53$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 4 was fully supported.

Table 1. Intercorrelations, Internal Reliability Estimates, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study Variables (N = 276).

Variable	α[a]	*M* (*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Task leadership	.93	5.58 (1.00)						
2. Relations-oriented leadership	.93	5.39 (1.11)	.77**					
3. Appropriateness	.96	5.28 (1.25)	.44**	.55**				
4. Effectiveness	.89	5.29 (0.86)	.59**	.62**	.69**			
5. Job satisfaction	.96	5.05 (1.46)	.37**	.48**	.40**	.48**		
6. Motivation	.95	4.95 (1.56)	.39**	.44**	.35**	.45**	.86**	
7. Organizational commitment	.94	4.67 (1.33)	.42**	.53**	.43**	.49**	.85**	.86**

[a]Internal reliability estimates are based on Cronbach's alpha. All variables were measured on a 7-point scale, wherein higher values indicate a greater frequency or intensity of the variable.
*p < .05. **p < .01 (two-tailed).

Hypothesis 5 predicted that there would be an interaction effect between effectiveness and appropriateness on employee outcomes. Hypothesis 6 stated that there would be an interaction effect between task- and relations-oriented leadership on employee outcomes. Finally, Research Question 1 asked which of the four variables (effectiveness, appropriateness, task-oriented leadership, relations-oriented leadership) would be the best predictor of employee job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment.

To test these relationships, a three-step hierarchical regression with the specific job outcome (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation) entered as the criterion variable was conducted. In the first block, length of employment in the organization and length of work under the current supervisor were entered as control variables. These were entered as control variables because both were significantly related to employee outcomes (participant sex, supervisor sex, age of employee, and industry were not significantly related to any of the work outcomes). The two dimensions of leadership (task and relations) and communication competence (effective and appropriate) were entered into Step 2. Finally, the interaction of task- and relations-oriented leadership and the interaction of effectiveness and appropriateness were entered into the third step. There were three regressions conducted, one for each job outcome: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation.

For job satisfaction, in the first step, length of work under supervisor, $\beta = .22$, $t = 2.60$, $p < .01$, exerted a significant effect on job satisfaction. In the second step, relations-oriented leadership, $\beta = .30$, $t = 3.26$, $p < .001$, and effectiveness, $\beta = .24$, $t = 2.94$, $p < .01$, had a significant effect on job satisfaction. In the third step, neither the interaction of task- and relations-oriented leadership nor the interaction of effectiveness and appropriateness exerted a significant effect on job satisfaction. This third step was taken out of the model because it did not significantly improve the predictive ability of the model. The complete results for this hierarchical regression appear in Table 2.

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Predicting Job Satisfaction (N = 276).

Predictor variables	B	*SE* B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1				.07**
Length of time in organization	.02	.02	.08	
Length of time with supervisor	.10	.04	.22*	
Step 2				.24**
Length of time in organization	.02	.02	.06	
Length of time with supervisor	.06	.04	.12	
Task leadership	−.05	.13	−.04	
Relations-oriented leadership	40	.12	.30**	
Appropriateness	.06	.09	.05	
Effectiveness	.42	.14	.24**	

Note. Total R^2 = .31; adjusted R^2 = .30; $F(6, 242)$ = 17.85.
p < .001. *p < .05. **p < .01.

For motivation, in the first step, length of work under supervisor, β = .19, t = 2.34, p < .05, exerted a significant effect on motivation. In the second step, effectiveness, β = .24, t = 2.83, p < .01, had a significant effect on motivation. In the third step, neither the interaction of task and relations-oriented leadership nor the interaction of effectiveness and appropriateness exerted a significant effect on motivation. This third step was taken out of the model because it did not significantly improve the predictive ability of the model. The complete results for this hierarchical regression appear in Table 3.

For organizational commitment, in the first step, length of work under supervisor, β = .26, t = 3.12, p < .01, exerted a significant effect on organizational commitment. In the second step, relations-oriented leadership, β = .30, t = 3.32, p < .001, and effectiveness, β = .21, t = 2.57, p < .05, had a significant effect on organizational commitment. In the third step, neither the interaction of task- and relations-oriented leadership nor the interaction of effectiveness and appropriateness exerted a significant effect on organizational commitment. This third step was taken out of the model because it did not significantly improve the predictive ability of the model. Hypotheses 5 and 6 were not supported. The complete results for this hierarchical regression appear in Table 4.

To answer Research Question 1, we examined the regression tables (Tables 2, 3, and 4) for job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment. In the final step, for each model effectiveness and relations-oriented leadership were the two variables that predicted the most unique variance in each of the employee outcomes. For job satisfaction and organizational commitment, relations-oriented leadership was the best predictor. Effectiveness was the best predictor of motivation.

Discussion

The present study investigated communication competence, leadership style, and employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The predictions in this study were derived from the theoretical framework

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Predicting Motivation (N = 276).

Predictor variables	B	*SE B*	β	ΔR^2
Step 1				.08**
Length of time in organization	.04	.03	.11	
Length of time with supervisor	.10	.04	.19*	
Step 2				.24**
Length of time in organization	.03	.02	.09	
Length of time with supervisor	.06	.04	.12	
Task leadership	.16	.14	.10	
Relations-oriented leadership	.26	.13	.18*	
Appropriateness	−.01	.10	−.01	
Effectiveness	.44	.16	.24**	

Note. Total R^2 = .28; adjusted R^2 = .26; $F(6, 242)$ = 15.20.
$p < .001$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Predicting Organizational Commitment (N = 276).

Predictor variables	B	*SE* B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1				.10**
Length of time in organization	.02	.02	.08	
Length of time with supervisor	.11	.04	.26**	
Step 2				.24**
Length of time in organization	.01	.02	.05	
Length of time with supervisor	.07	.03	.16*	
Task leadership	.00	.11	−.00	
Relations-oriented leadership	36	.11	.30**	
Appropriateness	.08	.08	.05	
Effectiveness	.32	.13	.21*	

Note. Total R^2 = .35; adjusted R^2 = .33; $F(6, 242)$ = 20.79.
$p < .001$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

behind communication competence and leadership styles and how those behavioral patterns manifest in a supervisor to influence employee outcomes.

Hypothesis 1 stated that effective communication would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The analysis revealed that effective communication was significantly related to job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. This finding is reasonable as effective communication is essential in clearly communicating key objectives and goals to employees (Bryman, 1992; Cupach et al., 2010). Moreover, without clear and efficient communication to help employees focus on the important goals and duties, key work responsibilities could become more difficult for employees to accomplish.

Hypothesis 2 asserted that task leadership would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The analysis revealed that task leadership was significantly related to job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. Task-oriented leadership puts the focus of the supervisor's behavior on completing various responsibilities and attaining goals (Bryman, 1992; Cupach et al., 2010). Furthermore, the clarification of tasks and goals by leadership can result in higher levels of performance and has been linked to managerial effectiveness (Yukl et al., 2002). The relationship between task leadership and job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment is especially interesting because of the inconsistent results of these relationships in the past (Yukl, 1994).

Whereas effective communication is essential for the communication of responsibilities and goals, the focus of appropriate communication is the communication of meeting norms and expectations. Appropriate communication helps build and maintain relationships (Cupach et al., 2010; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Hypothesis 3 asserted that appropriate communication would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. The analysis revealed that appropriate communication was significantly related to job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. This finding is understandable, as communicating within the norms and expectations for a work environment helps create a positive work environment where employees feel valued and respected. Furthermore, communicating appropriately helps supervisors and employees build a trusting work relationship. Thus, it is reasonable that appropriate communication would be related to employee outcomes.

Hypothesis 4 claimed that relations-oriented leadership would be positively related to the employee outcomes of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. Relations-oriented leadership focuses on building strong relationships with employees by treating employees with respect (Blake & McCanse, 1991), and has been found to be consistently related to job satisfaction (Yukl, 1994). Thus, it is reasonable that Hypothesis 4 was supported given that most employees want to have a good relationship with their supervisor.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that there would be an interaction effect between effectiveness and appropriateness on job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. Hypothesis 6 predicted that there would be an interaction effect between task- and relations-oriented leadership on job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. For communication competence it is assumed that when both effective and appropriate communication is utilized, positive outcomes will be even greater (Cupach et al., 2010). A similar assumption is made about task- and relations-oriented leadership while together even greater outcomes can be achieved (Blake & McCanse, 1991). However, neither hypothesis received support. The lack of a significant interaction effect could be due to some conceptual overlap between effectiveness and task leadership and the overlap between appropriateness and relations-oriented leadership.

For communication competence, it is assumed that an additional benefit will occur if communication is both effective and appropriate (Cupach et al., 2010). However, it may be that there is not an additional benefit beyond the main effects for being

effective and appropriate. A similar possibility exists for task- and relations-oriented leadership. It is assumed that the best leaders are both high in task and relationship aspects (Blake & McCanse, 1991), but there might not be an additional unique interaction effect when the two are combined, only the additive nature of the main effects.

Finally, Research Question 1 asked which variable was the best predictor of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. For job satisfaction and organizational commitment, relations-oriented leadership was the best predictor. For motivation, effectiveness was the best predictor. After accounting for the length of time at the organization and working under the supervisor, only relations-oriented leadership and effectiveness were significant predictors.

Berman and Hellweg (1989), Myers and Kassing (1998), and Madlock (2008) found positive effects of communication competence in the workplace. However, none of these studies measured communication competence as a multidimensional variable (effectiveness and appropriateness). At least in the current study, it appears as though the effectiveness of a supervisor is what primarily drives employee outcomes of satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment. More specifically, effectiveness appears to be especially important in relationship to motivation. Employees may be motivated by effective communication because they know exactly what their supervisor expects of them, through the clear communication of directions and goals.

Although the relationship between leadership styles and job satisfaction has been inconsistent (Bryman, 1992; Yukl, 1994), the most consistent link has been found to be between relations-oriented leadership and satisfaction. The current study affirms the importance of the association between relations-oriented leadership and employee outcomes. Although task-oriented leadership was also related to all three outcomes, in the regression analysis relations-oriented leadership accounted for the most unique variance for job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This is likely due to the fact that employees wish to be treated well and want to have a good working relationship with their supervisor. Most employees would like to know that their supervisor knows them on a personal level and cares about their well-being. Furthermore, when a supervisor focuses on the relational aspect of leadership they create a work environment that is often more pleasant and enjoyable for employees (Bowers & Seashore, 1966).

Both communication competence and leadership styles have been studied in previous research. Given that an employee's direct supervisor has the greatest influence on whether a person will leave their job (Emerson & Loehr, 2008), the use of competent communication and leadership styles becomes even more important. By examining communication competence and leadership styles together, we can begin to understand how these constructs are related and how they influence employee outcomes. The correlations between the predictor and criterion variables in the present study range from .53 to .35, with an average correlation of .44. Cohen (1992) stated that an $r = .30$, should be considered a moderate effect size and an $r = .50$, should be considered a large effect size. Furthermore, when examining the effects sizes for the regressions, $R^2 = .30$ for satisfaction, $R^2 = .26$ for motivation, and $R^2 = .35$ for organizational

commitment. These effect sizes fall in line with previous research, which estimates that a leader's behavior accounts for around 25% of employee outcomes (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Consequently, communication competence and leadership styles both appear to be important variables in understanding employee outcomes. Importantly, communication competence and leadership styles would be helpful to teach both new and established supervisors to help them improve their relationships with subordinates as well as improve the work output of their work group or team.

Previous research on communication competence has shown that it is a central aspect of personal and business success and key to personal participation in organizational life (Waldeck, Durante, Helmuth, & Marcia, 2012). For example, Payne (2005) found that both employees and supervisors that were considered "high job performers" had higher levels of motivation to adapt to their communication with others, and even higher levels of communicating empathy and managing their interactions. Other research has identified a need for training and development in interpersonal communication skills in the workplace (DeKay, 2012; Hynes, 2012). A combination of both knowledge/technical expertise and interpersonal communication skills is needed in order to be successful and to equip employees and supervisors (Robles, 2012).

The findings of the present study can be used to inform training and development for leaders in organizations. Leadership is enacted through communication. Additionally, a leader's ability to accomplish the tasks required and to do so in a way that increases motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment is connected to that leader's level of communication competence and leadership style. Thus, trainings for employees and supervisors could include an emphasis on explaining the value of adopting different leadership styles to meet the needs of the employees (Blake & McCanse, 1991; Goleman, 2000), and explaining how a communicator can be both effective and appropriate in their interactions with employees.

Directions for Future Research

The results of the present study suggest that communication competence and leadership styles in a supervisor have a substantial relationship with employee outcomes in a work situation. Furthermore, we found no differences across industry type. These findings are encouraging in that they validate the importance of a supervisor's (leader's) behavior on important employee outcomes. This preliminary study underscores the importance of key interpersonal communication behaviors in the workplace, especially as they pertain to the relationship between a supervisor and an employee. For example, future studies could examine how more specific communication behaviors such as listening, empathy, immediacy, self-disclosure, and relational maintenance behaviors are related to key employee outcomes. It also might be helpful to understand particular negative behaviors such as argumentativeness or distributive conflict styles and their relationship to employee outcomes as well.

Another possibility for future research would be to explore outcomes such as performance and productivity of employees. Although more difficult to measure, it would be helpful to understand how a supervisor's behavior is related to specific

performance outcomes. Furthermore, understanding how a supervisor's behavior is related to the employee's desire to stay in the job or position could also be helpful. Gaining a greater understanding of communication and its relationship to performance outcomes and employees' desire to stay in a position becomes increasingly important as global competition increases.

Conclusion

Although the present study explores communication and the relationship with employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment, these findings require careful interpretation. Because of the method of data collection, it is not possible to establish a causal connection between the predictor and criterion variables in this study.

Notably, Kouzes and Posner (2010) argued that a leader has the greatest effect on an employee's productivity, motivation, energy, effectiveness, and commitment to his/her work. The present study affirms that specific communication and leadership behaviors are substantially related to employee outcomes. Despite the shortcomings of the present study, we were encouraged by the findings. The current investigation provides further insight into communication within supervisor-employee relationships and we hope that future studies can provide a more complete understanding of these phenomena.

Authors' Note

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