A study of Implicit Leadership Theories among Business & Management Undergraduate students

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the subjective experience of *being led* by investigating the impact of their Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs) on followers' cognitive processes, affective responses and behavioural intentions towards leadership-claimants. The study explores how such responses influence the quality of hierarchical work-place relationships using a framework based on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory. The research uses focus groups to elicit descriptions of ILTs held by forty final year undergraduate Business and Management students. The data was then analysed using an abductive process permitting an interpretative understanding of the meanings participants attach to their past experiences and future expectations. This research addresses a perceived gap by making a theoretical contribution to knowledge and understanding in this field, focusing on how emotional responses affect their behaviour, how this impacts on organisational outcomes, and what the implications are for HRD practitioners. The findings support previous research into the content and structure of ILTs but extend these by examining the impact of affect on workplace behaviour. Findings demonstrate that where follower ILT needs are met then positive outcomes ensued for participants, their superiors, and their organisations. Conversely, where follower ILT needs are not matched, various negative effects emerged ranging from poor performance and impaired well-being, to withdrawal behaviour and outright rebellion. The research findings suggest dynamic reciprocal links amongst outcomes, behaviours, and LMX, and demonstrate an alignment of cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses that correspond to either high-LMX or low-LMX relationships, with major impacts on job satisfaction, commitment and well-being.

Introduction

Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT) is a follower-centric area of leadership research that focuses on the traits and behaviours that people expect of leaders. This paper seeks to understand notions of leadership from the perspective of the follower, exploring participants' meanings of the experience since, while considerable progress has been made in the theory and measurement of cognitive processes, similar research areas in regard to affective processes have been all but ignored (Lord & Brown, 2004).

There seemed to be a paucity of evidence regarding what follower's ILTs *mean* to them and it is argued that follower emotional responses to leadership-claimants have a major impact on their behaviour. This study adapts and combines *a priori* theoretical frameworks to provide a conceptual model that explains *why* people possess ILTs, *how* they work, and enables an understanding of how followers *feel.* However, there are many psychological antecedents, that whilst acknowledged, lay outside the scope of the current paper.

This study used focus groups to elicit descriptions of the ILTs held by final year undergraduate Business and Management students at the University of Gloucestershire. Specifically the study asks what Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs) are held by the participants? and how do their ILTs impact on their interactions with those claiming leadership roles in the workplace? This paper investigates the impact of these ILTs on cognitive processes, affective responses and behavioural intentions when expectations are, or are not, met. It then explores how these affect leader-member exchanges (LMX) and important workplace outcomes.

Contribution and Implications of the Study

This research addresses a perceived gap by making a theoretical contribution to knowledge and understanding in this field, focusing on the subjective meaning *for the perceiver*, how emotional responses affect their behaviour, what the implications are, and how these affect organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and well-being. Consequently, the study contributes to extant literature as well as explaining implications for organisations. While there is no assertion that the findings are generalisable they are credible, dependable, confirmable and transferable, and may therefore have some wider resonance.

The findings develop and extend existing theory and open up areas for further research, as well as having implications for HR practitioners. Organisations may need to revisit their assumptions concerning leadership/management in terms of HRD as perceived traits and qualities appear to be more important to followers than actual behaviours. Leadership development programmes, talent management and succession planning should be adapted in consideration of the needs and expectations of followers since these are vital for effective working relationships that directly impact on the organisations ability to meet its objectives.

Background

A study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) showed that nearly three-quarters of organisations in the UK reported leadership skills deficits (Lewis & Donaldson-Feilder, 2012). The result is unexpected considering the abundance and accessibility of leadership programmes. One possible explanation for this may be that leadership is "*in the eye of the beholder*" (ibid., p.6 citing Kenney *et al,* 1994) in that it is based not solely on any objective reality of what constitutes leadership but also encompasses an interpretation on the part of the follower who already has their own prototypic ideal of a leader. This view is shared by Lord and Emrich (2001, p.551) who recommended that "*If leadership resides, at least in part, in the minds of followers, then it is imperative to discover what followers are thinking*".

Mainstream leadership theory however continues to be leader-centric although it has evolved in recent years from being focused on transactional, contractual exchanges, described by Bass (1990, p.20) as "*a prescription for mediocrity*", to a focus on more transformational relationships. The turning point was perhaps Zaleznik's (1977) call for a separate of leadership and management, and the deluge of trait-based research that ensued (House, 1977; Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). The seminal studies of Lord, De Vader and Allinger (1986) and Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) were extended still further by Zaccaro (2007) who demonstrated that *Distal* attributes, those inherent in the personality could be separated out from *Proximal* attributes, those that can be learned and developed.

Echoing earlier calls, Kouzes and Posner (2007, p.24) state that "*Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow*" and this study is concerned with those who *choose* to follow.

Personality and Perception

Albeit that there is a growing body of literature looking at the leadership from the perspective of the follower, with a few exceptions it focuses mainly on the cognitive processes involved. Most follower-centric research emanates from the disciplines of psychology each of which offer different explanations based on different approaches, which contribute to our understanding of how our personalities and cognitive processes affect our attributions of others, and bias our explanations of their behaviour.

Attribution Theory was a major strand of Cognitive Psychology that focused on how people explained the causes of their own and others behaviour. The basic premise is that people *construct* explanations for human behaviour (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967), in particular we make inferences about the causes of our own and other people's behaviour via a distinction between personal and situational causes that allow us to make sense of events, often attributing success to our own actions and failure to that of others (Hewstone, 1989).

Social Cognition is now the dominant perspective and deals with how cognitive processes and how representations are constructed and influence behaviour (Hogg

& Vaughan, 2011). A 'cornerstone' is the Cognitive Schema whereby people assimilate what they observe to pre-existing cognitive structures that fill gaps in knowledge based on interrelated thoughts beliefs and attitudes allowing us to quickly make sense of a person, situation or event. Such knowledge is then applied via a process of categorisation with *prototypes* against which *all* further experiences are assessed (Azjen, 2005; Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Schema-use enables rapid decision making but they are extremely resilient, being resistant to conflicting or disconfirming information, which is generally either ignored or reinterpreted and entail biases that lend themselves to making erroneous dispositional attributions. Static schema models (Lord & Maher, 1991) allow that changes do occur, albeit slowly, whereas connectionist models (Brown & Lord, 2001) propose that prototypes and schemas are more dynamic.

It is argued that the two fields are not mutually exclusive with Attribution Theory explaining the *reason*, and Social Cognition explaining the *processes* by which we "*perceive, organise, process and use information*" (Burger, 2011, p.405).

Leader Categorization Theory

Formal ILT theory is largely based on the research of Lord and colleagues, which developed the concept of Leader Categorisation Theory, and it was Lord, Foti, and Phillips (1982) who first argued that ILTs were a reflection of the structure and content of cognitive categories used to distinguish leaders from non-leaders. Leader Prototypes are based upon schemas generated in childhood (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005; Keller, 2003) and there is evidence that they are intimately bound up with issues of attachment and identity (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011; van Knippenberg *et al.,* 2004).

ILTs are likewise categorised within a hierarchy, at *superordinate*, *basic* and *subordinate* levels and we are able to differentiate not only between those who are leaders and those who are not, but between different types of leaders at different hierarchical levels. If sufficient prototype related traits/behaviour are recognised in an individual the observer will automatically assign them to the leader category and will thereafter be influenced by what is attributed to 'the leader'. In terms of cognitive processing, categorisation precedes attribution and the actual behaviour of the leader is effectively coded out of perceptions, going unrecognised.

It has been suggested that congruence between perceiver ILTs and leader's actual, or perceived, behaviour will affect the degree to which followers will even accept attempts at leadership (Engle & Lord, 1997; Schyns, 2006). Leadership claimants who do not match the prototype can, in extreme cases, be considered "*illegitimate*" (Hunt, Boal & Sorenson, 1990. p.56). As stated by van Vugt, Hogan and Kaiser (2008, p.182) leadership, in the wider sense, involves a "*choice to initiate, and the choice to follow*".

Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs)

ILTs, generally credited to Eden and Leviatan (1975), have been defined as "*the evaluations people make about leaders and the cognitive processes underlying the evaluations and perceptions of leadership*" (House & Aditya, 1997, pp. 416/7). As an implicit part of followers' sense making, they represent a process that "*begins with social perception, progresses through causal judgements and social inference, and ends with behavioural consequences*" (Crittenden, 1983, p.426).

Offermann, Kennedy, and Wirtz (1994) developed measures to assess the content and factor structure of ILTs and their findings indicated that consist of eight broad dimensions which they dubbed: sensitivity, dedication, tyranny, charisma, attractiveness, masculinity, intelligence, and strength. Factor analysis has shown no statistically significant differences between undergraduate and working samples (Ehrhart, 2012; Singer, 1990), nor between US and British samples (Bryman, 1987), neither is age nor gender a factor. ILTs are stable over time, resistant to change, with no relationship based on organisational tenure (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offerman, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). While national culture can influence leader prototypes, since followers from different cultures expect different behaviours, research indicates that there are prototypical behaviours that are universal across all cultures (House *et al.*, 2004).

ILTs and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

The central concept of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, albeit based on a transactional model, is the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers (Schyns & Day, 2010). Schyns, Maslyn and Weibler (2010) specify multiple dimensions of LMX known as *Contribution* (carrying out work beyond what is contractually specified), *Affect* (friendship and liking), *Loyalty* (loyalty and a mutual sense of obligation), and *Professional Respect* (for ones professional capabilities). An understanding of this relationship is important because it impacts on a number of job-related outcomes with Epitropaki and Martin (2005) linking the increased quality-of-relationship to heightened follower satisfaction and reduced turnover, and reported that it was ILTs that affected LMX and not the other way around. Further research by Volmer *et al.*, (2011, p.527) found that while much previous research focused on LMX as a predictor of job satisfaction, they found that the converse applied, perhaps because "*satisfied employees show greater activity in seeking and engaging in social situations*". What is not clear, because such existing research seems to shy away from emotional responses, is whether the affective reaction is a response to a cognitive process, or vice versa.

Leadership research is predominantly quantitative, dominated by the self-administered questionnaire and wedded to the experimental design, which does not connect well to qualitative inquiry (Bryman, 2004). There seems to be only marginal interest in the implications, what it *means,* and this is also characteristic of existing ILT research (Avolio *et al.,* 2003; Schyns & Meindl, 2005).While considerable progress has been made in the theory and measurement of cognitive processes, similar research in regard to affective processes have been all but ignored (Lord & Brown, 2004).

Therefore, it is contended that current theories and models do not fully address "the need for *meaning*" (Gill, 2011, p.98, citing Kibby & Hartel, 2003). The web of implicit theories, illusory correlations, attributions, and mood states produce specific behaviours with direct impacts on work-place relationships. For a qualitative researcher these do not represent unwanted artefacts but rich veins in need of exploration. This paper therefore aims to expand on our existing understanding of Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs) by exploring the consequences of subjective meanings that participants attach to their own ILTs, with particular reference to the affective component, thereby making a theoretical contribution to knowledge and understanding in this field.

Methodology

The study took an interpretive approach and the qualitative analysis and interpretation have been guided equally by themes arising from the data, and by *a priori* knowledge of existing frameworks. This paper describes, explores and explains elements of ILT using data generated via focus groups. It should be noted however that there was no intention to form a group consensus but to determine, via dialogue and discussion, what individual participants *thought* and *felt*.

For evaluation purposes the criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) were adopted, namely *Credibility*, *Transferability*, *Dependability* and *Confirmability*. While sharing the understanding of meaning constitutes an explanatory process, at least at a theoretical level, there is no assertion that the findings are generalisable beyond the study. However, it is hoped they may *"provide a springboard for further research, or allow links to be forged with existing findings in another area"* (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.190).

Method

The Focus Groups

Final year undergraduate students undertaking Business/Management courses at the University of Gloucestershire's Business School in Cheltenham during the 2012/2013 academic year were identified as potentially having access to in-depth knowledge and/or experience of the issue under investigation. 60 students undertaking a Leadership module were selected via a purposeful non-probability sampling strategy as collectively representing instances likely to produce the most valuable data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Co-facilitators were subsequently enlisted from amongst doctoral students at the same university.

40 students consented to participate and although specific demographic data was not collected the majority were age between 21-25 years of age, one-third were female, and six participants self-identified themselves as being International students. Three separate sessions were held on the same day with participants being briefed before being randomly allocated into separate groups of approximately equal size. The focus groups were scheduled to last for one hour and digital audio equipment was used to facilitate later transcription.

To get a clear picture of the content and structure of ILTs held by the participants, so that analyses could determine the fit with existing theory, the group were asked the following questions and invited to discuss the topic.

1. What characteristics/behaviours do they value?
2. Why do they value them?
3. How did they feel when they have been in subordinate positions to someone that did or did not match their criteria?

Subsequent conversations led into a further discussion, as we both directed conversations and followed ideas as they arose about how those thoughts and

feelings affected their behaviour in the workplace, particularly looking for similarities and differences in the way people reacted to schema match and schema mismatch. At the end of each session participants were debriefed with several indicated a willingness to check the transcripts as part of respondent validation.

Transcription was carried out manually in order to thoroughly familiarise ourselves with the data, prepared in an orthographic style resembling a playscript. In the first cycle of coding the transcripts and accompanying audio files were also distributed to co-facilitators who separately applied preliminary descriptive codes. The separate transcripts were then merged, on a session by session basis, with the Master Transcript becoming the main document for further coding.

To move up from the data to more abstract concepts a second cycle of coding took the preliminary –*emic* codes and combining both concept-driven and data-driven approaches arrived at more abstract –*etic* categories that allowed analysis of patterns and themes. These –*etic* categories formed the basis of a final coding list containing 18 categories reflecting the three broad themes of Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural data, which were then further analysed and linked to the *a priori* theory reflected in the literature.

Findings

Findings are initially presented in sections covering the broad descriptive categories of Cognition (what participants think), Affect (how they feel), and Behaviour (how they subsequently act) when confronted with leadership-claimants who match, or do not match, their ILTs. We then move to higher levels of abstraction to understand the links to leader-member exchanges and organisational outcomes.

Those who Choose to Follow

<u>Cognition</u>

The cognitive elements of the study broadly supported existing ILT research particularly in relation to the process of leader categorisation itself. The following data extracts illustrate this before progressing to consideration of how cognitive processes impact on other elements of the follower-leader dyad.

The students reported (see Table 1, below) that perceptions of specific traits were central to whether they 'recognised' the person claiming a leadership role. The presence of key traits provides the specific matching criteria for this recognition process, without which someone would be perceived as a "*just another person*" and immediately categorised as 'not a leader'. The absence of desirable traits was as influential as the presence of others. In short, not having the desired trait automatically excluded recognition as a leader such that all subsequent perceptions of that person would be as 'not a leader' regardless of that persons' formal organisational role or status.

Table 1: Superordinate Categorisation

	Recognition	Non-Recognition	Trait Relevance	Nature vs Nurture
Superordinate Categorisation	"You want someone to have specific traits so you can distinguish between normal people and leaders, because they tend to have those things"	"some jobs you might have a crap leader, useless, other jobs you might get one who is really inspirational"	"not having the expected traits makes them *not* a leader ... It's more influential"	"you can't learn to be a leader - it's something in your personality. It's something you are born with"
	"if they don't have them [special traits] then they are just another person"	"are they crap because they don't meet our expectations? Or are they just crap?"	"you might be more affected by someone who didn't match [your expectations], than one who did"	"some people do naturally take the lead"
	"if someone doesn't have them, then they are not to me a leader"	"if you have an idea about how a leader should be, and they don't fit that, then you are going to think they are a crap leader"	"if they don't have the specific traits you'd be less inclined to follow them"	"they naturally fall into it, right time, right place, they know how to get stuff done"

Following the framework offered by Leader Categorisation Theory, assuming that someone has been assigned to the leader category, we next look to see what 'kind' of leader they are based on whether they are business, political or social leaders. For the purposes of this study, at the Basic level of categorisation we were focused exclusively on business leaders and so analysis progressed to Subordinate levels of categorisation, which differentiates between hierarchical levels of leadership.

Participants had clearly defined expectations of traits, qualities and behaviours needed by senior management as opposed to those needed by 'management' more generally, or by supervisors in particular (see Table 2, below). While they expected leader-like behaviour from senior board members, there was no such expectation for managers generally, nor for supervisors and line-managers. Senior leaders were expected to be visionary and charismatic, coming up with the big ideas and communicating that to the team in ways considered (by followers) to be inspirational and motivational. Management on the other hand was described variously as "an administrative bureaucratic process" concerned with 'taking care of the detail'.

Table 2: Subordinate Categorisation

	Senior Managers	Managers	Supervisors
Subordinate Categorisation	"at corporate level you need to be more visionary, it doesn't matter if you don't know what is going on day to day – you need a more long term view" "a good leader has charisma, they will use that to make you want to follow them rather than using their authority" "leaders and managers are completely different – leaders need to inspire and motivate me to do it" "top people have the clear ideas" "leadership isn't about your job role – it's about making you feel valued"	"there is quite a big difference between leaders and managers" "leaders and managers are completely different. Managers I expect to tell me what the position is, how to get there, what to do" "management is more an administrative bureaucratic process" "at operational level you need task knowledge" "managers take care of the detail"	"managers and supervisors are similar it's just a question of scale" "you don't expect supervisors to have as many, or any [leadership traits], compared to a senior exec"

Only those who were recognised as leaders, at the super-ordinate level, and subsequently categorised as a particular kind of leader, and *then* determined to have the characteristics compatible with specific rungs of the hierarchical ladder are deemed worthy of being 'followed'.

Affect

Participants reported a wide range of positive emotional states when interacting with a leader who met their ILT needs. Positive feelings about themselves, positive emotions about the leader, and by extension positive feelings towards the organisation that they were employed within (see Table 3, overleaf). In relation to their superior, in the case of ILT match, the students stated that they had "*faith*" in

their leader because they "*respected*" them and felt that *"I can achieve so much more [for him]"* or *"I was willing to do a lot more [for her]"* and was willing to *"go the extra mile to achieve whatever it is that they are trying to achieve"*.

Table 3: Positive Emotional States

	About Self	About Superior	About Company
Positive Emotions	"happy and motivated" "motivated"	"have faith" "I have respect"	"Belief in the company" "pride in the company"
	"feel valued"	"If I'm happy with my boss, and things are going well, then I'd be happy to follow"	"I can achieve so much more"
	"feel safe and secure"	"I can achieve so much more"	"I was willing to do a lot more"
	"feel hope"	"I was willing to do a lot more"	"It makes me want to go the extra mile to achieve whatever it is that they are trying to achieve"
	"I felt validated, valued, empowered"	"it makes me want to go the extra mile to achieve whatever it is that they are trying to achieve"	

When asked about their feelings in response to leadership-claimants who did NOT meet their ILTs the students had very different responses with a range of negative feelings, about themselves, about their superiors, and particularly in relation to the organisations within which they worked (Table 4, overleaf). In regard to feelings about themselves it can be noted that the predominant feelings were of being de-motivated, and depressed. As one student remarked, indicating a sense of helplessness "*There's not much you can do*", a view echoed by another who asked "*What am I doing? I don't feel valued*".

Their feelings towards their superior are likewise negative with numerous references to a lack of confidence in the ability of the superior which impacts on motivation and attitudes. The majority view can be summarised in the words of one student "*I wouldn't want to work with them*". At the extreme, albeit verbally and non-verbally supported by other group members, there is an outright rejection of the authority of the leadership claimant. As one student stated "*In any other context you would challenge them [for leadership]*". These negative feelings extend beyond the unrecognised leadership-claimant to the organisation itself, to the point where various students are vocal in expressing their intention to leave the organisation.

	About Self	About Superior	About Company
Negative Emotions	"There's not much you can do [helplessness]"	"I wouldn't work with them"	"If the boss was no good, then I'd be happier to just quit, or maybe start my own company"
	"I feel unmotivated"	"I got to have respect otherwise I'm not motivated"	"makes me hate the place"
	"What am I doing? I don't feel valued"	"In any other context you would challenge them [for leadership]"	"I don't feel valued - there's not enough reward for what you do - your effort isn't recognised"
	"It's not home anymore - I don't fit"	"bad managers"	"It's not home anymore - I don't fit"
	"I think I'd be depressed"	"she was rubbish ..."	"We don't have to be subjected to this. Why waste yourself working for someone who isn't right?"
		"It feels like I'm taking over the management role - it's disorganised - you go in and you don't know what to do"	"Someone else might appreciate this job, but not me"
		"I don't feel confident in his ability - which affects my motivation"	"We didn't want to be there, work there, or be anywhere near there"
		"We worked for someone we didn't respect, thought they were two-faced, and couldn't hide it"	

Behaviour

In this final section the behavioural responses to the cognitive and affective aspects of their ILT are contrasted against the positive behaviours that result when their ILT expectations are met, and the negative behaviours that result when they are not (Table 5, overleaf). While some of these findings are inferred on the basis of previously expressed thoughts and feelings, others are explicitly stated by the students themselves.

Positive emotional responses engender positive behaviours towards both the superior, and the organisation itself. One student stated, smiling blissfully, that "*happy cows produce more milk* meaning that she worked harder, and better when matched with a leader who met her ILT needs bringing additional benefits both in terms of her own satisfaction but also in terms of supporting the leader in meeting objectives. Students reported that they were "*willing to do a lot more"* and wanted to "*achieve so much more"* both in the context of the leaders' direct goals, and those of the organisation itself.

Conversely, in situations where leadership-claimants did not meet their ILTs there is a very different picture of negative cognitive and affective impacts on behaviour. Behavioural responses range from poor motivation and poor performance, through to rejections of authority and actions that undermine the superior and the organisation. Unrecognised leadership-claimants were, in all cases, relegated to the role of *"bad manager"* and where affective components were particularly strong leadership claims were rejected outright. Those who felt able expressed a desire to leave the organisation stating "*I'd be happier to just quit, or maybe start my own company*". This was echoed by others including one student who felt that "*we don't have to be subjected to this – why waste yourself working for someone who isn't right?*" For those who remained there was a strong sense of dissatisfaction including those who felt "*in any other context you would challenge them [for leadership]*".

Table 5: Comparison of behaviours under ILT Met/Not Met conditions

Positive behaviours (ILTs Met)	Negative behaviours (ILTs Not Met)	
"Happy cows produce more milk" "I can achieve so much more [for him]" "I was willing to do a lot more [for her]" "It makes me want to go the extra mile to achieve whatever it is that they are trying to achieve"	"In any other context you would challenge them [for leadership]" "bad managers" "If the boss was no good, then I'd be happier to just quit, or maybe start my own company" "I don't feel confident in his ability - which affects my motivation" "Nobody wanted to work under her, didn't like coming to work, people called in sick, nobody would do overtime. We were totally disincentivized" "I wouldn't want to work with them"	"We don't have to be subjected to this - why waste yourself working for someone who isn't right?" "It feels like I'm taking over the management role - so disorganised, you don't know what to do" "I feel unmotivated, makes me hate the place, not want to come into work. I'm less productive" "Someone else might appreciate this job, but not me" "I got to have respect for the boss otherwise I'm not motivated" "she was rubbish"

Relationship Outcomes when ILT criteria met/not met

When looking at the relationship between cognitive perceptions of a leadership-claimants' attributes and skills, the emotional responses to the claimant, and the behaviours that result we can see two very different scenarios. In the first table (Table 6, overleaf) we can view a situation where initial positive perceptions create positive emotional responses which result in positive behaviours. This leads to a virtuous feedback cycle where the results of those behaviours positively reinforce continued perceptions and emotions. In short, they enjoy their job, like their boss, like the organisation, and generally feel good about themselves and the situation.

Table 6: Consequences of Positive Match on ILT

	Positive Relationships			
	Cognitive Perceptions (Distal)	Cognitive Perceptions (Proximal)	Emotional Responses	Behavioural Impacts
ILT criteria Met	"You want someone to have specific traits so you can distinguish between normal people and leaders, because they tend to have those things"	"What I like is decision making, a good leader can make decisions"	"I like to feel like I am participating in something, to be part of the bigger picture. So, I need some 'meaning' - I'm not just there to earn a salary and go home"	"Happy cows produce more milk"
	"a good leader has charisma, they will use that to make you want to follow them rather than using their authority"	"It's about the ability to solve problems"	"I felt validated, valued ... Empowered. I knew I fitted and could be relied on"	"I can achieve so much more [for him]"
	"Someone who has the charismatic, inspirational personality that makes me want to do the job"	"They need to be knowledgable, to understand the situation, and what needs to be done"	"Easier to work when your boss isn't standing right over you. You know what you are doing is right, you know how to do it"	"I was willing to do a lot more [for her]"
	"I'd quite like a leader to have some vision so that the work I'm doing fits into that"	"They need to be able to influence, to persuade"	"It's more about how a leader makes you feel valued"	"it makes me want to go the extra mile to achieve whatever it is that they are trying to achieve"
	"Leaders and managers are completely different – leaders need to inspire and motivate me to do it"	"Knowledge of what they are doing and where we are going, and how to get there"	"I can feel as though I'm working as part of the overall goal of the company - I know where I fit in"	"Easier to work when your boss isn't standing right over you. You know what you are doing is right, you know how to do it"

By contrast the following table (Table 7, overleaf) demonstrates an entirely different situation whereby the initial negative perceptions trigger negative emotional responses, resulting in negative behaviours, leading to a negative relationship that creates a vicious cycle that reinforces the original perceptions. In short, they dislike their jobs, dislike the bosses, have little or no faith in the companies they work for, and in generally feel bad about themselves and the situation they are in.

Table 7: Consequences of Negative Match on ILT

	Negative Relationships			
	Cognitive Perceptions (Distal)	**Cognitive Perceptions (Proximal) ***	**Emotional Responses**	**Behavioural Impacts**
ILT criteria Not Met	"if they don't have them [special traits] then they are just another person"	"You need to be able to adapt to what different people need/want, what they will respond to"	"She was quite patronising [lacked social/emotional intelligence], I felt insecure"	"If the boss was no good, then I'd be happier to just quit, or maybe start my own company"
	"if someone doesn't have them, then they are not to me a leader"	"Motivational [due to their charisma/vision] - to go further. Him and me"	"In any other context you would challenge them [for leadership]"	"Someone else might appreciate this job, but not me"
	"if you have an idea about how a leader should be, and they don't fit that, then you are going to think they are a crap leader"	"I think it's important that they are charismatic and inspirational because you want to look up to them and believe them and can follow them – and that will make them a good leader"	"It feels like I'm taking over the management role - it's disorganised - you go in and you don't know what to do"	"Nobody wanted to work under her, didn't like coming to work, people called in sick, nobody would do overtime. We were totally disincentivized"
	"not having the expected traits makes them *not* a leader ... It's more influential"	"I need them to have charisma, drive - otherwise it would be boring"	"There's not much you can do [helplessness]"	"I wouldn't want to work with them"
	"you might be more affected by someone who didn't match [your expectations], than one who did"	"They need to be knowledgable, to understand the situation, and what needs to be done"	"We worked for someone we didn't respect, thought they were two-faced, and couldn't hide it"	"I feel unmotivated, makes me hate the place, not want to come into work. I'm less productive"

* Due to the process of negative attribution caused by failure to categorise their superiors as 'leaders' it has been *inferred* that the participants would NOT recognise the targets as possessing the specified traits or abilities.

Linking examples of such emotional responses to organisational concepts like 'Job Satisfaction', 'Commitment' and 'Well-being', we can see (Table 8, overleaf) that positive emotional responses are linked to increased job satisfaction, greater commitment (to the leader and to the organisation as a whole) and an increased sense of well-being. Conversely, negative emotional responses demonstrate precisely the opposite.

Table 8: Relationship Outcomes when ILT needs Met/Not Met

|	Job Satisfaction	Commitment	Well-being
Positive Emotional Responses	"I can achieve so much more" (30k) "It makes me want to go the extra mile to achieve whatever it is that they are trying to achieve" (30k) "I produced some of my best work, even won an award. I was willing to do a lot more, I kept stupid hours but I was willing to do that to get things done" (27n)	"I'd like the leader to have a vision so that the work I'm doing fits into that vision - what I'm doing it's amounting to something" (6o) "I like to feel like I am participating in something, to be part of the bigger picture. So, I need some 'meaning' - I'm not just there to earn a salary and go home" (28o) "I can feel as though I'm working as part of the overall goal of the company - I know where I fit in" (6l)	"I felt entirely validated by it ... I felt I was on track and could be relied on" (30l) "It's more about how a leader makes you feel valued" (28q) "I feel like I can perform because there is some safety and security there - my ideas are valued" (29e)
Negative Emotional Responses	"Nobody wanted to work under her, didn't like coming to work, people called in sick, nobody would do overtime. We were totally disincentivized" (31d) "It feels like I'm taking over the management role - it's disorganised - you go in and you don't know what to do" (31f) "I feel unmotivated, makes me hate the place, not want to come into work. I'm less productive" (31e)	"If the boss was no good, then I'd be happier to just quit, or maybe start my own company" (32l) "In any other context you would challenge them [for leadership]" (31g) "I don't feel valued - there's not enough reward for what you do - your effort isn't recognised" (31f)	"She was quite patronising, I felt insecure" (20h) "There's not much you can do [helplessness]" (31g) "It's not home anymore - I don't fit" (32n)

In all cases there is a clear alignment of cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses (influenced by personality factors unique to individuals) that correspond to either high-LMX or low-LMX relationships, with major impacts on job satisfaction, organisational commitment and employee well-being.

Discussion

This paper aimed to expand on our existing understanding on Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs) by exploring the consequences of subjective meanings that participants attach to their own ILTs, with particular reference to the affective component, thereby making a theoretical contribution to knowledge and understanding in this field.

Cognitive aspects of participant ILTs are discussed below together with an investigation into emotional responses and behavioural consequences when their ILT needs are met, or not met. It is argued that followers' emotional response to leadership-claimants, an area that appears under-researched, has a major impact on their behaviour. A conceptual framework (Figure 1, below) is offered as a means to guide further discussions. While the cognitive processes, affective responses and behavioural impacts are discussed here, the specific personality issues that cause these are not since they lay outside the scope of this particular paper. Note also that the 'leader' circle is reduced in scale to show that it is the followers' perception, not the actual traits and behaviours of the 'leader' that are the focus of the study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
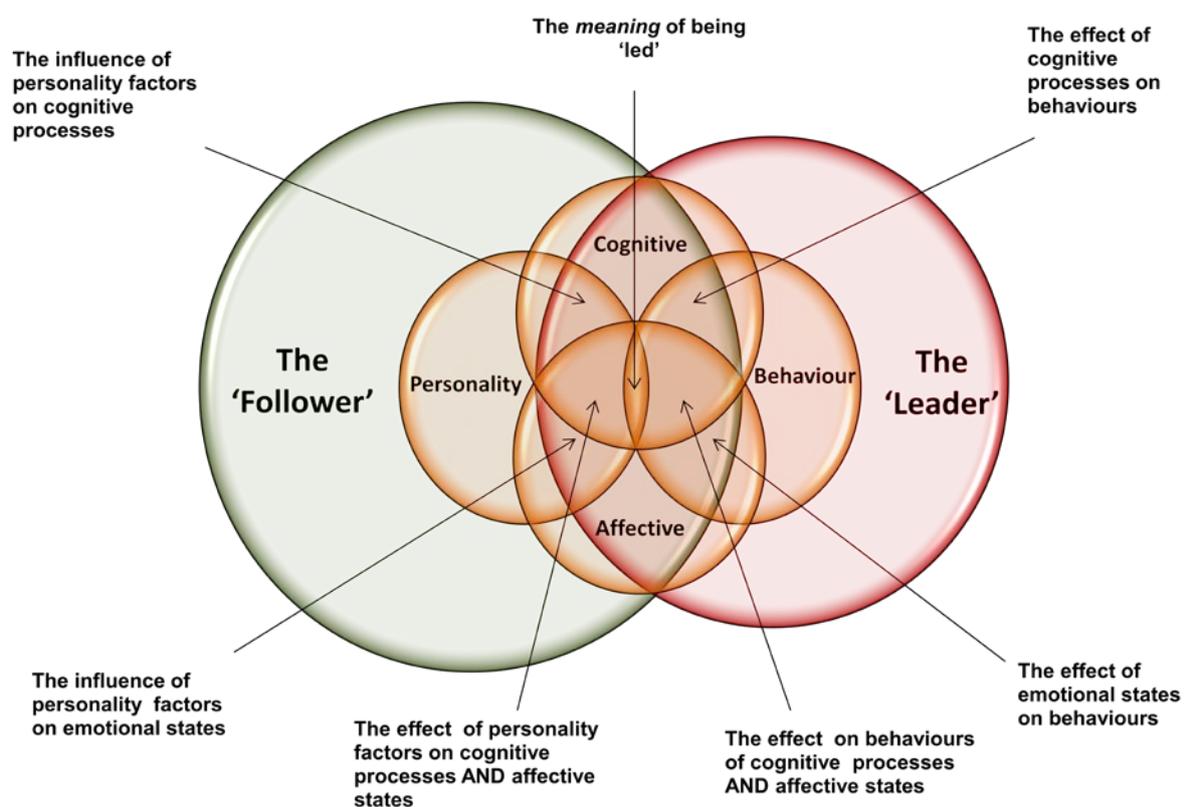
ILTs and Cognition

These findings support existing research in terms of ILT content and structure (Offerman et al., 1994; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004), particularly the process of leader categorisation with students demonstrating that prototypes and cognitive schemas

(Shondrick & Lord, 2010) are central to whether they 'recognised' the person claiming a leadership role regardless of that persons' formal organisational role or status.

Epitropaki and Martin (2005) reported a significant negative impact of prototype difference on LMX although these had only an indirect effect on organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and well-being through LMX. However, that was in the context of transactional relationships, in the current findings participant responses are indicative of a desire for leaders who conform to the transformational ideal, and are in opposition to several hypotheses advanced (ibid., p.662). This may be due to lower expectations voiced by those experiencing transactional relationships as opposed to innate expectations of those aspiring to transformational ones. The students clearly differentiate between 'managing' and 'leading' (Zaleznik, 1977) and only those categorised as leaders were deemed *"worthy of influence"* (Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney and Blascovich (1996) and thus worthy of being *followed*.

Participants were vocally desirous of leaders who displayed charisma, inspiration, and vision (See Table 1 and 2). While these and related concepts were incorporated within the Offerman *et al.,* (1994) scales and are still apparent in Transformational Leadership research (Edwards & Gill, 2012), the Charisma category was removed in the Epitropaki and Martin (2004) study, being replaced by 'Dynamism'. However, participants repeatedly spoke of the need for charismatic leaders without once referring for the need to be 'dynamic'. Conger and Kanungo (1998, p.6) thought charisma a "*poorly understood phenomenon*" and Schyns and Felfe (2008, p.304) echo this stating "*we all know charisma when we see it, but it is difficult to describe*". Therefore it may be that the students were merely using 'charisma' as a convenient label for a concept they all valued but conceived of differently.

ILTs and Emotion

Many of the discussions (see Table 3 and Table 4) evoked emotional responses reflect a range of personality issues that are central to their needs and motivations. Shondrick and Lord (2010, p.11) point out that "f*ollowers' cognitive and emotional processes are used to make sense of leadership processes"* but these processes are often so interlinked that it is difficult to separate the two.

A range of needs and motivations were voiced throughout and students seemed to have clear expectations about how a recognised leader might meet these (Table 6). For example, they wanted to know where they were going, and how they were going to get there, and wanted clarity about the role they were expected to play. Participants expressed a desire for their work to have meaning, and for it to fit within some vision, and Higgs (2003, p.273 citing Collingwood, 2001) suggests that it is a "*basic human need to be led*" indeed (ibid., citing Freud, 1927) "*groups of individuals need leaders to provide them with an identity and sense of purpose*".

Participants had expectations that a positive ILT match would result, or had resulted, in positive outcomes for themselves (Tables 3 and Table 6) whereas a negative ILT match would result, or had resulted, in negative outcomes (Table 4 and Table 7). In the former they had a greater belief in themselves and their abilities, while in the latter they doubt themselves on both accounts. Shamir et al., (1993) previously

noted that "*since our evaluations of self are often grounded in our relationships with others we would expect that our interactions with others, especially leaders, would affect our levels of self-esteem*".

ILTs and LMX Quality

Falkenburg and Schyns (2007, p.709) in examining withdrawal behaviours, such as absenteeism and turnover, demonstrated that job satisfaction can be both a result of behaviour, or a cause of behaviour, or indeed a dynamic interaction (see Table 5). Likewise, Volmer et al., (2011) show a similar reciprocal relationship between LMX and Job Satisfaction, whereby high quality LMX predicted job satisfaction, but also demonstrating that Job Satisfaction predicted the quality of the LMX relationship. However, since they were engaged in non-experimental quantitative research they were keen to specify that no causal inferences could be made. This study, on the other hand, conducting interpretive analysis of qualitative data can appreciate the common-sense notion of such a relationship. Further, if the findings of both sets of authors are combined in relation to reciprocity then, based on this study's findings, it is suggested that similar reciprocal links exist between other organisational outcomes and Behaviours and LMX (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 2: Reciprocal links between ILT, LMX and Organisational Outcomes
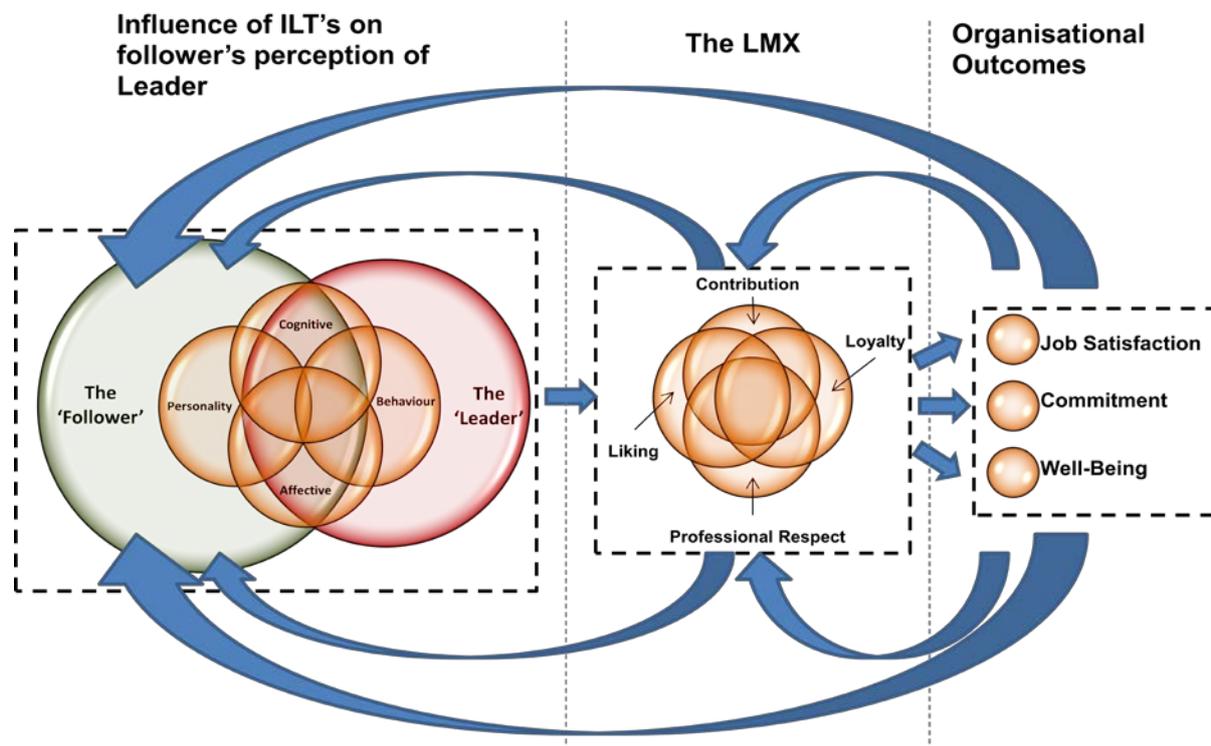
It can be seen that in positive relationships, where the leader is recognised there are positive emotional responses (both elements being linked to the fulfilment of multiple follower needs), resulting in positive behaviours towards the leader, LMX quality is likely to be high, with high Job Satisfaction, Commitment and Well-being. Whereas in negative relationships (see also Tables 7 and 8), where the leader is not recognised, there are negative emotional responses, negative behaviours, a low

quality LMX and decreased job satisfaction, commitment and well-being. The reciprocal nature of these elements means that positive reinforcement occurs at all stages of the best-case scenarios. Conversely, in worst-case scenarios negative reinforcement occurs which further damage the relationship, ensuring continued negative attributions.

Findings that illustrate this can be found (Table 8) where those expecting (or experiencing) high LMX relationships were enthusiastic in terms of job satisfaction commenting that they could "*achieve so much more*". They demonstrated Organisational Commitment they expressed their liking for "*participating in something"* and their well-being is illustrated by statements such as feeling "*validated, valued, empowered*". However, those experiencing low LMX relationships were left feeling depressed and demoralised. Low job satisfaction is shown in responses such as "*I feel unmotivated, makes me hate the place, not want to come into work, I'm less productive*". Similarly, lack of organisational commitment is demonstrated by those who would be "*happier to quit, or maybe start my own company*". For those less fortunate there appeared to be a dearth of well-being with feelings of "insecurity", "helplessness", and no sense of belonging (see Table 4 and 7).

Synthesis: Finding Meaning

The findings seem to indicate that followers, at least in this study, have an innate desire to '*perform beyond expectations'* (Bass, 1985) when matched with a leader who meets their ILT needs, indeed transactional management behaviours are never mentioned. The active schema was for 'l*eader' and*, as Bass (1985, p.36) notes, transformational leadership contains an "*intense emotional component*" denoting "*an absolute emotional and cognitive identification with the leader*".

While Bass (1985) may have conceived of transformational leadership in the context of organisational transformation perhaps it is the case that followers prefer such leadership regardless of the situation, since it meets their emotional needs, whereas transactional leadership does not. The romance of leadership (Meindl *et al.,* 1985) lives on, although here it is not the perception of the leaders' role in effective organisational performance that is the issue. It is the perception of the leaders' role in the creation of meaning, and purpose, in satisfying *"the full spectrum of human drives and desires*" (Zaleznik, 1977, cited by Higgs, 2003, p.276).

Conclusion

The research findings demonstrated that the ILTs held by the participants closely mirrored that of existing research in terms of content and structure in that the categorisation process was fundamental in recognising leaders. Whether the leadership claim was recognised or not resulted in entirely different relationships. Whereas previous research often looked at the relationship between superiors and subordinates from a purely transactional perspective this study showed that for 'followers' the exchange is of a different order. Participants exhibited a strong desire for a more transformational relationship with the leader's role perceived in terms of the creation of meaning and purpose that satisfied *their* motivations and desires.

In interpreting the findings through the lens of LMX Theory, in order to understand the impacts on relationship quality and outcomes relating to job satisfaction, commitment, and well-being, it was found that this relationship was not linear as expected, but that the outcomes fed back to reinforce positive or negative perceptions that further mediated, or partially mediated, the nature and quality of the relationship.

There appears to be a strong link between the implicit expectations of the follower and the cognitive and affective responses to the leadership-claimant which lead to disparate behaviours under conditions where their ILT needs are met, or not met. In the former a positive relationship ensues which leads to raised perceptions of job satisfaction, increased commitment and heightened well-being. In the latter a more negative relationship results and leads inexorably to decreased job satisfaction, decreased (or non-existent) commitment, and reduced feelings of well-being. In both cases these outcomes feed back into the perceptions of the follower, reinforcing their view of the leader, thereby perpetuating either a positive relationship, or a negative one. For those whose needs go unmet the relationship remains purely transactional, task orientated, a contractual master-servant relationship with positional authority being based on coercion and reward power.

In relation to evaluating the rigour with which the study has been conducted we have endeavoured to ensure that the findings are context-rich and meaningful whilst attempting to convince others as to the plausibility of same. Whilst there are a wide range of opinions expressed they all fall within explanatory frameworks offered by existing research. Whilst there is no assertion that the findings are generalisable beyond the study it is possible, reader assessment permitting, that comparisons can be made with other similar samples.

Weakness and Limitations

While LMX Theory was useful as a lens with which to interpret the findings, it was perhaps marred by its transactional era origins, focussed on purely contractual exchanges. Another possible weakness of the study was that the participants, when discussing positive emotions and behaviours, were predominantly hypothesising about their expectations of and responses to an Ideal leader, but were overwhelmingly recalling actual experiences when discussing negative emotions and behaviours. However, the extremes in emotions and behaviours serve admirably to

illustrate the consequences when their needs were met, or not met. It is important to clarify that the research looks at only one side of a dyadic relationship, and there is an implicit assumption on the part of the students that their ideal leader will reciprocate their feelings. No allowance was made, by the participants, for a scenario where the leader might meet all their expectations, but that they themselves did not meet the needs or expectations of the leader.

Contribution to theory/Implications for practice

The findings develop and extend existing theory by enhancing our understanding of the impact on workplace relationships, and of the antecedents of LMX relationships. By considering the *meaning* rather than just the content, structure, or relationships between variables, the findings could open up further areas for research, as well as having implications for HR practitioners. Organisations may need to revisit their assumptions concerning leadership/management in terms of HRD as perceived traits and qualities appear to be more important to followers than actual behaviours.

An understanding of the implicit needs and expectations of followers is vital for effective working relationships, since they directly impact on the organisations' ability to meet its objectives. How then can HRM, HRD and Organisational Development staff become more involved in developing better matching mechanisms? How can recruitment and selection procedures, appraisal systems, leadership development programmes, talent management and succession planning be adapted?

Future research

Although the findings show a reciprocal link between ILTs, LMX and organisational outcomes it was not within the scope of this paper to discuss specific psychological antecedents and mediators of those links. In addition, the main study was conducted from a follower perspective, examining only one side of the dyad, with a reciprocation of affection being assumed by participants. Future research could examine this issue of *meaning* from both leader and follower perspectives and thus map, qualitatively, multiple scenarios of expectations met/not met from differing perspectives. It would be rewarding to understand, in the context of a transformational Leader-Follower Exchange, the cognitive and emotional effects on the leader where followers meet/don't meet *their* implicit theories. As in all relationships it takes 'two to tango', if one side does not reciprocate then the other is left feeling rejected, leading to frustration and depression, and sometimes anger.

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