

# Literature Review: Leader Communication Styles and Work Outcomes

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## Abstract

Leader communication styles affect the work outcome of both the leader and the subordinates. To affirm this statement, we reviewed the various journals from Web of Science and Scientific Research databases from the earliest published work in 1978 to 2018 on leader communication styles. This paper identified articles that evaluated leader communication style in relation to leader and subordinates work outcomes. We classified each selected study into communication style dimensions, their components, type of industry, and leader communication style outcomes. Results from the review are discussed and some recommendations are given to expound the scope of the study.

**Keywords:** Leader communication style, work outcome, communication styles dimensions

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is as a central part of leadership practice. Such that, in order to create the most productive working relationships, it becomes mandatory to get in sync with the behavior patterns of the communicator (Luo et al., 2016). D Vries et al (2009, p. 179) defined communication style as the “characteristic way a person sends verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal signals in social interactions denoting; who he or she is or wants to appear to be, how he or she tends to relate to people with whom he or she interacts, and in what way his or her messages should usually be interpreted.” Similarly, Norton (1978 p. 19, 58) defined communication styles as, “the way one verbally, nonverbally, and para verbally communicate to indicate how their meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood literally”. Although according to Bakker et al (2013) communication styles are related to personality traits, D Vries et al (2010) argue that personality traits are much broader and expressed in a wide variety of situations, including those that, from an interpersonal perspective, are non-communicative.

Since leadership is a working component of every job, it is important for people to become as educated as possible about their own communication style (Rogers,

2012). A competent leader is one that influences subordinates in a desirable manner to achieve the goals set by the organization (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). The characteristics of a leader are determined by the particularities of his or her communication styles (Radu & Ramona 2014), which is a fundamental factor where the performance and success of an organization are concerned. According to Bekiari & Tsiana (2016), we often make the mistake of paying too much attention to the content of our message and less concern on how to deliver that message. Hence, Zulch (2014b) suggest that it's needful to understand the requirements of an organizational communication plan, what communication methods and communication styles can be used to effectively address those requirements. Therefore, in order to revise and improve the relations, the leaders have with the subordinates, understanding how many leaders' communication styles means is expedient (Radu & Ramona 2014).

This literature review aims to uncover the various dimensions of leader communication styles, the instruments that have been used to measure communication styles, and the influence of leader communication styles on subordinate work outcome and leader outcomes.

## 2 AN INSTRUMENT USED TO MEASURE COMMUNICATION STYLES

There are several extant pieces of research that have attempted to unleash and measure communication style.

Most renowned is Norton's (1978, 1983) Communicator Style Measure (CSM) which consist of nine factors including friendly, animated, attentive, contentious, dramatic, impression leaving, open, relaxed, communicator image and dominant. Although various studies have supported the validity of the CSM style in different fields; Arsalan (2017) has questioned its construct validity. Chaganti & Bikkina (2011) also claimed that, although the CSM has a strong concept, its measurement is still crude. Burgoon and Hale (1984) conceptualized relational communication in a Relational Communication Scale (RCS) as the verbal and nonverbal subjects that define the interpersonal relationship present in people's communication. The RCS obtained twelve relational communication facets namely: Dominance-Submission, Intimacy, Intensity of Involvement, Affection-Hostility, Inclusion-Exclusion, Depth- Superficiality, Trust, Emotional Arousal, Composure, Similarity, Formality, and Task-Social Orientation. A factor analysis of CSM and the RCS explains two main classifications of communication styles; friendliness and dominance in CSM (Hansford & Hattie, 1987) and affiliation and dominance in RCS (Dillard et al. (1999).

Gudykunst et al's (1996) created a Communication Style Scale (CSS) based on Hall's (1976) communication style instruments and Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's (1988) theoretical framework of high and low communication styles. The CSS contains eight dimensions including Inferring Meaning, Indirect Communication, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Dramatic Communication, Use of Feelings, Openness, Preciseness, and Positive Perception of Silence. However, D Vries' (2009, 2010) claimed that Use of Feelings, Positive Perception of Silence and Inferring Meaning showed affect toward communication rather than communication behaviors. Therefore D Vries conducted a lexical study using verbs and adjectives and drew another seven dimensions of communication styles with key acronym *PRESENT*, that is, preciseness, reflectiveness, expressiveness, supportiveness, emotionality, niceness and threateningness.

Richmond and McCroskey (1979) also constructed a Management Communication Style Scale (MCS) which contains four dimensions including Tell, Sell, Consult, and Join. Abdul et al (2013) employed the MCS Malaysian organization context and provided the measurements of the four factors of management communication styles. Duran (1992, 1983) developed a Communicative Adaptability Scale-Self Reference Measure (CAS-SR) consisting of six dimensions: social experience, social confirmation, social composure, appropriate disclosure, articulation, and wit, which use a sense of humor to diffuse social tension. Reece & Brandt (1996) also constructed a scale on communication

styles ranging from high dominance / low dominance and high sociability/ low sociability all together classified into supportive, emotive, reflective, and director communication styles. The CSM, RCS, and CSS were based on a preexisting concept of communication styles. However, Luo et al. (2016) among other researchers have lamented that these measures lack an integrated framework. Therefore they have proposed other dimensions of communication styles and their work outcomes which will be discussed in the next section.

### 3 LEADER COMMUNICATION STYLES AND WORK OUTCOMES

Over the years communication styles have been classified into various dimensions, ranging from dominant to friendly and many others. The main question being, does leadership equal communication? (De Vries et al., 2009). Notable literature classified leader communication styles according to either qualitative or quantitative analysis.

De Vries et al's (2009, 2010) investigated the relations between leaders' communication styles and charismatic leadership, human-oriented leadership task-oriented leadership, and leadership outcomes. De Vries et al. (2009) drew the key dimensions of communication styles using adjectives and verbs through a principal component analysis. He provided seven-dimension leader communication styles, that is; preciseness, reflectiveness, expressiveness, supportiveness, emotionality, niceness and threateningness. The study showed that charismatic and human-oriented leadership are mainly communicative, while task-oriented leadership is significantly less communicative. De Vries further stated that communication styles were differentially and strongly related to knowledge sharing behaviors, perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, and subordinate's team commitment while leadership styles mediated the relations between the communication styles and leadership outcomes. According to regression analyses, leader's supportive communication boosted knowledge donating behaviors to leaders and knowledge collecting from the leader. Leader's communication assuredness related to perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader and subordinate's commitment to the team. Leader's communication supportiveness, preciseness, assuredness and argumentativeness weakly related to leadership styles and leader outcome variable although leader argumentativeness related positively to charismatic leadership.

In leader outcomes, Bakker et al. (2013) claimed that personality traits and communication styles are

interlinked and that communication styles usually have a stronger conceptual link to leader outcomes than broad personality traits. Communication styles including expressive and preciseness, have a higher validity over the personality dimensions such as extraversion and conscientiousness in the prediction of a competent leader. Zaccaro et al. (2008) classified communication styles into four dimensions namely, authoritarian, authoritarian-exploiter, consultative, and participative. The four communication styles determined the leading type of a leader.

In the context of organizational change, Luo et al. (2016) investigated how leaders can effectively communicate change, boost commitment to the change process and reduce subordinates' fear of change. By analyzing employees varying fear of organization change, he found that communication styles in organization change context are composed of four orientation dimensions including; hope, reality, subordinate, and support. Hope orientation which helped reduce subordinate fear of change failure. Reality orientation provided complete and reliable information about the change as well as address subordinates' fear of partial awareness. Subordinate orientation emphasized the potential benefits to the organization and subordinates. Support orientation influenced insufficient support during the change process.

Shin (2014) Investigated leader communication style of leaders in a transportation firm. The study divided leader communication styles into two dimensions; direct and indirect styles. Results revealed that Master and Chief Engineer's direct communication with crew had lower conflict and higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment than their indirect one through Chief Officer and First Engineer. It was evident that isolation from home moderately affected the relation between the communication style and group conflict while direct communication style reduced conflict in the group. In summary, Shin affirmed that job satisfaction and organization commitment could be heightened by proper communication style of the leader which would promote the job performance of shipping organizations in the long term.

Moon et al (2011) investigated leader communication style in the context of Korean army; the study showed that, in autocratic leadership, sociable communication styles have positive effects on the level of organizational commitment, while dominant styles have a negative effect. Also, the relationship between leader's communication style and organizational commitment was partially mediated by the trust of the leader while the perception of leader's ability moderate the relationship between leader's communication style and trust of the leader. Such that the negative effect of dominant

communication style on the trust level is stronger when their leader's ability is low whereas the positive effect of sociable communication style on the trust level is higher when the perception of leader's ability is high. Bradley & Baird, (1977) added that autocratic leaders are primarily dominant in their communication style that democratic and laissez-faire leaders who mostly use relaxed, animated, attentive and friendly communication styles.

Similarly, Sidelinger & McCroskey (1996) developed a socio-communicative style construct including assertiveness and responsiveness communication style. Sidelinger and McCroskey defined assertiveness as the tendency to express positive or negative personal rights and feelings while stating personal stand while responsiveness is the ability to show sensitivity and sympathy to other people. It clearly showed that nonverbal immediacy and the socio-communicative style of a leader have a significant positive correlation with teacher clarity. Although responsive communication was more related to teacher clarity than assertiveness, instructors who were more assertive and responsive were perceived as clearer and understandable in their leadership. In an assessment test whether the communication style of leader vary or is consistent, Baker & Ganster, (1985) found that, evaluative communication dimensions are more consistent with group levels while dynamic communication dimensions are only consistent with specific conditions. However, both dynamic and evaluative styles are correlated strongly with follower's job satisfaction.

In the same line, Mattina (2008) research on college student leader communication styles, divided verbal aggressiveness into four traits of control namely assertiveness, hostility, verbal aggressiveness, and argumentativeness. Assertiveness and argumentativeness were considered as constructive traits while hostility and verbal aggressiveness represented the destructive traits. According to the results obtained, leader verbal aggression involved attacking the self-concepts of subordinates with an intention to hurt by humiliating, intimidating, depressing, and various negative feelings about the individual.

On the other hand, Guo et al (2015) empirical study classified verbal aggressiveness into two; autocratic verbal communication styles which led to low job satisfaction and supportive verbal communication styles which resulted to higher subordinate job satisfaction while work engagement intermediated between leader verbal communication styles and job satisfaction. It was clear that, even though job burnout mediated autocratic verbal communication style and job satisfaction, the mechanism did not exist between supportive verbal communication style and job satisfaction. The study revealed a significant role of leader's verbal

communication styles on subordinate job satisfaction which in turn influences job performance.

Cetin et al. (2012) study on Turkish bank leader's communication affirmed that communication style and communication competency has a stronger relationship with job satisfaction. Cetin found that the style that a leader uses to interact with the employees will determine their performance. Poor leader and follower interactions led to a negative influence on job satisfaction exhibiting signs of stress and resistance to comply with the organization vision and goals. Hick's (2011) empirical research asserted that communication styles have a significant influence on the satisfaction levels of employees. The findings demonstrated how appropriate and effective communication promotes organizational health whereas inappropriate communication may decrease employee satisfaction.

In a classroom setting, Noels et al. (1999) examined the perception of students on their teacher's communication style. Findings indicated that the perception of teacher's communication styles are significantly related to intrinsic motivation while stronger feelings of intrinsic motivation are related to positive language learning outcomes.

In physical education instructor-student relationships, Bekiari (2017) examined the influence of instructor's verbal aggressiveness on student's social communicative styles. Findings showed that instructor's verbal aggressiveness positively related to assertiveness, moral manipulation, desire to control, desire for status, and distrust from others but had a negative relation to responsiveness. Instructor's verbal aggressiveness closely related to student's Machiavellianism through communication styles. Bekiari (2012) study revealed that instructor's verbal aggressiveness negatively related to students affect learning towards the course, other behavior

related to the course and the tutor, and student's satisfaction. Also, verbal aggressiveness of the instructor has a significant prediction to the student learning outcomes. It also negatively related to social attraction and liking of the leader. Bekiari and Tsiana (2016) found that instructor's verbal aggressiveness negatively affected learner's personal orientation to tasks, basic reasons and caring reasons of discipline. Similarly, students' perception of their instructor's verbal aggressiveness negatively correlated with their perceptions of understanding, instructor credibility, and evaluations (Bekiari et al, 2006). However, instructor's verbal aggressiveness played an important role in disciplining students (Bekiari et al., 2017).

In a small- group, Barlow et al. (1982) found that the significant effect of leader's verbal communication style on the group members. The result showed that the leader's verbal response affected member's communication style and perception of leader orientation but had a little notable effect on self-concept or satisfaction with the leader. Maricchiolo et al. (2013) examination of two political leaders during a debate towards Italian General Election evidently showed that rhetoric and gestures of Berlusconi were different from Prodi's. The correlation analyses between objective and subjective measures including self-report and coding respectively indicated that verbal and gestural styles used in each answer, by the two politicians, had different persuasive effects on different politically oriented audiences. To address the occasional controversy regarding differences in leaders' communication styles, Schneider et al (2016) empirical study on the Linux Kernel Mailing List (LKML) leaders proved that it is rather easier to use a machine learning strategy to automatically differentiate between two leaders based on their writing language.

Table 1

Summary of Leader communication styles dimensions, components, and work outcome

Author	Dimensions of communication styles	Components	Type of industry	Outcome
De Vries et al (2009, 2010)	1.Preciseness 2.Reflectiveness 3.Expressiveness 4.Supportiveness 5. Emotionality 6. Niceness 7. Threatingness	Leadership outcomes a. Charismatic leadership, b. Human-oriented leadership c. Task-oriented leadership d. Leadership outcomes	Leadership	The study investigated the relations between leaders' communication styles and charismatic leadership, human-oriented leadership task-oriented leadership and leadership outcomes. The study showed that charismatic and human-oriented leadership are mainly communicative, while task-oriented leadership is significantly less

				<p>communicative. Communication styles were differentially and strongly related to knowledge sharing behaviors, perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, and subordinate's team commitment. Multiple regression analyses indicated that the leadership styles mediate the relations between the communication styles and leadership outcomes.</p>
Luo et al. (2016)	<p>Leader communication styles;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hope orientation,</li> <li>2. Reality orientation,</li> <li>3. Subordinate orientation,</li> <li>4. Support orientation,</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Organizational change</li> <li>2. Fear of change</li> </ol>	Business organization	<p>Analyses show that leader communication style in change context reduces subordinates' fear of change and boost commitment to the change process. Hope orientation, reduces the fear of change failure. Reality orientation provides complete and reliable information about the change as well as address subordinates' fear of partial awareness. Subordinate orientation emphasizes the potential benefits to the organization and subordinates. Support orientation influences insufficient support during the change process.</p>
Shin (2014)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Direct styles</li> <li>2. Indirect styles</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Job satisfaction</li> <li>2. Organizational commitment</li> </ol>	Shipping Organization.	<p>The empirical result show that Master and Chief Engineer's direct communication with the crew has lower conflict and higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment than their indirect one through Chief Officer and First Engineer. In turn isolation from home moderately effects the relationship between the communication style and group conflict while direct communication style reduces conflict in the group to show less isolation from home. The findings suggest that job satisfaction and organization commitment could be heightened by proper communication style of which would utilize the job performance of ship organization in the long-term.</p>

Bradley & Baird, (1977)	Relaxed, Animated, Attentive, Friendly.	Leadership styles -Democratic -Laissez-faire -Autocratic	Mid-Western Hospitals	The study showed that Democratic and Laissez-faire leaders are more relaxed, use animation, attentive and friendly as they communication styles but Autocratic leaders are use dominant communication styles.
Moon et al (2011).	1. Sociable style. 2. Dominant style	1. Organizational commitment. 2. Leader's ability. 3. Trust	Korean Army	The study showed that Sociable communication styles have positive effects on the level of organizational commitment, while dominant styles have a negative effect. Also, the relationship between leader's communication style and organizational commitment was partially mediated by the trust of a leader while the perception of leader's ability moderates the relationship between leader's communication style and trust of the leader. Such that the negative effect of dominant communication style on the trust level is stronger when their leader's ability is low whereas the positive effect of sociable communication style on the trust level is higher when the perception of leader's ability is high.
Mattina (2008)	1. Verbal aggressiveness, a. Assertiveness, b. Hostility c. Argumentativeness, d. Verbal aggressiveness	1. Subordinates self-concepts	College student Leaders	The findings show that verbal aggression involves attacking the self-concepts of subordinates with an intention to hurt by humiliating, intimidating, depressing, and various negative feelings about the individual.
Cetin et al. (2012)	Leader communication styles	Job satisfaction	Turkish bank	Empirical research on Turkish bank leader's communication revealed that communication competency has a stronger relationship with job satisfaction.
Schneider et al (2016)	Leader communication styles	1. Sharing code samples, 2. Discussing bugs, 3. Making decisions.	Linux Kernel projects	The study addressed the occasional controversy regarding differences in communication styles on the LKML leaders. Results showed that it is straightforward to use a machine learning strategy to automatically differentiate between two leaders based on their writing.

Bakker et al. (2013)	1. Leader communication styles/ a. Expressiveness, b. Preciseness 2. Personality traits. a. Extraversion, b. Conscientiousness	1. Leader outcomes 2. Personality traits	Business & Economics	Results showed that Personality traits and communication styles are interlinked, as evidenced by high convergent correlations. Communication styles have a stronger conceptual link to leader outcomes than broad personality traits. Expressive and preciseness have a higher validity over the personality dimensions extraversion and conscientiousness in the prediction of leader.
Maricchiolo et al. (2013).	1. Verbal styles 2. Gestural styles	1. Political orientation 2. Persuasive effect	Italian General Election debate	Results showed that rhetoric and gestures of Berlusconi were different from Prodi's. Correlation analyses between objective and subjective measures; self-report and coding respectively indicated that verbal and gestural styles used in each answer by the two politicians had different persuasive effects on different politically oriented audiences.
Guo et al (2015)	1. Autocratic verbal communication styles 2. Supportive verbal communication styles	1. Subordinate job satisfaction 2. Job performance.	Business Organization	Empirical study showed that autocratic verbal communication styles led to low job satisfaction while supportive verbal communication styles resulted in higher subordinate job satisfaction. Work engagement intermediates between leader verbal communication styles and job satisfaction. The study revealed a significant role of leader's verbal communication styles on subordinate job satisfaction which in turn influences job performance.
Noels et al. (1999)	Teacher communication styles.	Learning Outcomes. a. Motivation intensity, b. greater self-evaluation competence c. Less anxiety	French Teaching institution	The study examined the perception of students on their teacher's communication style. Findings indicated that the perception of teacher's communication styles are significantly related to intrinsic motivation while stronger feelings of intrinsic motivation are related to positive language learning outcomes.

Barlow et al. (1982)	Verbal response styles a. Confrontive b. Speculative c. No specific style	1. Leader's perception, 2. Satisfaction with leader 3. Self-concept changes.	Small groups leadership	The study examined the significant effect of small- group leader's verbal communication style on the group members. The result showed that the leader's verbal response style affected member's communication style and perception of leader orientation but had no notable effect on self-concept or satisfaction with the leader.
Bekiari, (2006, Bekiari et al, (2012) Bekiari, (2017)	1.Verbal aggressiveness 2.social- communicative styles 3. Machiavellianism	Students Machiavellian tactics	Physical education.	The study examined the influence of instructor's verbal aggressiveness on student's social communicative styles. Findings showed that (1) instructor's verbal aggressiveness positively related to assertiveness, moral manipulation, desire to control, desire for status, and distrust from others but had a negative relation to responsiveness. (2) Instructor's verbal aggressiveness closely related to Machiavellianism through communication styles.
Hicks, (2011)	Leader Communication styles	1. Employee satisfaction 2.Organizational health	Healthcare	The Analyses suggests that the communication styles have a significant influence on the satisfaction levels of employees. The findings also demonstrated how appropriate and effective communication is used to promote organizational health while inappropriate communication may decrease employee satisfaction.
Sarhadi (2016)	Leader-team Communication styles	Project teams	organization Business organization in Iran	The study determined team members' communication styles. The result indicates that there is a correlation between communication style arrangement of team members and project team performance. Teams that had all kind of communication style peoples, with suitable arrangement commonly had better performance than other teams that had the same communication style peoples.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

From the literature reviewed, it is evident that all the studies conducted reveal that leader communication style, organizational commitment, intrinsic motivation, and job satisfaction are closely interrelated. Thereby confirming

that, leader communication styles affect the work outcome of both leader and subordinates. However, since there is only less work carried out with respect to business organizations and project management, there is a need for the future study of the effect of leader communication styles on turnover and work engagement of employees



working in projects. Leadership is a working component of every job and it is important for people to become as educated as possible about their own communication style. This review would like to suggest that communication and public relations training could to a greater extent modify and develop the relationship between leaders and their subordinates by understanding what leader communication style really meant. Communication styles

of a leader as evidently uncovered in this study, determines the action to be taken or how information is interpreted. It, therefore, poses a challenge for every leader to get acquainted with his or her communication styles based on the team and organization needs. Each of the communication styles is valid as a sample to be used in either leadership style a leader adopts.

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