**Leader attentive communication: validation of a new questionnaire.**

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*Effective communication is a basic foundation of leadership. Since communication constitutes the majority of a leaders’ tasks, it is important to know how to do this well. Additionally, the rise of multitasking, associated with performance drops and burnout, is a threat to the effectivity of communication. To investigate effective leader communication in an organizational context, we propose a new concept, i.e. leader attentive communication: “an open-minded, attentive demeanor while in a conversation with an employee”. Instead of focusing on the content or form of the communication, we will measure the process of communicating. To develop this approach, we draw on research concerning psychological needs: i.e. self-determination theory and the need for achievement. This article contains the first validation study of the questionnaire. It provides a new way of researching communication and leadership, which will enhance theorizing on leader-employee relationships. Furthermore, with the use of this questionnaire, practical interventions may be developed as well.*

**Introduction**

Effective and skilled communication is crucial for leadership (Barge, 1994; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Neufeld et al., 2010; Riggio & Darioly, 2016). Some scholars even go as far as to argue that successful leadership is a consequence of effective communication (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). Research has indeed indicated that communication abilities of leaders are related to managerial performance (Penley, Alexander, Jernigan, & Henwood, Catherine, 1991; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016), even when there is physical distance between leaders and remote employees (Neufeld et al., 2010). Furthermore, since leader communication may constitute up to 70-80% of a leaders’ tasks, of which approximately 45% is direct and non-mediated communication in person, communication is a core task of a leader. Therefore it is extremely important to know how to do this well (Wajcman & Rose, 2011). Moreover, communication skills are universally seen as indicators of positive leadership styles (e.g. transformational and charismatic leadership, see Den Hartog et al., 1999).

It is also relevant to acknowledge that 55% of our communication during work is indirect and mediated using various screens (i.e. computers, mobile phones or tablets; see Wajcman & Rose, 2011), which hampers our ability to communicate attentively. Research has indeed shown that our general communication abilities are declining since the rise of our screen use: we have collectively started unlearning the detection and interpretation of facial information and bodily postures, and children and adolescents (growing up with this new technology) are already less empathic, les attentive in conversations and less able to read nonverbal signals during communication (Turkle, 2015). In addition, multitasking is on the rise. This has adverse effects on performance: high levels of multitasking lead to both less accuracy and less productivity (Adler & Benbunan-Fich, 2012), as well as employee burnout (Pikos, 2017). The same might be true during communication with employees, where there is a risk of increasing distractedness and absent-mindedness. The rise of screen use on the work floor, in combination with increased multitasking as well as remote working (Neufeld et al., 2010), signifies a problematic context in which leaders need to find new strategies in order to communicate effectively. Moreover, boss ‘phubbing’ or ‘phone snubbing’ is a recent work-related phenomenon under investigation. It entails ‘the extent to which a supervisor uses or is distracted by his/her cell phone while in the presence of subordinates’ (Roberts & Williams, 2017, p. 206) and is related to a reduction in supervisory trust and consequently employee work engagement through a diminished feeling of meaningfulness and availability.

These trends show the importance of attention as a scarce commodity on the work floor. Therefore, in this study we examine more specifically whether or when a leader takes the time to actually be present with their employee and communicate attentively without distractions. Of course, the content of a leader’s communication is important for employees, but “the way in which a leader communicates may be equally important” (Bakker-Pieper & De Vries, 2013, p. 2). We propose that leader attentive communication is an effective way to communicate in organizations. The question remains, however, what leader attentive communication actually entails: What are the behaviors leaders exhibit while communicating, what exactly should leaders be attentive to, and how can we investigate this? We draw upon research psychological needs, i.e. self-determination theory and the need for achievement, to develop a general framework to address these questions.

Research on this topic is relevant and timely: although leader communication is a crucial aspect of positive leadership (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Riggio, 2013; Penley et al., 1991), there has not been much organizational research investigating leader communication behaviorally. Research has focused on leader communication styles, i.e. the relevance of preciseness or expressiveness (Bakker-Pieper & De Vries, 2013), and on leader non-verbal behavior, i.e. the effect of positive kinesics and paralanguage (Bellou & Gkorezis, 2016), but there has not been much communication research through the lens of *leader attention*. However, recent research has shown that leader attention in general may have a positive effect on the relational quality with employees (Good et al., 2016; Reb, Chaturvedi, Narayanan, & Kudesia, 2018) and is related to active listening and interpersonal skills (Jones, Bodie, & Hughes, 2016), which is indicative of the relevance of our – more specified – leader communication construct.

In addition, as a response to a rapid growth of positive leadership styles, there are calls for developing an integrative view on leadership, and for considering possible overlap or shared leader behavior across positive leadership styles (Derue et al., 2011; Eberly, Johnson, Hernandez, & Avolio, 2013; Rowold, Borgmann, & Diebig, 2015; Yukl, 2002). The focus on attentive communication may help to bridge this gap, since our proposed positive communication behavior may augment the effect of specific positive leadership styles, or can be shared across different positive leadership styles. With this new scale, we will also be able to investigate whether an attentive communication style has an impact on employee outcomes (e.g. need satisfaction, engagement and performance). Finally, the knowledge about basic building blocks of (effective) communication are not only relevant for the development of better leadership theories, but also for creating more practical interventions for organizations (see e.g. Antonakis et al., 2011).

**The motivation for leader attentive communication**

According to communication scholars, “communication is motivated by our basic social need for affiliation, achievement, and control, as well as our strong desire to reduce our uncertainty and anxiety” (Griffin, 2012; p.474). Research also shows the importance of relation-oriented behavior in e.g. the success ratings of appraisal interviews (Meinecke, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2017). Relation-oriented behavior in this context consists of showing concern and respect for followers and their needs, expressing appreciation and supportive behavior for several employee and organizational outcomes. Leaders with “relation-oriented behavior tend to be skilled at identifying and addressing the needs of their employees” (Meinecke et al., 2017, p. 1058). Other scholars also suggests that in order for communication to be successful, leaders should emphasize follower needs, since they are fundamental “components of the communication environment” (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017, p.26). Combined, this is in line with the importance of the fulfillment of several psychological needs as a consequence of leader communication, i.e. the need for autonomy, competence, relatedness (i.e. Self-Determination Theory; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, since leadership is a dyadic process (Uhl-Bien, 2006), we posit that LAC may also enhance a leaders’ psychological need satisfaction (see below). In this context, the need for achievement from leaders is also relevant, (i.e.), since a more attentive communication will likely effect employee performance (through psychological need satisfaction), therefore achieving a leaders’ work goals. These theoretical developments in both the field of communication and psychology explain the motivation for leaders to be attentive while communicating with employees.

**Self-Determination Theory.** SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008) states that fostering three psychological needs, i.e. the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness, will lead to an autonomous, intrinsic motivation at work. Since leader attention in general has been linked to employee self-determination and engagement (Reb, Narayanan, & Chaturvedi, 2014), we posit that LAC will influence psychological need satisfaction as well, or even more, since (1) LAC it is a more specific measure of leader attention and (2) it focuses on communication with employees, which lies “at the heart of all workplace relationships” (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017, p. 116). Below we will argue that through LAC the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness especially will be satisfied for both the employee as well as the leader.

First, the need for autonomy constitutes “experiencing a sense of volition and psychological freedom” during work activities (Van Den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010, p. 981) or “experiencing choice and feeling like the initiator of one’s own actions” (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004, p. 2046). LAC may enhance employee autonomy need satisfaction, since it helps the leader to notice what the employee needs and therefore make more effective decisions with regards to the allocation of resources or decision making freedom (Reb et al., 2014). LAC can enhance leader autonomy need satisfaction, since paying attention open-mindedly during the conversation with an employee may reduce reactionary hostility towards bad performing employees (Liang et al., 2016), and help the leader manage his/her negative emotions (Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). LAC may also enhance leader autonomy need satisfaction through helping the leader notice when delegation is possible, which frees up more of the leaders’ time.

Second, the need for competence refers to “feeling effective” (Van Den Broeck et al., 2010, p. 981) or “succeeding at optimally challenging tasks and attaining desirable outcomes” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2046). LAC may enhance employee competence need satisfaction because it may help leaders to be more supportive (Reb et al., 2014), e.g. through listening to the employee explaining his/her needs directly or through recognizing (hidden) talent or providing timely training opportunities. Research shows that paying attention allows leaders to be more effective (Waldron & Ebbeck, 2015; Wasylkiw, Holton, Azar, & Cook, 2016), which also enhances a leaders’ competence need satisfaction. In addition, paying attention on the work floor by the leader is related to transformational leader behaviors (Agokei, 2013; Pinck & Sonnentag, 2017), less leader stress (Wasylkiw et al., 2016), more leadership flexibility (Baron, Rouleau, Grégoire, & Baron, 2018) as well as more psychological capital (Roche, Haar, & Luthans, 2014), which has an effect on leader well-being as well. In addition, general leader attention is related to employee performance (Reb et al., 2018, 2014; Schuh, Zheng, Xin, & Fernandez, 2017), which is a win-win: both the leader and the employee succeed (i.e. perform better) and both parties can feel competent.

Finally, since leadership can be viewed as primarily relational (Uhl-Bien, 2006), the effect of LAC on relatedness need satisfaction may be of great importance. Relatedness need satisfaction can be described as feeling connected to others or being “loved and cared for” (Van den Broeck et al., 2010, p. 981) or, less fluffy: “establishing a sense of mutual respect and reliance with others” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2046). In a conversation in which the leader takes the time and puts in the effort to pay attention to the employee (in an open-minded way), the employee is likely to feel respected or even cared for (Brown & Ryan, 2003). This is also shown in research indicating that paying attention to one’s partner increases relationship quality through empathy and better identifying and communication emotional states (Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007; Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Research in a work context also shows that when a leader is “fully present not only physically, but with their entire being” (Reb et al., 2014, p. 38), employees feel valued and respected, which indeed leads to psychological need satisfaction (Reb et al., 2014). Relational quality, based on a leaders’ general ability to pay attention, has also been related to employee performance (Reb et al., 2018). Therefore, we posit that when we specifically measure whether a leader pays attention in the context of employee conversations, this will likely be associated with a higher relatedness need satisfaction of both parties. Indeed, through LAC the relatedness need satisfaction of the leader may also be enhanced, either because he/she feels closer to the employee in this conversation, or because the employee in turn, is present for the leader as well (see Social Exchange Theory, Shore, Lynch, Tetrick, & Barksdale, 2006).

In sum, leader attentive communication may – in part – help to satisfy the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness of both the employee and the leader. Employee need satisfaction has positive consequences on the work floor: a higher level of psychological need satisfaction (and autonomous work motivation), has been e.g. associated to employee work engagement (Schreurs, van Emmerik, Van den Broeck, & Guenter, 2014; Van Den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, & De Witte, 2008). This means that psychological need satisfaction fosters an affective-motivational state which is related to employee performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Previous research has indeed shown that (transformational and servant) leaders can influence work engagement through psychological need satisfaction of employees (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, Sleebos, & Maduro, 2014; Kovjanic, Schuh, & Jonas, 2013; Van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014), with this research we look more closely at leader behavior and posit that leader attentive communication may be even more closely related to psychological need satisfaction of employees. In addition, psychological need satisfaction of the leader is associated with higher transformational leadership (Decuypere, Audenaert, & Decramer, 2018) and performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

**Kahn’s theory on engagement.** Besides SDT, there is also another theory on employee engagement (Kahn, 1990), in which the (momentary rather than static) conditions of psychological availability, safety and meaningfulness are hypothesized to lead to engagement on the work floor (Kahn, 1990). These three elements are also relevant in the context of LAC. Psychological safety is “being able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (p. 708), this means an employee feels safe to express opinions or take actions without fear of recrimination (Williams & Roberts, 2017). It can be enhanced by leader attentive communication since there is a focus on paying attention with an open mind. When an employee trusts his/her leader to listen open-mindedly to what they have to say, work engagement can be enhanced (Kahn, 1990; Li & Tan, 2013).

Furthermore, psychological meaningfulness, is “a feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy” (p. 703-704), or “the feeling that the behavior in question could be worthwhile, valuable, or enhance one’s personal and/or professional growth” (Roberts & Williams, 2017, p. 208). Leader attentive communication may enhance psychological meaningfulness since employees can feel more worthwhile, useful, and valuable (Kahn, 1990) because of the uninterrupted attention and time they get with their leader. A good working relationship, characterized by a positive and trust-inducing interactions, can also contribute to a feeling of meaningfulness on the work floor (Roberts & Williams, 2017).

Lastly, psychological availability refers to “the sense of having the physical, emotional, or psychological resources to personally engage at a particular moment” (Kahn, 1990, p. 714). In this sense, LAC may be a personification of psychological availability: the leader pays attention to the employee in the moment and is therefore both physically, as well as at least cognitively ‘available’ for the employee. Leaders, especially immediate supervisors, are an important resource for employees (Roberts & Williams, 2017); e.g. through providing access to resources, but also through emotional support. When there is no ambivalence or annoyance about the lack of attention or presence form the leader, this also frees up resources for the employee to employ in their work (Roberts & Williams, 2017). Through enhancing psychological availability, LAC sets up the conditions for employee engagement (Roberts & Williams, 2017).

According to Kahn (1990), the three psychological needs foster employee engagement, which has been shown to positively influence productivity (Anitha, 2014). Research on leader distractedness during conversations (conceptualized as ‘boss phone hubbing’) also indicates that when a leader is not paying attention, both the conditions of psychological meaningfulness as well as availability are hampered, which influences employee trust and consequently diminishes employee engagement (Roberts & Williams, 2017).

In sum, both SDT and Kahn’s theory on engagement provide a theoretical basis with regards to the motivation for leaders to engage in LAC: it enhances the psychological need satisfaction of both leader and employee, as well as creates conditions for employees to become engaged. Engaged employees, are likely to perform better (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which is, of course, what leaders want. This also relates to leaders’ need for achievement (see below).

**Leader need for achievement.** The theory on need for achievement was originally developed by McClelland (McClelland, 1987). In this context, the need for achievement is seen as a relatively stable personality trait, i.e. the need to achieve something and to do this well (Brysbaert, 2006). Building on this framework, research on achievement motivation defines achievement goals are “competence-relevant aims that individuals adopt and pursue in achievement situations” (Sijbom, Lang, & Anseel, p. 3). In the achievement-goal theory, a difference is made between a focus on different goals: a mastery goal (i.e. focused on the development of competence or attainment of task mastery; (Elliot, 2005), a performance-approach goal (i.e. focused on the attainment of normative competence; p. 59, Elliot, 2005) and a performance-avoidance goal (i.e. focused on the avoidance of normative incompetence; p. 60, Elliot, 2005). Here, it is posited that perceived competence can lead to a different achievement motivation. When perceived competence is high, individuals are more likely to orient towards the possibility of success, and take on both a mastery and performance-approach (Elliot, 2005). Need for achievement and achievement motivation are related to each other in that general need for achievement is related to positive achievement goals (Elliot & Mcgregor, 2001). Research also shows that approach goals, specifically mastery goals, have better outcomes than avoidance goals (Elliot & Mcgregor, 2001). In this context, research indicates that leaders’ achievement goals are related to employee burnout, even when employees’ own achievement goals are controlled for (Sijbom, Lang, & Anseel, 2018). This is because leader’s achievement goals in a work context provide social cues for how their employees ought to behave. We posit that the negative effects this has on employees may be counteracted when a leader is able to communicate attentively and notice what is going on in the present moment. When leaders learn to communicate attentively, they can therefore feel more competent at working with employees, which further influences their approach goal motivation.

In sum, we posit that leader need for achievement can drive leaders into being motivated to pursue leader attentive communication, since it can help sustain the employees’ performance, and subsequently the leaders’ performance. In addition, we posit that the attention geared towards to employee through leader attentive communication may counterbalance negative effects from e.g. leader achievement orientation through better decision making and therefore help employees perform in a sustainable way.

**Contingent reward.** According to the theory concerning contingencies of reinforcement (Skinner, 1969), a continuation of behavior is based on its consequences (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008; Luthans & Kreitner, 1985). A leaders’ attention and (non)verbal responses may help the employee to continue to share problems, feelings or remarks. It might even continue his/her performance. In this sense, a leaders nonjudgmental and undivided attention may be seen as a (contingent) ‘reward’ that will ensure the continuation of (wanted) behavior (Skinner, 1969; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008). Of course, this process goes both ways; the leader may also be reinforced by the employees’ response to continue to foster an attentive communication attitude.

**To conclude*.*** To conclude, leaders will be motivated to communicate attentively, since it will enhance psychological need satisfaction and especially the need for relatedness. The need for achievement will also be fulfilled, since a leader’s prime motivation is to provide conditions in which employees can excel. Based on the need for relatedness, employees will also be motivated to reciprocate the attentive communication. Furthermore, the leaders’ time and quality of attention can serve as a reward for the employee in itself (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). In combination, there are several pathways in which leader attentive communication may enhance the leader-employee bond and need satisfaction from both the leader and the employee. As a result, we expect results on the decision making quality of the leader, as well as well-being from both leader and employee.

**Towards a definition**

Based on conversations with practitioners and scholars (see method section below), we define leader attentive communication as *“an open-minded, attentive demeanor while in a conversation with an employee”.* The most important part of this definition is the focus on the quality of communication, i.e. *attentive*, since it can be seen as a building block from which effective leader communication (and behavior) emerges. The basic idea is this: what a leader cannot perceive, he/she cannot address.

Next, the focus on paying attention *open-mindedly* helps to maintain a level of openness from which a comprehensive image of an employee can be formed. This relates to social information processing theory, which is based on the idea that “individuals, as adaptive organisms, adapt attitudes, behavior, and beliefs to their social context and to the reality of their own past and present behavior and situation” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978, p. 227). In this context, leader attentive communication, and especially a focus on open-mindedness, will help he leader to see the situation clearly, without judgments of others or past experiences influencing his/her perception. For example, in the case where there has been negative information spreading about one employee, the leader will be able to maintain a general open and attentive attitude, which helps to have a productive conversation. This relates to putting values, opinions and attitudes aside (Kluger & Nir, 2010), while trying to fully comprehend the message of the employee. The open-minded aspect alone does not guarantee attentive communication itself, but is a necessary condition nonetheless. It is also important in developing psychological safety in the leader-employee relationship (Leonard, Graham, & Bonacum, 2004).

Third, the *demeanor* entails a general conduct in which the leader embodies the principles of attentiveness and open-mindedness in the conversation with the employee. It therefore entails a particular way to attend to an employee’s use of words, tone of voice, facial expressions, emotional state, body posture, etc., and an appropriate response to those cues during the conversation.

The *communication* process itself, has been traditionally categorized as a three-part (two-way) process between a leader and employee, in which a message is encoded (with a degree of expressiveness), decoded (through sensitivity for the message) and regulated (controlled; see e.g. Riggio, 2013). One possible definition is “the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response” (Griffin, 2012; p. 6). Instead of focusing on the content or form of the communication, we will measure the process of paying attention to an employee while communicating*.* We also do not focus on communication styles (Bakker-Pieper & De Vries, 2013), but rather on the general demeanor that may be seen as a basis for different communication styles and individual leader communication differences (that are perhaps more related to personality differences; Bakker-Pieper & De Vries, 2013).

**Related constructs and differentiation**

Leader attentive communication is (theoretically) different from several (related) constructs that will provide the nomological network in the questionnaire validation research.

**Respectful inquiry.** First, the importance of paying attention as a leader is also captured in the concept of respectful inquiry, in which attentive listening is coupled with asking open questions (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). Respectful inquiry is therefore: respectful (the employee gets a sense of equal worth due to the open questions), episodic or ongoing, and has three components, i.e. asking questions, question openness, and attentive listening. Only the attentive listening component is partly captured in our (broader) construct. One benefit of attentive listening is that leaders may better understand what their employees are conveying, while also supporting them to communicate better by their (non)verbal responses (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000). In this sense, attentive listening can actually be seen as a dual process in which both leader and employee provide input and create a narration together, even when only one person does most of the talking (Bavelas et al., 2000). With LAC we focus on paying attention throughout the whole communication process, rather than paying attentive while listening alone. The practical difference between respectful inquiry and leader attentive communication however, is the focus on respectfully asking open-ended questions versus simply paying attention throughout the whole communication process.

**Humble inquiry.** Related to respectful inquiry, another concept has been proposed, i.e. humble inquiry (Schein, 2013). Humble inquiry is also based on asking questions, but with a general demeanor characterized by humility. It refers to humbly asking questions as a leader (i.e. presuming you do not know everything), rather than telling employees what to do. Humble inquiry is, like LAC, based on paying attention to the employee, since it is “investing by spending some of my attention up front” (p. 9). It is asking questions based on what Schein (2013) calls “here and now humility”, since it is based on interdependability (i.e. someone knows something you do not, or someone needs to do something for you). This is, in fact, the case for all leaders in organizations, even though this is not regularly acknowledged. The inquiry-part of humble inquiry refers to “an attitude of interest and curiosity” (p. 19), which focuses more on the way in which questions are asked, rather than on the type of questions itself, which is more the case with respectful inquiry, although the general guideline seems to be to pose open, non-steering questions based on curiosity. This curiosity is related to the open-mindedness we propose in leader attentive communication. The purpose of humble inquiry is also clearly stated, which is “to build relationships that lead to trust which, in turn, leads to better communication and collaboration” (p. 21). Similarly to the difference between LAC and respectful inquiry, LAC does not imply any type of question posing, it merely attempts to measure the attention and demeanor with which a leader converses with employees.

**Empathy.** LAC is (theoretically) different from empathy. When you are empathic to someone, you experience their emotions as your own, instead of merely observing them (Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2002). In order to facilitate an empathic response, information is assimilated “without being aware of doing so… through a kind of inner radar” (Katz, 1963, p. 5; Kellet et al., 2002 p. 525). This is not the case with leader attentive communication, since it is concerned with the explicit attention a leader allocates to the present moment to develop a comprehensive observation of the employee he/she is talking to.

Other (older) conceptualizations of empathy do focus on four dimensions, i.e. perspective taking (cognitive), fantasy (transposing themselves into feelings of fictitious characters), empathic concern (being other-oriented) and personal distress (anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal situations; see Davis, 1980). In this respect, perspective taking might be most closely related to leader attentive communication, although the latter is concerned with having an attentive and open-minded attitude, which entails an observation of how an employee is feeling/doing in its entirety. Moreover, the focus of perspective taking questionnaire items is on thinking (by yourself), rather than on observing while talking (Davis, 1980). Furthermore, measures with regards to empathy are quite problematic since these are mostly self-report measures and respondents can be unaware of their levels of empathy or unwilling to relate to empathic experiences (Kellet et al., 2002), which makes it difficult to investigate. Furthermore, people are said to differ in empathic skill (Kellet et al., 2002), which makes it less practical than LAC; the leader does not have to imagine or actually feel what the employee is feeling, but rather (learn to) *observe* it, which might make it more accessible, practical and teachable.

**Emotional intelligence.** LAC is different from emotional intelligence (EI). Although this concept itself has undergone some scrutiny (Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009), the research on EI in the context of leadership is still booming (Harms & Credé, 2010; Khuong & Yen, 2014). There are two EI models. The first model, the ability-based emotional intelligence model, is composed of different abilities, e.g. perception of emotion, emotional facilitation, understanding emotions, and management of emotions. Recent research has shown that emotion facilitation is a redundant factor with a lack of empirical support (Joseph & Newman, 2010). The ability-model further posits EI to be separate but associated to general intelligence, although research has not shown predictive validity above general intelligence and conscientiousness (Antonakis et al., 2009). The ability model focusses most on maximum performance tests (e.g. coding images), which requires more effort to administer.

The second model, which is more popular, is a trait-model, which is operationalized through different self-report questionnaires (Van Der Linden et al., 2017). The ability and trait model only correlate weakly with each other, indicating they may be different constructs, or – put more optimistically – they may be measuring different aspects of a more general EI ability (Van Der Linden et al., 2017). Practically speaking, the trait-model based questionnaires are often a mixed-based model of EI, since they contain items measuring a combination of intellect, affect and personality. This has received criticism as well, since it can be seen as an umbrella term (and sometimes even includes empathy), which is mostly (or only) characterized by its non-redundancy with cognitive intelligence (Joseph & Newman, 2010).

Nonetheless, to our knowledge, there are two valid questionnaires that measure trait-based emotional intelligence: the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue; Petrides, 2009) and the Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale (REIS; Pekaar, Bakker, van der Linden, & Born, 2018). The first one measure four dimensions, i.e. emotionality, self-control, sociability and well-being, illustrating the criticism of ‘umbrella’ term, since it is highly associated with personality (Van Der Linden et al., 2017). In this regard, research has shown that there is a huge overlap between trait-based emotional intelligence and a general personality factor (GPF) that consists of openness, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion. This general factor may be interpreted as ‘a social effectiveness factor’ and in effect strongly overlaps, or perhaps is even synonymous with a certain personality pattern (Van Der Linden et al., 2017). This indicates that “emotionally adjusted and socially desirable actions of high-GFP individuals are cardinal aspects of their personality” (p. 45). High-trait EI individuals may indeed be more likely to behave in socially effective ways related to personality facets like friendliness, dependability, and sociability (Van Der Linden et al., 2017). The overlap between personality and EI is not 100%, indicating there is some (affect-related) variance in trait EI is not represented in personality hierarchies (Van Der Linden et al., 2017). This has been confirmed with meta-analytic research, indicating that the TEIQue explains a small portion of incremental variance over personality (Andrei, Siegling, Aloe, Baldaro, & Petrides, 2016). The second and very new EI questionnaire, the REIS, has a sound theoretical basis and measures solely self- and other-focused emotional appraisal and emotion regulation (Pekaar et al., 2018), which is probably the way forward for emotional intelligence research.

The other-focused emotional appraisal is very similar to two other concepts in the EI literature that are of particular interest to LAC: nonverbal sensitivity and emotional perception. First, nonverbal sensitivity is based on research concerning nonverbal communication (Riggio & Darioly, 2016). It is defined as “the ability of individuals to read and decode nonverbal cues in others and, importantly, the ability to correctly interpret the meaning of those cues” (Riggio & Darioly, 2016, p. 589). We propose that the ability to be attentive to employees, precedes the ability to accurately decode nonverbal sensitivity; you can only accurately decode something when you first pay attention to it carefully. Moreover, a problem with measuring nonverbal sensitivity, is that the self-report measures do not necessary stroke with reality, and nonverbal decoding tests take up a lot of administering time (Riggio & Darioly, 2016). However, not all EI measures include nonverbal observation of others, some focus solely on self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation (Wong & Law, 2002); which shows that the EI-field is a heterogeneous pool of various definitions and operationalizations. Second, emotional perception is defined as “the ability to identify emotions in oneself and others, as well as in other stimuli, including voices, stories, music, and works of art” (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006; p. 781).

LAC, however, is a narrow, clearly defined construct and focuses solely on observing *employees’* emotions (not necessarily emotions of oneself), while also entailing more than just observing emotions. The first part, observing employees’ emotions, is also related to one dimension of the new EI measure (MEIS; Pekaar et al., 2018), i.e. ‘other-focused emotion appraisal’. Yet, with our concept, we measure more than paying attention to and correctly perceiving emotion as such, we aim to measure (1) attention paid more broadly to the employee, including tone of voice, body postures, *verbal message*, implicit message,.. and (2) a general, open-minded (present-focused) demeanor of the leader while (3) actually having a conversation.

**Leader-Member Exchange.** Next, LAC is different from leader-member exchange (LMX), since there is a different focus in a shared context (i.e. leader-member relationships). LMX has mostly been defined as quality of the exchange relationship (between leader and employee, for a review see Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999) that builds on trust as an important corner stone. LMX be an outcome of leader attentive communication. In support for this reasoning, a recent meta-analysis by Gottfredson and Aguinis (2017) found that positive leader behaviors motivate employees because they have a positive effect on LMX quality (Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017).

Other (older) definitions of LMX also focus on the role of attention from the leader (see e.g. Danserau, 1982; as in Schriesheim et al., 1999), but when measured it is operationalized more with regards to attention for certain work-related topics (e.g. decision-making, day-to-day performance, ..). We found only one old item of interest to our construct, i.e. “Attention by the supervisor to feelings and needs” (Haga, Graen, & Dansereau, 1974). However, the leader attentive communication questionnaire contains items that are both more detailed (e.g. also specific attention to tone of voice etc.), and more general (e.g. “My leader is perceptive during conversations”). In addition, the definition of LAC focuses on an open-minded approach of the leader, which is not emphasized in theorizing on LMX. Furthermore, this (older) approach was replaced by prominent LMX-scholars, in favor of a multidimensional view on LMX entailing respect, trust and obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

In sum, LMX is concerned with the relationship between leader and employee, while leader attentive communication is concerned with the attention for the employee while communicating.

**Communication styles*.*** In line with the differentiation substantiated above, leader attentive communication is quite different from a communication style. Although, some proposed communication styles do share characteristics with LAC, since they are related to not only verbal, but also paraverbal and nonverbal signals in social interactions. For example, the communication styles inventory (CSI; De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Konings, & Schouten, 2011), proposes there are six communication styles, i.e. expressiveness, preciseness, verbal aggressiveness, questioningness, emotionality and impression manipulativeness. Of particular interest is the facet ‘nonsupportiveness’ from the dimension verbal aggressiveness, since it does contain items like ‘I can listen well’. Listening well assumes paying attention to what someone is saying, which makes it the only similarity with LAC.

**Individualized consideration.** Individualized consideration is a dimension of transformational leadership and has to do with considering individual differences and developing individual strengths of followers (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). On an item-level, however, it becomes clear that individualized consideration is only similar to LAC with regards to giving personal attention to employees. Yet it says nothing about the underlying demeanor or what the leader pays attention to exactly. Furthermore, individualized consideration also focuses on developing employees, and providing individual feedback, which is beyond the scope of LAC.

**Mindfulness.** Finally, leader attentive communication can be seen as a practical application of mindfulness in a specific context, i.e. being “mindful” in a conversation with an employee. Moreover, rather than noticing sensations, emotions, thoughts, .. of oneself (Brown & Ryan, 2003), the focus will be on the employee. According to Dane (2011) mindfulness is defined as “a state of consciousness in which attention is focused on present-moment phenomena occurring both externally and internally” (p. 1000). This definition shows that leader attentive communication is indeed a form of mindfulness, since attention is focused on the present moment, yet the attention is mostly focused on the employee, thus externally, rather than divided between internal and external phenomena. In terms of characteristics, mindfulness and leader attentive communication share a present moment orientation, but the attentional breadth is different (Dane, 2011): mindfulness has a wide attentional breath, while leader attentive communication pertains to focus solely on the employee The underlying (attention) process we propose is therefore not necessarily theoretically different from mindfulness, albeit more focused and attending only to external input (i.e. the employee). It will also be measured using very practical items with regards to what’s being noticed with regards to the employee. A more specific approach attention in the context of (leader) communication is necessary to answer to research call for an integrative view on leader behavior.

**Methodology and results**

To develop a good construct definition and valid questionnaires, several accepted guidelines were followed (see e.g. Mackenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). The steps that were undertaken are outlined in detail below.

**Definition and item development**

First, of course, the literature was consulted in order to see whether similar constructs existed. While we found a number of related constructs (see table 1), however something similar to leader attentive communication did not seem to exist. In addition, leader (and follower) communication typology (e.g. Hatfield & Huseman, 1982) were not relevant, since we wanted to capture a specific (attentive) *process* of communication, rather than *the content* of what is being discussed. It was decided to develop a solid definition and a first version of the questionnaire with very specific items concerning what can be observed and include reverse-scored items with regards to absent-mindedness.

Second, in order to develop a specific definition, a couple of leadership experts were interviewed. They all had more than twenty years of experience in the field of leadership consultancy, mindfulness training or therapy. They answered the following questions; 1. What would be a good definition of a communication process in which a leader is present?, 2. What elements of mindfulness are important in this context?, 3. How can we make this (working) definition shorter? A specific definition was formulated and agreed upon, i.e. leader attentive communication is “a non-judgmental comprehensiveobservation of an employee while communicating”. This initial definition drove the initial item development. We developed items designed to measure both *what* a leader does (i.e. paying attention while communicating with an employee) and *a specific object* (i.e. paying attention to physical characteristics, emotional reactions, facial …, body postures, of an employee). A first 20-item questionnaire was developed.

Third, the working definition with a first questionnaire were presented to a leader panel. They followed a postgraduate course on HR specifically designed for HR practitioners in a leadership position. They had varying levels of experience as leaders. In combination with their familiarity with several leadership constructs throughout the course, they had a unique position from which to judge the proposed construct. The leader panel also had the opportunity to comment on the definition, the questionnaire as a whole, and the opportunity to propose new items. Based on their recommendations, several items were added to the item pool with regards to the non-judgmental attitude of the leader and the ability of the leader to accurately describe the message of the employee. We agreed that these items might provide insight into the degree to which a leader was attentive during a conversation.

Fourth, the definition and first questionnaire were presented on several conferences and workshops, i.e. the *10th Biennial International Conference of the Dutch HRM Network* in Nijmegen (2017), the *Workshop on Research Advances in Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Management* in Paris (2018) and the *International Conference on* Mindfulness in Amsterdam(2018). At these conferences and workshops, valuable input on the definition and item construction were provided by expert scholars. One of the changes based on this input was the replacement of non-judgmental with open-minded in the definition, since, of course, leaders still have to judge, and open-minded may reflect the desired attitude better. In addition, more items were developed. This lead to an initial scale of 28 items.

**Employee ratings.** Additionally, there are several reasons for which we have decided to measure leader attentive communication from the perspective of the employee. First, self-report questionnaire responses could be biased by leaders’ own desires (Grossman, 2011). Second, responses might be informed by actually knowing ‘the correct’ response and answering accordingly (Grossman, 2011). Third, research indicates that respondents are generally not aware of mind wandering, which is why the employee might be better suited to answer two items with regards to being distracted (Van Dam, Earleywine, & Borders, 2010). Last, research has indicated that it is not the leaders self-perception, but the employee’s perception of the leaders that influences employee outcomes (Kopperud et al., 2014). Indeed, it seems more relevant to measure how “subordinates rate the leaders’ communicative behavior than how leaders themselves *think* that they communicate” (Bakker-Pieper & De Vries, 2013, p. 4; Hogan, 2005).

**Scale details.** The reliability of a Likert-type scale increases up to the use of five points, and then seems to level off (Hinkin, 1995). In order to ensure enough variability in the answers, we used a 7-point Likert scale. Furthermore, the number of items is of importance. Too little items may lead to a lack of content and construct validity, as well as internal consistency and test-retest reliability problems, although too many items may lead to respondent fatigue and other response biases (Hinkin, 1995). Therefore we focused on being as parsimonious as possible, while still retaining a sufficient amount of items. We ended the initial development process with a 28-item scale, with the ambition to reduce the number of items using EFA and CFA analyses in the validation studies (outlined below).

**Study 1**

**Sample and procedure.** For the first validation study, we collected data in employment agencies. A Qualtrics questionnaire was distributed to 170 leaders and their 360 employees. First, they filled in an informed consent, after which they filled in several questionnaires (see below). We added 2 control items to the questionnaire, where participants were asked to fill in a predetermined response. In order to increase response accuracy, we deleted entries where these items were not filled in or answered wrongly. Furthermore, we asked employees “Do you feel like you can properly assess your manager?” on a scale from 4(“yes”) to 1(“no). When the answer was a clear “no”, the entrees were deleted (N=4). This resulted in a final dataset of 314 employees and 144 leaders forming 166 teams (not every leader had employees who filled in the questionnaire and the other way around).

*Demographics employees (N = 314).* Forty-four employees were male (14%) and 256 were female (81.5%), 14 employees did not report their gender. The average age was 29.34 years old (SD 6.01), ranging from 20 to 56 years. The average tenure in general was 4.3 years (SD 5.07), ranging from 0 to 33. The average tenure with their leader was 1.96 years (SD 2.25), ranging from 0 to 18 years. Employees’ educational background ranged from 1 with no or only education up to 12 years old (0.3%), 13 with vocational secondary education (4.1%), 56 with technical secondary education (17.6%), 30 with general secondary education (9.4%), 138 with higher education (44%) and 62 with university education (19.7%).

*Demographics leaders (N = 144).* Thirty-five leaders were male (24.3%) and 107 were female (75.4%), 2 leaders did not report their gender. The average age was 37 years old (SD 8.01), ranging from 25 to 59 years. The average tenure was 11 years (SD 7.54), ranging from 0 to 32 years. The average tenure as leader from their current team was 3.78 years (SD 4.02), ranging from 0 to 23 years. Leaders’ educational background ranged from 3 with vocational secondary education (2.1%), 24 with technical secondary education (16.7%), 9 with general secondary education (6.3%), 72 with higher education (50%) and 34 with university education (23.6%).

**Measures employees**. All questionnaires (except demographics) were measured on a 7-point Likert Scale from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Totally agree” (7).

*Leader attentive communication*. First this first validation study we administered the 28-item self-report questionnaire. The items were mostly developed in English. For this study we used a translation backtranslation procedure from the English items to obtain the exact Dutch items (Brislin, 1990).

*Engagement.* Work engagement was measured with a 3-item scale, which measured each dimension with one item: (1) “At my work, I feel bursting with energy” (vigor); (2) “Iam enthusiastic about my job” (dedication); (3) “I am immersed in my work” (absorption). (Schaufeli, Shimazu, Hakanen, Salanova, & De Witte, 2017). Cronbach’s α was .87.

*Burn-out.* This was measured with the 5-item emotional exhaustion dimension of the Utrecht Burn-Out Scale (Schaufeli & Van Dierendonck, 2000). An example item is: “I feel empty at the end of a work day.” Cronbach’s α was .88.

*Trust* was measured with five items from the cognitive trust in supervisor scale from Yang & Mossholder (2010). An example item is: “My supervisor follows through with commitments s(he) makes.”. We chose the cognitive scale as opposed to the affective scale because of its closer relation with the LAC scale: because of its focus on attention, the LAC can also be characterized as *cognitive*.Cronbach’s α was .93.

*Psychological need satisfaction.* We used the Work-Related Basic Need Satisfaction Scale (W-BNS) to measure psychological need satisfaction. The scale includes six items for each dimension, i.e. autonomy (e.g. “The tasks I have to do at work are in line with what I really want to do.”), competence (e.g. “I really master my tasks at my job.”) and relatedness (e.g. “At work, I feel part of a group.”). The scale showed a good internal consistency as a whole (Cronbach’s α = .89) and for each of the dimensions separately: autonomy (α = .80), competence (α = .88), relatedness (α = .87).

*Autonomous motivation* was measured with the three-item identified regulation (Cronbach’s α = .81) and intrinsic motivation (Cronbach’s α = .85) subscales from the multidimensional work motivation scale (Gagné et al., 2015). Example items are: “Why do you or would you put efforts into your current job?”… e.g. “Because I personally consider it important to put efforts in this job” (identified regulation) or e.g. “Because the work I do is interesting” (intrinsic motivation). Cronbach’s α of the total scale was .83.

*Leader-Member Exchange*. We used the eight-item scale based on work by Scandura & Graen (1984) with the adaptations proposed by Bauer & Green (1996). Mostly, we followed their recommendations to split one item ("Do you usually feel that you know where you stand... do you usually know where you stand and do you usually know how satisfied your immediate supervisor is with what you do?") into two separate items ("I usually know where I stand with my manager" and "I usually know how satisfied my manager is with me"). Cronbach’s α was .89.

**Measures leaders.** *Demographics, engagement, burn-out, trust and psychological need satisfaction* were assessed using the same self-report questionnaires as described above. In addition, out of curiosity, we also administered the self-report version of the LAC (Cronbach’s α = .89).

*Mindfulness*. Since there is some debate concerning the underlying structure and measurement of mindfulness (Grossman, 2011; Van Van Dam et al., 2010), we have administered two self-report measures with different underlying assumptions. The Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) assumes that mindfulness has a unidimensional structure. This questionnaire uses only reverse items to measure present-moment awareness (e.g. “I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later.”). Cronbach’s α was .87.

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006) assumes there are five underlying dimensions of mindfulness, i.e. observing (e.g. “When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.”; Cronbach’s α = .57), describing (e.g. “I’m good at finding words to describe my feelings.”; Cronbach’s α = .71), acting with awareness (e.g. “I don’t pay attention to what I’m doing because I’m daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted.”; Cronbach’s α = .80), nonjudging (e.g. “I tell myself I shouldn’t be feeling the way I’m feeling.”; Cronbach’s α = .76) and nonreactivity (e.g. “When I have distressing thoughts or images I am able just to notice them without reacting”; Cronbach’s α = .67). The scale showed an acceptable internal consistency as a whole (Cronbach’s α = .72). Due to low reliabilities in some of the subscales we only used the total scale in further analyses.

*Emotional intelligence.* We used the 28-item Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale (REIS; Pekaar et al., 2018) with four different components: self-focused emotion appraisal (e.g. “I always know how I feel.”; Cronbach’s α = .91), other-focused emotion appraisal (e.g. “I am aware of the emotions of the people around me.”; Cronbach’s α = .89), self-focused emotion regulation (e.g. “I am in control of my own emotions.” ; Cronbach’s α = .84) and other-focused emotion regulation (e.g. “I can make someone else feel differently.” ; Cronbach’s α = .86). The scale also showed a good internal consistency as a whole (Cronbach’s α = .91)

*Transformational leadership.* Transformational leadership was measured using an adapted 12 items from the Multifaceted Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1990). The short MLQ version with 12 items concerning 4 dimensions has been validated and used in previous research (Bae, Song, Park, & Kim, 2013; Decuypere et al., 2018; Song, Bae, Park, & Kim, 2013; Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011). The scale (Cronbach’s α = .85) included 3 items for each of the four dimensions of transformational leadership, including idealized influence (e.g. “I make sure my employees feels good when I am around.”; Cronbach’s α = .68), inspirational motivation (e.g. “I use a few simple words to express what we can do.” ; Cronbach’s α = .53), intellectual stimulation (e.g. “I help my employees to think in new ways about old problems.” ; Cronbach’s α = .70) and individual consideration (e.g. “I help my employees to develop themselves.” ; Cronbach’s α = .56). Due to low reliabilities of the subscales (probably because we used the abbreviated scale), we only used the total scale for further analyses.

**Analyses and results***.* In order to test whether the data was suitable for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Barlett’s Test for Sphericity were calculated. The KMO measures whether the correlation matrix contains factors or rather chance correlations. Values of .60 or higher have been suggested as appropriate (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). The Bartlett’s test of sphericity estimates the probability that the matrix correlations are 0, hence it needs to be significant in order to use EFA (Bartlett, 1950). The KMO was 0.93 and Bartlett’s Test was significant (χ2(378) = 5840.72, p <.001), indicating that we could go ahead with the factor analysis.

Furthermore, we used principal axis factoring with an oblique rotation (oblimin with Kaiser Normalization). This method is more robust against violations of the assumption of normality and allows the factors to correlate (Fabrigar, Wegener, Maccallum, & Strahan, 1999; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). We also followed the Kaiser criterion and searched for factors with eigenvalues greater than one. We also inspected the scree plot to help determine the number of factors to retain (Yong & Pearce, 2013).

We followed a cyclical process to analyze the questionnaire and determine the best (amount of) items. In each round, we inspected the communalities, i.e. the extent to which an item correlates with all other items. When there were items that correlated less than 0.40 with the other items, they became candidates for removal (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Second, we examined the pattern matrix of these items. Items with poor item loadings or a crossloading that exceeded .32 ánd differed less than .20 with the highest loading (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) were removed. This way, we had a conservative approach. After three rounds, there were 18 items left that loaded on three different factors. However, the third factor never had the highest loading, and seemed redundant. Therefore, we “forced” the remaining 18 items on two factors. Then, for reasons of parsimony, we deleted the two items that loaded lower than .50, including the one remaining reverse item. When we analyzed the remaining 16 items, we deleted one more low loading item. The final 15-item questionnaire loads on two factors that explain 62% of the variance, i.e. general attention (paid to the employee; Cronbach’s α = .94) and attention paid to nonverbal cues (Cronbach’s α = .90). The Cronbach’s alpha for the entire questionnaire was 93.2 (see table 2 for the specific items and item loadings).

**Additional exploratory analyses.** On the individual level, bivariate correlations indicated that LAC is highly associated with LMX (r = .69, p<.01) and trust in the leader (r=.68, p<.01). Next, LAC has medium associations with psychological need satisfaction (r=.39, p<.01), autonomous motivation (r=.36, p<.01), employee work engagement (r=.38, p<.01) and burn-out (r=-.22, p<.01). On the leader level, the aggregated employee-rated LAC (rwg = .79 indicating strong agreement between employees; Lebreton & Senter, 2008) is not significantly related to leader self-rated empathy (r=0.03, p>.05) or emotional intelligence (r=.08, p>.05), mindfulness (MAAS: r=.10, p>.05; FFMQ: r=.03, p>.05), need satisfaction (r=.12, p>.05), burnout (r=.11, p>.05) or work engagement (r=.10, p>.05). It is only significantly associated with self-report transformational leadership (r=.28, p<01). Interestingly, the aggregated LAC employee report and LAC self-report do not correlate significantly (r=.16, r>.05), which may indicate a very large discrepancy between how leaders view their own attentive communication versus team perceptions.

In addition, we used the chi-square difference test of the variance components to assess whether a multilevel approach (controlled for LMX and trust) could provide further insight with regards to employee outcomes. For burnout [χ2(122) = 173.75, p <.01], and psychological need satisfaction [χ2(122) = 148.24, p =.05] this was the case. Burn-out was negatively associated with LAC (*B* = -.35, *SE* = 0.14, p < .001), but not anymore (*B* = -0.03, *SE* = 0.18, p >.05) when trust was a predictor as well (*B* = -.31, *SE* = 0.10, p <.01). Need satisfaction was significant associated with LAC (*B* = 2.38, *SE* = 0.36, p < .001), but not anymore (*B* = 0.01, *SE* = 0.08, p >.05) when LMX was a predictor as well (*B* = 0.45, *SE* = 0.06, p <.001).

The other (hypothesized) outcomes, employee work engagement and autonomous motivation, were investigated on the individual level. Linear regression, controlled for LMX and trust, indicated that employee-reported LAC was significantly associated with engagement (*B* = 0.29, *SE* = 0.09, p <.01) and autonomous motivation (*B* = 0.21, *SE* = 0.07, p <.01).

**Discussion.** The exploratory factor analysis provided support for a 15 item questionnaire with two factors. The questionnaire and its components also have a good internal consistency. Furthermore, employee-rated LAC is associated with psychological need satisfaction and autonomous motivation, which is preliminary evidence for the notion that self-determination theory and psychological needs can be seen as the motivation for LAC. In addition, in future studies, it is necessary to analyze whether LAC explains variance above and beyond LMX and trust. In this first study, this does seem the case for employee work engagement and autonomous motivation.

**Validation study 2 (future)**

For the second validation study, we will focus our efforts on a more diverse sample of employees from different industries. The survey will distributed by students for course credits using Qualtrics (a web-based tool). We will use the same measures as in the first study. In addition, we will add ‘industry’ to the demographic questionnaire and also add the transformational leadership scale to the employee questionnaire. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis will be performed based on recommended practices (see e.g. Hinkin, 1995; Mackenzie et al., 2011).

**Validation study 3 (future)**

Validation of the questionnaire in English.

**Validation study 4 (future)**

Predictive validity with regards to psychological need satisfaction, burn-out and work engagement of both leaders and employees in a longitudinal study.

**Discussion**

Leader communication is a crucial to leadership (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Riggio, 2013; Penley et al., 1991). More broadly speaking, scholars have even suggested that communication plays a crucial part in creating the meaning, form, and even the “very possibility of organizational life” (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011, p.15; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017), whereby meaning is created through the interaction of leader and employee (Cooren et al., 2011). This also shows the importance of sustained attention for and during communication, rather than just ‘message delivery’ by the leader. Furthermore, several calls have been made to develop overarching leadership theories that can bring together different positive leadership styles (Derue et al., 2011; Rowold et al., 2015; Yukl, 2002). With a focus on communication behavior, we help to bridge this gap. More specifically, LAC may be a behavior that is shared across positive leadership styles. This may help lead to a more integrated theoretical perspective that focuses on similarities, rather than (tiny) differences.

Therefore, in this research article, we proposed a new questionnaire to measure LAC. The first exploratory validation study indicated that a fifteen-item questionnaire measured LAC in a parsimonious and reliable manner. We found two factors, i.e. general attention and attention paid to nonverbal cues. In follow-up studies, we will further assess the reliability through a confirmatory factor analysis, examining the nomological network, validating the questionnaire in other languages and through analyzing longitudinal data to assess the predictive validity. With regards to the specific scientific value of our questionnaire, it is (1) a new (behavioral) questionnaire which focuses on leader attention in the context of communication, (2) it is perception-based rather than self-report and (3) provides a clear description of the characteristics it assesses, as called for on a commentary of Grossman (2011).

In addition, we argued that attentive communication may benefit leaders and employees in several ways. First, it may enhance single-tasking while conversing with employees (Levy, Wobbrock, Kaszniak, & Ostergren, 2012), and therefore possible even reduce burnout (Reb et al., 2014). Second, leader attentive communication may enhance leader and follower need satisfaction, especially the need for relatedness. In this vain, House and Podsakoff (1994) already observed that “outstanding leaders differ from less effective leaders in their higher consideration of and sensitivity to the needs of their followers” (in Kellett et al., 2002, p. 527). Third, through attentive communication, leaders may be more in tune with their employees, and as a consequence make better decisions with regards to managing their human resources in a more sustainable way (Van Dam, Van Vuuren, & Kemps, 2017), for instance through altering job demands and job resources (see e.g. Schaufeli, 2015).

Finally, a great deal of leadership involves the intellectual processing and communication of emotions (Riggio, 2013), which leads to the conclusion that “people skills” or leaders are important. With this in mind, the knowledge of basic building blocks of (effective) communication is not only relevant for the development of better theories, but also for creating more practical interventions for organizations (see e.g. Antonakis et al., 2011). With our new questionnaire, it would become possible to provide in-depth feedback to leaders on how employees perceive their communication behavior.

**Limitations and future research**

First, through aiming at very specific items based on a construct definition, we did not attempt to measure whether or not the leader is able to distinguish between his/her own emotions or perceive his/her own reactions (which would be more similar to emotional intelligence), while this would obviously contribute to a conversation. However, with this questionnaire, we specifically focus on how the leader is able to pay attention to the employee. With this questionnaire we measure both (1) the attention paid in general and (2) the attention paid to specific nonverbal cues from the employee. Implicitly, however, we do acknowledge the importance of self-knowledge on the part of the leader with regards to being able to actually communicate attentively and thoughtfully.

Second, even though we use employee-reported ratings of the leader’s attention, common method bias (i.e. questionnaire research) may still be a problem, although there has been some research indicated that the claims of inflated results might be exaggerated (George & Pandey, 2017). Furthermore, the possibility for endogeneity bias must be taken into account (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010; Jacquart, Cole, Gabriel, Koopman, & Rosen, 2017). Gender has been shown to influence leadership style and thus may influence communication behavior as well (Carli & Eagly, 2017). Furthermore, aspects of leader personality have been related to leader emergence and effectiveness (Zaccaro, Dubrow, & Kolze, 2017). Specifically, we hypothesized that openness and agreeableness may influence the leaders’ ability to communicate attentively.

With regards to theorizing on leader attentive communication, we draw on research concerning SET, SDT and reinforcement theory to explain why leaders may want to engage in attentive communication, and which results may be expected. There are some boundary conditions to take into account when theorizing on a dyadic process between leader and employee. First of all, when follower need satisfaction is already high, leader attentive communication might not be of additional importance (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). Furthermore, when there are no problems or issues to be discussed, additional attentive communication may not add more to e.g. productivity levels, indeed it may hamper efficiency, since more time is consumed to communicate. Additionally, it will depend in part on the (nonverbal) communication levels of the employee, and the level of emotionality, whether or not the leader accurately perceives the situation, independent of the level of attentiveness. In our definition of leader attentive communication, we also stress the importance of a non-judgmental attitude, if this is absent, employees might feel uncomfortable with an attentive and perceptive leader.

Furthermore, we see the ability to be attentive when in a conversation with an employee as a behavioral building block, that may be a part of several (positive) leadership styles. The proposed leadership construct is a behavior that can be seen as a building block of several positive leadership styles. Future research may wish to research exactly how much attentive communication is typical of a certain positive leadership style, and whether a training in attentive communication may enhance leader effectiveness. More specifically, future studies could include diary studies, e.g. following the protocol of Breevaart et al. (2014). In this sense, the questionnaire may be modified from “in general” to, “Today, when I communicated with my leader..” or even “During my performance appraisal..”. After more research, it may even be possible to develop norms for leader attentive communication (Mackenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011).

**Final note**

Leader attentive communication is a new concept and questionnaire intended to study leader communication from a behavioral lens. It has the potential to bridge the gap between several positive leadership style theories, as well as to be a valuable tool for leader training. By focusing on specific behavior, rather than communication styles or strategies, we zoom in on the building block of effective communication: actually being present.

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**Table 2. EFA.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Item wording** | **M** | **SD** | **α** | **Factor loadings** | |
|  | *General attention* |  |  | *0.94* | 1 |  |
| 1 | My leader is perceptive during conversations | 6,01 | 1,01 |  | **0,71** | 0,01 |
| 2 | My leader accurately hears the verbal message I want to convey (for instance through repeating the message, summarizing it or asking additional questions) | 5,69 | 1,08 |  | **0,77** | 0,00 |
| 3 | When I communicate with my leader, he or she is able to describe my points accurately | 5,76 | 0,99 |  | **0,84** | -0,04 |
| 4 | My leader rephrases my intended message accurately | 5,41 | 1,12 |  | **0,72** | -0,03 |
| 5 | My leader displays a keen awareness during our conversations | 5,92 | 0,87 |  | **0,79** | 0,05 |
| 6 | My leader helps me to come up with solutions | 5,88 | 1,01 |  | **0,76** | -0,01 |
| 7 | My leader considers how I feel | 5,57 | 1,03 |  | **0,64** | 0,13 |
| 8 | My leader makes me feel understood | 5,78 | 1,01 |  | **0,82** | 0,03 |
| 9 | My leader helps me to get clarity | 5,73 | 1,01 |  | **0,83** | -0,09 |
| 10 | My leader provides insight into my issues | 5,52 | 1,09 |  | **0,70** | 0,04 |
| 11 | When I talk to my leader, I get his/her full attention | 5,81 | 1,02 |  | **0,77** | -0,01 |
|  | *Attention to nonverbal cues* |  |  | *0.90* |  | **2** |
| 12 | My leader perceives my facial expressions | 5,53 | 1,04 |  | -0,04 | **0,88** |
| 13 | My leader perceives my body posture | 5,5 | 1,10 |  | -0,03 | **0,90** |
| 14 | My leader perceives the tone of my voice | 5,58 | 1,02 |  | -0,02 | **0,91** |
| 15 | My leader acknowledges my main/predominant emotions | 5,46 | 1,10 |  | 0,28 | **0,55** |

Table 2. Items, means, standard deviations, internal consistencies and factor loadings of the LAC scale in study 1 (N employees = 314)