

A Manager's self-concept in the context of their leadership style within McGregor's theory

Lenka Ďuricová, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, lenka.duricova@umb.sk

Terézia Šugereková, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice teri.sugerekova@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the present study is to examine a manager's self-concept as a potential source of their leadership philosophy. The research study is focused on the verification of the relationship between particular aspects of a manager's self-concept (especially self-esteem and self-efficacy) and of their employees' leadership style in the context of theory X/Y. On the basis of previous research results (e.g., Wood and Bandura, 1989; Whitney, 1990; McCormick et al., 2002; Wang, 2010; Ahn et al., 2016) and theoretical outcomes, we presuppose the relationship between a manager's attitude to themselves and their attitude to the employees. McGregor's theory is still relevant more than 50 years after its publication because it has a solid foundation (Kristensen, 2015). Although empirical studies examining the theory X and Y managerial assumptions in a work environment were very scarce for a long time, in recent years there have been several research studies examining the effect of leader's X/Y managerial assumptions on follower's attitudes and behaviours (e.g. Gurbuz et al, 2014, Lawter et al, 2015). However, we are more interested in the individual leader's self-concept in respect to the preferred leadership philosophy.

Research hypotheses: We stated two hypotheses arising from the theoretical background of the analysed theory. RH1: We presuppose a positive relationship between a manager's self-esteem and their managerial attitude Y. RH2: We presuppose a positive relationship between a manager's perceived self-efficacy and their managerial attitude Y.

Research sample: Our research sample consisted of 77 middle management level managers (89.6% males, 10.4% females), aged between 23 and 61 (mean age = 38.82, SD = 8.75). The research sample was collected intentionally. The research was realized anonymously by the means of a questionnaire set.

Research method: A simple correlational research study was carried out. To estimate the normal distribution of the variables, we used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The test results suggest that the condition of normal data distribution is not fulfilled ($p \leq .004$), which is why we used non-parametric tests. The relation between individual variables was estimated through a non-parametric Spearman correlation coefficient.

The questionnaire set comprised of these research tools:

1. Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (RSS, Halama, Bieščad, 2006) is used to assess the emotional aspects of self-concept and self-esteem. It is a one-dimensional scale consisting of 10 items. The higher score indicates a higher global self-esteem of an individual, whereas the lower the score is a higher level of self-depreciation. Reliability (its inner consistency) of the research instrument stated by Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .72$) proves an acceptable value.
2. General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (GSEQ, Krivohlavý, Schwarzer, Jerusalem in Balaščíková, Blatný, 2003) assesses the level of experienced self-efficacy and eventually perceived self-efficacy. It comprises of 10 items in the form of statements. An overall high score indicates a higher level of self-efficacy. The inner consistency of the research instrument stated by Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = .81$.
3. The theory X/Y – Attitude Questionnaire consists of 26 items. The questionnaire is the result of a backward translation from the English original Theory X/Y attitudes (Kopelman et al., 2010). Half of the items (13) assess

the attitude X (e.g., most people will try to do as little work as possible), and the other half (13 items) assess the attitude Y (e.g. most people can be trusted.) Referring to research instrument adaptation, we used a standard procedure for its translation. The backward translation was done by two independent professionals with appropriate language skills. The individual item comprehension was evaluated during the pilot research. Reliability (the inner consistency) of this new adapted research instrument in the Slovak conditions stated by Cronbach alpha proves an acceptable value for both factors ($\alpha=.78$; $\alpha=.71$).

Research results: The analysed self-concept (consisting of two aspects: self-esteem /AM= 34.14; SD=3.62/ and self-efficacy /AM= 33.81; SD=3.75/) and manager's leadership styles (attitude X: AM= 35.43; SD=5.59; attitude Y: AM= 34.47; SD=4.85) were basic variables of this research study. To estimate the presupposed correlations between chosen aspects of a manager's self-concept (respectively self-esteem and self-efficacy), and a managerial attitude, Spearman correlation coefficients (using McGregor's theory) were calculated. By means of correlation analysis we found a positive, moderate, statistically-significant correlation between self-esteem and managerial attitude Y (.311, $p \leq .01$). Referring to statistical correlation analysis we can conclude there is no correlation between perceived manager's self-efficacy and their managerial attitude in the sense of theory X/Y. Also, a relationship between both self-concept aspects was confirmed (.472, $p \leq .01$).

Research limitations: 1: the research sample size and its choice, 2: male predominancy; 3: the use of self-reports (may have elicited socially desirable responses). All of them may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Practical implications: In spite of the limitations mentioned above, from our research results we can make two possible recommendations regarding managerial practice: 1 – while hiring managers it is recommended considering also their level of self-esteem, and 2 – there should be a directly aimed development and facilitation of a manager's positive self-esteem in their practice by means of various seminars, training or workshops. Improving a manager's self-esteem could be one way of developing successful leadership.

Theoretical/research implications: A manager's self-efficacy as a conative aspect of their self-concept might be more related to the manager's behaviour referring to their concrete manifestations of behaviours in the framework of McGregor's leadership theory than to their **attitudes, eventually to the perception of employees**. This opens up a new perspective to further research findings.

Originality/Value: The biggest contribution is supported by the existence of a positive, moderate, statistically-significant relationship between self-esteem and managerial attitude Y. The research study indicates that self-concept is one of the variables moderating a manager's style of leadership at work. Additionally, the study can support the empirical knowledge of manager's personality research findings.

Key words:

Manager. Self-esteem. Self-efficacy. X/Y theory (attitudes).

Introduction

In recent years, managers have been facing increasing pressure and volume of work demands from their employers due to constantly changing internal and external factors. Their job requirements have intensified; especially regarding the variability and scope of activities demanded from their employers. Personality characteristics can determine professional success to a certain extent, which is why the present research study is aimed at the self-concept as a personality centre and also at its basic relational frame. The way an individual perceives themselves determines every aspects of their lives, and the manager's profession is no to exception to this rule. While there are various daily managerial activities, we have aimed our research at the concrete leadership style used at work.

The relationship between self-concept and leadership style was confirmed by Whitney (1990). Although his research sample was made up of lecturers, rather than managers, they do reflect some leadership and group managerial characteristics. Referring to self-concept as a personality attitude (Greenwald, Pratkanis, 1984, Blatný, 2003), we then reconsider certain aspects that are typical of it. In the latest research done by Ahn et al. (2016) in South Korea, a manager's self-concept centre core was found, relating to emotional aspects or factors, i.e. their self-esteem, is related to a so called 'ethical leadership'.

Besides this, we think a successful manager should also have a certain level of self-efficacy reflecting demanding tasks, situations and problems. We think self-efficacy should be another

aspect of self-concept related to the manager's leadership philosophy. That is why we can reflect on McCormick et al. (2002), where they claim that self-efficacy is an essential element of leadership. Wood and Bandura (1989) have already proved in research that self-efficacy perception determines a manager's performance regarding problem-solving, their behaviour towards their employees and their decision making. Arising from these facts we can assume that a manager's self-concept can be a very important and valuable source for determining performance.

Currently, there is a certain invitational leadership model based on the self-concept theory. It might improve the organizational success according to some authors (e.g., Purkey, Stanley, 2006), and is becoming more established in educational practice.

Even though there are some critical reviews (e.g., Bobic, Davis, 2003), the McGregor theory is one of the most important and influential theories in managerial history and organizational behaviour. McGregor (1960) studied managers' opinions about personality, working motivation and appropriate leadership style. The previous view of personality leadership at work had been characterized by him as a theory of X. This theory represented an extreme arising from human indolence and work avoidance, although the majority of employees and leaders did not fit into these theory X parameters. At the same time, McGregor created the theory of the absolute anti-pole where he thought people were dynamic when they perceived work as something natural. He labeled this theory as theory Y. McGregor evaluated theory X as pessimistic, inhibiting and out-of-date, and he contrasted it with theory Y, which was considered by him as more progressive. He then suggested to leading managers to accept and adhere to theory Y.

X/Y theory is respected because it is still relevant more than 50 years after its publication. In fact it can be said that he was a pioneer or even a futurist in the way that he contributed to framing our contemporary understanding and practice of management in which our basic assumptions must be constantly evaluated and revised. Additionally, in current times when the production of management concepts and distinctions has become an industry in itself McGregor's distinction between X and Y still holds ground (Kristensen, 2015).

McGregor's X/Y theory subsequently influenced the research and practice in various fields of management and organizational behaviour strongly, e.g., humanistic and optimistic views of employees (theory Y) introduce the basic principles for organizational development. His work significantly determined leadership theories; especially transformation leadership. The impact of so-called transformational, or charismatic leadership on the employees' self-concept, was verified by various studies (e.g., Shamir et al, 1993, Balaji, Krishnan, 2014); though we were more interested in the individual leader's self-concept in respect to the preferred leadership philosophy.

McGregor fundamental premises, especially those of a more positive approach to human behaviour management in an organization, have a constructive benefit. A lot of authors (Forrester, 2000; Kochan et al., 2003; Schein, 2004; Russ, 2011; Gurbuz et al., 2014; Lawter et al, 2015) confirm the probability of more effective managerial behavioural manifestations in the context of theory Y in comparison to the manifestations in the context of theory X in present organizations.

Within the studies of X/Y Theory in McGregor's terminology, there are various notions of attitude towards people, employees' attitudes and managers' behaviour manifestations. Though all of them are various constructs, a lot of research studies are combining them while trying to assess them (to quantify them). The studies of Kopelman et al. (2008, 2010) point to this fact, because they try to separate them and validate the individual research instruments. In our research study we aim for the aforementioned manager's attitudes towards people and towards employees (Kopelman et al., 2010).

Research goals

The primary goal of our study is to verify the relation between chosen aspects of a manager's self-concept, especially self-esteem and self-efficacy, and of their employees' leadership style in the context of theory X/Y. On the basis of previous research results (e.g., Wood and Bandura, 1989; Whitney, 1990; McCormick et al., 2002; Wang, 2010; Ahn et al., 2016) and theoretical outcomes, we presuppose the relational existence between a manager's attitude to themselves and their attitude to the employees. That is why we state the following research hypothesis:

RH1: We presuppose the positive relation between a manager's self-esteem and their managerial attitude Y.

RH2: We presuppose the positive relation between a manager's perceived self-efficacy and their managerial attitude Y.

Research sample and research method

Our research sample consisted of 77 middle management level managers; predominantly male (89.6% males to 10.4% females), aged between 23 and 61. The research sample was collected intentionally. The research was realized anonymously by the means of a questionnaire set. The questionnaire set was administered individually using, partially, also the snowball method.

The questionnaire set used to collect the data comprised of these research tools:

1. Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (RSS, Halama, Bieščad, 2006) used to assess the emotional aspects of self-concept and self-esteem. It is a one-dimensional scale consisting of 10 items. There are 5 of them formulated positively and 5 of them formulated negatively. The agreement with these items was assessed by the 4-point Likert-type scale where 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I agree, 4 = I strongly agree. The final score could range from 10 to 40. The average score is 25. The higher score indicates the higher global self-esteem of an individual, while the lower the score indicated a higher level of self-depreciation.

2. The General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (GSEQ, Křivohlavý, Schwarzer, Jerusalem in Balaščíková, Blatný, 2003) assesses the level of experienced self-efficacy, or perceived self-efficacy. It comprises of 10 items in the form of statements. The respondents are asked to mark the suitability of the statement for themselves using the Likert-type scale where 1 = not at all true, 2 = hardly true, 3 = moderately true, 4 = exactly true. The score can range between 10 to 40 points. An overall high score indicates a higher level of self-efficacy.

3. The theory X/Y – Attitude Questionnaire consists of 26 items. The questionnaire is a result of a backward translation from the English original Theory X/Y attitudes (Kopelman et al., 2010). Half of the items (13) assess the attitude X (e.g., most people will try to do as little work as possible.), and the second half (13 items) attitude Y (e.g. most people can be trusted.) The agreement was assessed again by means of a four-point Likert-type scale where 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I partially disagree, 3 = I partially agree, 4 = I strongly agree. The questionnaire is two-dimensional; which is why a respondent gets a raw score in each dimension. Referring to research instrument adaptation, we used a standard procedure for its translation. The backward translation was done by two independent professionals with appropriate language skills. The individual item comprehension was evaluated during the pilot research.

The collected data were registered by Microsoft Office Excel and calculated by statistical program SPSS. We assessed the reliability of the used research instruments by Cronbach alpha, and the values are presented in tables (Table 1). To estimate the normal distribution of the variables, we used Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The test results suggest that the condition of

normal data distribution is not fulfilled (Table 2), that is why we used non-parametric tests. To estimate the relation between individual variables, non-parametric Spearman correlation coefficient was used.

Table 1: Research instrument reliability (N=77)

	Cronbach alpha	Number of items
self-esteem	.721	10
self-efficacy	.805	10
X	.777	13
Y	.710	13

X – managerial attitude X, Y – managerial attitude Y

Table 2: Normality of Variability Distribution (N = 77)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov test	
	statistic	significance
self-esteem	.134	.002
self-efficacy	.149	.000
X	.128	.003
Y	.125	.004

X – managerial attitude X, Y – managerial attitude Y

Research results

At the beginning of the statistical analysis, we present the basic descriptive statistics of our research sample at an individual level of each variable (Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of self-concept and manager's leadership styles (N=77)

	self-esteem	self-efficacy	X	Y
arithmetical mean	34.14	33.81	35.43	34.47
standard deviation	3.615	3.752	5.590	4.847
median	35.00	34.00	37.00	33.00
minimum	24	26	25	23
maximum	40	40	47	47

X – managerial attitude X, Y – managerial attitude Y

To estimate the presupposed correlations between chosen aspects of a manager's self-concept, respectively self-esteem and self-efficacy, and a managerial attitude in the sense of McGregor's theory (RH1 and RH2 Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated. By means of correlation analysis we found a positive, moderate, statistically-significant correlation between self-esteem and managerial attitude Y. A negative, moderated, statistically-significant relation between self-esteem and managerial attitude X. was proved. In regards to statistical correlation analysis, we can conclude there is no correlation between perceived manager's self-efficacy and their managerial attitude in the sense of theory X/Y. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Relations between managers' self-concept and their managerial attitude X/Y

Spearman correlation coefficient				
	X	Y	self-esteem	self-efficacy
self-esteem	-.325**	.311**		.472**
self-efficacy	.043	.044	.472**	

N = 77, X – managerial attitude X, Y – managerial attitude Y, **p < .01

Though it was not our main concern, the completed correlation analysis has proved there is the existence of a statistically-significant, positive, moderate relation between the aspects of self-concept, i.e. the manager's self-esteem and their perceived self-efficacy (table 4).

Discussion

The aim of this correlation study was to explore the relationship between a manager's self-concept and their leadership style. We aimed our attention at two aspects of self-concept; the emotional aspect of self-esteem and practicing aspect of perceived self-efficacy. In regards to self-perception, we have chosen the McGregor's theory X/Y from leadership theories. The baseline of McGregor's theory is the perception of employees, or a manager's co-workers.

Our expectations of the mutual relationship between a manager's self-concept and applied leadership style in the sense of McGregor theory were partially fulfilled. The biggest contribution is supported by the existence of a positive, moderate, statistically-significant relationship between self-esteem and managerial attitude Y. A negative, moderate, statistically-significant correlation coefficient of self-esteem and managerial attitude X supported our assumptions.

We can conclude the increase of a manager's self-esteem is reflected in an increase in their trust in their employees, and the decline in their self-esteem is reflected in the decrease in their trust in people. We can interpret this in another way; if a manager appreciates themselves, and has a positive self-image, then they also have a tendency to judge people around them positively. In general, they consider their employees as hard-working, reliable, independent, willing to cooperate, creative and with positive working habits.

However, if a manager's self-esteem is low, according to our results, there is an increase in attitude X. Managers with low self-esteem perceive their employees as lazy, unwilling to cooperate or not looking for opportunities, and prefer it when someone leads them or decides for them (Donnelly et al., 1997).

Beane (2005) also states that positive realistic self-perception enables a manager to perceive others as capable, valuable and responsible. That is an essential part of the so-called 'invitational leadership' model. Our results reflect the research findings of Ahn et al. (2016) verifying a manager's self-esteem influence on so-called 'ethical leadership'. Wang (2010) has not confirmed the relationship between a manager's leadership style and self-concept; although the author himself is aware of the research limits and emphasizes the need to research these issues more deeply. Besides this, he has used to assess the leadership styles a different instrument (LPI).

In our research findings, in regards to manager's perceived self-efficacy, it was proved there was no relationship to a manager's attitudes using McGregor's theory, although McCormik (2002) considers it as an essential element for people to lead. Also, Wood and Bandura (1989) verified how self-efficacy influences the way managers solve tasks, the way they behave towards their employees, and the way they make decisions. This discrepancy can be interpreted in the way that a manager's self-efficacy as a conative aspect of their self-concept

might be more related to a manager's behaviour referring to their concrete manifestations of behaviour in regards to McGregor's leadership theory than to their attitudes, or to the perception of employees. This opens up a new perspective to further research findings.

As is common in the majority of research oriented towards self-concept, there is a great support for the approved relationship between the concept parts, or its aspects, and it is a positive moderate statistically significant relation. We can thus state the increase of a manager's self-esteem influences the increase in their own self-efficacy, trust in their own abilities and competency. This fact (though only a by-product of our realized research) can support the empirical knowledge of manager's personality research findings.

Conclusion

Our aim was to contribute to widening and deepening the empirical knowledge of manager's self-concept and their professional relationship issues in the field of Slovak psychology. Our correlation research findings support the fact of a positive relationship between a manager's self-esteem and manager's attitude Y as a part of McGregor's leadership theory X/Y. We can conclude that a favourable manager's self-esteem relates to favourable evaluations of their employees. Bender (2008) assumes a good leader should influence others in a way which increases their self-competence. We add a manager's self-concept as being reflected in their perception of others. If it also being reflected in their behaviour to them, then it could have a formative influence on their self-concept (perception of own value and abilities). These are the ideas for further potential research into self-concept of this professional cohort.

Though we are aware of the limits of our research (such as, 1: the research sample size and choice, 3: male predominancy; 2: the use of self-reports that may have elicited socially desirable responses), we still maintain two recommendations towards the managerial practice in reflection to our research results: 1 – while hiring managers it is recommended to consider also their level of self-esteem, 2 – there should be directly aimed development and facilitation of a manager's positive self-esteem in their practice by the means of various seminars, training or workshops. A manager's self-esteem facilitation could be one way of increasing the successful leadership of employees.

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