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The Romance of Leadership Scale – Cross-cultural testing and refinement

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### Abstract

The Romance of Leadership scale (RLS) has been used in various studies in different countries and contexts. However, to date, the structure of the scale has been a subject of discussion, making it difficult to compare results over different studies. In this study, using student as well as organization samples from two countries, we want to clarify the factor structure of the RLS. In order to do so, we used a hypothetical factor matrix into which we rotated our data. Although this matrix fits some of the data quite well, the results argue for the use of one core factor. The factor solutions are, however, still ambiguous and we therefore recommend doing more research on a core factor of the Romance of Leadership scale.

Keywords: Leadership, Romance of Leadership, Culture, Organizational context

### The Romance of Leadership Scale – Cross-cultural testing and refinement

Leadership is a complex matter that can be seen from several different perspectives. The focus of research has predominantly been on the leader and his / her behaviour or his / her traits. Recently, researchers have become more interested in the followers' perspective of leadership. In this paper, we are focusing on an example of follower-centred research, namely, the Romance of Leadership (e.g., Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985). In this approach, leadership is regarded from a social constructivist point of view (Meindl, 1998a) and is defined as “an experience undergone by followers“ (Meindl, 1993, p.97). This means that individuals are actively involved in constructing leadership rather than that leadership being simply what a leader does. The Romance of Leadership approach predicts that in times of good or poor company performance, people will attribute high levels responsibility to leaders thereby ignoring other possible influencing factors, such as the general economic situation. For organizations, this romantic view of leaders can have negative consequences, for example, if leaders are replaced in “bad times” without any change in the company performance resulting there from (Meindl, 1990; 1993; to regard this in a broader context, imagine football or soccer coaches being replaced without the performance of the team improving<sup>1</sup>).

To assess this phenomenon, Meindl and Ehrlich (1988) established a measure of assessment for the Romance of Leadership. Since then, the instrument has been widely used in different contexts (experimental research with student samples versus field studies with employees) and countries (e.g., the USA: Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Germany: Felfe, 2005). However, in different studies, different factor structures emerged (e.g., Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Cho & Meindl, undated). The focus of our paper is, therefore, to analyze the factor structure of the Romance of Leadership scale on both theoretical and empirical grounds and then to examine this structure in different countries and different contexts.

### Theoretical background of the Romance of Leadership approach

Originally, Meindl et al. (1985) conceptualized Romance of Leadership as the general tendency to have a romantic view of leaders in so far as all responsibility for company performance is attributed to its leaders. This process of attribution is due to sense-making in organisations, in other words the schemas we have to help us to simplify information processing with respect to what happens in organisations (e.g., Kroon, 2005, for a discussion on implicit organisational theories in start-up firms): As company performance is complex to explain, leadership can serve as a means of simplifying the cognitive processes involved in explaining performance (see Meindl, 1990). Consequently, Romance of Leadership has its theoretical basis in social constructivism (Meindl et al., 1985). Leadership has gained a prominent role in the explanation of company performance and one of Meindl's aims was therefore to explain the reasons for this development (Meindl, 1990).

In 1993, Meindl went from explaining Romance of Leadership as a general phenomenon to a more follower-focused approach. He claimed that emerging leadership is dependent upon followers. The idea that leadership only depends upon leaders' behaviour is too narrow in his view. Rather, followers interact and socially construct leadership. Consequently, Meindl (1998a) refers to the Romance of Leadership approach as the construction and representation of followers' thought systems. Leaders' behaviour is then a "rough 'clue' for the construction of leaders and leadership" (Meindl, 1998a, p. 287). That means that followers' reactions to leadership are more strongly shaped by their own construction than by the traits and behaviours of a leader. Meindl (1998a) further claims that follower ratings of leaders are more informative about followers than about leader characteristics and that the relationship between follower ratings of leadership and their ratings of outcome variables reflect followers' "thought systems" (p. 289) rather than a leader's impact.

#### Critique of the Romance of Leadership approach

Being a follower-centred approach to leadership, the Romance of Leadership approach has been criticized for neglecting the leader in the process of leadership, or rather for not

recognizing the effect of leadership on performance (Day & Lord, 1988). Ehrlich (1998) found the approach too limited. He argues that the leader is needed in leadership research, for example as a reference point, to make sure that the followers' construction of leadership is about their leaders and not their own personal approach to leadership. He also highlights the importance of the leader in terms of the construction of leadership because different styles of leadership lead to different social constructions (p. 308).

Similarly, Schneider (1998) emphasises that shared perceptions are really grounded in the attributes and behaviours of leaders. Without taking the leader into account, in his view, "the stimulus or basis of social construction" (p. 311) is missing. He argues that followers experience the same "substantive issues" (p. 313) at work and, therefore, social construction without taking into account these circumstances is insufficient. In addition, Schneider (1998) maintains that in organisations, people with similar personalities interact, and through this interaction come to shared meanings.

To summarize, Romance of Leadership has been criticized for not taking into account the leader and the situation in which followers act. Therefore, it has been regarded as too narrow an approach to leadership.

In a response to this critique, Meindl (1998b) stresses that this approach focuses on processes not directly connected to actual leader behaviour and characteristics. He underlines that Romance of Leadership is simply an alternative way of looking at leadership. Rather than narrowing the view on leadership, he claims to broaden it.

#### Empirical evidence

In the following, we provide a short overview of studies on the Romance of Leadership. In their initial examination of the approach, Meindl et al. (1985) conducted several studies to show the tendency to romanticize leadership in several areas of society. Analysing business journals, they found that leaders are often highlighted when their company is doing well. Setting Romance of Leadership in the context of nationwide economic tendencies, they found

that dissertations, as well as business periodicals, focus more strongly on leaders when the economy is doing badly (dissertations) or well (business periodicals)<sup>2</sup>. This implies that leaders are seen as having the ability to control and influence the fates of the organizations they run, whereas other factors, such as the economic situation, are more or less neglected.

In 1987, Meindl and Ehrlich conducted two studies that showed the effect of attributions to leadership on outcome evaluations. When participants received an explanation for company performance that referred to leadership (as opposed to employees, markets or government policies) as being responsible for company performance, they evaluated the performance of that company as more profitable and less risky. In a second study, Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) found that participants rated stability, internality and controllability higher for the leader and employee explanation of company success than those explanations related to markets or government policies. In addition, in the leadership explanation, attributions of company performance to the top management were higher than in the other conditions. Attributions to the company's environment or to chance or luck were higher in the markets or the government policies condition than when the participants received an explanation of company success referring to leaders or employees. This means that participants differentiated between company internal and external factors in relation to their influence over companies' performance.

With these two initial papers, one might say that the phenomenon of Romance of Leadership was proven. Research from here on mainly concentrated on the effects of Romance of Leadership rather than the phenomenon itself.

Ehrlich, Meindl and Viellieu (1990) conducted a first study on the effect of Romance of Leadership on the perception of specific leadership styles. They examined the effect of Romance of Leadership on the perception of charisma and leader behaviour as assessed using the LBDQ (Stogdill, 1963). Although they did not find any significant relationship between Romance of Leadership and charisma, Romance of Leadership and leader behaviour were

significantly related. In addition, Romance of Leadership and charisma overlapped in explaining the perception of leader behaviour.

In line with Meindl's (1990) assumption that leadership, especially charismatic leadership, is an "output of social psychological forces operating among followers, subordinates and observers, rather than arising directly out of the interactions between follower and leaders" (p. 188), other researchers have focused on the effect of Romance of Leadership on the perception of actual leaders (Al-Dmour & Awamleh, 2002; Awamleh, 2003; Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Meindl, 1990; Schyns, Felfe & Blank, in review; Schyns & Sanders, 2004). The aim of these studies was to examine the extent to which a follower's individual degree of Romance of Leadership impacts on the perception of transformational / charismatic leadership. Transformational / charismatic leadership was the focus of these studies, as Meindl (1990) claimed that transformational / charismatic leadership is itself a type of "hyper-romanticism" (p. 182). The results of these studies are mixed. Some authors (Al-Dmour & Awamleh, 2002; Awamleh, 2003; Meindl, 1990) found a positive relationship between Romance of Leadership and the perception of transformational / charismatic leadership. Shamir (1992) found that the attribution of influence to the leader, as well as general agreement on the importance of leadership, is positively related to the attribution of charisma to a leader. However, others could not confirm this relationship (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Schyns & Sanders, 2004). These mixed results may require more complex analyses. Haslam et al. (2001) found that the attribution of company performance to a leader is not only dependent upon the type of company performance (crisis turnaround, stable profit, stable loss, or crisis decline) but also on the way leaders behave in terms of affirming or negating the identity of the group they lead.

Bligh, Kohles and Pillai (2005) conducted a study on the 2003 California recall election and how charismatic and effective the candidates (the present governor, the challenger from his own party and an "outside challenger" from another party) were seen to be<sup>3</sup>. As a result of



their study, they go one step further than previous research, in that they enhance our knowledge of the conditions under which Romance of Leadership is related to the perception of charisma. Bligh et al. (2005) found that for the outside challenger Romance of Leadership was indeed related to the perception of charisma, though this was not the case for the other candidates. They found no relationship between Romance of Leadership and expected effectiveness. With respect to the interaction between Romance of Leadership and a perceived crisis in California, they found that for the outside challenger there was indeed a higher correlation between Romance of Leadership and the perception of charisma amongst those participants who perceived California to be in a crisis. The opposite was true for the challenger from party of the governor: for those participants who perceived California to be in a crisis, the correlation between Romance of Leadership and the perception of charisma was negative.

#### The Romance of Leadership Scale

As Meindl (1990) put it, the Romance of Leadership scale “was not intended to tap romanticizing directly, but focused instead on the extent to which leadership is likely to be prominent in actors’ implicit theories of organization” (p. 168). Rather than assessing anything about a specific leader, it assesses a characteristic of the observer (Meindl, 1990). As Ehrlich (1998) noted, the degree of Romance of Leadership differs within persons (over time) and between persons. Therefore, an assessment of Romance of Leadership is necessary to examine the different degrees of Romance of Leadership and their possible impact on other variables, such as the perception of leadership. To do so, Meindl and Ehrlich (1988; see also Meindl, 1998c) established the Romance of Leadership Scale (RLS). In order to develop a scale, Meindl and Ehrlich (1988) generated a pool of 70 items reflecting the idea of Romance of Leadership. These items were then reviewed with the result that twenty-eight items remained. These were administered to business students for rating and discussion. The result was a set of 32 items. These were presented to a sample of 150 undergraduate business

students, yielding a one-factor solution. Two shorter versions (RLS-B with twenty-one items and RLS-C with 11 items) were established on the basis of factor loadings and item-total correlations.

The resulting instrument consists of 32 statements on the influence of leaders in organizations all of which were formulated to represent extreme assertions. As mentioned above, these items were supposed to reflect one factor (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1988). However, when factor analysing the Romance of Leadership scale, researchers often found solutions with more than one general factor. In the following, we will give an overview of findings on the Romance of Leadership scale. However, it is necessary to remember that none of the studies reported here had the aim of clarifying the factor structure of the Romance of Leadership scale. Therefore, information on the factor solutions is often scarce.

Al-Dmour and Awamleh (2002) and Awameh (2003) found a one-factor solution (both with one item deleted) for the 11-item version in a study of employees of Jordanian Public Shareholding companies, Cho and Meindl (undated) found a three factor structure of the same version. Their first factor was named “Different effects for different leaders” and comprised five items. The two items loading highest are: “When the top leaders are good, the organization does well; when the top leaders are bad, the organization does poorly” and “There’s no thing as critical to the ‘bottom line’ performance of a company as the quality of its top-level leaders”. The second factor “Absolute effects of leaders” consists of four items. “It’s probably a good thing to find something out about the quality of the top-level leader before investing in a firm” and “The process by which the leaders are selected is extremely important” are the two highest loading items. Their third factor was “Relative effects of leaders”, comprising only two items, namely “Many times, it doesn’t matter who is running the show at the top, the fate of an organization is not in the hands of its leaders” and “In comparison to external forces such as the economy, government regulations, etc., a company’s leaders can have only a small impact on a firm’s performance”. In their

experimental study, Awamleh and Gardner (1999) employed the 11-item version of the RLS. They found a three factor-solution again, but it differed from Cho and Meindl's solution. Their first factor comprised four items. The two items loading highest on this factor are: "There is nothing as crucial to the bottom-line performance of a company as the quality of its top-level leaders" and "When the top leaders are good, the organization does well; when the top leaders are bad, the organization does poorly". The two items loading highest on the second factor (four items) are: "Sooner or later, bad leadership at the top will show up in decreased organizational performance" and "The great amount of time and energy devoted to choosing a leader is justified, because of the important influence that person is likely to have". The last factor consists of three items, such as "The process by which the leaders are selected is extremely important" and "It's probably a good thing to find something out about the quality of the top-level leader before investing in a firm". Recently, Bligh, Kohles, and Pillai (2005) used the Romance of Leadership in the context of a study on the election in California. They found a two-factor solution for the Romance of Leadership scale, with the reverse coded items loading on a separate factor. Considering these mixed results, it would appear to be very useful to establish a factor solution that is stable across different contexts.

In a first endeavor to clarify the structure of the Romance of Leadership Scale, Schyns, Meindl and Croon (2004) constructed a hypothetical factor matrix on the basis of the content of the 32 items contained in the Romance of Leadership scale. They were able to differentiate three factors. The first or core factor, referred to as 'the influence of a leader', is the one that best represents the theory. It contains items reflecting beliefs concerning the extent to which a leader is able to affect organizational outcomes. The second factor emphasizes the interchangeability of leaders. Although the label given this second factor suggests that it is nothing more than the opposite of the first factor, some qualitative differences have to be highlighted. It is true that the first factor focuses on one leader who is considered to be completely responsible for everything that happens in an organization, whereas the second

factor emphasizes the exchangeability of leaders. However, it must be noted that the belief in the exchangeability of a leader does not necessarily preclude the belief that the leader is still very influential. The third factor concentrates on the significance of the influence of other factors, in addition to leadership, that may impact on an organization's performance (see Appendix A for the grouping of the items).

In order to examine the structure of the Romance of Leadership scale, Schyns et al. (2004) drew three samples of German participants: a student sample ( $N = 146$ ), a heterogeneous organisational sample ( $N = 104$ ) and a homogeneous organizational sample ( $N = 202$ ); for a detailed description see Schyns et al., 2004. The results of their analyses showed that, although there were some differences in the number of items that could be grouped to the factors, the three-factor solution continued to fit the data better than could be expected by chance. However, this prior research had focused only on the German translation (an overview of the results of prior studies using the Romance of Leadership scale is depicted in Table 1.). Further tests are needed to examine other language versions, especially the original English instrument. In this study, we will apply the same hypothetical matrix to Dutch and US data in order to examine further the extent to which these factors can be used for future research.

## Method

### *Samples and procedures*

#### *The Netherlands*

Prior to the collection of data, a Dutch and an American scientist made independent Dutch translations of the RLS. Minimal deviations were discussed with James R. Meindl, who finally approved the translation<sup>4</sup>.

*Organization sample (heterogeneous; sample 1).* Students from a course on research methods received course credit for gathering the data for this sample from their acquaintances. The questionnaire was constructed identically for all students / participants and contained several

instruments on leadership. Only the data referring to Romance of Leadership are reported here.

292 respondents from different companies filled in the questionnaire. 145 were male, 147 female. The mean age was 36.5 years ( $SD = 12.9$ ). On average, the respondents had worked for 9.4 ( $SD = 10.4$ ) years in their company. 29.8 % of the participants have or had previously been working as a manager.

*Organization sample (homogeneous; sample 2).* The participants were personally approached in the workplace. After being asked if they wanted to take part in the research, the participants were handed the questionnaire. The surveys were returned personally or sent back via mail. In the questionnaire, participants were asked for demographic data concerning age, sex, discipline, and work experience before they were requested to fill in the rest of the questionnaire.

The 191 participants were employees of an accountancy agency in the Netherlands (54 % accountancy, 18 % support, 9 % tax advice, 7 % consultancy, 5 % other and 7 % didn't indicate their discipline). 47 % were men and 52 % were women (1% did not indicate their gender). The mean age was 34.3 ( $SD = 10.0$ ). The mean years of work experience was 14.9 ( $SD = 10.4$ ). 25 % of the participants had had work experience as a manager.

*Student sample (sample 3).* The participants were asked during lectures whether or not they wanted to take part in the study. The questionnaire was handed to them and they were asked to give it back within two weeks. In the questionnaire, they were asked for demographic data concerning age, sex, discipline, and work experience before they were requested to fill in the rest of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were returned personally or via internal mail (in the case of psychology students, in exchange for course credits).

The 145 participants were students of the following subjects: psychology students (84), human resource students (56), and students of other majors (5). Most of them (117) were women (22 men; 6 did not indicate their gender). The mean age was 21.3 ( $SD = 4.0$ ). 97.8 %

of the students had had work experience in different lines of businesses (profit and non-profit).

#### *USA*

*Student sample (sample 4).* 364 US students filled in the questionnaire. 214 of the participants were male; 149 were female. The mean age was 21.4 years ( $SD = 2.5$ ). Students were majoring in different subjects, namely, accounting (21.2 %), management science (20.9 %) marketing (18.7 %), finance (14.6 %), business administration (12.9 %), human resources studies/ organizational behaviour (9.3 %), and others (2.5 %).

#### *Analysis*

##### *Treatment of missing values*

The samples contained few missing values. These were replaced by an estimate derived from an appropriate regression analysis of the variable in which the missing value occurred on the remaining items in the RLS. This regression imputation method was carried out by means of the Missing Value Analysis procedure provided by SPSS 11.5. A randomly selected regression residual was added to the estimates of the missing values (see Schafer, 1997).

##### *Factor extraction and rotation*

In order to examine the extent to which the data fit our hypothetical matrix, we determined a three-factor principal axis solution for each sample. In all analyses, the number of common factors was chosen on the basis of a Parallel Analysis, as described by Humphreys and Montanelli (1975). We then orthogonally rotated each principal factor solution into the hypothetical matrix so that maximal agreement occurred, meaning that the items load high on the factor they are supposed to load on and zero on the other factors. We then tested the congruence of the rotated factor matrix with the hypothetical matrix, using Tucker's factor congruence coefficient (Korth & Tucker, 1976). In order to test the significance of our solution, we rotated each factor solution into matrices that consisted of random permutations of the rows of the original hypothetical matrix and compared the congruence coefficients to

our solution. The probability level of the coefficient was determined under a normal distribution with the mean and standard deviation of the simulated distribution. Although we could have carried out confirmatory analyses, we decided to restrict ourselves to explanatory factor analyses, as we were also interested in describing the differences between the factor solutions obtained in the different subgroups.

## Results

### *Testing the significance of the agreement of factors with the hypothetical factor solution*

Table 2 contains the results of the congruence tests. This table shows the observed congruence coefficient along with its significance under the random permutation distribution for each factor in each sample. For Samples 1, 2, and 3, the congruence coefficients for the first two factors are significantly higher than would be expected by chance. In all three samples, the congruence coefficient for the third factor does not reach significance. This means that in relation to the data for the first two factors the hypothetical matrix fit is significantly better than would be the case in a chance matrix. However, this is not true for the third factor. In the fourth sample, the congruence coefficients for all three factors are significantly higher than would be expected by chance<sup>5</sup>. This means that, according to the overall agreement test, the solution for the US students fits best. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the item structure of the respective solutions.

### *Testing the agreement in factor structure*

The rotated factor solutions for the four samples are given in Table 3. We also counted number of hits and false positives (Table 4). We defined the number of hits as the number of variables with a high loading on the expected factor. The number of false positives is the number of variables with a high loading on the wrong factor. A high loading is a loading with an absolute value larger than 0.30. The last row of Table 4 contains the number of hits and false positives that would indicate perfect congruence with the hypothetical solution.

The tables show that the agreement between observed and hypothetical factor loadings is high for the first factor. For the second factor, we find a significant number of false positives. We find general poor levels of agreement for the third factor, except in sample 4.

We preferred a global comparison of the four factor solutions with the hypothetical factor solution to a more detailed item-wise investigation of the differences and similarities between the factor solutions in the four samples. For the latter strategy the risk of capitalizing on chance fluctuations may be rather high. However, some differences can be highlighted.

Regarding factor one, two items load especially high in all samples: item 24 (“When the top leaders are good, the organization does well; when the top leaders are bad, the organization does poorly”) and item 25 (“There’s nothing as critical to the “bottom line” performance of a company as the quality of its top-level leaders”). In addition, item 8 (“High- versus low quality leadership has a bigger impact on a firm than a favorable versus unfavorable business environment”) and item 20 (“When a company is doing poorly, the first place one should look to is its leaders”) load especially high in the employee samples. A closer look at items loading on the second factor shows that this factor could have been interpreted somewhat differently in the four samples. Whereas in the first and second sample, interchangeability and irrelevance are emphasized, in the third sample, this factor consists of items referring to attributing no influence to leaders, as well as to denying that leaders deserve the attention they get (leaders’ selection, salary and investment). In the fourth sample, in addition to items referring to interchangeability, items referring to leaders having little impact are included in this factor.

For the third factor, similar interpretation differences apply: In the first and second sample, only one or two items load on the factor referring to lack of influence and chance aspects. In the third sample, items reflecting a kind of resignation with respect to company performance, as well as the aspect of chance, define the third factor. In the fourth sample, the



only two items making up the third factor refer to the fact that no responsibility for company performance should be attributed to leaders.

### Summary and Discussion

In this paper, we examined the factor structure of the RLS in different countries and contexts. In order to do so, we established a theoretical factor matrix into which the data was rotated. The first factor can be described as the core factor, which fits the theory best and consists of items that more or less stably show the highest factor loadings on this factor in three countries and with student as well as organization samples.

The results for the Dutch and US samples were comparable to prior results obtained from German samples (Schyns et al., 2004). The first and second factors emerged almost as expected. Our results therefore allow us to differentiate at least two factors (“influence of a leader” and “interchangeability of a leader”) for purposes of future Romance of Leadership research. In organizational practice as well as research, the first factor will probably arouse the most interest. If followers believe leaders in general to be ‘almighty’, what they expect from their actual leader will be shaped by this belief. This could result in decreased effort on the part of the followers, as they do not feel responsible for the company performance. On the other hand, the followers’ efforts might well increase to create a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Further research on the effects of romanticizing leaders is needed.

With respect to the second factor, some interesting research questions emerge. We can try to imagine a situation in which, independent of how much responsibility employees attribute to a leader, employees believe that one leader is the same as the other. Strong feelings of loyalty between such followers and their present leader are not likely. Such a belief in the interchangeability of leaders could also turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy, in the sense that leaders are more likely to change often in situations where they cannot rely on their followers to back them (here, think again of sport teams).

Additionally some differences emerged between the student and employee samples on factor 1. This might hint at structural differences between employee and student samples, although further research is needed to confirm this result, before engaging in a stronger interpretation of our findings.

Future research could focus on the relationship between the two main factors (“influence of a leader” and “interchangeability of a leader”) We can assume that the relationship between these factors will be different for different individuals and groups of followers. Four groups of followers might be differentiated depending on their values on the two factors: The first group (high influence/high interchangeability) contains of people who assume that leaders assumed to have a high impact in the organisation. However, this impact is independent of a specific person. Rather leaders in general have a high impact, maybe due to their position. We could call this collective Romance of Leadership. The second group (high influence/ low interchangeability) could be called the “classical” romanticizers: They attribute high responsibility for company performance to a specific leader, in that sense that they assume that this specific person makes a strong difference to the company he / she works in. We can call this individualised Romance of Leadership. The third group (low influence/high interchangeability) does not show Romance of Leadership at all. They assume that leaders do not impact on organisational performance and also that leaders are interchangeable. The fourth group (low influence/low interchangeability) again does not show Romance of Leadership. However, this maybe due to a specific person, meaning that not all leaders lack influence but specific ones do. When differentiating between these groups, an interesting line of research would be to examine the different attitudes the group members have towards their actual leader.

The above considerations mean that both directions of the relationship between the two factors make sense. However, it would be interesting to examine the nature of Romance of Leadership in organisations depending on the relationship between the two factors. We can

assume that followers who attribute a lot of responsibility to leaders but still think that one leader is like any other may show little loyalty to their current leader. On the other hand, followers who attribute a lot of responsibility to leaders may just as likely think that these leaders are unique and that they cannot be exchanged for one another. This could lead to followers placing importance on being able to work with a particular leader.

More research is needed to extend the third factor (influence of other factors). In our study, it turned out to be the least stable factor. Nevertheless, it covers a theoretically interesting aspect of leadership. Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) already examined the degree to which people attribute responsibility for company performance to other factors rather than leadership when stimulated to do so. The third factor contains ideas that tap into a certain idea, namely the attribution of company success to other factors *besides* leadership. Strictly speaking, the attribution of responsibility to other factors than leadership may not be Romance of Leadership. However, when people explicitly deny the influence of other factors, their romanticisation of leaders is indeed strong. For future research, it would be useful to have a better assessment of this aspect of Romance of Leadership.

In addition, it could be interesting for future research on Romance of Leadership to give people a choice between a range of factors that might explain company success, for example, leadership, the state of the economy or HR policies etc. Doing so could shed light on the question whether people attribute externally (in the sense of not feeling responsible for the company's success themselves but making other factors responsible) or to leaders in particular.

Another line of research should involve further examinations of the structure and comparability of measurement of the Romance of Leadership Scale in other countries and cultures. Although, to date, a total of seven samples have been included in the testing for the factor structure of the RLS, all three of the countries involved were western. For future research, samples from other countries should be drawn from countries that differ from those

considered here with respect to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. In addition to expecting different degrees in the romanticizing of leaders, we can assume the structure of the instrument to be different in, for example, high power-distance cultures. Interchangeability of leaders may be less prominent in these countries, given that they are individualistic as well. A strong sense of hierarchy connected with emphasis on the individual can turn Romance of Leadership into having high expectations of one's actual leader. In high power distance, high collectivist countries, however, interchangeability may be more strongly related to the attribution of responsibility, meaning that emphasis is put 'on the top', rather than on one specific person.

Although we did not test for cultural differences and could not do so given the nature of our samples (all from Western countries), we still found that the second factor comprises slightly different items in the samples. This may be hinting at different aspects included in interchangeability, namely, that it contains romanticising leadership (no matter who it is, *all* leaders are highly influential on company performance) or imply a negative notion of leaders' impact (it makes no difference who is at the top, leaders have no influence). Only when having a close look at the different items that comprise this factor in different samples and in relationship to the first factor can we really determine the degree of Romance of Leadership. Future research could focus on uncovering the extent to which these different aspects of interchangeability are culturally determined.

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**Table 1: Overview of the factor found for the Romance of Leadership scale in prior research**

Authors	Year	Topic	Sample	N of factors (items)	Name of factor / example items <sup>1</sup>
Al-Dmour & Awamleh	2002	Transformational leadership	Jordan, Employees	1 (11)	
Awameh	2003	Transformational leadership	Jordan, Employees	1 (11)	
Cho & Meindl	undated	Work ethics	202	3 (32)	1) Different effects for different leaders 2) Absolute effects of leaders 3) Relative effects of leaders



**Table1 (continued): Overview of the factor found for the Romance of Leadership scale in prior research**

Authors	Year	Topic	Sample	N of factors (items)	Name of factor / example items1
Awamleh & Gardner	1999	Charisma	USA, Students	3 (11)	<p>1) “There is nothing as crucial to the bottom-line performance of a company as the quality of its top-level leaders” and “When the top leaders are good, the organization does well; when the top leaders are bad, the organization does poorly”.</p> <p>2) “Sooner or later, bad leadership at the top will show up in decreased organizational performance” and “The great amount of time and energy devoted to choosing a leader is justified, because of the important influence that person is likely to have”.</p> <p>3) “The process by which the leaders are selected is extremely important” and “It’s probably a good thing to find something out about the quality of the top-level leader before investing in a firm”.</p>

**Table1 (continued): Overview of the factor found for the Romance of Leadership scale in prior research**

Authors	Year	Topic	Sample	N of factors (items)	Name of factor / example items <sup>1</sup>
Schyns et al.	2004	Factor structure	Germany, Students, Employees	3 (32)	1) Influence of a leader 2) Interchangeability of a leader 3) Influence of other factors
Bligh et al.	2005	Charisma	USA, students	2 (11)	1) Positive coded items 2) Reverse coded items

<sup>1</sup> Note: Awamleh & Gardner (1999) did not name the factors they found. Therefore, to better understand the contents of the factors, example items are given

**Table 2: Observed congruence coefficients and the results of the permutation tests**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<b>Sample 1</b>			
$\phi$	.923	.789	.445
M	.606	.410	.284
SD	.079	.103	.113
z	4.013	3.702	1.420
p	.000	.001	.077
<b>Sample 2</b>			
$\phi$	.903	.751	.306
M	.582	.397	.278
SD	.089	.102	.111
z	3.633	3.482	.252
p	.000	.000	.401
<b>Sample 3</b>			
$\phi$	.871	.726	.438
M	.464	.344	.254
SD	.107	.119	.111
z	3.806	3.207	1.658
p	.000	.001	.049
<b>Sample 4</b>			
$\phi$	.946	.828	.796
M	.602	.403	.283
SD	.077	.101	.110
z	4.456	4.191	4.647
p	.000	.000	.000

**Table 3: Optimally rotated factor solutions**

Item	Sample 1			Sample 2			Sample 3			Sample 4		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
1	<b>.487</b>	-.088	-.021	<b>.395</b>	-.014	-.304	<b>.387</b>	.076	-.284	<b>.339</b>	-.014	.061
2	-.007	.323	<b>.078</b>	-.136	<b>.261</b>	.056	-.014	.291	<b>.396</b>	.056	.390	<b>.318</b>
3	-.118	<b>.463</b>	.227	-.182	<b>.335</b>	-.014	-.041	<b>.151</b>	.488	-.145	<b>.465</b>	.096
4	<b>.552</b>	.041	.251	<b>.360</b>	.110	-.105	<b>.425</b>	.006	-.009	<b>.265</b>	-.060	-.056
5	<b>.402</b>	-.365	.257	<b>.323</b>	-.404	.098	<b>.369</b>	-.449	.117	<b>.369</b>	-.245	.161
6	<b>.510</b>	-.313	.299	<b>.310</b>	-.328	.209	<b>.111</b>	-.139	-.172	<b>.426</b>	-.238	.150
7	.131	.407	<b>.127</b>	.093	.182	<b>.042</b>	-.023	.185	<b>-.008</b>	-.001	.353	<b>.304</b>
8	<b>.530</b>	-.015	.003	<b>.505</b>	.013	-.119	<b>.334</b>	-.078	-.104	<b>.315</b>	.159	-.087
9	<b>.499</b>	.210	-.030	<b>.520</b>	.104	-.264	<b>.538</b>	-.036	.369	<b>.427</b>	.158	.018
10	.272	<b>.353</b>	-.051	.213	<b>.141</b>	-.003	.091	<b>.143</b>	-.164	.063	<b>.285</b>	-.004
11	-.258	<b>.477</b>	.071	-.315	<b>.485</b>	.128	-.245	<b>.637</b>	.068	-.088	<b>.422</b>	.119
12	<b>.481</b>	.121	-.145	<b>.564</b>	.021	-.282	<b>.520</b>	.042	.078	<b>.442</b>	.023	-.191
13	-.242	<b>.577</b>	-.155	-.049	<b>.502</b>	.002	-.082	<b>.520</b>	.081	-.010	<b>.528</b>	-.082

Item	Sample 1			Sample 2			Sample 3			Sample 4		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
14	<b>.442</b>	.110	-.118	<b>.596</b>	.096	-.112	<b>.460</b>	.079	.298	<b>.384</b>	.019	-.136
15	<b>.314</b>	-.021	-.111	<b>.475</b>	-.026	-.058	<b>.378</b>	.070	-.150	<b>.392</b>	.142	-.020
16	<b>.327</b>	-.074	.004	<b>.260</b>	.227	.106	<b>.381</b>	.097	-.015	<b>.437</b>	-.076	.003
17	-.146	<b>.428</b>	.238	-.011	<b>.465</b>	.244	-.396	<b>.434</b>	.272	-.159	<b>.559</b>	.091
18	-.234	<b>.491</b>	.195	-.079	<b>.525</b>	.254	-.174	<b>.532</b>	.008	-.085	<b>.428</b>	.082
19	<b>.363</b>	-.232	.118	<b>.487</b>	-.156	.404	<b>.124</b>	-.438	-.195	<b>.333</b>	-.319	.056
20	<b>.501</b>	.054	-.064	<b>.631</b>	-.022	.043	<b>.499</b>	.208	-.205	<b>.463</b>	.034	-.040
21	<b>.375</b>	-.344	.102	<b>.466</b>	-.324	.190	<b>.482</b>	-.292	-.015	<b>.350</b>	-.287	.138
22	.028	<b>.405</b>	.292	.046	<b>.199</b>	.158	.091	<b>.310</b>	-.117	.045	<b>.501</b>	.138
23	-.233	<b>.415</b>	<b>.385</b>	-.379	<b>.431</b>	<b>.218</b>	-.311	.321	<b>.367</b>	-.026	<b>.463</b>	<b>.306</b>
24	<b>.606</b>	.191	-.280	<b>.541</b>	.118	-.398	<b>.638</b>	.118	-.139	<b>.567</b>	.193	-.070
25	<b>.592</b>	.029	-.262	<b>.619</b>	.074	-.469	<b>.610</b>	-.140	-.289	<b>.552</b>	.185	.074
26	.026	<b>.447</b>	.292	.082	<b>.255</b>	.199	-.016	<b>.446</b>	-.291	.040	<b>.582</b>	.153
27	-.049	<b>.183</b>	.259	-.121	<b>.350</b>	.328	-.127	<b>.209</b>	.146	-.020	<b>.507</b>	-.026

Item	Sample 1			Sample 2			Sample 3			Sample 4		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
28	<i>.324</i>	.108	-.279	<i>.433</i>	.157	-.110	<i>.356</i>	.069	-.249	<i>.250</i>	-.092	.084
29	-.145	.157	<i>.252</i>	-.306	.171	<i>.325</i>	-.318	-.333	<i>.237</i>	-.053	-.067	.367
30	-.203	.079	<i>.284</i>	-.382	.187	<i>.184</i>	-.325	-.167	<i>.221</i>	.043	-.098	<i>.524</i>
31	-.067	<i>.570</i>	.012	-.109	<i>.487</i>	-.064	-.098	<i>.378</i>	-.192	.057	<i>.593</i>	.278
32	<i>.300</i>	-.198	-.181	<i>.403</i>	-.170	.061	<i>.395</i>	-.191	-.026	<i>.186</i>	-.090	-.119

Note: Numbers in italics indicate that the highest factor loading of this item. Bold indicate the factor on which the item should theoretically have the highest loading. Consequently, bold-italics indicate when an item has the highest loading on the factor it hypothetically belongs to.

**Table 4: Hits and false positives per sample and factor**

	F1		F2		F3	
	Hits	False Pos.	Hits	False Pos.	Hits	False Pos.
Sample 1	16	0	9	6	1	0
Sample 2	16	4	7	4	1	5
Sample 3	15	4	7	4	2	2
Sample 4	14	0	9	4	5	0
Perfect	17	0	10	0	5	0

## Appendix A

Item	1	2	3
1) When it comes right down to it, the quality of leadership is the single most important influence on the functioning of an organization.	x		
4) Anybody who occupies the top level leadership positions in an organization has the power to make or break the organization.	x		
5) The great amount of time and energy devoted to choosing a leader is justified, because of the important influence that person is likely to have.	x		
6) Sooner or later, bad leadership at the top will show up in decreased organizational performance.	x		
8) High-versus low quality leadership has a bigger impact on a firm than a favorable versus unfavorable business environment.	x		
9) It is impossible for an organization to do well unless it has high-quality leadership at the top.	x		
12) A company is only as good or as bad as its leaders.	x		
14) With a truly excellent leader, there is almost nothing that an organization can't accomplish.	x		
15) Even in a bad economy, a good leader can prevent a company from doing poorly.	x		
16) Top level leaders make life and death decisions about their organizations.	x		
19) It's probably a good idea to find something out about the quality of top level leaders before investing in a firm.	x		
20) When a company is doing poorly, the first place one should look to	x		



Item	1	2	3
is its leaders.			
21) The process by which leaders are selected is extremely important.	x		
24) When the top leaders are good, the organization does well; when the top leaders are bad, the organization does poorly.	x		
25) There's no thing as critical to the "bottom line" performance of a company as the quality of its top-level leaders.	x		
28) Leadership qualities are among the most highly prized personal traits I can think of.	x		
32) No expense should be spared when searching for and selecting a leader.	x		
3) Most things in an organization have very little to do with the decisions and activities of its leaders.		x	
10) When faced with the same situation, even different top-level leaders would end up making the same decisions.		x	
11) Many times, it doesn't matter who is running the show at the top, the fate of an organization is not in the hands of its leaders.		x	
13) You might as well toss a coin when trying to choose a leader.		x	
17) The connection between leadership and overall company performance is often a weak one.		x	
18) Many times, organizational leaders are nothing more than figureheads like the King and Queen of England.		x	
22) So what if the organization is doing well; people who occupy the top level leadership positions rarely deserve their high salaries.		x	
26) In many cases, candidates for a given leadership position are pretty		x	

Item	1	2	3
much interchangeable with one another.			
27) The President of the United States can do very little to shape the course of our country.		x	
31) One leader is as good or as bad as the next.		x	
2) The majority of business failures and poor organizational performances are due to factors that are beyond the control of even the best leaders.			x
7) Luck has a lot to do with whether or not business leaders are successful in making their firms profitable.			x
23) In comparison to external forces such as the economy, government regulations, etc., a company's leaders can have only a small impact on a firm's performance.			x
29) Leaders should not be held totally responsible for what happens to a firm's performance.			x
30) There are many factors influencing an organization's performance that simply cannot be controlled by even the best of leaders.			x

Note: 1 = the influence of a leader, 2 = the interchangeability of a leader, 3 = the significance of the influence of other factors; the numbers before the items refer to the original item numbers as given in Meindl (1998b).

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> We thank Hartmut Blank for this very illustrative example.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, we can find a nice example in the German press: In the last years, growth in Germany was well below expectations and, during this time, a major weekly newspaper (“Die Zeit”) put forward two different series on leaders in Germany, one called “Moments of Decision” (February 2003 to June 2004) and “What drives ...” (October 2004 to today).

<sup>3</sup> Only the results for Romance of Leadership are reported here.

<sup>4</sup> To give an example of differences: The English original “organisation” has the connotation of referring to a very big company both in Dutch and German. Therefore, we preferred to use the term “company” throughout the questionnaire.

<sup>5</sup> Note however that although many congruence coefficients reach an acceptable significance level, the values they attain are not so high as to indicate perfect agreement with the hypothetical factors.