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Are Relationally Transparent Leaders More Receptive to the Relational Transparency of Others? An Authentic Dialog Perspective

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Abstract
Using a sample of 114 leaders (described by 516 team members), we show empirically that the association between leader relational transparency and leader receptiveness to relational transparency of team members is indirect (through leader respect) and conditional on leader humility. When a transparent leader expresses humility, he/she conveys respect to team members and is perceived as more receptive to the relational transparency of employees toward him/her. The indirect association between leader relational transparency and leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members is negative, however, when the leader is perceived as non-humble. Our paper contributes to discussion about the limits of relational transparency as an indicator of authentic leadership. We suggest that what is often described as *relational* transparency is no more than *unidirectional* transparency—from leaders to followers. We conclude that transparency (and authenticity) in leaders is relational only when it is bidirectional.

Keywords Leader relational transparency · Leader receptiveness · Team working · Humility · Respect · Authentic leadership

Carlos Ghosn, former CEO of Nissan Motor Company, was "renowned for his transparency (…) frankness and openness" (Kets de Vries & Florent-Treacy, 2012, p. 190, 207). Humility was not one of his qualities, however, and he was a victim of his own arrogance, hubris, and disrespect for others (Lewis et al., 2019). He was described as a person about whom "no one dared to say anything that would confront his opinions" (Chozick & Rich, 2018, p. A1). A report on the company's governance standards indicated that "some

Directors, officers and employees were suggested that they would be removed if they expressed dissenting views" (Nissan Motor Co. Ltd., 2019, p. 11). The case epitomizes a notion that is missing from the literature on the trumpeted merits of authentic leadership (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012): being a transparent (i.e., allegedly authentic) leader with team members differs from being *receptive* to the transparency of team members with the leader.

In fact, relational transparency (i.e., showing one's true self to others, expressing true thoughts and emotions, and openly sharing information; Gardner et al., 2005) has been considered a cornerstone of authentic leadership (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). This form of positive leadership has been accepted by both scholars (e.g., Avolio & Mhatre, 2012) and practitioners (e.g., George, 2003) as having great value for leaders, and a high moral value that is essential for the ethical behavior of followers (e.g., Hannah et al., 2011) and organizational sustainability (Lemoine et al., 2019). It has also been suggested that a relationally transparent leader fosters relational transparency among team members (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012; Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005). However, as the case discussed above suggests, and as corroborated by the theoretical and empirical evidence presented in this study, having a leader who behaves

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Fig. 1 Hypothesized model
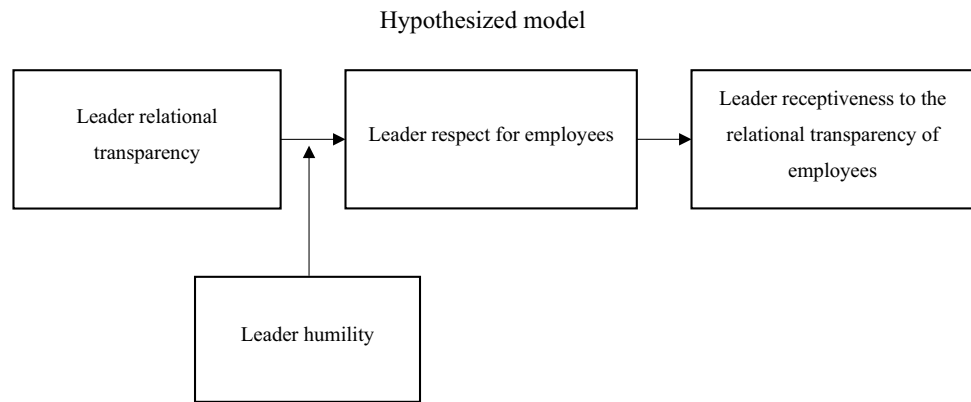
transparently with team members does not necessarily mean that they perceive that leader as being receptive to their relational transparency in return. If team members believe that the transparent leader is arrogant and does not respect them, they do not feel safe to be transparent toward the leader, and authentic dialog does not follow (Sidani & Rowe, 2018).

This is where the current paper is positioned. Specifically, we suggest that the association between leader relational transparency and leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members is indirect (through the leader's respect for team members) and contingent upon leader humility. Before proceeding, it is important to note that we are measuring the employee's perceptions of those leadership behaviors (Connelly & Hülsheger, 2012). Because leadership is a relational phenomenon (Uhl-Bien, 2006), and this paper adopts a dialogical perspective, we suggest that the employee's perceptions of leader relational transparency versus self-reported leader relational transparency (i.e., a facet of the leader's identity; Oh et al., 2011) are more closely associated with the employees' reactions to their leaders. Some authors have used the terms "expressed" (e.g., "leader-expressed humility"; Owens et al., 2013) or "conveyed" (Rego et al., 2019b, 2020) to represent those perceptions. In this paper we use the expressions "leader relational transparency", "leader respect", "leader humility", and "leader receptiveness to team members' relational transparency" to facilitate communication.

We argue that a relationally transparent leader is more receptive to the relational transparency of team members only when the leader is humble and respectful. We are aligned with scholars who have criticized the authentic leadership literature for neglecting the consequences of power-asymmetric relationships between leaders and followers, this asymmetry enabling leaders to impose their values on others (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). Being a relationally transparent leader may also be a symptom of excessive narcissism and "other pathologies" (Alvesson & Einola, 2019, p. 385). It is here, we argue, that leader humility operates as a boundary condition.

Leader humility (i.e., conveying that one maintains a grounded perspective of oneself in relation to others; Owens et al., 2012) operates as a self-regulatory mechanism: it not only mitigates possible negative outcomes of relational transparency, but also facilitates its potentially positive outcomes by helping the transparent leader to show respect for team members (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017), and thus to convey the message that he/she is receptive to relational transparency toward him/her. If the leader is not humble, the potential negative consequences of relational transparency make team members feel disrespected by the leader, and believe that the leader is not receptive to their relational transparency.

Our hypothesized model (Fig. 1) posits that: (a) a leader who is both relationally transparent and humble toward team members conveys greater respect for those team members, and, therefore, is perceived as more receptive to their relational transparency in return; (b) if the transparent leader is not humble, his/her relational transparency may convey less respect for team members and, therefore, lead those team members to perceive that the leader is not receptive to their own relational transparency.

We position our overall model in relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006) and the construction-of-legitimacy literature (Tost, 2011). The former sees leadership as a co-production of leaders and followers, and the latter suggests that it is through the construction-of-legitimacy that such a co-production unfolds. As Sidani and Rowe (2018, p. 629) stated, "a person grants legitimacy to a social entity based on that entity's promotion of a person's identity by means of giving respect, status, and self-worth within a relevant group". We suggest that the legitimacy ascribed by team members to a leader's relational transparency is enacted by the respect the leader expresses to team members, the effect being conditional on leader humility. Only when the leader is both relationally transparent *and* humble with the team members, will he/she conveys respect, status, dignity, and self-worth to them (Tost, 2011), thereby signaling that he/she is receptive to their relational transparency, a stance that

may foster important team outcomes such as psychological safety, team reflexivity, team learning, and team performance (Edmondson, 1999, 2018; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Lyubovnikova et al., 2017).

This paper makes several important contributions. First, we provide a more balanced perspective on the merits of relational transparency in leaders. Second, by presenting leader humility as a boundary condition, we contribute to the literature about humility in leaders. Third, we contribute to an understanding of the antecedents of respect (from the receiver's perspective) in organizations, which is an understudied topic (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Fourth, we emphasize that being a relationally transparent leader differs from creating conditions for a transparent "authentic dialog" (Sidani & Rowe, 2018) between the leader and team members. We therefore suggest that the expression "relational transparency" is ambiguous when approached merely from a leader-centric perspective, in that it reflects more "unidirectional" than "relational" or "bidirectional" transparency.

When "Relational" Transparency is not Dialogical

There is something of a blind spot in the literature on the merits of relational transparency in leaders. It has been claimed (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012, p. 775) that relational transparency "results in the development of transparent relationships that are characterized by a high level of trust among the participating parties". This emphasis on the relational nature of transparency is missing, however, from the leader-centric perspective adopted by various scholars (see Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Sidani & Rowe, 2018). For example, it has been argued (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 357, our italics) that relational transparency "involves presenting one's genuine as opposed to a 'fake' self through selective self-disclosure *to create bonds based on intimacy and trust with close others, and encouraging them to do the same*". This argument suggests, at least implicitly, that a leader who presents his/her genuine self rather than a "fake" self creates positive bonds with team members and leads them to believe that he/she is receptive to relational transparency in return. However, we believe that the argument is limited, even if assuming that there is a single genuine self versus a fake self (an assumption that has been criticized; see Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Alvesson & Einola, 2019): expressing a genuine self is different from being receptive to the expressions of other people's own selves. Being frank, honest, and transparent with others (i.e., expressing what one really believes, thinks, and feels in a given moment) differs from welcoming frankness and transparency toward us.

A possible explanation for the alleged positive effect of leader relational transparency involves positive role modeling (Bandura, 1977; Gardner et al., 2005). It has been argued that, by observing a leader's relational transparency, team members learn to voice and share their own true thoughts, opinions, ideas, and emotions, thereby contributing to more effective leadership, better team decisions, and greater team effectiveness. We believe this argument is limited, as it does not take leader–follower power discrepancies and dependencies into account (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). Being a frank and transparent team member with a frank and transparent leader may be risky if the leader is narcissistic or rude enough to "kill" the transparent messenger who brings bad news or the knowledge of uncomfortable truths.

Another explanation for the positive effects of relationally transparent leaders is that leaders who present their genuine selves are more predictable and thus trustworthy (Peus et al., 2012). However, predictable leaders may not *be* positive role models. A leader who is predictably frank and destructive does not make team members feel safe about being transparent and frank with the leader. Consider how Muntz et al. (2019, p. 488) have described predictability: "Predictability means that followers are continuously certain about their supervisors' attitudes and behaviors, because they communicate clearly and openly deal with even delicate subjects" (see also Peus et al., 2012). Being "continuously certain" about a leader's attitudes and behaviors, as a consequence of the leader communicating clearly and openly even regarding delicate subjects, does not mean that such certainty is comfortable for team members, or that they feel that the leader welcomes their own transparent, clear, and open stance. As the vignette mentioned in the introduction suggests, Ghosn was predictably rude and arrogant, making followers fearful of offering or conveying opinions to him that contradicted his own.

Caution must also be adopted regarding the argument that relationally transparent leaders show high levels of behavioral integrity (Leroy et al., 2012). A leader's behavioral integrity means that the leader's actions "are perceived to be in line with their words, because they communicate transparently and explicitly signal what they expect from others, which is particularly helpful to avoid ambiguous situations" (Muntz et al., 2019, p. 489). Acting in line with words, communicating transparently, and explicitly signaling what is expected from team members may reduce situational ambiguity for those team members, but does not mean that such situational clarity makes them feel that the leader welcomes their own transparent stance. Situational clarity differs from situational favorability or safety, and clarity may even signal a clear lack of conditions for voicing one's opinions frankly.

The arguments discussed above lead us to conclude that, contrary to what Gardner et al. (2005, p. 357) suggested (i.e., that presenting one's genuine as opposed to a "fake" self encourages others "to do the same"), being a relationally

transparent leader may not mean that leader is receptive to the relational transparency of team members. Almost all empirical studies have measured the relational transparency of leaders in ways that underestimate such a possibility. The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ; Walumbwa et al., 2008) includes items such as (a) "I say exactly what I mean" or "The leader says exactly what he/she means", and (b) "I tell you the hard truth" or "The leader tells us the hard truth". While these items measure the relational transparency of leaders toward others, they do not identify whether others perceive the leader as being receptive to their own relational transparency. Ghosn spoke *his* hard truth, but his behaviors did not allow team members to tell him *their* own hard truths. The items ("The leader clearly states what he/she means"; "…openly shares information with others"; "…expresses his/her ideas and thoughts clearly to others") included in the Authentic Leadership Inventory (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011) suffer from similar limitations. Even the ALQ item "[the leader] encourages everyone to speak their mind" is not immune to the same problem. When Alan Mulally took the helm of Ford in 2006, he encouraged executives to speak the hard truth, but he soon found that executives were afraid to speak up about problems and to communicate honestly and frankly (Lorsch & McTague, 2016). Our observational and professional experience as executive trainers and coaches also suggests that a leader who is emphatic in inviting employees to speak their minds may soon "kill the messenger of bad news" or humiliate those who disagree with his/her point of view. As a participant in a training program told us about her own leader: "He emphatically encourages us to tell him what we think, as long as we think like him or agree with him".

It is also worth emphasizing that some scholars who supposedly focus on the relational nature of this dimension of authentic leadership argue, at the same time, that authentic leadership is "a root construct" underlying other forms of leadership (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012, p. 780), including the "unidirectional" form. It has been argued (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 806) that authentic leaders "can be directive or participative, and could even be authoritarian". Avolio and Mhatre (2012) suggested that these leadership styles in and of themselves do not determine whether a leader is or is not authentic. How can a relationally transparent authoritarian leader, who makes transparent one-sided decisions, create the perception in team members that he/she are receptive to their relationally transparent stances?

Relational as Dialogical

The above discussion suggests that if relational transparency, as a key component of authenticity, "involves valuing and achieving openness and truthfulness in one's close relationships" (Kernis, 2003, p. 15), then it is necessary to consider not only how transparent a leader is with team members, but also how receptive he/she is to the relational transparency of those team members. Although this bi-directionality is essential for leadership as a relational phenomenon, it has been neglected in the literature. While "followers and followership are essential to leadership" and leadership is a co-production of leaders and followers, "followers are very often left out of the leadership research equation" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 83). As Uhl-Bien et al. (2014, p. 83) pointed out, "leadership can only occur if there is followership—without followers and following behaviors there is no leadership". We thus argue that relationally transparent leadership emerges only when a leader is both transparent *and* reciprocally receptive to the relational transparency of followers. It is only in that situation that followers ascribe legitimacy to a leader's relational transparency and consider that leader to be truly authentic (Sidani & Rowe, 2018).

It has been argued (Eagly, 2005) that relational authenticity requires that followers attribute legitimacy to their leaders. Sidani and Rowe (2018, p. 632) also states that "authentic relationships cannot occur before followers grant legitimacy to their leaders, to their value systems, and—subsequently—to their actions." Such legitimacy is enacted by several means, including the respect the leader conveys to team members. In fact, team members make active and passive evaluative judgments of their leaders, including relational evaluations (Sidani & Rowe, 2018; Tost, 2011). A positive relational evaluation emerges when "a person grants legitimacy to a social entity based on that entity's promotion of a person's identity by means of giving respect, status, and self-worth within a relevant group" (Sidani & Rowe, 2018, p. 629). We thus consider that the relational transparency a leader expresses with team members, per se, is not enough to ascribe authenticity to leaders—and that being receptive to their relational transparency is also necessary (Sidani & Rowe, 2018; Suchman, 1995; Tost, 2011). We also consider that such a receptiveness emerges only when the leader, through being perceived by employees as both transparent and humble, is perceived as being respectful. When a leader is perceived as being both relationally transparent *and* humble toward team members, he/she conveys respect, status, dignity, and self-worth to team members (Tost, 2011) and signal to them that he/she is receptive to the relational transparency of team members. A fruitful dialog thus develops between the leader and team members.

In addition to having intrinsic value, such a dialog nourishes a positive upward spiral that intertwines the work of the leader and the team members in a productive and virtuous way. When a leader is transparent, humble, and respectful toward team members, team members are more likely to trust his/her input (i.e., information, knowledge, ideas, suggestions), and use it to make their own decisions

and perform their jobs. Observing a leader's receptiveness to their relational transparency also means that team members are more likely to "give back": they show that they agree with the leader when they agree, show that they disagree when they disagree, and they contribute toward enriching the leader's repertoire of information, knowledge, ideas, and suggestions. This frank input from team members supports the leader in making better decisions and sharing better input with team members, thereby reinforcing a virtuous cycle. Conversely, if a leader is transparent but not humble, his/her disrespectful stance inhibits team members from providing constructive input to the leader, thus hindering the leader's capacity to make better decisions and to provide constructive input for team members. This negative downward spiral jeopardizes the decisions and performance of team members, and may contribute to hiding or even reinforcing a leader's wrongdoing—the case of Ghosn being a good illustration (Nissan Motor Co. Ltd., 2019). With this authentic dialog framework (Sidani & Rowe, 2018) in mind, we next present arguments supporting our hypothesized model.

Hypothesized Model

Leader Respect

Being respected at work means that several employee needs can be satisfied (e.g., needs for belonging and status), and respect is one of the greatest desires of employees (Ashforth et al., 2007; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017; van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). The feeling of being respected is critical to both the functioning of teams and the well-being of team members (Rogers, 2018; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). As Rogers and Ashforth (2017, p. 1579) stated, "respect is among the most important of all social cues that employees receive from their work environment, as it validates their worth and meets universal human needs." Leaders serve as important sources of respect for team members (Rogers, 2018; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Team members infer respect from leader behaviors such as "expressing trust, being friendly and supportive, and promoting development" (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017, p. 1601; see also van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010).

In this paper, leader respect refers to a leader's behaviors that convey the message that the leader believes that team members have dignity and value in their own right (Van Gils et al., 2018; see also Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Showing respect for employees means noticing them (i.e., recognizing their importance and value), valuing them as people (i.e., as ends in themselves and not merely as means to other ends), and leading them to feel appreciated in importance

and worth as individuals (van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). For the reasons explained below, being perceived as relationally transparent by team members is not enough for them to feel respected by the leader—it is also necessary that the leader is perceived as humble.

Leader Humility

Humility involves maintaining a grounded perspective of oneself in relation to others (Owens et al., 2012). Humility in leaders helps them to recognize areas of strength and weakness in both themselves and others, while buffering them from developing feelings of superiority or inferiority. Although this overall description appears to accurately define the construct, scholarly consensus on a definition of humility and its components, or dimensions, remains wanting (Ou et al., 2014; Rego et al., 2018). In this paper, we adopt a parsimonious conceptualization of humility, as we analyze data collected from a leadership development program in which a proxy of leader humility was included within the 360° instrument, and operationalize it as a combination of modesty, the ability to accept one's mistakes, and a relatively low self-focus. We acknowledge that while "a moderate estimate of personal merits or achievement" (Tangney, 2009, p. 485) is a component of humility, such a component "does not capture other key aspects of humility such as a 'forgetting of the self' and an appreciation of the variety of ways in which others can be worthy" (see also Kachorek et al., 2004). However, we concur with other authors (e.g., Davis et al., 2013) in considering our measure a proxy of leader humility.

We focus on leader humility (i.e., humility in leaders as perceived by team members), rather than self-reported humility, for three important and interrelated reasons (Owens et al., 2013; Rego et al., 2017, 2019a). First, humility in leaders has behavioral manifestations that team members are able to perceive. Second, it is these manifestations, rather than the leader's inner sense of humility, that matters for how team members respond to their leader. Third, measures of self-reported humility are biased (Owens et al., 2013), in that truly humble people tend to underestimate their own humility, while those who are not truly humble tend to overestimate it.

How the Interaction Between Relational Transparency and Humility is Associated with Respect

Several reasons suggest that merely being perceived as relationally transparent by team members is not enough to be perceived as respectful toward them, and that being perceived as humble is also necessary. Some research has also suggested that being a transparent leader is potentially

imbued with risks and perverse consequences (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Berkovich, 2014; Diddams & Chang, 2012; Sidani & Rowe, 2018). For example, a leader who presents his/her genuine self may even damage relational bonds with team members if he/she does not regulate the expression of such a self and instead display it in ways that make team members feel the leader is not receptive to their own relational transparency. A leader may display his/her genuine self in ways that communicate to team members that he/she considers his/her self as the optimal self, and the team members' selves as inadequate.

For these and other reasons, some scholars have suggested that simply emphasizing relational transparency in leaders misses the relational nature of leadership and neglects the fact that effective leaders have to consider the nature of the context and adapt their behaviors to the circumstances (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Sidani & Rowe, 2018; Uhl-Bien, 2006), and that such a flexible approach is a demonstration of character and wisdom (Newstead et al., 2019). As Eagly (2005, p. 461) noted, when the values and believes of followers and leaders are incongruent, "a leader must engage in negotiation and persuasion that may result in greater acceptance of the leader's agenda but may also include some conformity by the leader to followers' construals of community [e.g., team] interests". This, we argue, requires humility. Sometimes, effective leaders have to be diplomatic, able to regulate their narcissistic or abusive impulses, and willing to consider "the needs and wants of others rather than eager to express the self" (Alvesson & Einola, 2019, p. 386). Being a relationally transparent leader without weighing the consequences for employees and how employees will react may be a symptom of problematic narcissism and "other pathologies" (Alvesson & Einola, 2019, p. 385), leading to rudeness, callousness, and disrespect for others, so that team members believe the leader is not receptive to their relational transparency.

Simply by being relationally transparent, the leader demonstrates *candor* (i.e., directness and sincerity in their communications). However, candor is not enough in order to show respect for team members. Only through an authentic, genuine, dialog (Berkovich, 2014) with team members can a leader show respect for them. Such a dialog requires not only candor but also *inclusion* (i.e., vividly experiencing the team members' points of view, factually and emotionally, and experiencing the feelings and thoughts of team members "not in a detached manner but as a living reality"; Berkovich, 2014, p. 250), *confirmation* (i.e., acknowledging and respecting the team member viewpoints, even if disagreeing with them; valuing team members as human beings), and *presentness* (i.e., committing to dialog by listening attentively, responding accordingly, and learning from the learning experience). It is humility that makes a leader able to express inclusion, confirmation, and presentness.

A relationally transparent leader, if he/she does not show humility, may be dogmatic, inflexible, uncompromising, and unable to acknowledge the imperfections and the positive qualities of either him/herself or of team members, thus refraining from entering into a relational dialog with team members and being unwilling to open up to their relational input (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Leroy et al., 2012; Sidani & Rowe, 2018). They are likely to look inward before considering team members, which means that their authenticity derives more from narcissism than from considering the situational requirements and the feedback and contributions of team members (Sidani & Rowe, 2018). Such a relationally transparent leader who is not humble may be more focused on imposing his/her ideas on team members than on relating to them, thus adopting an aggressive and egoistic behavior bordering on narcissism (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Berkovich, 2014). Such a leader may be blinded by his/her narcissistic approach, which makes him/her feel excluded from the moral norms and constraints that apply to others (Sidani & Rowe, 2018). As a consequence, the leader may convey a message of superiority to team members (Berkovich, 2014), silencing and delegitimizing those who disagree, thereby making them feel that the leader does not respect them and is not receptive to their relational transparency.

Note that each team member develops a sense of being respected by the leader not only through observing how the leader behaves toward them, but also by observing how other team members are treated (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Individual legitimacy judgments are based not only on active personal evaluations (i.e., effortful information processing), but also on validity cues from observing the observations of other team members, that is, on how other team members endorse and legitimize the leader's actions (Sidani & Rowe, 2018; Tost, 2011). Several mechanisms explain how shared team interpretations of a leader's behavioral expressions develop: behavior modeling (Bandura, 1977), social and emotional contagion (Chartrand & Lakin, 2013), social sharedness (Tindale & Kameda, 2000), and mental model convergence (Mathieu et al., 2000). These mechanisms lead team members to develop similar perceptions that mutually reinforce sentiments and beliefs about the team leader. Hence:

Hypothesis 1 The relationship between leader relational transparency and leader respect for team members is conditional on leader humility, the relationship being positive (negative) when the leader is (is not) humble.

Respect and Receptiveness to Team Members' Relational Transparency

Respect is one of the most important qualities that, from an employee's perspective, identifies excellent leaders (Rogers, 2018; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Being respected is also one of the greatest desires of employees (van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). Before discussing why leader respect may be associated with leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members, it is important to distinguish the two constructs. As argued above, team members infer being respected by a leader when the leader expresses trust, behaves in a friendly and supportive way, and promotes the development of team members (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017; van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). These behaviors convey the message that the leader sees team members as having dignity and value in their own right (Van Gils et al., 2018).

A leader's receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members is of a different nature. It represents the extent to which team members believe that they can show their true selves to the leader, express their true thoughts and emotions, and openly share information with the leader (Banks et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2005). While a leader who respects employees may do so in part by being open to their opinions and criticism, that is not always the case. On the one hand, a leader may show such an openness for instrumental reasons alone (e.g., to be more aware of the team's socio-emotional climate; to obtain important ideas and knowledge aimed at making better decisions)—and not because he/she genuinely believes that team members have dignity and value in their own right (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017; Van Gils et al., 2018). On the other hand, team members may espouse values, beliefs, and mindsets which leads them to believe that a respectful leader expects submissive and courteous behavior from employees, and does not welcome disagreement or criticism from them (Kirkman et al., 2009). Such an exchange may unfold, for example, within a paternalistic leadership relationship (Bedi, 2020). While paternalistic leaders are moral and "take personal interest in the well-being of their followers and exemplify a life of superior personal virtues, selflessness and integrity" (Bedi, 2020, p. 961), they are also authoritarian, and such an idiosyncratic respectful approach may signal to team members that deference and submission are expected from them.

Although the two constructs are different, there are reasons to believe that feeling respected may lead team members to consider a leader as being receptive to their relational transparency, at least in the Western world. Employees who feel respected believe that their leader is receptive to their desire to be themselves and satisfy their own need for self-determination (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010) through expressing their own true opinions. When they feel respected by the leader, team members form a positive interpretation about the intragroup status ascribed to them by the leader. As a consequence, they develop the sense that sharing their genuine thoughts, opinions, and ideas with the leader in the pursuit of the team's welfare is welcome (Blader & Tyler, 2009; van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010; Yang et al., 2016). A leader who conveys respect, status, dignity, and self-worth to team members (Tost, 2011) creates a sense of psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018) and signals that he/she is willing to listen to them (even if they disagree with the leader's opinions), and is open to advice. In short, by feeling that the leader respects them, and ascribes them dignity and value in their own right (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017; Van Gils et al., 2018), team members feel accepted as they really are, and believe that such a leader conveys the message that expressing themselves transparently is welcome (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Hence:

Hypothesis 2 Leader respect for team members is associated with leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members.

Conditional Indirect Effects

Considering the arguments supporting the two hypotheses above, we posit that a leader who is perceived as being both relationally transparent and humble toward team members is perceived as being respectful. This should consequently lead them to perceive the leader as receptive to their relational transparency. Conversely, a leader who is perceived as relationally transparent but is not humble is perceived by team members as disrespectful. This should consequently lead them to perceive the leader as not being receptive to their relational transparency. Hence:

Hypothesis 3 There is a moderated mediating relationship between leader relational transparency and leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members, in that the mediated relationship is positive (negative) when leader humility is high (low).

Method

Sample and Procedures

The study uses data from a leadership development program carried out in a European Business School. The first part of that program included a 360° feedback tool in which the variables of our model were measured. While we are aware of the limitations inherent to the measures used (including their content coverage), we hold that the data are worth sharing with scholars interested in critically studying relational

transparency in leaders. Thirty five leaders who had been rated by fewer than three subordinates were removed from the initial sample of 149 leaders in the analysis. The sample for this study thus comprised 114 leaders in top and middle management positions (all but three being Caucasians; all with a university degree; 79.8% males; mean age: 32.15 years, SD: 4.43). Those leaders worked for 98 organizations and operated in several sectors (e.g., consulting, telecommunications, banking, energy, pharmaceuticals, electronics, freight transport, software development, construction). They performed roles as diverse as asset manager, business unit manager, CFO, logistics manager, marketing manager, sales director, security manager, IT director, operations manager, product manager, investor relations manager, and services development manager. Data from their subordinates ($n = 516$; 66.3% males) were used to test the hypothesized model. Overall, 44 leaders were described by three subordinates, 48 leaders by four to five subordinates, and 22 leaders by at least six subordinates. A 7-point scale (1: "the statement does not apply to the team leader at all"; …; 7: "applies to the team leader completely") was used for all measures.

In order to reduce the risks of common method variance, the following procedures were adopted so that data from different subordinates were used to measure different variables. First, we randomly created three subsamples of subordinates within each leader/team (subsample 1: SS1; subsample 2: SS2; subsample 3: SS3). Second, we measured the independent variable with data from SS1, the mediating variable with data from SS2, and the dependent variable with data from SS3. The moderating variable was measured with data from SS3. In this way, each path of our model is measured with data from different subordinates (Jung & Sosik, 2002; Rego et al., 2017). This procedure was found to be adequate. Correlations between the independent, the mediating, and the dependent variables, as measured with data from different subordinates, range between − 0.03 (ns) and 0.28 ($p < 0.01$), while correlations in the single-source procedure range between 0.49 ($p < 0.01$) and 0.81 ($p < 0.01$). A similar pattern emerges when the moderating variable is considered.

Measures

Leader relational transparency ($\alpha = 0.69$[1]) was measured through the three items suggested by Neider and Schriesheim (2011), with some adaptations: (1) "He/she says exactly what he/she is thinking"; (2) "He/she invites team members to speak their minds"; (3) "He/she speaks the hard truth".

Humility ($\alpha = 0.70$) was measured through four items (see Rego et al., 2018), one adapted from Park et al. (2004), another adapted from Dennis and Bocarnea (2005), and two other items created specifically for the 360° tool: (1) "[The team leader] prefers that his/her achievements speak for him/herself, rather than calling attention to himself/herself"; (2) "[…] makes a point to brag about his/her successes, even when they are not really important" (reverse-coded); (3) "[…] is not troubled when unnoticed"; (4) "when not knowing the answer to a problem, […] admits he/she doesn't know".

Leader respect for team members ($\alpha = 0.83$) was measured through four items created specifically for the 360º assessment tool. Items are: (1) "[The team leader] makes team members feel like valued people"; (2) "[…] acts without regarding to the feelings of his/her co-workers" (reverse-coded); (3) "[…] treats team members with dignity and respect"; (4) "[…] is genuinely interested in being fair with his/her team members".

Leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of employees ($\alpha = 0.89$) was measured through four items, some having been adapted from several sources (Rego & Cunha, 2008; Smither et al., 1995) and others having been created specifically for the 360º assessment tool. The items are: (1) "Team members feel free to communicate frankly and openly with the leader"; (2) "The team leader seeks the honest opinion(s) of team members regarding his/her proposals"; (3) "Team members feel free to show when they are in disagreement with the leader"; (4) "The team leader accepts points of view that are different from his/her own".

Before proceeding, a brief note is necessary: the measures of leader relational transparency and leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members are not fully homological. Such a difference is not problematic, and in fact makes sense for two interrelated reasons: the power asymmetries between leaders and team members, and the differences in the content/nature of their roles. For example, while the item "The leader makes team members feel free to show that they disagree with him/her" makes sense, the commensurate item ("The leader feels free to show that he/she disagrees with the team") would be inappropriate. In the same vein, while the item "Our leader invites team members to speak their minds" makes sense, the commensurate item "Team members invite the team leader to speak his/her mind" would make no sense.

Leader ethicality, age, and gender were included for control. Leader ethicality was included because it is associated with the respectful treatment of employees (Bedi et al., 2016). This variable ($\alpha = 0.76$) was measured through three items adapted from Neider and Schriesheim (2011): (1) "[The team leader] makes decisions based on what he/she consider to be life's fundamental values"; (2) "[…] makes difficult decisions based upon high standards of ethical

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[1] While reliability is 0.72 if one item is removed, we retained that item in order not to lose content validity.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender (0: female; 1: male)	–	–	–					
2. Age	32.15	4.43	0.05	–				
3. Ethicality (reported by the subsample #1, SS1)	5.34	0.83	0.00	0.02	–			
4. Relational transparency (SS1)	5.42	0.72	− 0.09	− 0.07	0.53**	–		
5. Humility (SS3)	4.85	0.96	− 0.15	− 0.06	0.09	0.06	–	
6. Respect (SS2)	5.94	0.71	− 0.08	− 0.07	0.14	0.12	0.28**	–
7. Receptiveness to relational transparency of employees (SS3)	5.58	0.87	− 0.10	− 0.13	− 0.05	− 0.03	0.51**	0.28**

$N = 114$ leaders

**$p < 0.01$

conduct"; (3) "[…] stimulates people to act according to their own fundamental values". Age was included because humility may develop with accrued life experience (Owens et al., 2013). Gender was also included because males and females differ regarding the norms of respect (Montgomery et al., 2004), as well as on empathy scales (Van der Graaff et al., 2014), with possible consequences for their respectful behaviors toward employees.

Aggregating Data at the Leader/Team Level

ICC(1), ICC(2), and r_{wg} were calculated to assess the validity of aggregating data from team members at the leader/team level. The usual rule of thumb establishes that when r_{wg} exceeds 0.70, and ICC(1) exceeds 0.05 (Bliese, 2000), aggregation is warranted (Cohen et al., 2009). For ICC(2), values greater than 0.60 are usually considered sufficient (Bliese, 2000; Chen et al., 2004). ICC(1) is 0.13 (medium effect; LeBreton & Senter, 2008) for ethicality, 0.14 (medium effect) for relational transparency, 0.18 (medium-large effect) for humility, and 0.15 (medium effect) for both respect and receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members. ICC(2) are 0.40, 0.41, 0.50, 0.45, and 0.44, respectively, for ethicality, relational transparency, humility, respect, and receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members. r_{wg} values (uniform distribution) are 0.82 (0.75, slightly skewed distribution), 0.84 (0.79), 0.79 (0.71), 0.82 (0.76), and 0.85 (0.79), respectively. These values demonstrate strong interrater agreement. Although the ICC(2) values are below 0.60, these values do not prevent aggregation. While diminishing statistical power, a low ICC(2) does not prevent aggregating data if r_{wg} is high and aggregation is theoretically justified. We thus proceeded with aggregating data for all variables.

Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analyses indicated that the five-factor model fits the data well ($\chi^2_{[125]} = 154.86$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.05; GFI = 0.88; CFI and IFI = 0.95), and better than the following models: (1) relational transparency and humility merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[4]} = 60.39$ $p < 0.01$); (2) ethicality, relational transparency, and humility merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[7]} = 109.97$, $p < 0.01$); (3) respect and receptiveness to the relational transparency of employees merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[4]} = 99.72$, $p < 0.01$); and (4) all variables merged ($\Delta\chi^2_{[10]} = 233.28$, $p < 0.01$).

Findings

Table 1 shows that gender correlates negatively (− 0.15, $p = 0.10$), although only marginally, with humility (male leaders are described as less humble). Humility correlates positively (0.28, $p < 0.01$) with respect. Humility also correlates positively with receptiveness to the relational transparency of employees (0.51, $p < 0.01$), a finding that may be explained, at least partially, by the common source (SS3). Respect correlates positively with receptiveness to the relational transparency of employees (0.28, $p < 0.01$). Relational transparency and leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of employees do not correlate.

The hypothesized model was tested using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; Model #7; Bootstrap sample size = 5000). The findings (Table 2) show that the interaction between relational transparency and humility is associated with respect (effect: 0.34, $p < 0.01$; SE: 0.09; LLCI: 0.16, ULCI: 0.51); and respect is associated with receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members (effect: 0.35, $p < 0.01$; SE: 0.11; LLCI: 0.12, ULCI: 0.57).

The findings also show (Table 3) that while the direct effect is not significant (B: − 0.07, $p = 0.69$; SE: 0.13, LLCI: − 0.33, ULCI: 0.20), the index of moderated regression is

Table 2 Hypothesized model tested with the PROCESS macro (template #7, 5000 samples)

	Outcome: respect			Outcome: receptiveness to relational transparency of employees		
	B	SE	[LLCI, ULCI]	B	SE	[LLCI, ULCI]
Constant	5.66**	0.63	[4.41, 6.91]	4.61**	1.05	[2.52, 6.70]
Gender (0: female; 1: male)	− 0.02	0.15	[− 0.32, 0.29]	− 0.16	0.20	[− 0.55, 0.24]
Age	0.00	0.01	[− 0.03, 0.03]	− 0.02	0.01	[0.25, − 0.06]
Ethicality	0.07	0.09	[− 0.11, 0.24]	− 0.06	0.11	[− 0.28, 0.17]
Relational transparency (RT)	0.05	0.10	[− 0.15, 0.26]	− 0.07	0.13	[− 0.33, 0.20]
Humility (H)	0.22**	0.06	[0.09, 0.34]	–	–	–
RT * H	0.34**	0.09	[0.16, 0.51]	–	–	–
Respect	–	–	–	0.35**	0.11	[0.12, 0.57]
R^2	0.20**			0.10*		
R^2 change (after entering the interaction term)	0.10**					

$N = 114$

Data for relational transparency and humility centered

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Table 3 Conditional indirect effects (template #7, 5000 samples)

	B	SE	[LLCI, ULCI]
Low humility	− 0.10	0.05	[− 0.22, − 0.02]
Medium humility	0.02	0.04	[− 0.05, 0.09]
High humility	0.14	0.06	[0.03, 0.28]

Direct effect = B: − 0.07, $p = 0.69$; SE 0.13, LLCI − 0.33, ULCI: 0.20

Index of moderated regression = 0.12, SE 0.04; LLCI: 0.04, ULCI: 0.21

The three levels of humility refer to the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles (output of PROCESS macro)

significant (index: 0.12, SE: 0.04; LLCI: 0.04, ULCI: 0.21), and the conditional indirect effects are as follows: low humility (effect: − 0.10, SE: 0.05; LLCI: − 0.22, ULCI: − 0.02), medium humility (effect: 0.02, SE: 0.04; LLCI: − 0.05, ULCI: 0.09), and high humility (effect: 0.14, SE: 0.06; LLCI: 0.03, ULCI: 0.28). When humility is low, the indirect relationship is negative, and the relationship is positive when humility is high. Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

As depicted in Fig. 2, the relationship between relational transparency and respect is positive when humility is high, but negative when humility is low. The highest level of respect emerges when both relational transparency and humility are high. The lowest level of respect emerges for leaders who are relationally transparent but not humble. When leaders are humble (not humble), being more relationally transparent makes them more (less) respectful, and therefore more (less) receptive to the relational transparency of employees.

Discussion

Our study suggests that a relationally transparent leader is respectful toward team members and thus more receptive to their relational transparency only if he/she is also humble. By being perceived as both relationally transparent and humble, a leader conveys respect toward team members and helps them perceive that they are granted agency and may express themselves in a transparent way with the leader (Sidani & Rowe, 2018; Tost, 2011). When a transparent leader is not humble, his/her transparency and frankness may convey disrespect for team members and thus lead team members to suspect that the leader is not receptive to their own transparency. A relationally transparent leader who is not humble may be less able to listen to and respect opinions that are dissonant with his/her own, receiving those ideas as a threat to his/her ego (Diddams & Chang, 2012). We suggest that in such a case authenticity is not legitimized by team members (Sidani & Rowe, 2018; Tost, 2011), and it does not make sense to consider such (unidirectional) transparent leadership as representing true authentic leadership (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Berkovich, 2014; Sidani & Rowe, 2018).

Our study thus contributes to the literature on the antecedents of respect in organizations, from the receiver's perspective (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). We also provide an additional contribution to the literature about humility in leaders (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018; Owens et al., 2012, 2013). Specifically, we suggest that humility may facilitate a "dialogical pedagogy" in authentic leadership development (Berkovich, 2014). We thus contribute critically to the authentic leadership literature, in at least three ways.

Fig. 2 How the interaction between relational transparency and humility is associated with respect. The three levels of humility refer to the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles (output of PROCESS macro)

How the interaction between relational transparency and humility is associated with respect
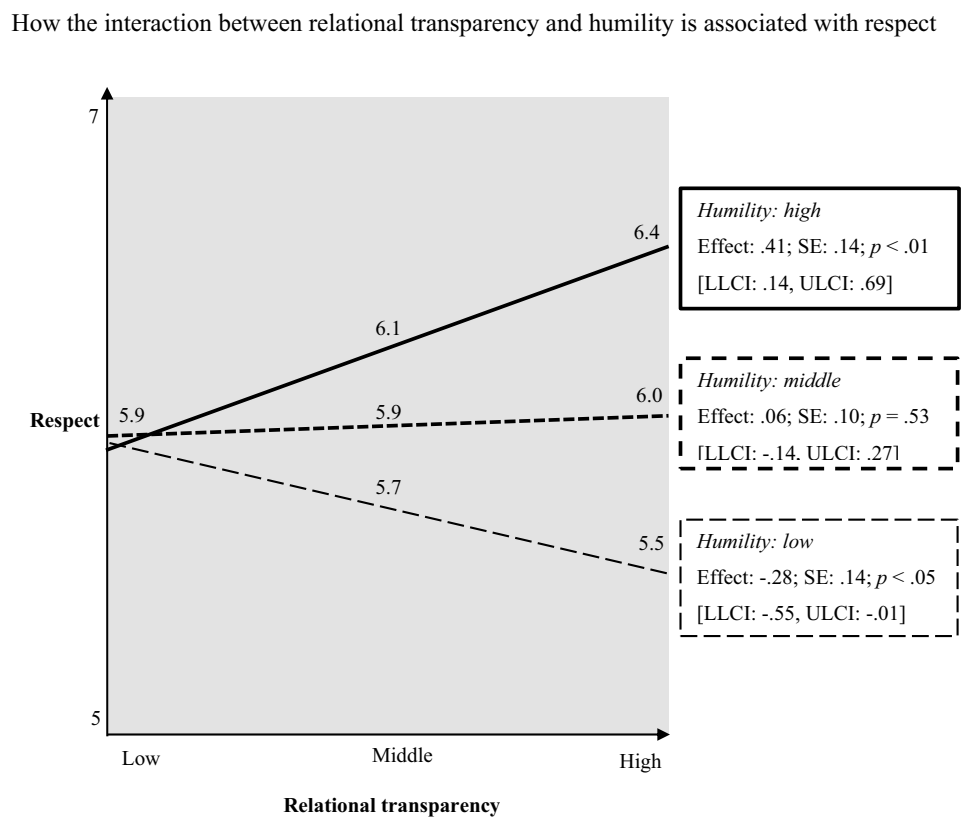
Note: The three levels of humility refer to the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles (output of PROCESS macro).

First, the authentic leadership literature tends to be one-sided: it is focused on the leader (Eagly, 2005). It has been argued (Sidani & Rowe, 2018, p. 626) that authentic leadership definitions have "remained overwhelmingly centered around the leader". A significant amount of literature, "while recognizing that [authentic leadership] is a relational concept, focus on how the leader achieves authenticity and how she then assists the follower in becoming authentic" (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012, p. 120). By showing that a transparent leader, if he/she is not humble, may be unreceptive to the transparency of team members, we point out the risks of a leader's relational transparency. Such a transparent leader should not be considered authentic. Imposing authenticity on others is a source of inauthenticity (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). It is also dangerous: the presumed superiority of the leader's "authenticity" may inhibit team members from speaking up, impoverish critical reflection, lead to underestimated mistakes and shortcomings, and damage team functioning and team/collective authenticity (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012). It has been suggested (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012, p. 126) that by "assuming that authenticity can or needs to be created by the leader, [authentic leadership] is in danger of developing 'dehumanizing' leadership

practices which might in fact provide barriers to finding meaning in work for followers". We therefore propose that relational transparency should imply a bidirectional or a dialogical (Berkovich, 2014; Sidani & Rowe, 2018) approach, something that the mainstream literature on authentic leadership has thus far neglected.

Our study contributes indirectly to rethinking the dimensionality of the authentic leadership construct (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012; Neider & Schriesheim, 2011), which includes relational transparency and the balanced processing of information (i.e., the ability to objectively analyze important data and information before making a decision; the other two dimensions are self-awareness and internalized moral perspective). Receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members may be considered an indicator of balanced processing. What our study indirectly suggests is that leaders who are relationally transparent but not humble may be unreceptive to their followers' relational transparency (Diddams & Chang, 2012) and thus unable to objectively analyze important data and information before making a decision (i.e., to adopt a balanced processing of information stance; Avolio & Mhatre, 2012; Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). Our study therefore

responds to Banks et al. (2016), who recommended that future research examine authentic leadership at the component level, and we also indirectly provide some support to Alvesson and Einola's claims (2019, p. 385) that the four constitutive elements of authentic leadership "do not form a solid theoretical construct and a logical whole". It has also been argued (Kempster et al., 2019, p. 334) that the authentic leadership construct "wholly underestimates the complex, nuanced and multidimensional character of authenticity in the context of leading, with the relational transparency component being particularly problematic". The same study also suggested (p. 334) that the "normative ideal of relational transparency in leaders is misguided and potentially harmful." Our study suggests that negative consequences may emerge when a relationally transparent leader is not humble.

Our study also suggests that the moral nature of authentic leadership (or at least some of its components) is not as straightforward as it is often presumed to be, and instead is contingent on boundary conditions, including virtues (e.g., humility) in leaders. Taking boundary conditions into consideration when studying authentic leadership may thus be a fruitful way to increase the utility of that form of positive leadership regarding more traditional expressions, such as transformational leadership (Hoch et al., 2018).

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

While our contributions are important, we acknowledge limitations to our study, and believe that future studies are necessary to provide additional support for our evidence and open other research possibilities. First, the measures used in this study were not tailored specifically for testing our hypothesized model. Rather, they had been included in a 360° exercise for leadership development, and thus suffer from limited content validity. The reliability of the items used to measure relational transparency ($\alpha = 0.69$[2]) is slightly lower than 0.70. Future studies may adopt more robust measures, including measures of a leader's relational transparency and a leader's receptiveness to the relational transparency of team members that are more homological. Second, future studies must include teams with a greater number of participants, thus making it possible to measure each variable with data from at least three team members. Third, our study includes a single moderator and a single mediator. Future studies may test whether, for example, team psychological safety operates as a mediator (parallel or serial), and whether other team processes and emergent

states (Marks et al., 2001) operate as moderators. Fourth, our paper focuses on the judgment formation stage of the legitimacy cycle (Sidani & Rowe, 2018; Tost, 2011). Future studies may explore how the judgments formed give rise to judgement uses, and thus include team members speaking up and other relationally transparent behaviors as mediators between leader receptiveness to relational transparency and team performance. Fifth, future studies must include national culture as a moderator in the relationship between leader respect and leader receptiveness to the relational transparency of employees. It is possible that in cultures characterized by Confucian ethics and collectivism, which are typical of some Asian societies, employees react to leader respect by adopting a submissive and courteous attitude and thus not conveying disagreement and criticism to the leader (Park et al., 2005). Regardless of the national culture, the individual values, beliefs, and mindsets of employees may also operate as moderators (Kirkman et al., 2009). For that reason, future studies may also include employee characteristics as moderators.

Practical Implications

In our experience we have found that some leaders complain that while they are frank and transparent with team members, team members do not reciprocate by being frank and transparent in return. On the contrary, leaders complain, team members do not tell them what they actually think. As a consequence, those leaders experience and express frustration, exasperation, and resentment. Our research indicates that executive training and coaching may help those leaders be more aware of the consequences of their power-asymmetric relationship with team members, and to realize that their behavioral-emotional negative reactions may even reinforce the relational transparency unbalance. To show that they are receptive to the relational transparency of team members, leaders must be perceived as respectful—and this requires that they are not only frank but also humble. Saying exactly what they are thinking, inviting team members to speak their minds, and speaking the hard truth is not enough to encourage team members to reciprocate in the same way. It is also necessary that leaders (a) avoid bragging about their successes, (b) admit that they do not know things if they actually do not know, (c) acknowledge the strengths and contributions of team members, and (d) are teachable (Owens et al., 2013). By being frank and humble, leaders are granted legitimacy by team members and thus foster a productive dialog with those team members. Conversely, by being frank but not humble, leaders risk developing a monolog.

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[2] Individual data from the subordinates were aggregated at the leader/team level for this and the other variables. See the section "Aggregating Data at the Leader/Team Level".

Conclusion

Our study suggests that being a relationally transparent leader differs from creating the conditions for an authentic dialog between the leader and followers. Creating such a dialog requires that leaders express themselves not only in a relationally transparent way but also with humility; otherwise their relational transparency may emerge from their own self-interest and narcissism, leading to an impositional approach that does not make them receptive to the relational transparency of team members. Our paper thus suggests that what is often considered relational transparency is no more than unidirectional transparency—from leaders to followers. If researchers want to focus on relational transparency in leaders, they must consider and measure both directions of the relationship. Relational transparency is truly relational only when it is bidirectional.

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