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RESPECTFUL INQUIRY:
A MOTIVATIONAL ACCOUNT OF LEADING THROUGH ASKING QUESTIONS AND LISTENING

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Abstract

Practitioners repeatedly note that the everyday behavior of asking followers open questions and attentively listening to their responses is a powerful leadership technique. Yet, despite such popularity, these practices are currently under-theorized. Addressing this gap, we formally define the behavioral configuration of asking open questions combined with attentive listening as "Respectful Inquiry", and then draw on Self-Determination Theory to provide a motivational account of its antecedents, consequences, and moderators within a leader-follower relationship. Specifically, we argue that Respectful Inquiry principally satisfies followers' basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Against this background, we highlight ironic contexts where Respectful Inquiry is likely to be especially rare, but would also be especially valuable. These ironic contexts include situations where interpersonal power difference, time pressure, physical distance, cognitive load, follower dissatisfaction, or organizational control focus are high. We additionally outline how the effect of Respectful Inquiry behaviors critically hinges upon the interaction history a follower has with a leader. More generally, we make the suggestion that the leadership field would benefit from complementing its traditional focus on "gestalt" leadership styles with research on concrete and narrow communicative behaviors, such as Respectful Inquiry.

Keywords: Respectful Inquiry, Self-Determination Theory, communication, question asking, basic psychological needs, competence, relatedness, autonomy, control, dominance, listening

As Pondy (1989) succinctly put it, “Leadership is a language game”, a statement many managers seem to agree with (Groysberg & Slind, 2013; Hildebrandt, Bond, Miller, & Swinyard, 1982). And indeed, communication constitutes approximately 70% to 80% of managers’ daily work (Mintzberg, 1973; Wajcman & Rose, 2011). The majority of that communication is with subordinates (Dubin & Spray, 1964; Tengblad, 2006). Hence, somewhat unsurprisingly, leader communication skills have been found to be directly related to managerial performance (Penley, 1991). However, we believe, that the day-to-day language game of managing subordinates’ motivation – a core responsibility of managers – is currently under-theorized.

Interestingly, when successful modern leaders are asked how they motivate followers, many refer to the value of asking questions and attending to responses (for some popular press accounts, see: Cohen, 2009; Ferrari, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2013; Leeds, 2000; Marquardt, 2005; Maxwell, 2014). Yet, the everyday practice of asking questions and listening has not been met with similar enthusiasm by business academics (e.g., Brink & Costigan, 2015). In the vein of engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007), we take the insight from practice seriously that there is motivational power in asking open questions and listening, a configuration that we come to formally define as Respectful Inquiry.

Although sparse, the available empirical leadership research is suggestive of the power of asking questions. For instance, large-scale, cross-industry surveys have found that “leaders who regularly ask for input are seen as increasing in effectiveness” (Goldsmith & Morgan, 2004: 75). Respectful questions from leaders seem to create more encouraging work relationships (Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011), while a leader’s verbal dominance decreases group performance (Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012). On a more detailed level, Bales’ (1950) interaction process analysis revealed that only 6% of all speech acts are questions, yet around 60% of all speech acts are in

response to a previous question. In other words, the 6% of questions drive 60% of the conversation. Correspondingly, Bechter and Johnson (1995, 1998) found in their video-coding of group discussions that those who ask and listen are also more likely to be perceived as leaders. And most recently, Edgar Schein (2013), writing on the "gentle art of asking and not telling", predicts that the future of leadership will be defined by a humble, inquisitive leadership style.

Having said that, any proposition that focuses on questions as a means for leaders to gain new *information* is unlikely to offer novel insights. Research on feedback seeking, information seeking, environmental scanning, participation, exploration, and reflexivity are all undergirded by the common-sense notion of "seek, and ye shall find." Similarly, research on participation, voice, and conflict resolution all establish that seeking input from followers often increases the chance of *compliance* with leaders' decisions. Both the informational and compliance consequence of question-asking were comprehensively addressed many years ago in Vroom and Yetton's (1973) participative leadership theory. However, from our point of view, the leadership literature has missed one of the most valuable potential benefits of asking questions and listening: namely, that these behaviors can motivate followers.

The present article is an attempt to provide such a motivational account of Respectful Inquiry in a leadership context. To do so, we build on the theoretical foundation of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which includes the notion that all humans have basic psychological needs, which social interactions – such as those between followers and leaders – may support or thwart (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Sheldon, Turban, Brown, Barrick, & Judge, 2003). The SDT perspective thus not only allows generalizable theorizing but also helps explain how motivation can be externally fueled but still experienced as autonomous. Moreover, because leaders and followers have the same basic psychological needs, the same motivational lens can

be used to explain the behavior of both leaders and followers in a model of antecedents and outcomes that is systematic and parsimonious.

By connecting research on communication and motivation, we seek to make three contributions to leadership theorizing. First, while there is a growing body of scholarship on unidirectional and "major" leader communication events such as visionary speeches (e.g., Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Carton, Murphy, & Clark, 2014; Stam, Lord, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2014), there is considerably less work on the more commonly occurring communication acts between leaders and followers. Our exploration of Respectful Inquiry extends previous theorizing on leadership communication by showing how an everyday dyadic communication behavior can motivate followers.

Second, unlike prior scholarship (e.g., Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; Stam, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010; Steffens & Haslam, 2013), our theorizing focuses on the *form* of leader communication rather than the *content* of what leaders say. As such, our investigation is topic agnostic; Respectful Inquiry may be used when setting goals, providing feedback, explaining decisions, coaching, monitoring, or simply in small talk. In doing so, our approach is different from that usually taken in discursive research, much of which is committed to a social constructivist / interpretivist philosophy of science (for reviews, see Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). This view of leadership often rejects variable-based theorizing and behavioral definitions of leadership concepts. We reject these rejections, and instead highlight the benefits of focusing on leaders' concrete behavioral communication acts.

Third, in contrast to work on leadership styles, we emphasize a different level of analysis. This article focuses on elements of leadership at the level of specific communication *behaviors.* Behavioral theories of leadership effectiveness can provide a foundation on which to build a

more integrated leadership field (Day & Antonakis, 2012), a field that has been labeled "curiously unformed" (Hackman & Wageman, 2007: 43). To draw an analogy from Chemistry, we hope that developing an understanding of single elements (e.g., discrete leader communication behaviors) will ultimately help build a sounder taxonomy of compounds (e.g., gestalt leadership styles).

To preview the structure of the article, we first define "Respectful Inquiry" as a multi-dimensional behavioral construct and argue for the level of our investigation. Then, drawing on Self-Determination Theory as a motivational framework, we outline why Respectful Inquiry can be expected to lead to improved follower satisfaction and performance. Continuing with the same motivational lens, we also identify leader self-determination as an antecedent to Respectful Inquiry. Thereafter, we focus on contextual factors that render Respectful Inquiry unlikely, but highly valuable. We describe these latter settings as *ironic*, given that they contradict the expectation that leaders will use Respectful Inquiry when it would be most effective. Finally, we note that the experience of Respectful Inquiry critically hinges on the interaction history between leader and follower. The elements of our model are depicted in Figure 1. We conclude with a discussion of the model's boundary conditions as well as implications for communication-based leadership research and practice.

Insert Figure 1 about here

WHAT IS RESPECTFUL INQUIRY?

We define Respectful Inquiry as *the multidimensional construct of asking questions in an open way and subsequently listening attentively,* which in their interplay signal the degree to which a person invites an addressee to (continue to) share his/her thoughts on a subject during a

conversational episode. There are several things to note about this definition. First, we refer to such communication as "respectful" because inviting the thoughts of addressees without preemptively limiting the range of appropriate answers carries a signal of equal worth and dignity (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015; Van Quaquebeke, Henrich, & Eckloff, 2007). Second, like many motivational concepts having to do with managerial behavior (e.g., goal-setting, feedback, OB modification), Respectful Inquiry is episodic. As such, an individual can engage in Respectful Inquiry to different degrees across different conversations. Third, we theorize that a set of three components – i.e., asking questions, question openness, and attentive listening – combine into the multidimensional construct (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998) of Respectful Inquiry. Each of these three components is necessary to specify the level of Respectful Inquiry. Through these, the construct ranges from Respectful Inquiry (positive pole) to Disrespectful Inquiry (negative pole). Each of the three components of Respectful Inquiry, as well as their interplay, and their partly nested structure are considered next.

Fundamentally, a question can be defined as "any statement or nonverbal act that invites an answer" (Stewart & Cash, 2000: 79). In that sense, "the essential function of a question is to elicit a verbal response from those to whom the question is addressed" (Hawkins & Power, 1999: 236). This function, also called the illocutionary point, serves as the question's purpose (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Although all questions have via their syntax seemingly the same illocutionary point – i.e., to invite an answer – some questions have more illocutionary strength than others. Illocutionary strength refers to the extent to which a speaker's language emphasizes a commitment to what they are saying (e.g., a promise reflects more illocutionary strength than merely saying "sure") (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985; Vanderveken, 2009). Importantly, the strength of the illocutionary point is a property of the language used rather than the true intent of

the speaker.

In order to engage in Respectful Inquiry with a high degree of illocutionary strength, simply asking questions is necessary but insufficient. A second component of Respectful Inquiry involves the degree of *question openness*. Such openness can range from "closed" (e.g., rhetorical questions, commands phrased as a question) to "limited openness" questions (e.g., closed yes/no questions), to "completely open" questions that invite an elaborate and undetermined response (Kearsley, 1976). More open questions have more illocutionary strength because they indicate more commitment to the message that the addressee is welcome to share his/her thoughts (Jablin, 1979). In contrast, closed questions curtail the range of possible responses deemed acceptable. One of the more closed types of question is the kind of "cold call" where only one possible answer is acceptable and the addressee is compelled to try to provide the "right answer" as determined by the questioner (cf. in an educational context, Reeve & Jang, 2006). Here, it is important to note that while part of question openness resides in the pure syntax of a question – i.e. wh-questions are usually more open than questions that can be answered with a yes or no – another part is the tone of the question (O'Connor & Arnold, 1973). For example, a question like "What is the problem?" can be asked in a way that suggests that the addressee should not respond at all or in a way that honestly invites elaboration (Thompson, 1995).

To conclusively decipher the illocutionary point and strength of a question, it is necessary to include *listening behaviors* as part of the relevant communication episode. Following a question, verbal and non-verbal signals of listening reflect whether the leader is interested in the response (Hargie & Dickson, 2004, ch. 7). Thus, listening behavior can reinforce the original illocutionary point that the questioner is interested in the addressee's thoughts on a particular subject (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015). Attentive listening behavior includes adequate eye contact,

appropriate facial expressions (e.g., expressions consistent with the emotional tone of the speaker), head movements that convey understanding (e.g., nodding), occasional verbal reassurances that encourage the speaker to continue (e.g., saying "uh huh" or "sure"), and showing that the content resonates (e.g., wincing or exclaiming) (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000; Hargie & Dickson, 2004, ch. 7; Wirth, Sacco, Hugenberg, & Williams, 2010).[1] As a study by Pasupathi and Rich (2005) suggests, however, it is not important that the listener agrees with the speaker. Instead, it is the signal of alertness and responsiveness that is crucial for the conversation as these perceived listening cues indicate to the speaker whether what they have to say is valuable and worth remembering (Bavelas et al., 2000; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2010).

In contrast, low listening contradicts the illocutionary point of the question itself when, for instance, leaders ask a question but then fail to listen in a way that shows they are interested in the response. This could occur when leaders ask a question and then gaze off, check their phone, interrupt the response, or otherwise demonstrate that they were not listening to the follower. Such a configuration can confuse, hurt, or offend as an initially expected illocutionary point (conveyed interest in an answer) is reversed (conveyed disinterest in an answer). This "blowback effect" can be assumed to be even stronger when a speaker's commitment to the question was initially reinforced by the openness of the question, i.e. when the illocutionary strength was high. Not listening after asking a question thus presents a disrespectful form of inquiry. The proposed dynamic is analogous to other types of psychological contracts that

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[1] While we employ a straightforward, narrow, and behavioral conception of listening, others take a broader approach. For instance, some scholars incorporate the inquiry aspect itself in the concept of listening (e.g., Bechler & Johnson, 1995; Kluger & Zaidel, 2013) or they focus on the kind of things that listeners pay more or less attention to (e.g., Bodie & Worthington, 2010).

provoke negative reactions when implicit expectations are broken (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). Thus, poor listening can contradict the illocutionary point of an (open) question.

To summarize, we have outlined three components that combine into the construct Respectful Inquiry. Figure 2 illustrates the nested nature of the component interplay in that the openness of a question enhances the illocutionary point of asking a question. This illocutionary point is predicted to be fully qualified by listening, in that it is either enhanced by subsequent attentive listening or, because of shattered expectations, completely reversed by cues of non-listening. Due to the nested structure, and as implied in the figure, each element is necessary to identify the degree of Respectful Inquiry. Notably, non-inquiry – i.e., asking zero questions in a conversational episode – is not a meaningful part of the construct because at least one question is logically required for the level of question openness and listening to be specified. However, given that few people say nothing or only communicate in statements, this point is more philosophical than practical.

Insert Figure 2 about here

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS LEVEL OF ANALYSIS?

Naturally, because Respectful Inquiry pertains to a discrete and narrow set of communication behaviors in a communication episode, it can surface as part of many broader leadership concepts. Indeed, it would be hard to picture empowering, servant, humble, participative, respectful, or any other generally considerate leadership style without leaders asking questions and listening to their followers once in a while. Rather, this article emphasizes that discrete communication behaviors constitute basic building blocks of leadership. As these aggregate over time together with other communication behaviors, communication content, and leadership decisions, the amalgam is then interpreted as a certain leadership style.

Similarly, Respectful Inquiry can be a communicative element of interpersonal (e.g., showing respect), informational (e.g., accuracy and quality of explanations), or procedural (e.g., giving voice) justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001) – even though the corresponding literature tends to focus on providing better explanations rather than focusing on how to engage in the specific art of asking questions. As with leadership concepts, these (partly overlapping) justice concepts are often an amalgam of diverse agent behaviors, organizational structures, and routines.

While the level of conceptual abstraction pursued in scholarship is somewhat a matter of taste and scholarly cycles (Hirsch & Levin, 1999; Yg, 1989), we believe there are two clear advantages to a focus on discrete and concrete forms of communication (see also van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

First, broader approaches to leadership or justice try to identify meaningful clusters of covarying elements that can be conceptualized under one label. Key conceptual challenges associated with such broad theories include tautology (Day, 2014, ch. 38), statistically erroneous aggregation (Johnson, Rosen, & Djurdjevic, 2011), failure to provide theoretically sound inclusion and exclusion criteria (Johnson, Rosen, & Chang, 2011), concept traveling (Yg, 1989), and vagueness (Hirsch & Levin, 1999), with the result being definitional wrangling about how various concepts should be defined (see, for example, Colquitt et al., 2001; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013) and what their effects are (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2014). In contrast, narrowly focused concepts have a clear denotation and a narrow connotation that is at low risk of being stretched into something so general that it become almost meaningless (Yg, 1989). As such, precise basic-level behavioral conceptualizations can provide solid building blocks for better understanding or constructing higher-level, gestalt styles of leadership.

Second, higher-level gestalt styles of leadership come with two key challenges in operationalization. First, in order to cover the whole construct, the scales associated with these constructs usually refer to vague classes of behaviors (some examples from published leadership and justice scales: "…treats me in a polite manner.", "…gives me power.", "…treats me in a fair way.", "…treats me with respect.", or "…understands how to inspire me."). Yet, such abstract operationalizations run the risk of measuring overall positive attitudes (i.e., halo) instead of actual behaviors (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007). Second, broad concepts open the possibility for different scholars to operationalize the same broad concept in widely different ways (Lee, Martin, Thomas, Guillaume, & Maio, 2015). In contrast, locating Respectful Inquiry at a lower level of analysis facilitates the use of consistent operationalizations in future scholarship, which in turn allows programmatic accretion of knowledge. As such, we believe that theoretical and empirical contributions of a lower, i.e. behavioral level of analysis are intertwined (van Maanen, Sørensen, & Mitchell, 2007). Ultimately, such knowledge about basic building blocks is not only relevant for subsequent theorizing, but also for creating more actionable, to the point interventions for practice.

WHAT ARE THE (MOTIVATIONAL) CONSEQUENCES OF RESPECTFUL INQUIRY?

We propose that Respectful Inquiry is powerful in leader-follower interactions because it sends three meta-messages that followers need to hear in order to be autonomously motivated: a) you have control, b) you are competent, and c) you belong – with each message mapping on one of the three basic psychological needs as indicated by Self-Determination Theory (SDT): autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, in press). Before describing how Respectful Inquiry relates to the three needs, however, it

is important to understand some of the basic tenets of SDT and its importance in a work context.

Self-Determination at Work

Self-Determination Theory is an elaborate theory of human motivation that has been widely applied in different fields (Deci & Ryan, 2012). While SDT is a broad framework that organizes the study of human motivation ranging from extrinsic to more intrinsic forms, it also offers specific sub-theories that are distinct from other motivation theories in the field (for a good review, see Gagné & Deci, 2005). One of these sub-theories in SDT emphasizes that humans have three universal and basic psychological needs: 1) to feel in control and have options, which is referred to as the need for *autonomy*, 2) to feel adequately challenged so that one can experience mastery, which is referred to as the need for *competence*, and 3) to feel that one belongs, which is referred to as the need for *relatedness*.

Importantly, and in contrast to some other need-based views on motivation, SDT research *de*-emphasizes individual differences in need strength, but instead focuses on the extent to which different situations allow these generally important needs to be satisfied (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This perspective stems from evidence suggesting that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are each innate, universal, and readily salient needs (Sheldon, 2011).

Central to SDT is the tenet that humans are embedded in social environments that may support or thwart their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Given that work is a central aspect of the social environmental for many people, organizational stressors and resources unsurprisingly have a profound influence on people's basic psychological needs (for an overview see: Van den Broeck et al., in press). Among these, leaders are particularly influential, acting as a critical source of basic psychological need satisfaction at work (e.g., Kovjanic, Schuh, Jonas, Van Quaquebeke, & van

Dick, 2012; Lanaj, Johnson, & Lee, 2016; Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010).

SDT holds that, when an environment facilitates the experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the individual will not only be *satisfied* due to basic psychological needs being met, but also experience *autonomous motivation* (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Autonomous motivation can be defined as freely choosing to strive in a particular direction. It is characterized by a sense of choicefulness, endorsement, and ownership of behavior (Meyer & Gagné, 2008). As such, in a work setting, autonomous motivation can range from work maintenance behaviors (such as continuing to work as requested even when nobody is watching) to more proactive work behaviors (such as scanning the environment and initiating change). Regarding the latter, the freedom implied in autonomous motivation can guide followers toward novel approaches or solutions that are beyond their regular job descriptions. Some of these approaches might be good, others not. Fostering autonomous motivation thus may not only raise the mean but also the variation in follower performance (e.g., Chan, 2006). However, on balance, the literature suggests that the good effects of proactive behaviors outweigh the bad (e.g., Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010).

In sum, and consistent with prior research, *the experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness improves employee satisfaction and autonomous motivation, which are themselves linked to retention and job performance.* As these conclusions are adequately established in the literature (Van den Broeck et al., in press), we do not formalize them as propositions. However, they are important because subsequent theory hinges on the assertion that, ceteris paribus, it is desirable for followers to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Respectful Inquiry and the Satisfaction of Followers' Basic Psychological Needs

Having outlined how the three basic psychological needs fuel follower satisfaction and

motivation, we will now argue that Respectful Inquiry supports each of these three needs. First, by engaging in Respectful Inquiry, leaders signal that they accept followers' autonomy. Quite literally, just by the act of asking, whether "How's it going?" or "What do you think?", leaders relinquish control over the conversation. Beyond relinquishing conversational control, Respectful Inquiry also gives the addressee the autonomy to make sense of the situation from his/her perspective (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). The freedom to "make sense" rather than be "given sense" is likely play a key role in explaining the relationship between Respectful Inquiry and follower sense of autonomy. In sum, Respectful Inquiry sends the meta-message to followers: you have control.

Proposition 1: Leader Respectful Inquiry increases followers' experience of autonomy.

Second, Respectful Inquiry also supports a follower's competence needs, which involves the desire to successfully meet new challenges. As outlined above, by asking somebody a question, control is relinquished, which, if paired with attentive listening, signals a leader's trust and confidence that the addressee can capably respond. Respectful Inquiry by a leader thus conveys the message that the follower is assumed competent enough to give an informative or otherwise valuable answer; and the more open the question is, the more confidence is signaled to the follower. In addition, Respectful Inquiry by leaders offers followers the opportunity to reveal their competence. For example, if a leader asks the question, "What are your takeaways?" or "Are we missing anything?", it converts the follower from a passive message receiver into an active message creator, thereby also challenging him or her to make good use of that opportunity. Respectful Inquiry therefore generally sends the meta-message: you are deemed competent.

Proposition 2: Leader Respectful Inquiry increases followers' experience of competence.

Third, the verbal act of Respectful Inquiry itself also causes the conversation to become bidirectional, irrespective of whether the question is "What is our objective here?" or "How are you today?". As such, respectful Inquiry opens the communication to dyadic contributions, thereby communicating "We are in this together". More pointedly, the nature of a directed question as well as the resources spent on attentive listening (e.g., attention and time) imply "I care about you personally". These signals culminate in the meta-message: you belong.

Proposition 3: Leader Respectful Inquiry increases followers' experience of relatedness.

Note that, even though we listed some examples for better understanding, our focus is on the form of communication rather than the content of communication. Certainly, different contents may relate to different needs. That said, a seemingly competence-need related question such as "What is your opinion?" may just as easily also satisfy a respondent's need for relatedness or autonomy. Likewise, since Respectful Inquiry shifts control of the conversation to the receiver, the content of a question does not completely predetermine the way followers answer. Thus, regardless of the content, an open question can provide a follower with the opportunity to shift the conversation to, for example, topics that display his/her competence. For example, a leader's "How's it going?" might evoke a response from the follower about recent successes in solving a technical challenge. In this case, Respectful Inquiry itself (rather than the content of the question) allows the follower to direct the conversation to fulfill their need to demonstrate competence.

WHAT ARE THE MOTIVATIONAL ANTECEDENTS OF RESPECTFUL INQUIRY?

Given the propositions that leader Respectful Inquiry should be generally satisfying and motivating for followers and thus generally beneficial for organizations, we continue to build our model by focusing on what spurs such communication. While a range of largely dispositional

factors may prompt Respectful Inquiry (e.g., humility, non-arrogance, agreeableness, learning orientation), these are often not malleable and thus provide little opportunities for organizations to intervene in ways that increase leader's Respectful Inquiry. Instead, this article thus focuses on the three basic psychological needs identified by Self-Determination Theory, which can be influenced by organizational practices.

First, as noted earlier, Respectful Inquiry involves giving up autonomous control of the conversation. As such, Respectful Inquiry is less likely if a leader is experiencing an autonomy deficit. There are two related reasons for this. First, according to SDT theorizing, autonomy can be considered a resource that individuals seek to restore if depleted (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Thus, leaders will be reluctant to give up conversational control when their own autonomy needs are depleted. Second, low control experiences likely result in a dynamic akin to what has been called "threat-rigidity" (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). As such, low control experiences are related to constricted attention, less perspective taking, reduced adaptive communication, and more rigid decision-making (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Roxssnagel, 2000). As a likely result of both reasons, students ask fewer questions when they feel that their academic performance is beyond their control (e.g., Daly, Kreiser, & Roghaar, 1994) or when they are concerned about their own autonomy (Butler & Neuman, 1995). Also experimental studies show that a thwarted autonomy need provokes both defensiveness (Hodgins, Yacko, & Gottlieb, 2006) and an increase in independence striving (Radel, Pelletier, Sarrazin, & Milyavskaya, 2011). In sum, based on a resource-maintenance perspective on autonomy and a threat-rigidity perspective on information processing, we thus expect that a leader who experiences low autonomy is likely to communicate to followers through orders, statements, or closed questions, rather than open questions accompanied by attentive listening.

Proposition 4: Leaders are more likely to engage in Respectful Inquiry to the extent that their own need for autonomy is satisfied.

Second, we argue that a leader will be more reluctant to engage in Respectful Inquiry if he or she does not feel competent. Any kind of open inquiry involves an admission, both to the leaders themselves and their followers, that the leader does not know every relevant piece of information. Hence, leaders who are insecure about their own competence may not feel safe to ask genuine questions because it threatens to further undermine their sense of competence (even though, paradoxically, asking questions could make them more competent over time). As a result, when challenge outstrips skill, leaders are unlikely to seek out new information (Staw et al., 1981) or appreciate their followers' desire to share their perspectives (Roxssnagel, 2000). Education research, for instance, shows that teachers use less inquiry in the classroom when they are less knowledgeable (Dobey & Schafer, 1984). Similarly, students with lower self-perceived academic performance and efficacy were found to ask fewer questions in class (Daly et al., 1994; Ryan & Shin, 2011) due to a threatened sense of competence (van der Meij, 1988). The same seems true in organizations. Argyris' (1982) classic work points to the desire to protect one's ego as a key barrier to asking questions. Ironically, for instance, Lee (2002) found that contrary to her expectation, physicians and nurses in a hospital asked *less* questions when overwhelmed by a new IT system, and *more* when working in well-known environments. And indeed, asking others for help is often considered a sign of incompetence, inferiority, and dependence (Lee, 1997), and is experienced as especially threatening when the question addressee is of lower-status (Druian & DePaulo, 1977; Lee, 2002). As a result, rather than respectfully inquire, it seems that many leaders become more aggressive toward others when they do not feel competent (Fast & Chen, 2009).

Proposition 5: Leaders are more likely to engage in Respectful Inquiry to the extent that their own need for competence is satisfied.

Third, we argue that when leaders feel like they do not belong – i.e. when the relatedness need is thwarted in their lives (with work being a major portion of that life for most leaders) – the resulting social insecurity will decrease their willingness to ask genuine questions because these would render the leader even more vulnerable. As such, when relatedness needs are not met, leaders' communication can be expected to become more risk-averse and conservative (Park & Baumeister, 2015), with less propensity towards Respectful Inquiry.

At work, there are various resources that can make people feel that they belong. Among these, most significant are social ties and the support they represent (Van den Broeck et al., in press). For instance, if an individual's connection to their own supervisor is of a high quality, the individual's relatedness needs are more satisfied (Van den Broeck et al., in press). Conversely, we would expect that leaders' relatedness needs may also be fueled via the relationships they have with their followers – with consequences for communication as outlined above. And indeed, relationship quality between leader and follower seems to affect whether leaders engage in overriding communication (Fairhurst, Rogers, & Sarr, 1987) and whether their communication is involving rather than adversarial (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989). We thus propose that:

Proposition 6: Leaders are more likely to engage in Respectful Inquiry to the extent that their need for relatedness is satisfied.

WHEN IS RESPECTFUL INQUIRY PARTICULARLY VALUABLE BUT RARE?

Having argued that Respectful Inquiry is beneficial for follower motivation, we now adopt a pragmatist approach to theory building (cf. Kilduff, Mehra, & Dunn, 2011) and focus on contexts where there are likely to be large gaps between normal behavior and effective behavior, between

"is" and "ought". In other words, we focus on contexts that elicit "ironic" dynamics in that they may prevent a leader from engaging in Respectful Inquiry in exactly those situations where Respectful Inquiry would be most beneficial. These contexts can be organized into ironic dynamics due to the leaders' job, due to organizational culture, and due to relational aspects. They are discussed in the order they appear in Figure 2 from left to right.

Ironic Dynamics due to Leader Job Contexts

Three aspects of a leader's job are likely to elicit an ironic Respectful Inquiry dynamic: time pressure, physical distance from subordinates, and cognitive load. For each aspect, we first describe in the following why the value of Respectful Inquiry increases under the condition, and then argue why Respectful Inquiry likely decreases in the self-same situation.

Time pressure. At least since Mintzberg (1973), it has been recognized that many managers operate in a time-starved environment. As a result, leaders often experience time pressure as deadlines loom (Hall & Lawler, 1970). When leaders are time-starved, they have less capacity to closely monitor and guide the behavior of followers toward high performance. In such contexts, it is important that followers are willing and able to work independently without a need for close supervision, and that the followers themselves maintain a devotion to the assigned tasks and proactively engage with their work environment (Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker et al., 2010). In other words, when leaders are under time pressure, it becomes more critical that their followers are autonomously motivated.

Proposition 7: Follower performance becomes more dependent on follower autonomous motivation the more time pressure their leaders are under.

Time pressure is, however, also listed by managers as one of the prime reasons why they cannot communicate with their followers as much as they desire (Smeltzer & Fann, 1989).

Indeed, perceived time pressure may inhibit Respectful Inquiry simply because directive statements seem like a way of saving time (negative direct effect).

In addition, time pressure may indirectly reduce Respectful Inquiry through the mediating mechanism of reduced feelings of control, i.e. deadlines control the leader. The link between time pressure and the experience of control loss can be delineated from experimental (Maule, Hockey, & Bdzola, 2000; Muraven, Gagné, & Rosman, 2008) as well as field research. For example, teachers who feel that they do not have enough time in the classroom report feeling less in control (Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012). Similarly, hospital physicians were found to perceive the efforts by hospital management to micromanage their time as a breach of their autonomy (Epstein, 2000), which then inclined said physicians to limit their students' autonomy when they taught (Williams & Deci, 1998). Correspondingly, and consistent with the autonomy as a resource perspective, research finds that time pressure often results in control maintaining effects, such as constricted attention, a decrease in perspective taking, reduced adaptive communication, and more rigid decision-making (Epley et al., 2004; Roxssnagel, 2000). As such, we propose:

Proposition 8: Leaders' experience of time pressure reduces their tendency to engage in Respectful Inquiry, in part because time pressure threatens their sense of autonomy.

Physical distance. Physical distance between leaders and followers is common (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). While it is theoretically possible for distant leaders to maintain a high level of communication with their followers, such communication is more effortful and requires explicit scheduling (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003). Regular communication is challenging when followers are located on different floors or buildings (Davis, 1984), but becomes a herculean challenge when followers are working across time zones (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003).

Under conditions of distance, the variety of informal conversations, via which leadership so often takes place, suffers. As a result, leaders are not only able to exert less control over their followers, but they are also less aware of the actual organizational environment their distant followers operate in. Under these circumstances, it becomes more critical to have self-determined followers with autonomous motivation, i.e., who work independently and proactively engage with the environment.

Proposition 9: Follower performance becomes more dependent on follower autonomous motivation the more physically distant their leaders are.

At the same time, we posit that physical distance also leads to less Respectful Inquiry. The argument again includes both direct and indirect effects. First, being physically distant simply means there is less opportunity for interactions and therefore the chance of being able to easily ask questions simply decreases (a direct effect).

Second, we propose that physical distance is, in part, responsible for thwarting the leader's relatedness need, which then decreases Respectful Inquiry (an indirect effect). While it may be debatable whether it is really "lonely at the top" (Waytz, Chou, Magee, & Galinsky, 2015), at least feelings of belongingness are unlikely to be salient in the context of impoverished leader-follower relationships (Lee & Tiedens, 2001). Indeed, physical distance from followers makes it especially difficult for leaders to be included in the sort of light-hearted informal conversations, lunches, coffees, and after work drinks that are the basis of belongingness and relationship quality (Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska, & Gully, 2003; Mueller & Lovell, 2015). Moreover, physical distance usually means that the bulk of interaction occurs through email exchanges, which are less warm than face-to-face exchanges and more prone to relationship imparing conflict (Friedman & Currall, 2003). Thus, physical distance may reduce experiences

of belongingness in the context of leader-follower interactions, which may lower a leader's overall sense of relatedness, and as such may decrease Respectful Inquiry. Needless to say that a leader's sense of relatedness may also be fueled in other life domains. However, for most people and leaders in particular, the work domain is an important part of one's life (Harpaz & Fu, 2002). Thus, ceterus paribus:

> *Proposition 10: Leaders' experience of physical distance reduces their tendency to engage in Respectful Inquiry, in part because physical distance threatens their sense of relatedness.*

Cognitive overload. Cognitive load refers to the total amount of mental effort that needs to be spent to solve a certain problem (Plass, Moreno, & Brunken, 2010). When the mental effort associated with a task/role outstrips the resources available in attention and working memory, an individual becomes cognitively overloaded. Cognitive overload is thus a function of (a) how inherently cognitively challenging a job is, relative to (b) the individual's information processing and memory capabilities (Jackson & Farzaneh, 2012).

When leaders are cognitively overloaded, we predict that Respectful Inquiry will be particularly beneficial. The argument has two parts. First, under high cognitive load, leaders will find it harder to spare the cognitive resources needed to closely oversee and guide their followers. Under these circumstances, it becomes more critical to have autonomously motivated followers. Second, in order to be effective, leaders must have an information-processing capacity that matches the information-processing requirements of their environment (Driver & Streufert, 1969). If the cognitive load outstrips the leader's capacity, the followers may lend their information processing capacities (Huber & Lewis, 2010). More specifically, autonomously motivated followers may proactively help the leader by independently thinking through

problems. Thus, both dynamics result in:

Proposition 11: Follower performance becomes more dependent on follower autonomous motivation the more their leaders experience cognitive overload.

Yet, cognitive overload is also likely to keep leaders from engaging in Respectful Inquiry simply because the mental strain makes it more difficult to engage in meaningful conversations (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998) and because not asking questions seems like a straightforward way to reduce further outside input (a direct effect).

In addition, we propose an indirect effect, in that, when a leader's information-processing capacity does not match the information-processing requirements of the role, cognitive overload is likely to represent a threat to the leader's sense of competence, simply because the leader is less likely to *be* competent in such settings (Bawden & Robinson, 2008; Eppler & Mengis, 2004). Or, in other words, cognitive overload would lead to the opposite of what Ryan and Deci (2002) argue is necessary for a satisfied competence need, i.e. "a felt sense of confidence and effectance in action" (p.7). This diminished sense of competence would then, as argued above, translate into lower Respectful Inquiry. Support for the link can be delineated from some adjacent research. Fernet and colleagues (2013), for instance, find a negative correlation between self-perceived role overload (i.e. experience of unreasonably many and complex role expectations) and self-perceived competence among school board members. Related considerations have been put forward by Krasikova, Green, and LeBreton (2013), who more generally posit that when leaders lack sufficient resources to meet their job's demands, they experience a goal blockage, which they argue ultimately negatively impacts their interactions with followers. And more directly related to cognitive overload, empirical research finds that, leaders' self-regulation becomes impaired when task difficulty outstrips leaders' available

cognitive resources, which subsequently leads to less perspective taking (Roxssnagel, 2000) and to higher levels of abusive supervision (Collins & Jackson, 2015). Thus, we suggest:

> *Proposition 12: Leaders' experience of cognitive overload reduces their tendency to engage in Respectful Inquiry, in part because cognitive overload threatens their sense of competence.*

Ironic Dynamics due to Organizational Context

Organizational culture is an important element of the organizational context that can influence Respectful Inquiry dynamics. Indeed, organizational culture shapes leadership practices and expectations, and as such may simultaneously affect whether Respectful Inquiry occurs and what its effects are. Of particular relevance to our reasoning is the Competing Values Framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), which suggests that a core dimension of organizational culture is the emphasis on control versus flexibility. Control-oriented cultures accomplish tasks through deference to authority and an emphasis on measurement, goal setting, and rational planning. They are consistent with a neo-Weberian bureaucracy (Heugens, 2005). Because such depersonalizing cultures tend to formalize processes in ways that reduce both individual discretion and interpersonal communication, employees in such contexts likely feel less satisfaction on all three basic psychological needs.

Notably, though, people often respond positively to need supportive leadership in such a setting (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Indeed, need supportive leadership can *more easily* raise the sense of self-determination in contexts that have thwarted individuals' self-determination simply because these contexts provide the opportunity for a bigger change. Analogous to this argument, a study by Black and Deci (2000) found that the relationship between an instructor's autonomy support and student performance was highest for those students who were initially low in

autonomous regulation. In control-oriented contexts, Respectful Inquiry may hence be experienced as a breath of fresh air and more easily satisfy previously unmet needs. As such, we predict that Respectful Inquiry is especially powerful in contexts where people are not used to such leadership.

Proposition 13: The positive effect of Respectful Inquiry on followers' basic psychological need satisfaction is stronger in control-oriented organizational cultures.

While Respectful Inquiry may be particularly satisfying in control-oriented organizations, it is also likely to be particularly rare in said organizations. Given that Respectful Inquiry involves leaders giving up control and reacting flexibly to followers' views, it seems plausible that Respectful Inquiry will be deemed more appropriate in flexibility-oriented organizations and less appropriate in control-oriented organizations. For example, Courtright, Fairhurst, and Rogers (1989) found that questions were common in a manufacturing plant organized by an organic, self-managing team philosophy. In contrast, in a different plant driven by a mechanistic philosophy, commands without conversational elaboration were more typical. Interactionist theories of organizational behavior would accordingly lend support by arguing that a leader will inhibit any tendencies toward Respectful Inquiry if discouraged by a strong situational pressure (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Indeed, if leaders fail to inhibit these tendencies in a control-oriented culture, they may even cease to be seen as a leader (Lord & Maher, 1991). Thus, we predict:

Proposition 14: Control-oriented organizational cultures decrease leaders' Respectful Inquiry.

Ironic Dynamics due to Relational Contexts

Finally, we turn to relational context in which leaders and followers interact. Specifically, we consider a) differences in power between the leader and follower, and b) whether the

follower's basic psychological needs are already satisfied. For both aspects, we again highlight when Respectful Inquiry would be particularly beneficial, only to then argue why the self-same situation likely reduces engagement in Respectful Inquiry.

Interpersonal power asymmetry. Throughout our theorizing, we have focused on leaders asking followers questions, even though anybody, not just leaders, can ask and listen. However, in this section, we will explain why the messages conveyed through Respectful Inquiry – i.e., you are autonomous, competent, and belong – are more motivationally consequential the more powerful the sending individual is. While there are various approaches to conceptualizing interpersonal power, a recent review summarizes it as "having the discretion and the means to asymmetrically enforce one's will over others" (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015: 139). Accordingly, the powerful enjoy "freedom from others' influence and the right to decide one's own fate" (2015: 138), while the less powerful need to pay close attention and properly decipher what the more powerful want (Fiske et al., 1996).

Within organizations, leaders have power. Leaders not only control the allocation of resources, but also govern to a significant extent the allocation of intragroup status (Tyler & Lind, 1992; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Thus, less powerful people devote substantial sensemaking energy to the communications of more powerful people (Fiske, Morling, & Stevens, 1996). Put differently, the bigger the asymmetry in interpersonal power, the higher the stakes for followers, and hence the bigger the need to attend to the communicative messages sent by leaders (Fiske et al., 1996). As such, interactions with leaders are more likely to be ruminated upon. This is especially true if contextual factors (sub)consciously reactivate memories of that communication episode (Higgins, 1996). Against this background, we propose that the three meta-messages inherent in Respectful Inquiry (you have control, you belong, you are competent)

will be more attended to, given more weight, and will have more sustainable impact beyond the conversational episode in relational contexts where the leader is powerful vis-à-vis the focal follower.

Proposition 15: The more power a leader has over a follower, the more the leader's Respectful Inquiry will affect the follower's basic psychological need satisfaction.

Yet, while more interpersonally powerful leaders may elicit larger reactions when engaging in Respectful Inquiry, power is simultaneously likely to cause "psychological distancing" (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002), which, we posit, makes it less likely that these individuals will engage in meaningful, bidirectional conversations, such as Respectful Inquiry. For instance, research by Galinsky and colleagues (2006) suggests that high power individuals are unlikely to ask questions because they are rather self-oriented, anchored heavily in self-knowledge, and less able to read emotional expressions. Relatedly, research has found that power holders also objectify (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008) and are more likely to stereotype others than to see them as individuals (Fiske, 1993). Similarly, powerful individuals tend to experience a diminished sense trust and a certain cynicism toward lower power individuals (Inesi, Gruenfeld, & Galinsky, 2012). Correspondingly, studies in the realm of communication suggest that more powerful individuals are less likely to listen to others (See, Morrison, Rothman, & Soll, 2011) and are more likely to verbally dominate conversations (Tost et al., 2012). Thus, we propose:

Proposition 16: The more power a leader has over a follower, the less the leader will engage in Respectful Inquiry.

Saturation of follower's basic psychological needs. One of the basic premises of our theorizing is that leader Respectful Inquiry satisfies follower basic psychological needs. Yet, if

basic psychological needs are saturated, and, as such, followers already feel satisfied and are intrinsically motivated, a leader's Respectful Inquiry is unlikely to "push the needle" by much. Such reasoning is in line with the substitutes for leadership literature, which shows that even the best leadership has little effect if employees are already intrinsically motivated (e.g., Nübold, Muck, & Maier, 2013; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996). In our framework, several such substitutes can be found in the various demands-resources models vis-à-vis basic psychological needs (cf. Van den Broeck et al., in press). No matter the specific resource (e.g., job control, skill utilization, social support), the basic idea would be the same: If resources at work already clearly convey the message "you have control", "you are competent", and "you belong", a leader's Respectful Inquiry will likely only have a diminished return on a follower's basic psychological need satisfaction. The same also holds for the effect of Respectful Inquiry itself. If a leader has consistently employed Respectful Inquiry in the past, then additional engagements in Respectful Inquiry likely depreciate in impact.

Proposition 17: The relationship between Respectful Inquiry and follower basic psychological need satisfaction is weaker the more follower needs are already met.

Yet, while employees, whose basic psychological needs have not been met, present an opportunity for especially impactful Respectful Inquiry, we also posit that leaders will be less likely to engage in Respectful Inquiry with these individuals. The argument is straightforward. Need-thwarted employees are more likely to respond to Respectful Inquiry by sharing their dissatisfaction and demotivation. Like most people, on an interpersonal level leaders likely want to avoid or at least curtail negative interactions (Solomon, 2016). As such, when dealing with employees whose basic psychological needs have not been met, leaders may opt for unidirectional statements over Respectful Inquiry. Conversely, it likely is more enjoyable for a

leader to approach and engage in open conversation with followers who are satisfied and autonomously motivated.

Proposition 18: Leaders will engage in more Respectful Inquiry with a follower the more the follower's basic psychological needs are met.

Together these dynamics suggest a self-perpetuating cycle in which the more motivated followers are engaged with Respectful Inquiry and thus stay motivated, while demotivated followers are submitted to controlling statements, which will not lift their motivation.

WHAT ROLE DOES LEADER-FOLLOWER HISTORY PLAY?

The final aspect of our theorizing pertains to the interaction history between leader and follower. Indeed, given that it is usually not the first time that the leader and follower have interacted, it seems prudent to consider how prior leader-follower interactions may affect a focal communication episode. For example, if a leader previously engaged in Respectful Inquiry but then used the situation/information disclosed to embarrass, reject, or punish the follower, then future Respectful Inquiry is likely to be interpreted skeptically by the follower. While we argued above that, in the main, open questions and attentive listening are generally signals of respect, previous experiences may have taught the follower that Respectful Inquiry can be used abusively. Under such circumstances Respectful Inquiry can be perceived as a "Trojan horse", designed to lure the follower into a trap. In other words, if previous encounters with a leader's question asking have led the follower to a sinister and malevolent interpretation of the leader's intentions (Lapidot, Kark, & Shamir, 2007), then current Respectful Inquiry likely will not support a follower's basic psychological needs, but rather would be interpreted as a cloaked attack on the very same (e.g., the leader's questions are interpreted signaling to the follower that s/he really has no control, is incompetent, and does not belong).

Proposition 19: The more a leader has abusively used previous engagements in Respectful Inquiry to subdue, embarrass, or exclude a follower, the more likely it is that current Respectful Inquiry will weaken the follower's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Of note, while our description above pertains to the focal leader and follower dyad, these abusive experiences of Respectful Inquiry could be learned from other sources. For example, a follower could have observed such interactions between the leader and other followers. The degree to which such social learning will take place, however, is likely to depend on the perceived similarity between other followers and focal follower (Bandura, 1977). Alternately, a follower may have had abusive experiences with a previous leader, and then transfer this interpretation onto the current leader's Respectful Inquiry (Ritter & Lord, 2007).

Notably there is a difference between malevolent leader responses, like the ones described above, and the question of whether leaders incorporate the follower views into future action. In particular, for questions that call for input, it could be guessed that Respectful Inquiry might create expectations that the leader will subsequently behave in line with the follower's voiced perspective. If these expectations are later unmet, then "blowback" could be a plausible result. However, the available empirical evidence on this subject is interesting. It suggests that having the opportunity for voice may be more important than whether the subsequent outcome is consistent with the opinions voiced (Bies & Shapiro, 1988). Recent research on organizational suggestion systems seconds this notion by showing that declining to act on people's suggestions does not demotivate (Deichmann & van den Ende, 2014). Thus, while Respectful Inquiry is likely to lose its benefits if used malevolently to harm the follower, it does not seem to obligate the leader to behave in ways consistent with the views expressed by the follower.

DISCUSSION

To summarize, this article introduces and develops theory around the concept of leaders engaging in Respectful Inquiry. Respectful Inquiry was defined as a multidimensional construct of asking questions in an open way and subsequently listening attentively. Respectful Inquiry is generally expected to increase followers' sense of self-determination, which is then expected to boost retention via job satisfaction, and job performance via autonomous motivation. However, the relationship between Respectful Inquiry and autonomous motivation is expected to be qualified by the degree that previous experiences cause followers to assume a malevolent intent behind a leader's Respectful Inquiry. Respectful Inquiry is predicted to be more likely when leaders feel self-determined and when the organizational culture endorses such behavior. We further developed the argument that leaders will feel a lack of self-determination, and thus avoid Respectful Inquiry, when under time pressure, physically distant, or faced with high cognitive load. Similarly, we argued that leaders are less likely to engage in Respectful Inquiry when they are powerful and when their follower's needs have not been satisfied. Ironically, we predict that these are precisely the contexts where leaders would benefit most from engaging in Respectful Inquiry.

Where to go from here?

This article can inform future research by a) testing the model, b) exploring potential boundary conditions, and c) broadening the scope beyond leadership research.

Testing the proposed model. A key component of testing the proposed model is measuring Respectful Inquiry. One approach, involving behaviorally anchored rating scales, would ask followers to rate their leader's communication based on the number of questions asked, the openness of the respective questions, and whether their leaders show listening

behavior. Of course, this kind of data collection is subject to a number of biases and thus not necessarily advisable (Baumeister et al., 2007; Lord & Maher, 1991; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). Fortunately, other research designs are available.

Experimental designs could, for instance, not only address causality concerns, but also enable clear behavioral manipulation. For example, a confederate could be trained to engage in different configurations of Respectful Inquiry with followers, with researchers observing the consequences. Alternately, a naïve subject could be assigned as a leader and simply encouraged to engage in Respectful Inquiry. Should such lab designs bring about the proposed positive effects, a next step could be to conduct field experiments. For instance, leaders in a treatment condition could be assigned to a Respectful Inquiry workshop, with researchers tracking subsequent changes in follower motivation, satisfaction, performance, and retention.

An alternative measurement approach would be to record and code everyday leadership communication in situ (Fairhurst, 2007). For face-to-face communication, this could be done through video or voice recordings (e.g., Courtright et al., 1989; Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010; Wodak et al., 2011). For written communication, letters, emails, or instant messages can be used to create a corpus of conversations (Fanelli, Misangyi, & Tosi, 2009; Fragale, Sumanth, Tiedens, & Northcraft, 2012). Naturally, with written forms of communication, one will need to identify proxies for actual listening. For instance, in the context of email, indications of "listening" could include quoting a follower's prior comments, or responding to each point a follower raised. More generally, a variety of different coding instruments can be employed (for a review see Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). For coding statements and questions, researchers may want to revisit Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) (Bales, 1950) or its variant SYMLOG (Bales, Cohen, & Williamson, 1979), or turn to promising recent developments such as the Discussion

Coding System (DCS) (Schermuly & Scholl, 2012). Alternatively, experience-sampling methods (via smartphone apps) could allow followers or leaders to directly code communication behaviors after interactions (Beal & Weiss, 2003). If simultaneously paired with indications of basic psychological need satisfaction, such approaches could also expose the within-person variation of leader communication and its within-person effects on followers.

Potential further boundary conditions of the model. While the present article outlines a core model, further boundary conditions and contingencies may exist. Below, four potential boundary conditions are considered: 1) when Respectful Inquiry crowds out other leader communication, 2) when Respectful Inquiry with one follower creates dissent among other followers, 3) when people lack the skills to encode and decode Respectful Inquiry, and 4) when Respectful Inquiry is inconsistent with gender stereotypes.

A first boundary condition that future studies may explore is that it seems possible that there is such a thing as too much Respectful Inquiry (cf. Grant & Schwartz, 2011), especially if a reliance on Respectful Inquiry "crowds" out advocacy and constructive feedback. A leader who always inquires and never discloses his/her own views misses the opportunity to express vision and values, which in turn may carry detrimental effects for identification, liking, and trusting (Collins & Miller, 1994). As several scholars have noted, a combination of advocacy and inquiry may be superior to either alone (e.g., Ames, Maissen, & Brockner, 2012; Rudolph, Simon, Rivard, Dufresne, & Raemer, 2007). While this is a definite theoretical possibility, we suspect that few leaders currently engage in too much Respectful Inquiry.

Second, we have looked at leadership as a dyadic phenomenon. However, leadership is often enacted within a group and leaders may have different relationships with different group members (cf. LMX differentiation). In a naturally occurring setting, it is thus also likely that

some followers will be asked and listened to more than others, potentially creating jealousy or feelings of inadequacy based on social comparisons (Thau, Tröster, Aquino, Pillutla, & de Cremer, 2012). This article's model does not speak to the possibility that asymmetries in Respectful Inquiry may spur dysfunctional team dynamics, though that is indeed a possibility.

Third, our model rests on the assumption that followers are adept in interpreting communicative verbal and non-verbal cues from leaders. However, for some individuals this may be harder to achieve than for others. For instance, those on the autistic spectrum may find it more difficult to fully decipher how open a question is meant to be, or whether a leader is interested in their response. If followers cannot decode the implicit messages sent by Respectful Inquiry, it is unlikely to have the anticipated effects.

Fourth, future research may also investigate whether Respectful Inquiry is seen as more or less appropriate for certain genders. There is some evidence that the social costs of seeking help are higher for males than for females (Lee, 2002; Rosette, Mueller, & Lebel, 2015). While Respectful Inquiry is different from seeking help, it nevertheless seems worthy to explore whether Respectful Inquiry is perceived as more communal and thus role-appropriate for females (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Broadening the scope beyond leadership research. The ideas presented in our theorizing may also be linked with other literatures. For example, research could consider how leaders' Respectful Inquiry relates to organizational innovation (e.g., Cohen, 2009; Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2009), to organizational learning (e.g., Argyris, 1982), to decision-making (e.g., Schwenk, 1990; van Knippenberg, 2014), and to organizational change (e.g., Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). All of these literatures have partly incorporated notions of inquiry – for instance, that leader inquiry can help people disrupt and challenge the status quo,

adopt learning mindsets, weigh options properly, or overcome resistance to change.

Needless to say that Respectful Inquiry, because it is an everyday communication behavior, need not only apply within leader-follower relationships. For instance, Respectful Inquiry can also be used with peers, superiors, or clients. Shifting the audience lens would open yet other fields for investigation. Correspondingly, applications in the domains of peer coaching, upward social influence, or consultative selling seem promising. Likewise, we assume that the core dynamics of Respectful Inquiry also apply in non-work domains such as communication in the classroom, in the family, or in other personal relationships. Future research may thus inspire or be inspired by these research fields.

Implications for Practice

As we highlighted in the beginning, the practitioner literature acknowledges the potency of asking open questions and listening (e.g., Cohen, 2009; Ferrari, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2013; Leeds, 2000; Marquardt, 2005; Maxwell, 2014). However, if the model developed in this article is supported by future research, it could add substantial specificity around why and when practitioners should use Respectful Inquiry. A particular pragmatic value of the model is that it highlights how leaders may be caught up in psychological dynamics that keep them from engaging in Respectful Inquiry in precisely those situations where it would be most valuable. Specifically, the implication of our model is: If leaders want to increase their followers' autonomous motivation, they should try to engage in more Respectful Inquiry, particularly when they operate in a context that is characterized by time pressure, physical distance, cognitive overload, and a control-orientated organizational culture. To harness the fullest effect of Respectful Inquiry, leaders are further advised to overcome their tendency to seek out and engage highly-motivated followers but rather to focus on those followers whose psychological

needs have not yet been been met.

However, these implications are easier stated than accomplished. The important practical challenge is how to get people to change their communication behavior (Willer, Bell, & Andersen, 1987). One method is to encourage leaders to practice ask open questions and listen attentively. Self-perception theory and cognitive dissonance theory would both suggest that if a leader can be encouraged to engage in Respectful Inquiry behaviors, their attitudes will ultimately change to be consistent with those behaviors (Fazio, Zanna, & Cooper, 1977).

Beyond direct training in Respectful Inquiry, a second approach is to reshape leaders' jobs such that their basic psychological needs are met. For instance, the threat to autonomy inherent in time pressure could be countered with time management seminars that give leaders back their sense of control (Macan, 1994). The threat that physical distance imposes on feeling related toward followers may be countered with video-conferencing and regularly scheduled off-site meetings. The threat to competence inherent in high cognitive load may be countered by an ex ante delegation of responsibilities into the group, such that the required information-processing capacity is shared throughout the team (Huber & Lewis, 2010). Naturally, whenever vulnerability is involved, a climate of psychological safety, where mistakes and missteps are not considered personal failures but learning opportunities (Edmondson, 1999), should be helpful.

A final thought on Respectful Inquiry in practice: Given that need satisfaction is posited to be a consequence and an antecedent of Respectful Inquiry, Respectful Inquiry may represent a potent communication mechanism via which basic psychological need satisfaction can trickle-down in an organization, from directors to managers to team leaders to entry-level employees. Thus a simple adaption in syntax at the top may go a long way down.

CONCLUSION

Two decades ago, Hambrick (1994) asked the provocative question: What if the Academy actually mattered? With the present analysis, we investigated a behavioral configuration that seems to matter to many in practice. Maybe Peter Drucker was right when prophesizing: “The leader of the past was a person who knew how to tell. The leader of the future will be a person who knows how to ask” (as described in Goldsmith & Morgan, 2004).

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FIGURE 1

Proposed model of Respectful Inquiry including antecedents, consequences, and moderators.

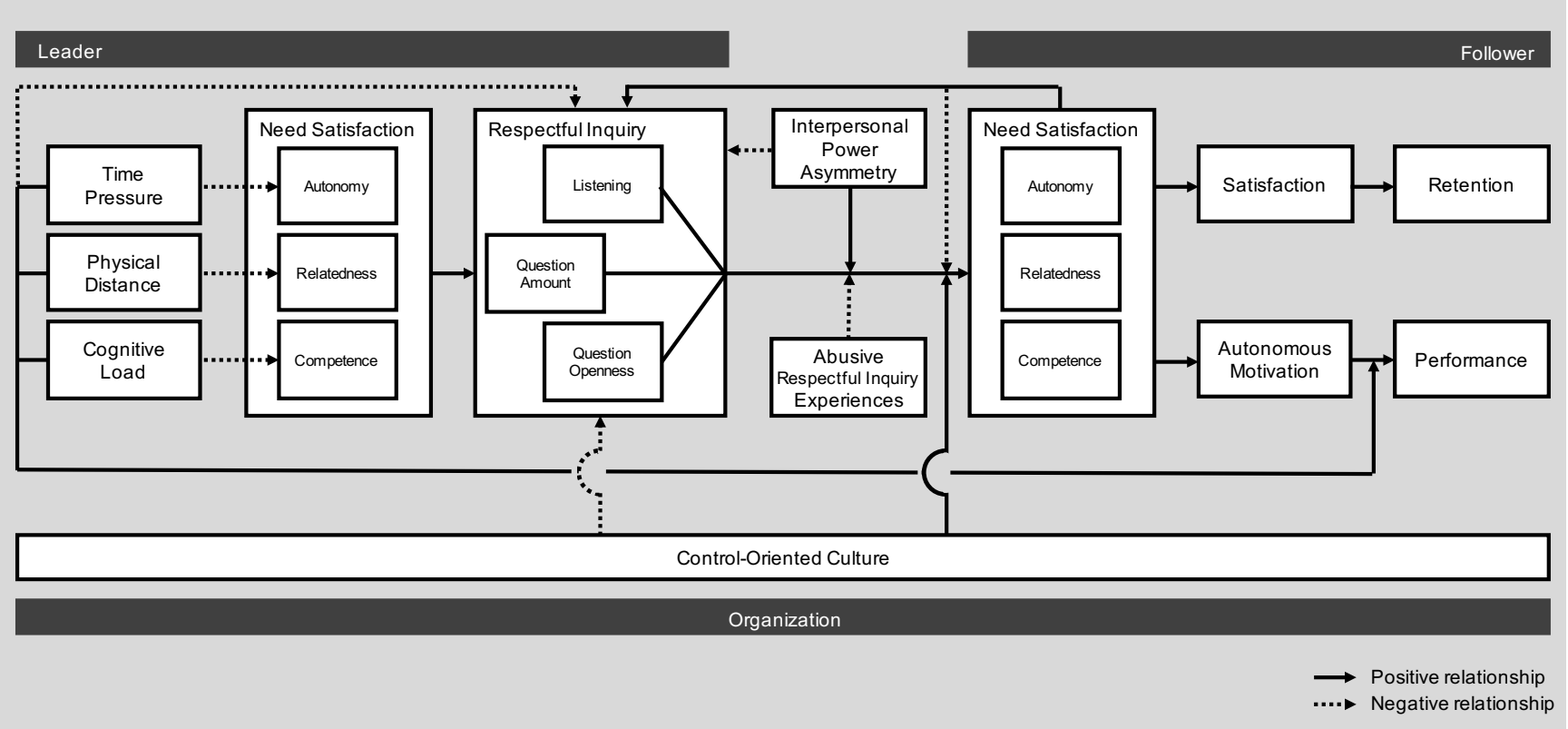
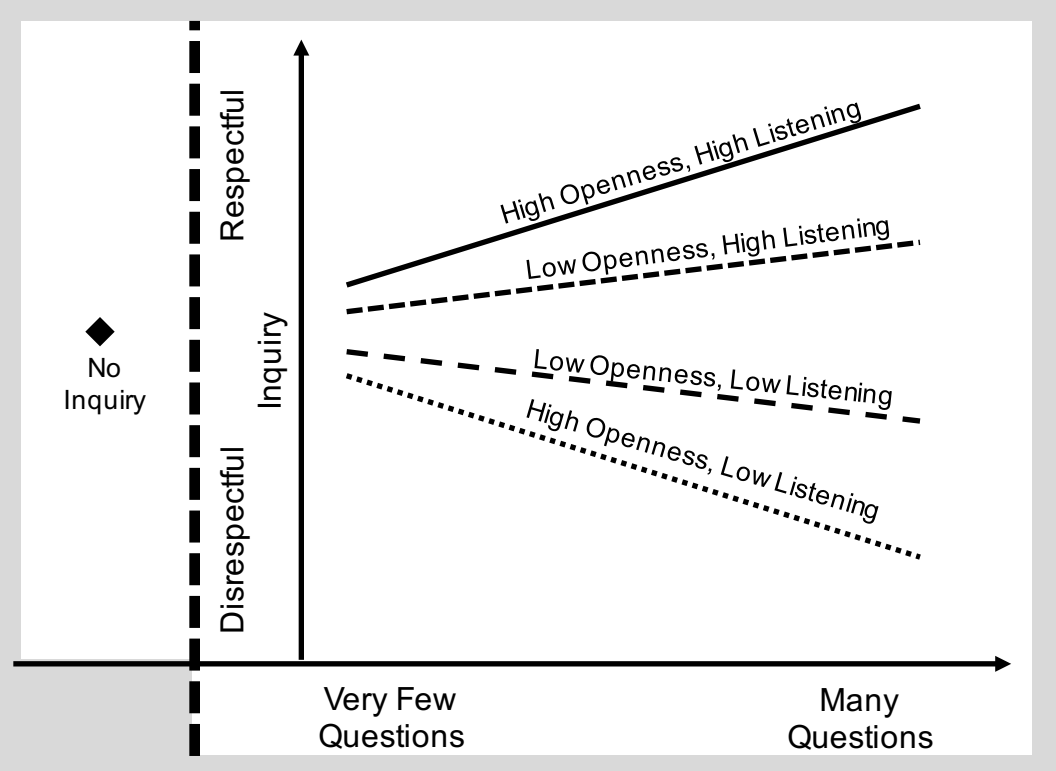


FIGURE 2

The multidimensional construct of Respectful Inquiry



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