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## Self-Perceived Leadership vs. Group Perception

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Leadership is a necessary component for the success of any group. Without this difficult to define skill, organizations flounder and individuals lack direction. Green (1988) acknowledged that leadership is difficult to define. He believes that leadership is difficult to predict, but people know it when they see it. How leadership is perceived is an important component in helping a person become a stronger leader. Anecdotal evidence portrayed individuals who never considered themselves a leader are, in fact, perceived as leaders by their peers (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). However, Goleman et al. (2002) also report the antithesis of this statement. Some individuals considered themselves to be the leader of a group while their peers believed the exact opposite. The present study was an attempt to determine if self-perception of leadership skills is related to group perception and facilitator perception. It was hypothesized that results would determine that self-perception of leadership would not be related to group and facilitator perception.

### Leadership Theories

Johnson and Johnson (2003) have defined leadership as the process by which leaders exert influence on those they are leading. There are a variety of ways to exert this influence over group members. One theory supported by Johnson and Johnson is Fiedler's Situational Theory of Leadership, which divides the role of leaders into two categories, task-oriented and maintenance-oriented. The task-oriented method of leadership is most effective when a group has clear goals to accomplish. Chemers (2000) believed that groups led in this manner should be highly functional in situations of high control and predictability or very low control and predictability. When control and predictability are at more moderate levels a maintenance-oriented leader is needed. This type of leader allows more group participation and control of decision-making (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Maintenance-oriented leaders attempt to keep relations within the group positive and seek decisions that the entire group can accept.

### Research Models

Two models reviewed by this researcher can be used to study the role of perception within small groups. Bell-Dolan and Wessler (1994) advocated sociometric research as a tool to determine opinions of a group about individual members. This method asked participants to rank other group members in predetermined areas. The Social Relations Model also

studied perceiver effects and how they relate to various targets a researcher may deem appropriate (Marcus & Kashy, 1995). Kennedy (2001) developed a simple model to help judge perception of individual group members in regards to task and maintenance leadership attributes.

For the purpose of this study, Kennedy's model was adapted to strengthen gaps identified in her research (Kennedy, 2001). Instead of using a 100-point scale for task and maintenance leadership individually, a total 100-point scale was used to force participants to rank members. This design allowed the researcher to receive a more precise picture of the individual's views. Additionally, more time was spent on helping the participants understand the difference between the two different leadership styles. The graduate facilitators' perception was also added so that the results could be triangulated.

### Hypothesis

The scores will be viewed from three different dependent variables; self, group and facilitator perceptions then triangulated to determine that self-perception of leadership differs from group perception and facilitator perception. The results will also establish that group perception and facilitator perception are related.

## METHOD

### Participants

The subjects consisted of 28 undergraduate students and 4 graduate students enrolled during the Spring 2004 semester at Georgia College & State University. All undergraduate students were taking Psychology 4090: Group Dynamics and graduate students were enrolled in Psychology 6950: Group Leadership. Of the undergraduate group, 10 participants were male (35.7%) and 18 were female (64.3%). Twenty-four participants were Caucasian (85.7%) and 4 were African-American (14.3%). The graduate students were all Caucasian and evenly divided between males and females. The undergraduate class was divided into four small groups with each group facilitated by a graduate student. The groups met twice a week for one hour and fifteen minutes each session. Graduate students met with the groups during one session per week. Participants gave permission at the beginning of the semester to be a participant in research and extra credit was given for completing the necessary instruments for this research.

### Instrument

A leadership questionnaire, Leadership In Your Group (see Appendix 1), developed for a previous study (Kennedy, 2001) was adapted

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for this research. The questionnaire defined leadership as well as the roles of task and maintenance leaders (Johnson and Johnson, 2003). Participants were asked to rank themselves as well as their fellow group members in regards to their role as a task or maintenance leader within their small group. Each participant was scored on a 100-point scale where points were distributed between two blocks (task and maintenance). There was no reliability or validity data available for this instrument. The instrument took 10-20 minutes to complete.

### Procedure

Undergraduate participants were asked to complete the leadership questionnaire by ranking themselves and their fellow group members using a 100-point scale. Respondents distributed 100 points between task and maintenance leadership styles for each group member. Graduate facilitators also completed the scale for each group member but not for themselves. After the questionnaires were completed, the data was analyzed.

### Design

Upon receiving the data, group member's scores were averaged for each participant. At this point the results were ready for statistical analysis. A two-tailed Pearson's Correlation was used to determine the statistical significant relationships between the dependent variables. This correlational study investigated the relationship between how participants ranked themselves and each other. Additionally, the rankings of the graduate students were also compared to the undergraduate rankings. The dependent variables of this study were the self-rankings, average rankings of other group members, and the graduate student rankings. The results were triangulated to help determine relationships.

## RESULTS

This section presents an overview of the results of the Pearson's Correlation. A table is used to present means and standard deviation for the Leadership in Your Group Questionnaire. A table also shows the statistically significant Pearson correlations. Table 1 shows the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each of the dependent variables. The table also shows the number of scores (N) that was used to obtain these figures. The results indicate the mean for task is higher than maintenance for group and facilitator. However, the maintenance mean is higher for self. This shows that individuals feel they are more maintenance-oriented than task-oriented. The group and facilitator, however, do not see it this way. In addition, the group standard deviation is lower than self and facilitator standard deviations.

**Table 1**  
Means and Standard Deviation

	Self $r(21)$	P
Task		
-Self		
-Group	.593	.005
-Facilitator	.562	.008
Maintenance		
-Self		
-Group	.593	.005
-Facilitator	.562	.008

Statistically significant relationships are found between self-task and group task as well as self-task and facilitator task (Table 2). An analysis using Pearson's Correlation coefficient supports this observation, as the relationship between self-task and group task is  $r(21) = .593$ ,  $p < .05$ . The relationship between self-task and facilitator task is  $r(21) = .562$ ,  $p < .05$ . There is not a statistically significant relationship between group task and facilitator task. The same significant relationships are also found between self-maintenance and group maintenance as well as self-maintenance and facilitator maintenance (Table 2). The relationship between self-maintenance and group maintenance is equivalent to self-task and group task. This is also true for the self-task/facilitator task and self-maintenance/facilitator maintenance. The analysis also shows the lack of a significant relationship between group task/facilitator task as  $r(21) = .343$ ,  $p > .05$ . The lack of relationship between group maintenance/facilitator maintenance is equivalent.

**Table 2**  
Significant Correlations between Self, Group, and Facilitator Task/Maintenance Scores

	N	N	SD
Self-task	21	49.05	19.21
Self Maintenance	21	50.95	19.21
Group Task	28	52.24	13.68
Group Maintenance	28	47.76	13.68
Facilitator Task	28	64.46	21.23
Facilitator Maintenance	28	35.54	21.23

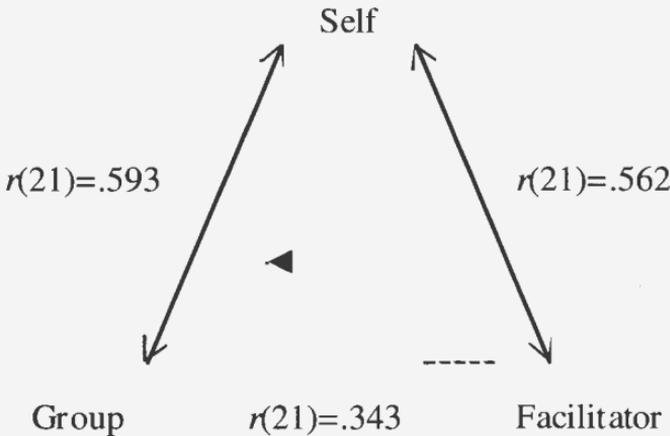
## DISCUSSION

### Summary of Results

The results reveal that there is a significant relationship between self-perception of leadership style and both group and facilitator perception. However, there is not a significant relationship between group perception and facilitator perception (Figure 1). Essentially, the data shows that self-perception shares a view with the group perception and also shares a view with the facilitator perception of leadership style. However, group perception and facilitator perception differ on leadership style. These findings do not support the hypothesis that self-perception is different from group and facilitator perception. It also does not support the hypothesis that group and facilitator perception would have a relationship.

Figure 1

Statistically Significant Relationships in Perceptions of Leadership



These results can be attributed to several factors. As Kennedy (2001) suggested in her study, group members may not fully understand the difference between task and maintenance leaders. Because the facilitators are graduate students, they may have a more accurate view of these definitions and a more accurate view of where individual leaders fit into the 100-point scale. This would account for not having a statically significant relationship between group and facilitator. Additionally, the results may indicate that group members and facilitators see different leadership qualities in an individual. The individual may be able to see through the same leadership lens as both the group and the facilitator, but group and facilitator

can not see through each other's lens. Johnson and Johnson (2003) speak to this when discussing different leadership theories. Individuals may see a leader in a different manner because of the type of leadership they are seeking. A task-oriented style may be recognized more often because the individual may want task leadership; the converse may also be true.

### Limitations

There are several variables that may have affected this study and caused limitations to the findings. First, this is a quasi-experimental study. Many of the students were required to take Psychology 4090 for their major. Students were not randomly selected for the study. However, students were randomly assigned to activity groups. This convenience sampling method does not allow for this study to discover generalizations about leadership outside of this particular group. Additionally, many of the students knew each other prior to their experience in this group, and some have been placed in leadership positions with each other in other classes. Evaluation of leadership may have included previous experiences (both positive and negative) that others in the group could not evaluate. This would affect the results of the correlation. Finally, some of the students maintain friendships with other group members. Their interaction outside of class may have led to an unintentional bias when selecting leadership styles.

Another aspect that may have affected the internal validity of the study was the extra credit given as a "reward" for completing the study. The students were asked to complete 14 surveys for several studies that were being completed simultaneously. Students may have rushed through the completion due to the number of studies and desire to receive the extra credit.

Several factors also affected the external validity of this study. The students completed the survey through a web-based program (WebCT) and the time and location were left uncontrolled, which could affect the outcomes. Also, the small, limited sample does not allow for generalizations. A larger, more randomly selected group would increase the validity of the findings.

### Recommendations

This study has been a successful follow-up of Kennedy's (2001) study completed a few years ago. By following the recommendations to enhance the study, statistically significant relationships were found between several variables that were not previously discovered. For future study, researchers need to continue to explore the definitions of task versus maintenance leadership with the participants. In a best case scenario, all participants, including facilitators, would understand the definitions equally.

Also, a more random selection process would benefit the study. Perhaps the study could be completed with a variety of academic groups that are working together throughout a specific semester. This would allow for larger variety of students and improve the external validity. Additionally, replicating the exact study in a variety of settings would increase the external validity.

The present study had one facilitator perspective on each individual leader. Future research may benefit from more than one facilitator's perspective on the leadership preferences. This may help account for facilitator bias. Because the sessions are videotaped, it would allow for other facilitators to observe the process throughout the semester and complete the survey. This small change may present deeper insights into the relationship between perspectives of leadership.

Leadership is a dynamic quality. Groups, facilitators, and others all have an influence on how leadership manifests itself within an individual. This study found that college undergraduate students can distinguish between task and maintenance leadership. It also found that their perspectives are related to the group's perspective. Future research should be conducted to see if these relationships are relevant only to this study and setting or if the relationships can be more generalized.

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APPENDIX 1  
Leadership in Your Group

According to Johnson and Johnson (2003) in Joining Together, a leader is a person who can influence others to be more effective in working to achieve their mutual goals and maintain effective working relationships among members. A task leader focuses on the task at hand and initiates structure for the group. Characteristics include directing, summarizing, and providing ideas to the group. A maintenance leader focuses on interpersonal aspects of the group and provides emotional support for group members. This may include alleviating frustrations, resolving tensions and mediating conflicts. They try to have all members participate in the decision making process.

Please identify yourself:

WebCT ID	

Using the above definitions and group work, please rate yourself and all of your group members on a scale from 0 to 100 total points. For example, you may give one group member 30 points as a task leader and 70 points as a maintenance leader or vice versa. Please base your responses on group interactions from this class only.

Name	Task leader rating (0-100)	Maintenance leader rating (0-100)
Your First Name:	_____ +	_____ =100
Group Members Names		
2. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
3. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
4. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
5. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
6. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
7. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
8. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
9. _____	_____ +	_____ =100
10. _____	_____ +	_____ =100

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