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Theoretical letters

## Can chameleons lead?

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### Abstract

In this exchange of letters, Art Bedeian and Dave Day attempt to square findings from the self-monitoring theory literature with what is known about leadership. Research suggests that high self-monitors [HSMs; relative to low self-monitors (LSMs)] are more likely to emerge as leaders. Bedeian, however, expresses skepticism about this finding. He notes that the description of a typical HSM does not correspond with what he considers to be the portfolio of a true leader. By drawing upon the self-monitoring and leadership literatures, Day responds to Bedeian's doubt about this finding, as well as other related issues. The exchange leads to a consideration of alternative views and their implications for future research on the relationship between self-monitoring and leadership.

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## Letter 1

Professor David V. Day  
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Dear Dave:

Several months ago, you were kind in vetting a manuscript reporting a study in which Sonya Premeaux and I investigated the influence of self-monitoring on employees' willingness to speak up about various workplace issues. In recently reading page proofs for the manuscript (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003), an old puzzle resurfaced. In your *Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP)* meta-analysis examining the validity of self-monitoring in organizational settings (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002), you and your co-authors summarize research indicating that high, relative to low self-monitoring individuals, are more likely to emerge as leaders. What puzzles me is that the description of typical high self-monitors, as reported in the literature, does not match what either my personal experiences or decades of research in other areas indicate is the portfolio of a real leader. Given your familiarity with theory and research on both self-monitoring and leadership, I am writing in the hope that you might extend your earlier kindness by helping me clarify my understanding of the connection between these two constructs. It might be helpful for me to begin by briefly explaining what I understand to be the contrasting styles or propensities of low and high self-monitors. Perhaps my confusion is that I simply have misunderstood their varying orientations.

### 1. Two Contrasting Orientations: Pragmatism vs. Principles

Based on my reading, *self-monitoring* is generally construed as an individual difference variable, of temporal and situational stability, that reflects the extent to which people observe, regulate, and control the self they display in interpersonal relationships (Snyder, 1979). Prototypic *high self-monitors* (HSMs) are typically portrayed as being sensitive to contextual cues and possessing a pronounced ability to modify their behavior for the sake of desired public appearances. To this end, they are driven by a near-compulsion to scrutinize a situation so as to know what is expected of them before responding. They read the nature of the situation, invoke an image of the type of person the situation calls for, and then use the image as a guide to their own behavior. In this regard, HSMs tend to play to their audiences, having a plastic readiness to garner signals from their surroundings and then mold their images accordingly. They are much like the Woody Allen character Leonard Zelig, who had the ability to turn into other people when surrounded by them. When with physicians he transformed into a physician, if around overweight people, he quickly became heavy himself. Thus, HSMs answer in the positive to such items as "I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else" and "When I feel that the image I am portraying isn't working, I can readily change it to something that does."

In contrast, prototypic *low self-monitors* (LSMs) are generally portrayed as behaving in a manner that accurately reflects their authentic selves. They have no desire to project what they perceive to be a false impression of whom they are (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Thus, rather than looking to contextual cues

for guidance in how to behave, LSMs use knowledge of their own values and beliefs to guide their actions in social situations. LSMs answer in the affirmative to such items as “My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs” and “I can only argue for ideas which I already believe.” Corporate über-managers Jack Welch, Andy Grove, and Larry Bossidy easily come to mind as likely LSMs. Each is noted for knowing his own mind and not needing a focus group or an opinion poll to tell him what he believes.

In reflecting on these contrasting descriptions, I am struck with how often HSMs are characterized as “pragmatic” in presenting themselves and LSMs are portrayed as “principled” in their interpersonal orientations (e.g., Day & Kilduff, 2003, pp. 207–208). It occurs to me that there has been an overabundance of pragmatism and too little “principled dissent” (Graham, 1986) behind the corporate scandals and coverups that have made headlines over the past few years. Pragmatism has seemingly stood in the way of principle in a great many cases. Reconciling principle with pragmatism can, admittedly, be a challenge for anyone. This said, however, it is perhaps no surprise that research indicates, like the high-profile top-siders making headlines, HSMs can become so concerned with enhancing their own entitlements that they are willing to engage in deception, especially to increase their status in the eyes of others (think Tyco CEO Dennis Kozlowski’s \$6,000 shower curtain). In this respect, HSMs have been shown to be predisposed to actively fashion information to be consistent with what they think higher ups wish to hear (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000), to craft their verbal (and nonverbal) self-presentations for the purpose of engaging in information manipulation so as to present more positive images of themselves (Fandt & Ferris, 1990), and to tailor expressive behavior to match social pressures (Caldwell & O’Reilly, 1982). Further, as William Graziano notes, expedient HSMs “don’t mind in the least saying one thing and doing another” (quoted in Goleman, 1985, p. C1). Personally, I find disturbing the notion such individuals might occupy positions of leadership, especially when selected over true-to-themselves LSMs, who have been repeatedly shown to be less worried with projecting public images and to be more concerned with sustaining their underlying values and beliefs than furthering their own entitlements. Is my concern (and that expressed in both the popular and business presses) unfounded?

## **2. Human Chameleons and Situational Ethics**

Given their artificiality, it is perhaps no wonder that HSMs have long been known for their chameleon-like situational ethics, tailoring their self-presentations to current settings (Snyder, 1979), and for possessing the same social skills essential for being a con artist, diplomat, or politician (Snyder, 1980). Indeed, extreme HSMs have been characterized as sociopaths, “who will say and do whatever gets them what they want at the moment” (Snyder quoted in Goleman, 1985, p. C1). The chameleon aspect of the HSM orientation has always made me uncomfortable, as it again seems so incongruent with what research suggests is necessary for effective leadership. Bazerman (1998, p. 75) contends that followers prefer leaders who are consistent in their behavior, and Staw and Ross (1980) have presented evidence suggesting that managers consistent in their actions are perceived as being more successful as leaders than those who switch from one behavior to another. From what I can discern, the basic difference here is quite overt. Being more susceptible to pressure from others (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001), HSMs rely on contextual cues in making decisions. This contrasts with LSMs, who are more consistent in behaving in accordance with their values and beliefs because they are especially aware of their inner thoughts and feelings and the resulting implications of their

behavior (Jawahar, 2001). Indeed, Karla Carmichael (2002) has suggested that, in comparison to LSMs, the inconsistent behavior common to HSMs inevitably results from their attempts to simultaneously reflect the divergent opinions of the many people with whom they are trying to maintain a favorable public image. The analogy she draws is that HSMs are “somewhat like a chameleon on plaid” (p.1). The notion of someone jockeying to please others so as to maintain a desired front is not my idea of a true leader. Am I off base?

This said, I have always been bothered by the nomenclature “high self-monitor” and “low self-monitor.” As Carver and Scheier (1985) note, HSMs focus as much (or more) on contextual cues as they do on their selves. The self on whom an HSM focuses is not the private self, but the public self as presented to impress others. Recognizing this point, Madden (1998) has suggested a more accurate nomenclature for HSMs would be *high other-monitors*. In contrast, he notes LSMs monitor their inner selves as much (or more) than HSMs, so as to be able to accurately portray themselves, as the LSMs believe they really are. In this sense, it would seem more correct to switch the term “high self-monitor” to those currently called “low self-monitors.” Am I misguided in thinking that “high self-monitors” is rather an infelicitous term?

### 3. Social Metaphysicians and Self-Generators/Radar and Gyroscopic People

The point that strikes me here as it relates to leadership is that the source of motivation for the behaviors of LSMs and HSMs is quite different. The behavior of HSMs results from a desire to satisfy the perceived expectations and values of others, so as to achieve a favorable public image. Branden (1969) has labeled this syndrome “social metaphysics” (p. 179). It occurs when achieving a favorable image in the eyes of others is an individual’s ultimate frame of reference. As a consequence, social metaphysicians have no personal standard of truth or rightness. Rather they, like HSMs, act according to contextual cues directed by others. Lacking a policy of independent thinking and an integrated set of values, they are without a strong sense of personal identity or direction. Following Branden, this may explain why HSMs prefer interpersonal settings where situational guidelines are clearly defined and independent thinking is not required. They find such situations less stressful. By contrast, LSMs prefer social situations that allow them to determine and enact their own goals and values (Snyder & Gangestad, 1982) or to be what Branden (1969) dubbed “self-generators” (p. 174). Given today’s post-industrial context, it would seem easy to argue that the world needs more LSM-leaders who are self-generators, capable of being given broad responsibility, and fewer HSM social-metaphysicians, with their need to function within a context defined by others.

The contrasting preferences of HSMs and LSMs in this regard bring to mind Riesman’s (1950) argument that there are essentially two kinds of people. *Gyroscopic people* have internal guidance systems based on solid values and beliefs. They are ideally suited for a world of change because they are able to adapt while maintaining a clear and stable identity. In contrast, *radar people* steer according to signals bounced off others. They have “an exceptional sensitivity to the actions and wishes of others” and are driven by an insatiable need for the respect and affection of an amorphous and shifting jury of relevant others (p. 22). It seems to me that HSMs are like radar people and that LSMs are more gyroscopic. If so, this logic suggests that LSMs, who obey their internal piloting for gyroscopic direction, are more likely to be leaders than HSMs, who receive

signals from many directions and sources—both of which may change rapidly. Is this logic misdirected?

#### 4. A Misconception: Unmotivation or Inability?

Note that I am not suggesting LSMs are unconcerned with public opinion or are oblivious to social cues in their environment. To be sure, LSMs are highly concerned with maintaining a reputation as being genuine people who act on their values and beliefs (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). In my view, the misconception that LSMs lack a wide range of skills for monitoring self and others seems to be at the heart of the belief that HSMs are more likely to emerge as leaders. The logic commonly presented in this regard is that because HSMs (as compared to LSMs) are attuned to cues about the effects of various types of behavior, they are more socially skilled in identifying the needs of others (e.g., followers) and, by extension, altering their own behavior to fulfill those needs (e.g., Ellis, 1988). This reasoning, however, strikes me as overlooking an important distinction. Whereas LSMs were originally portrayed as lacking the ability to discern and adapt their self-presentations to contextual cues, Snyder and Gangestad (1986) have concluded that, rather than being deficient in this regard, LSMs may simply lack the motivation to do so.

As Madden (1998) recognizes, “the distinction between *unmotivation* to perform a specific behavior and an *inability* to engage in that behavior is not trivial” (p. 11). He goes on to cite research (Shaffer, Smith, & Tomarelli, 1982; Shaffer, Ogden, & Wu, 1987) indicating that HSMs and LSMs are equally accurate in their assessments of others’ self-disclosures and argues that HSMs and LSMs process contextual cues in similar fashions. They are, however, differentially motivated when it comes to using the cues in shaping their self-presentational strategies. Whereas HSMs use contextual cues to design self-presentational strategies to maximize future personal outcomes, LSMs utilize such information to search for situations that permit the display of their authentic selves. This may explain why HSMs have been found to be more successful in boundary-spanning (“go-between”) roles than LSMs (Caldwell & O’Reilly, 1982). Such roles require interacting with groups whose norms may be so different they may be unable to deal directly with one another. The Janus-like ability of HSMs to adjust their self-presentations to the value structures of such groups (e.g., management and labor) on contested issues would seem to be an advantage. In contrast, Snyder and Copeland (1989) and Anderson (1990) have suggested that LSMs are more likely to be successful in unstructured roles that allow them to engage in activities congruent with their personal values and beliefs. Thus, their propensity to shun certain roles (e.g., those that would seem custom-made for HSMs) may be explained more by a lack of motivation to perform specific behaviors (e.g., feign emotional displays) than an inability to do so. Between the misunderstanding in this regard and the unfortunate labeling of high self-monitoring, I wonder if the existing literature should be excised and research on interpersonal orientations begun anew.

#### 5. Relations with Others

What this suggests to me is that LSMs and HSMs each have a different sense about their relations with others. It also suggests why, in comparison to HSMs, LSMs display greater commitment to

personal (Snyder & Simpson, 1984) and work relationships (Day et al., 2002). With respect to their relations with others, you have noted that LSMs, relative to HSMs, are “motivated primarily by the desire to build close social relationships of mutual trust” (Day & Kilduff, 2003, p. 219). The notion that such relationships would only be possible when people are their authentic selves seems evident. Regarding the greater commitment of LSMs to personal and work relationships, you go on to note that close social relationships also build “loyalty, respect, and emotional commitment, which are requisite commodities for effective leadership development”. As would be expected, HSMs live in a world characterized by less stable and satisfying social relationships (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Your own research shows that, compared to LSMs, HSMs are less committed to their workplace colleagues and more likely to change employers. In the world you and I occupy, we are both familiar with the perennial “academic butterfly” who skirts from one university to another, always in search of a promotion or pay raise. In my experience, such people are generally capable of talking a good game (thus finding employment elsewhere), but seldom capable of standing and delivering. As a consequence, as you have noted (Day & Kilduff, 2003, p. 220), HSMs that come across as disingenuous because of inconsistencies in their words and actions are at risk of losing the respect of their colleagues, especially LSMs with their stable underlying values and beliefs. Thus, once HSMs’ true selves are revealed, they soon deduce that they have little choice but to take their acts elsewhere.

Again, these are not the kind of people that I believe you or I would consider candidates for leadership positions. Nonetheless, it does seem that the self-promotional and ingratiating style of HSMs all too often results in their appointments to higher level positions. This may be explained by the fact that HSMs are more comfortable with people like themselves and are thus more likely to select other HSMs as associates (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). In this respect, I’ve always believed one can understand and measure an organization by the type people it promotes. You are familiar with my comments on the so-called “cesspool syndrome” (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1998) and what happens to an organization once it comes to be dominated, especially at the top, by what might be termed *faux* leaders. Thus, enough said. Your thoughts in this regard would be of interest.

## 6. Trust as a Key to Leadership

A correlative point that also comes to mind is that HSMs invest in social relationships as a means of impression- and image-management. They seek friends on the basis of whether others can contribute to their image enhancement and potential reputational capital (Day & Kilduff, 2003, p. 209). By contrast, LSMs invest in social relationships in which they and those close to them can be trusted and are especially responsive to the trustworthiness of parties in their interpersonal interactions (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). The fact that HSMs are more opportunistic in their behavior, especially in establishing friendships, is a transparent characteristic that easily evokes scorn and opprobrium among one’s colleagues (Crant, 1996). Acknowledging the chameleon-ways of HSMs and the lack of trust they engender, Snyder (1980) has asked the question of what happens to HSMs when they must present a true and honest image to other people (p. 40). I have always felt, and empirical evidence confirms (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), that trust is a key to effective leadership. For me, leadership begins with trust. Manipulating the friendship of others in an effort to promulgate a self-serving public image, as HSMs do, is not behavior I would recommend for anyone interested in being a leader—at least not for long.

Betrayal of trust is one of the most frequent causes of top-executive derailment (McCall & Lombardo, 1983). Am I wrong?

## 7. Getting Promoted: Politics and Social Presentability

Recognizing the manipulative nature of HSMs, it gives me pause to read studies indicating that HSMs enjoy greater success than LSMs in promotion tournaments. Your own work supports this conclusion, at least for the first five years of new graduates' careers (Kilduff & Day, 1994). You suggest that HSMs may have the edge over their LSM counterparts in situations where promotions are based on political skill or social presentability. You also note that the perception of job performance is important, but that having prominent workplace friends influences this perception. To this you have added that HSMs may use impression-management techniques to influence their performance ratings (Day et al., 2002, p. 394). Your *JAP* meta-analysis is consistent with this reasoning in revealing a significantly higher correlation between self-monitoring and subjective (versus objective) measures of job performance and advancement.

Snyder and Copeland (1989) suggest that, relative to LSMs, HSM candidates may be particularly willing to fashion personal images to match the positions into which they hope to be advanced. Although the image may be false, this may actually be an effective strategy for being promoted because, as Snyder and Copeland speculate, image-conscious HSMs already in topside positions may give more attention to candidates' appearance than their previous performance (pp. 16–17). This may explain why the HSMs seem to enjoy playing dress-up (Snyder, 1986, pp. 63–54) and are so often more show than go. In fact, it has been shown that HSMs emerge as leaders only in positions requiring high levels of verbal interaction (e.g., boundary-spanners), and where task competence is difficult to assess (Garland & Beard, 1979).

At this point, I can only wonder, along with you and Martin Kilduff (1994), what it means for an organization's future when upper management consists disproportionately of HSMs who value form over substance. This also raises the question of the likely long-term career success of those promoted based on tailored images, in that, "self-promotion without the deliverables to support it" is one of the most common causes of failed careers (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995, p. 66). In this connection, Turnley and Bolino (2001) acknowledge the ability to manage impressions may be a helpful skill in some positions (e.g., short-interaction-relationship sales positions). They specifically caution, however, against allowing HSMs to get ahead in roles where their impression-management skills, rather than technical expertise, are less relevant.

Further, one might think that, given their impression-management skills, HSMs would be able to get along well with just about everyone. Nonetheless, research suggests that LSMs and HSMs experience particular difficulty when they are paired (Ickes & Barnes, 1977). One might speculate that LSMs object to the rhetoric–reality gap between what HSMs say and do and that LSM's interpersonal styles likely provide HSMs with few cues for bridging their individual differences (Goleman, 1985). The difficulties likely to result when HSMs and LSMs interact carry implications for superior–subordinate relationships and peer interactions, as well as forming workplace teams, committees, task forces, and other groups. Going beyond just the leadership literature and looking at decision making in top-management teams, what would you predict for the long-range future of an organization whose upper management is disproportionately populated with either LSMs or HSMs?

## 8. Job Performance: Contextual and Technical Expertise

An additional issue that naturally flows from the preceding discussion is the relationship between self-monitoring and job performance. Although some research has suggested HSMs outperform LSMs because they differentially occupy central positions in social networks (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001), I am more influenced in my thinking by your conclusion that it is helpful to consider different dimensions of job performance in considering whether such a relationship exists. To this end, your research with Paula Caligiuri (2000) has shown that LSMs (compared to HSMs) are more likely to demonstrate helping behaviors dealing with motivation, commitment, and maintaining good working relationships (i.e., aspects of contextual performance). You suggest this occurs because the inconsistency of HSMs' behavior is such that maintaining helping behaviors associated with contextual performance is difficult over time. You also note that as opportunists and pragmatists HSMs may not place the same importance on contextual performance as more principled LSMs. HSMs would be expected to engage in such behavior only when it would enhance their immediate self-presentations to relevant others.

At the same time, you saw no reason to expect a relationship between self-monitoring and technical performance dealing with technical knowledge and its application. This expectation was supported in your research. Although I am unable to offer an explanation for the inconsistent findings across performance dimensions, it seems to me that a preference for someone whose performance exhibits both contextual and technical expertise over someone who, although technically capable, only engages in helping behaviors when it is personally convenient to do so, is an easy call. Congruent with this notion, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) have already suggested that individual difference variables, such as self-monitoring, may be useful in selecting employees based on the likelihood that they will function effectively in several areas of contextual performance. In this respect, it does not surprise me that research has shown that, when compared to HSMs, LSMs possess greater vocational maturity as reflected in career knowledge and career decision-making skills (Blustein, 1987).

If one believes in leadership by example (as I do), LSMs with their penchant for being both good citizens and technically capable, would seem better role models than HSMs, who may be technically qualified, but concern themselves with important contextual demands only when it is to their personal advantage. Technical competence can never be gainsaid, but contextual activities—such as cooperating with others, volunteering for additional assignments, and following procedures even when they are personally inconvenient—are also a major aspect of workplace performance whose value cannot be minimized. Indeed, Borman and Motowidlo (1993) have estimated that some 30 percent of the variance in managerial performance may involve contextual performance. Finally, both your study with Caligiuri (2000) and the Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass (2001) study cited above relied on subjective-based performance ratings. Given the skill of HSMs at impression management, at least over the short-term, the use of objective performance measures in future studies would control for possible source bias. You and Caligiuri (2000) recognize the likelihood of HSMs using impression-management behaviors to influence supervisor performance ratings. You note that by rating the contextual performance of LSMs relatively higher, the raters in your study may have seen through the impression-management behavior of HSMs (p. 168).

More recent research extends this possibility. Warech, Smither, Reilly, Millsap, and Reilly (1998) report a positive relationship between self-monitoring ability and supervisor ratings of interpersonal effectiveness. In contrast, they uncovered a negative correlation between an individual's motivation to



engage in self-monitoring to control others' impressions and peers' ratings of the individuals' business competence. They speculate that this negative relationship may be due to peers suspecting that colleagues (i.e., HSMs) who rely on self-presentational strategies (e.g., "kissing up") to gain favor are attempting to overcome a lack of business competence by otherwise currying supervisor favor. As Warech et al. recognize, self-monitoring may be a double-edged sword, with both favorable and unfavorable consequences according to whose judgment is being applied—one's colleagues or one's peers. Ego-stroking one's boss may be one way to get ahead, but doesn't rewarding such truckling behavior tilt the playing field away from being a meritocracy?

## 9. Other Issues

In closing, there are other issues relating to self-monitoring that have always seemed worrisome to me, but these primarily relate to methodological concerns surrounding laboratory experiments using students to study the effects of self-monitoring and the question of whether self-monitoring is a discrete rather than a dimensional variable. Your *JAP* meta-analysis indicates that lab experiments generally produce stronger, but not significantly higher, correlations between self-monitoring and job performance/advancement than do field studies. In that lab experiments involve temporary settings in which participants seldom know one another intimately, I wonder if the impression-management behavior of HSMs might more easily go undetected in such a venue than in a more permanent setting where, over time, the chameleon-like nature of HSMs would come to be recognized by colleagues. Further, if HSMs are more responsive to situational cues, it follows that they should be especially sensitive to demand characteristics that exist within a lab setting. Recognizing this point, Ickes and Barnes (1977) go so far as to advise that it is "essential to create a [lab] situation in which social interaction would not be required of the subjects as a 'task' to be performed" (p. 317). Although I have not reviewed all the lab studies that report findings which favor HSMs when it comes to job performance/advancement or leadership emergence/effectiveness, some number of those I have perused did not follow Ickes and Barnes's advice and, thus, their results are open to alternative interpretations.

Whether self-monitoring is a discrete rather than a dimensional variable has been broadly debated. Gangestad and Snyder (1985) offer justification for considering self-monitoring to be a discrete class variable (represented by a fifty–fifty splitting of their subject samples). Others agree with Miller and Thayer's (1989) dissenting view that self-monitoring is best represented using multi-dimensional, continuously distributed scores. Putting this debate aside, what may be of interest is more recent research suggesting that whereas LSMs are generally a homogenous group, there are subpopulations of HSMs (Davier & Rost, 1997). Thus, the structure of self-monitoring as a construct may be more complex than most research to date indicates. Further, I must admit to questioning whether self-monitoring theorists have fallen into the trap of taking people at their word. HSMs report that they would make good actors, are the center of attention in groups, and are considered by others to be entertainers. Given that there is a positive correlation between impression management and self-deception (Viswesvaran, Ones, & Hough, 2001), I wonder, however, if this is mainly true in their minds and if data collected from others would undercut their claims that they possess superior social skills. In fact, I also wonder if there may be some people who are actually neither high nor low self-monitors, but are simply forced into one classification or the other by virtue of scoring above or below the median on a paper-and-pencil instrument.

This is complicated further, in that, Snyder has suggested that “many people have different [self-monitoring] orientations in various parts of their lives” (Snyder quoted in Goleman, 1985, p. C1). At work they may strive to impress their colleagues, whereas at home they may be more like their true selves. My reading of the self-monitoring literature suggests that most people are neither high nor low self-monitors. Rather, their interpersonal style depends on the social context of a particular situation. They are able to adapt themselves to new jobs, roles, and relationships. This jives with my own experience (and role theory) that very few people adopt one or another orientation in all situations. Thus, for individuals in the middle range (a majority of people), self-monitoring serves an adaptive function. By contrast, it has been suggested that individuals who are at either extreme in self-monitoring likely pay an emotional price and suffer from psychological problems (Goleman, 1985). LSMs who refuse to bend in the least so as to fit in, no doubt, incur social costs due to their rigidity. On the other hand, to the extent HSMs are overly concerned with making a good impression, they may virtually cease to exist as individuals of substance.

Lastly, I cannot help but notice that there appears little agreement across self-monitoring studies as to what “leadership” really means. In some studies, it is treated as being synonymous with holding an upper level position. Others use the term to mean the possession of certain personal characteristics. Finally, in some, leadership is used to describe a category of behavior in which an individual behaves in a certain manner, thereby influencing others to follow. This confusion, however, strikes me as endemic throughout the leadership literature and not just in studies investigating self-monitoring. In any case, it seems possible that divergent findings regarding the relationship between self-monitoring and leadership may simply reflect differences in how leadership is conceptualized from one study to the next or whether leader emergence rather than long-term leader effectiveness was a study’s focus. If, in your meta-analysis, studies with vastly different criteria for “leadership” and timeframes were combined, the resulting inferences may not reflect true underlying relationships.

## **10. A Worthy Puzzle**

Again, thank you for your willingness to engage in this exchange of thoughts. Reviewing what I have written, I continue to find the idea that HSMs are more likely than LSMs to emerge as leaders to be an enigma. What baffles me the most is how HSMs could ever qualify as legitimate leaders, when they are guided by signals bounced off others, are predisposed to engage in false fronts and opportunistic chameleon-like behavior, are less committed to their workplace colleagues and more likely to change employers, have less stable social bonds, engage in contextual job activities only when it is to their personal advantage, and their manipulative nature engenders distrust. In my view, HSMs stand in stark contrast to LSMs—who with their characteristic authentic selves, based on stable underlying values and beliefs as reflected in consistent behavior that engenders mutual trust, respect, emotional commitment, and loyalty—embody the essence of real leadership. What am I missing?

Sincerely,

Arthur G. Bedeian

Boyd Professor-Louisiana State University

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## Letter 2

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Dear Art:

Thank you for your interesting and provocative letter. You raised a number of important issues with regard to the relationship between self-monitoring personality and leadership—both in terms of theoretical linkages as well as empirical findings. In fact you raised so many good issues that it is difficult to know where to begin with my responses. Let me first clarify that by no means do I claim to be a definitive expert on these issues, but I do have some thoughts on many of the puzzles that you posed. Perhaps a fitting start point is to respond to a question near the end of your letter: How could high self-monitors ever qualify as legitimate leaders?

## 11. Flexibility and Conformity to Interpersonal Expectations

Leadership is based on social interaction and influence processes. Because of this, there can be no leadership without others to lead. Put the most brilliant and inspirational leader on a desert island alone—will there be any leadership? There can't be any leadership! The others needed for leadership to occur (i.e., “followers”) hold a lot of the cards in terms of whether or not leadership happens. So, turning your question around, why would other people allow high self-monitors to emerge as leaders? A core reason for this is that they like and identify with high self-monitors because they do a better job of meeting interpersonal expectations. Eagly and Karau (2002) have proposed a model of stereotyping and

prejudice against female leaders that is based on the important (and empirically supported) notion that violating others' expectations leads to dislike. Other research has shown that unmet expectations are associated with a lack of trust in leadership. Of course, this is not to say that low self-monitors never meet others' expectations; rather, high self-monitors are more highly motivated and are better able to do this (yes, they have greater ability!).

A particular challenge faced by the low self-monitoring interpersonal style is a lack of flexibility. Low self-monitors risk appearing dogmatic and self-righteous because of their unwillingness (and inability) to modify their opinions, beliefs, or behavior in order to get along with others. There is a fine line between being principled and being perceived as narrow-minded and rigid.

An interesting and relatively unexplored aspect of this interpersonal tendency is that low self-monitors should be less susceptible to leadership processes. Allowing oneself to be influenced requires a certain degree of conformity and it is the high self-monitors who are greater conformists (and thus are potentially better followers). They tend to go along with others' wishes and are influenced by the expectations of those in their social networks (at least until a better opportunity comes along). William H. Whyte's classic (1956) text on "the organization man" bemoaned the way in which organizations expected and exacted conformity from their employees. The high self-monitor would be all too willing to go along with those expectations. The up-side of conformity is that it likely contributes to their long-term career success. Consider all of the attention to person–organization fit in our field. Isn't fit just another manifestation of conformity? By being more of a non-conformist, the low self-monitor risks earning the label of a "difficult" employee who does not fit with prevailing organizational norms. As a result, career progression can be delayed or stymied altogether.

In a review of the literature on leadership and personality, Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994) assert that selection decisions regarding who to promote into middle management are mainly a function of "likeability and perceived ability to work with senior management" (p. 495). Getting along with others—especially powerful others—is an important skill for getting ahead in organizations, and ultimately, for effective performance as a leader. Indeed, Hogan et al. point out that selecting leaders based on technical ability alone often results in a double loss: An organization loses a good technical performer and acquires a manager whose talent for leadership is unknown.

## **12. Derailment**

You mention that you see the high self-monitor as often "more show than go" which can lead to their career derailment. Indeed, failing to meet business objectives is one such derailment factor that has been shown to recur across time and countries. The other three derailment factors summarized by Van Velsor and Leslie (1995) were (a) problems with interpersonal relationships, (b) failure to build and lead a team, and (c) inability to change or adapt during a transition. All three of these additional factors hold implications for self-monitoring. Being unable or unwilling to adapt can create problems in creating and maintaining effective working relationships, which in turn can provide interpersonal obstacles to building and leading a team. The inability to build and lead a team could be a primary cause for failing to meet business objectives. These are interrelated issues that provide more of a challenge to the low self-monitor than the high self-monitor. The origin of the challenge is that low self-monitors have a more difficult time getting along with others because of their relatively rigid interpersonal style. It can be hard to get along with someone who adopts a "take me or leave me" attitude.

### 13. Context Matters

You correctly point out that the construct of job performance is now widely acknowledged to be a function of both contextual as well as technical performance. You also cite my work with Paula Caligiuri (Caligiuri & Day, 2000) as evidence that low self-monitors are more likely to engage in helping behaviors associated with contextual performance than are high self-monitors. This is a fair assessment of our findings but somewhat of an oversimplification. An important aspect of this study was that it looked at the performance ratings of global assignees—those employees working in cultures other than their own and often reporting to supervisors of a different cultural background. One of our central hypotheses was that the background similarity between supervisors and expatriate subordinates would interact with self-monitoring in predicting performance ratings on different dimensions of performance (contextual, assignment-specific, and technical). This cultural similarity x self-monitoring interaction was indeed found but for only the contextual performance dimension. Low self-monitors were rated as demonstrating superior contextual performance especially when rated by a supervisor of a different cultural background. Our interpretation of this effect was that attempts at impression management directed at leaders from a dissimilar culture may be difficult to enact successfully even for the high self-monitor with superior impression management skills. Another aspect of these results, which we failed to explore in the paper, was that a possible reason why high self-monitors did not demonstrate greater levels of contextual performance was that they had difficulty interpreting cross-cultural cues for help. High self-monitors are very dependent on situational context and if that context is unfamiliar or perhaps even confusing (as a cross-cultural experience might be), it would pose obstacles to their sensemaking and ultimately impede effective performance. These context-based effects would be less likely to influence technical performance, however, given the lack of an interpersonal focus in enacting most technical skills. In short, much more research is needed on the relationship between self-monitoring and contextual performance before any firm conclusions can be drawn. But an important point to take away from the Caligiuri and Day study is that context really matters when the focus is self-monitoring.

### 14. Leader Emergence and Effectiveness

The role of others' ratings is very relevant to our discussion of leadership and self-monitoring. Specifically, it is applicable in attempting to distinguish leader emergence from leader effectiveness. A primary conceptual difference is that leader emergence pertains to perceiving someone as a leader whereas leader effectiveness tends to be evaluated in terms of team, group, or organizational performance (Hogan et al., 1994). Empirically, the distinction between these constructs gets pretty fuzzy because both are typically measured in terms of others' ratings. Leader emergence is measured in terms of supervisor, peer, or subordinate ratings of how leader-like someone appears. Leader effectiveness is usually measured in terms of supervisor, peer, or subordinate ratings of individual leader performance. In practice, however, both types of ratings are influenced by the implicit leadership theories of respondents and thus it is very difficult to disentangle emergence from effectiveness.

Beginning with the research of Staw (1975), researchers have shown that group members who received bogus group performance feedback distorted their group process ratings in the direction of that feedback. Subsequent research demonstrated that this *performance cue effect* also occurred with

impartial group observers. The point is that identifying a “real” or “true” leader is not as simple or straightforward as it might seem. People develop cognitive schemas that integrate all of the various expectations and beliefs that are held implicitly regarding leaders and leadership. One of the strongest beliefs central to most implicit leadership theories is that good group performance is the result of effective leadership. Thus, if raters are led to believe that a group is high (or low) performing then the “cause” of that performance must be effective (or ineffective) leadership. Behaviorally based ratings completed subsequently about a group leader would reflect the particular performance prime because of the mediating role of implicit leadership theories. In short, implicit leadership theories bias perceptions of who is leader-like and distort ratings of individual leader effectiveness. If someone is perceived as a leader, effectiveness is usually inferred. If effectiveness is assumed (or primed), leadership is attributed to a salient group member or formal leader. Understanding who is a real leader often comes down to a matter of perceptions and those perceptions are influenced by a host of socio-perceptual factors.

We need much more (and better) research on the long-term effectiveness of leaders beyond demonstrating that leadership makes a difference to group and organizational performance. As noted recently, “Such questions as how or why leaders affect outcomes remain largely uncharted and poorly understood” (Lord & Brown, 2004, p. 3). Furthermore, other authors lament that “we know surprisingly little about how leaders create and manage effective teams” (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001, p. 452). Mapping the criterion space of effective leadership-independent of others’ perceptions and ratings—is of paramount importance in moving the leadership field forward.

The reasons why high self-monitors might emerge more often as leaders seem pretty straightforward. The evidence indicates that they tend to be more extraverted than low self-monitors, are more likely to be situationally appropriate, have better control over their expressive behavior, and are flexible and adaptable with regard to their attitudes and behavior. All of these actions and characteristics increase the high self-monitor’s salience and likeability in a group. The reasons why high self-monitors might be more effective as leaders may seem less intuitively obvious, but exist nonetheless. Much of the literature on leadership takes a *leader-centric* approach in that individual leaders are thought to directly cause better team performance or improve organizational outcomes. What often gets overlooked is that the so-called followers are active participants in the leadership process who bring about the desirable outcomes that are often attributed to their leaders (Lord & Brown, 2004). Follower attitudes and behaviors mediate the relationship between leader traits and behaviors and observable outcomes. In short, a leader’s performance is very much a function of what their followers do.

## 15. Relationship Imperative

A question to consider is what is the work of a leader? I believe that the essence of being a good leader is building effective working relationships because functional relationships form the basis of social interaction and influence. This perspective is supported by Gabarro (1987) who wrote that “The importance of interpersonal relationships as an aspect of management is documented in study after study of managerial behavior, regardless of national culture or type of management job” (p. 172). Although there are certainly important differences between leadership and management, the need to build effective working relationships is something that I believe they hold in common. Relationships are at the core of social capital, which I have argued is essential for leadership development in organizations (Day, 2000). Effective relationships also hold the key for developing personal sources of power beyond position-



based sources of reward, coercive, and legitimate power. A more widely developed repertoire of power allows for greater opportunities to influence others beyond what is provided by whatever formal position is held in an organization. As others have noted, leadership is a process not a position.

Research and theory suggest that there are important differences in how high and low self-monitors build and manage interpersonal relationships. Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass (2001) reported that self-monitoring was positively related to network centrality among members of a high-technology firm. High self-monitors were more likely to connect otherwise unconnected others in a workflow network. Occupying these kinds of “structural holes” is associated with gaining a competitive advantage in organizations and is entirely consistent with a status-enhancement motive that is thought to drive the behavior of high self-monitors (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). It also helps build the social capital of organizations (i.e., it is not completely self-serving). Low self-monitors, on the other hand, tend to build relationships with those who are similar to themselves resulting in more homogenous social networks (Day & Kilduff, 2003).

There are likely to be important leadership implications associated with these different tendencies. From the perspective of leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, the tendency to build relationships mainly with similar others could lead to highly differentiated in-groups and out-groups. Being willing and able to initiate high-quality working relationships with all members of a team is thought to be important for maximizing group and organizational performance. Although research is needed to test this hypothesis, high self-monitors may be more likely to negotiate high-quality exchanges with a greater number of associates. A key proposition of LMX theory is that effective leadership eschews an “average leadership style” in that effective leaders treat their associates differently depending on their needs. Because of their more flexible interpersonal style, high self-monitors would be expected to be better at enacting individualized leadership approaches across associates.

## **16. Interpersonal Motives in Image Management**

I mentioned the work of Gangestad and Snyder (2000), who speculated that high and low self-monitors operate under different interpersonal motives. Specifically, they offered that high self-monitors operate under a status-enhancement motive with regard to image projection, whereas low self-monitors are guided by a self-verification motive in their interpersonal relations. Certain important distinctions are necessary regarding these motives. Most important, status enhancement is not the same as self enhancement. In their review of the literature on motives of the self in social contexts, Banaji and Prentice (1994) discuss self-enhancement as an ongoing drive to have a positive sense of self, which is “presumably rooted in a more basic tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain” (p. 299). Other research has shown that self-enhancement in ratings of leadership ability was negatively related to subordinate’s reported liking of the leader and subordinate’s perceptions of LMX quality (Engle & Lord, 1997). Self-enhancement motives apparently undermine effective leadership. The motive of status enhancement, however, pertains to the desire to impress others by acting in situationally appropriate ways as well as doing things to enhance one’s own status (e.g., affiliating with others of perceived high status). It is interesting to note that according to the socioanalytic theory of relationships there are fundamental, biologically based drives associated with being liked and attaining status—what has been termed getting along and getting ahead (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). In particular “interpersonal success requires maintaining a balance between egocentric drives for status and

sociocentric drives for popularity” (Hogan, Jones, & Cheek, 1985, p. 191). Based on research and theory, it makes sense to think of high self-monitors as having both a stronger drive for status as well as being better able to balance these competing drives. High self-monitors are better at getting along and getting ahead.

## 17. Ethics and Trust

An implicit message in your letter, Art, seemed to be an expression of a strong sense of injustice because of the tendency for high self-monitors to get along and get ahead in organizations. In other words, this may be the way it is but is it the way it should be? Issues that you raised around ethics and trust deserve particular attention with regard to the justice issue, as well as their significance in these times of individual and corporate scandal and malfeasance. Something worth noting about self-monitoring and ethics is that the context matters. If a high self-monitor is employed by an organization in which ethical behavior is expected—it sounds funny saying that ethical behavior might not be expected but there are those kinds of organizations—then behavior will likely adhere to prevailing norms and values. The particular risk is when there are no clear expectations or when the prevailing culture encourages results at any cost (e.g., the “crooked E” of Enron). But this does not mean that low self-monitors necessarily will be more ethical organizational actors. It depends on their values. I am reminded of Gordon Gecko of the movie *Wall Street* with his credo “greed is good.” We could debate whether or not he was a high or low self-monitor but his greedy behavior did correspond closely to his fundamental philosophy, which is a hallmark of a low self-monitor. The protégé who succumbs to Gecko’s influence might be seen as the prototypical high self-monitor who conforms to the dominant philosophy (at least for awhile). So I do not believe that low self-monitors would automatically be ethical leaders because they follow an internal compass. It depends on the underlying values that are guiding a leader’s behavior. Which direction does the internal compass point?

I completely agree with your statement that trust is critical to leadership. Being able to predict someone’s behavior (i.e., consistency and predictability) is likely to enhance trust—of course provided that you like what you see. For example, if you know that if you disagreed with your boss that he or she would demonstrate displeasure by yelling or ridicule or other dominance strategies, how likely will you be to trust this leader? My guess is that even though this boss is completely consistent and predictable, he or she will not garner much trust from subordinates.

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) found that unmet expectations were associated with lower trust in leadership. One of the hallmarks of high self-monitors is that they act in situationally appropriate ways that help to meet the expectations of others. The expressive behavior of low self-monitors, however, “are not controlled by deliberate attempts to appear situationally appropriate” (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000, p. 531). You can trust the high self-monitor to do what is appropriate in a given situation and you can trust the low self-monitor to act in ways that accurately reflect their inner attitudes, emotions, and dispositions. The high self-monitor is more likely to meet others’ expectations whereas the low self-monitor is likely to be true to him- or herself, regardless of others’ expectations. If you care little of others’ expectations, they will like and trust you less.

Your point is well-taken with regard to commitment because we know that high self-monitors have lower overall commitment to relationships and organizations than low self-monitors. What we do not

know empirically are the long-term effects on trust of these “less committed and stable social bonds” (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000, p. 547). Longitudinal research is sorely needed to address this important question. It also deserves noting that trust is a reciprocal effect. In elaborating on a model of relational leadership, Brower, Schoorman, and Tan (2000) proposed that a key factor was the degree of trust that leaders have in subordinates. Subordinates with dissimilar core values are unlikely to be trusted by a low self-monitoring leader. This lack of trust could also be a side effect of highly differentiated in-groups and out-groups on the part of low self-monitoring leaders. Research is needed to test these possibilities, however, before any firm conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between self-monitoring and the propensity to trust.

## **18. Other Issues**

You raised a number of other issues dealing mainly with the nature of the self-monitoring construct that deserve some response. I will not go into all of these issues or in much detail because I see them as somewhat tangential to the core issue of the relationship between leadership and self-monitoring, and this letter is already lengthy. You suggest that low self-monitors may have the ability to project favorable self-images but lack the motivation to do so. The research evidence, however, suggests that high self-monitors have superior ability to accurately perceive social cues and are better at expressive control of emotions than low self-monitors (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). The latter is notable because it is a fundamental component of emotional intelligence, which has been linked theoretically and empirically with leadership. But the research evidence indicates both an ability and motivation difference between high and low self-monitors.

You claim that “high self-monitors” is an infelicitous term (I had to look that one up!) and suggest that a more accurate label would be “high other-monitors.” Gangestad and Snyder (2000) disagree. Based on a quantitative review of the literature, they were unequivocal in their conclusion that researchers should refrain from claims that the forms of impression management associated with the Self-Monitoring involve close attention and responsiveness to other people. This is because close attention and responsiveness to others could be manifested in defensive and socially ineffective forms of adaptation. Gangestad and Snyder prefer to interpret individual differences in self-monitoring as variations in predispositions to engage in particular forms of impression management that pertain to status-based image projection designed to bring about favorable outcomes (p. 546).

Several psychometric issues were mentioned, including whether self-monitoring is best considered a continuous or discrete class variable, high self-monitors as a potentially heterogeneous group, the Self-Monitoring scale as a self-report measure of personality, and situational variability. Responding to each of these issues individually is beyond the scope of the present letter. Nonetheless, there is little debate that self-monitoring is one of the most heavily researched personality constructs in social and applied psychology. There have been literally hundreds of studies published that have investigated empirically how self-monitoring is related to other variables. The results show that it demonstrates good convergent and discriminant validity and that it predicts many work-related variables. In sum, there is ample evidence for the construct validity of self-monitoring.

Overall, the issues addressed in your letter raise a more fundamental ontological question about the construction of self. You assert that high self-monitors may “virtually cease to exist as individuals of

substance.” High self-monitors may indeed become those (positive) images that they cultivate and project. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, tend to look within to understand the nature of being. In this way high self-monitors may be more socially constructed beings whereas low self-monitors are self-constructed. This raises a number of philosophical questions about how we construct ourselves and our social worlds with potentially profound implications for the study of interpersonal behavior in leadership contexts. It is indeed a worthy puzzle.

Sincerely,  
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### Letter 3

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Dear Dave:

I truly appreciate your thoughtful response to my initial letter. Your comments on what we both see as a worthy puzzle are quite helpful in my efforts to square findings from the self-monitoring theory literature with what is known about leadership. My bottom-line assessment at this point aligns with your own conclusion that further work is sorely needed to address the various issues that seem to perplex us both. If the present exchange piques the interest of others and prompts additional research, our efforts will have served an even larger salutary goal. In particular, as I note below and as you also suggest, diachronic studies that view the interplay between self-monitoring and leadership would seem necessary to advance our current understanding of the long-term effects of self-monitoring on either leader emergence or effectiveness, especially in naturally occurring interactions. In this respect, the heavy reliance on laboratory methods in ad hoc groups to understand the contrasting orientations of high versus low self-monitors still gives me pause. This is a point to which I will return shortly.

### 19. Interpersonal Expectations

Not to be too slow on the uptake, I am unclear about your suggestion that HSMs are “allowed” to emerge as leaders because they are liked and that people identify with them because they do a better job of meeting others’ interpersonal expectations. Whereas I can agree with your notion that violating others’ expectations leads to being disliked, I am less comfortable with the belief that HSMs have a greater ability to meet others’ expectations as leaders. My discomfort in this regard may reflect a differing time perceptiveness than that reflected in most research. It is easy for me to understand how, in episodic relationships, chameleon-like HSMs might get away with tailoring their self-presentations to the moment, but what I do not follow is how, in the fullness of time, one would not expect others to not only

see through the underlying tendencies of HSMs to say or do whatever it takes to get their way, but also to find such behavior to be both duplicitous and reprehensible. The old saying, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me,” quickly comes to mind.

Over time, groups of all sorts develop their own histories and unique normative structures. My personal experience suggests that HSMs are quite adept at maintaining false fronts in interactions involving a limited duration, but with time are quite easily seen as individuals who stand for little which is constant. Returning to a point above, this is precisely why I question the generalizability of the many lab studies involving self-monitoring behavior. As opposed to groups that remain intact, lab groups that disband after a brief period do not allow for the playing out of ongoing relationships. Their external validity is thus necessarily limited.

## 20. Trust and Flexibility

We are in complete agreement that mutual trust is critical to effective leadership and that being able to predict someone’s behavior is likely to enhance such trust. Where we seem to view things differently is my belief that once trust is lost, as a result of HSMs’ true selves being revealed (when it is realized that they will do or say whatever is expedient), HSMs will be exposed as lacking a crucial quality (viz., trustworthiness) necessary for leadership. If I have correctly interpreted your argument, you contend that the chameleon-like jockeying of HSMs is a mark of flexibility and, thus, a plus lacking in LSMs, whom you see as being narrow-minded and rigid.

Let me hasten to agree that individuals who can sense and articulate changing social landscapes would logically seem more likely to emerge as leaders. I am unaware of any research, however, suggesting that LSMs are inept in this regard. Indeed, evidence I cite in my last letter (“A Misconception: Unmotivation or Inability?”) indicates HSMs and LSMs process contextual cues in a similar fashion, indicating that HSMs and LSMs are equally accurate in their assessments of others’ self-disclosures. Moreover, I would once again argue that LSMs, with their established values and beliefs, are actually better suited for a world of change because they are able to shepherd a central idea through continually evolving circumstances, while maintaining a clear and stable identity. This contrasts with HSMs, who possess an exceptional sensitivity to the actions and wishes of others and are driven by an insatiable need for the respect and affection of an amorphous and shifting jury of relevant others.

This recalls my memories of an upper level administrator with whom we both once worked. An HSM, he was especially noted for agreeing with the last person with whom he spoke, and his decisions reflected this proclivity. Indeed, he could change his mind innumerable times between leaving his office and crossing campus, depending on the number of people he encountered on the way. Some may see this as a sign of flexibility, but (in my book) hardly the essence of true leadership or as a means for better fulfilling others’ expectations. If such people are in fact leading, is it hard for me to believe that they know where their leading is leading to. Drucker (1996) has argued that a leader’s greatest temptation is to do things that are popular rather than right. With this in mind, it just seems to me that HSMs are much more likely to fall victim to this temptation than their LSM counterparts.

This said, I do agree with your belief that there is a fine line between being principled and being closed-minded and inflexible. The proportion of the population that would fall into this latter category is uncertain. Granted, it may include a percentage of individuals who are extreme LSMs. At the same time, I suspect there is an equally fine line between being unprincipled and being open-minded and flexible. It

has been suggested that individuals who are at the extreme in either direction of self-monitoring likely suffer from psychological problems (Goleman, 1985). Thus, LSMs who refuse to bend in the least, no doubt, incur social costs due to their rigidity. On the other hand, HSMs who are overly obsequious, in the hope of maintaining a favorable public image, may virtually cease to exist as individuals of substance.

## 21. Self-Determining Freedom and Authenticity

As you recognize, this last point raises a number of philosophical questions about how individuals construct themselves and their social worlds and carries profound implications for the study of interpersonal behavior in leadership contexts. Your comments in this regard bring to mind what Taylor (1991) terms “self-determining freedom” (p. 27). Writing in his book *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor argues that we are free when we decide for ourselves what concerns us rather than allowing ourselves to be shaped by external influences (i.e., contextual cues). He maintains that such freedom only comes when we break the hold of external impositions and behave in a manner that accurately reflects our authentic selves. In Taylor’s view, it is only then that one’s true self emerges. Rather than reiterate my earlier thoughts (“Radar and Gyroscopic People”) on the merits of being what Branden (1969) tagged a “self-generator,” I will only add that it seems to me that Taylor’s logic likewise suggests that LSMs, who shun layers of artificiality so that their true selves emerge, are more likely to be leaders than HSMs, who lack authentic (clear and stable) identities.

Friedman and Lobel’s (2003) observations on the importance of authenticity for providing the personal and organizational support that employees need to find workplace satisfaction seem particularly pertinent in this regard. Especially relevant to the present discussion is Friedman and Lobel’s argument that “authentic leaders, whose actions express what is most important to them, approach their work filled with passion and commitment to their people” and, in so doing, create shared understandings that are responsive to change and growth (p. 90). This perhaps explains why, in comparison to HSMs, LSMs display greater commitment to personal (Snyder & Simpson, 1984) and work relationships (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002).

Let me hasten to say that I agree with your belief that LSMs are not automatically more likely to be ethical leaders because they follow an internal compass, but, rather, it depends on their underlying values. Following Bickle (2000), however, I do view values as an important aspect of one’s self-concept, defining what one considers being fundamentally right or wrong. Given that LSMs have internal guidance systems based on solid values, it seems to me that they are more likely to be more principled in their choices than HSMs, who receive signals from many directions and sources—both of which may change rapidly. Indeed, this may well explain why HSMs, relative to LSMs, are more willing to engage in deception and information manipulation as they seek to further their own entitlements (see my first letter where I contrasted pragmatism versus principles).

Your suggestion that LSMs risk appearing dogmatic and self-righteous for not demonstrating a more “get-along-go-along” style in their workplace relationships, however, does merit comment. Upon being labeled as inflexible, a low-self-monitoring orientation may be mistakenly equated with possible authoritarianism and difficulties in getting along with others. Doing so, however, seems inconsistent with your own observation that LSMs (relative to HSMs), are “motivated primarily by the desire to build close social relationships of mutual trust” (Day & Kilduff, 2003, p. 219). On a personal level, the authoritarian bosses I’ve known were exactly that—bosses and not leaders—and

far from being interested in close relationships or mutual trust. In any case, at least one executive coach reports finding that authenticity—a characteristic that defines LSMs (and is lacking in HSMs)—is of such importance that despite everything else, authoritarian “leaders” who are also authentic outperform and engender greater trust than their artificial counterparts (Cashman, 1998, pp. 47–51).

In sum, being consistent in one’s actions and standing for well-defined principles does seem essential for a copacetic and productive workplace. In my experience, the fact that HSMs are willing to do and say whatever it takes to get what they want is a transparent characteristic that becomes all the more evident with time. It may be a redolent question, but I still wonder what happens to HSMs when they must present true and honest images to other people.

## 22. Profiles in Courage

Further in this regard, various essays in the book *Profiles in Courage* (Kennedy, 2002) reinforce my thoughts. The Profile in Courage Award is presented by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation to honor individuals who have demonstrated leadership in bringing about change for the greater good. As described in the essays, award recipients saw standing for their principles to be a mark of courage. Some might say they crossed that fine line you mentioned between being principled and being closed-minded and inflexible. It seems to me, however, that rather than being characterized as closed-minded and inflexible, all could just as accurately be described as independently minded and able, willing to stand up for their values. Each of the award recipients would, in my judgment, easily qualify as a LSM. None would be described as waiting to see what other people said before knowing what they thought or believed. As LSMs are apt to do, the award recipients all placed their principles before their self-interests to look beyond such immediate concerns as portraying a desired public image or furthering their own entitlements. This is not to say, however, that they were unaware of their impact on others. To the contrary, most recognized that it would be much easier to forsake their principles and be pragmatic, “going along to get along”.

All this is perhaps a long way of coming to the realization that the weaknesses of *both* LSMs and HSMs may also be their strengths. The world no doubt needs individuals (HSMs) capable of garnering signals from their surroundings and then molding their images (however plastic) accordingly. At the same time, the presence of individuals (LSMs) who use knowledge of their own values to prod colleagues to follow the less popular road would also seem essential. Perhaps this is why such likely LSM corporate icons as Jack Welch, Andy Grove, and Larry Bossidy have obtained heroic status as world-class leaders. Each is known for behaving in a manner that accurately reflects his authentic self and for pushing others to question their accepted ways of doing things.

## 23. Conformity and Followership

Your observations on the possible relationship between self-monitoring and followership are intriguing. I agree that a certain degree of conformity would seem to be a requisite for allowing oneself to be influenced. The question would seem to be, however, “what degree?” In my view, contrary to what



you speculate, it does not necessarily follow that simply because HSMs are more susceptible to influence than LSMs and, thus, are potentially greater conformists, they are likely to be “better” followers. Perhaps this is where your legitimate concern with context might play a role.

It seems to me that in a world that is less and less predictable, it would be easy to argue that organizations need greater diversity in thinking and less conformity as they strive to generate new strategic options. If everyone thinks alike (i.e., conforms), all save one are redundant. This explains why companies such as GE spend large sums each year trying to develop employees who can think on their own and resist bureaucratic pressures to conform. Rather than being seen as “difficult” (your word), these people are viewed as “A” players, inventing GE’s future. It may sound odd, but GE purports to be trying to create a culture where leaders lead other leaders. In a sense, nonconforming is the norm or, as former GE CEO Jack Welch (2001) explained, “In manufacturing, we try to stamp out variance. With people, variance is everything” (p. 157). To this end, you’ll note that none of the three contenders for Welch’s job at GE was a Jack clone.

Admittedly, there has to be *balance* between being a rebel and being an automaton if one is to experience long-term career success. Your belief that conformity contributes to such success caught me off guard. As someone who has edited the autobiographies (Bedeian, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 1998, 2002a) of more than 60 of the current generation’s leading management scholars, I can readily vouch that their career successes did not come from being conformists, but rather from being independent thinkers willing to endure the wrath associated with challenging established paradigms and offering new ideas. Such nonconformity may be more easily accomplished in an academic context than in other settings, but then none of the likely LSM corporate icons I mentioned above are known for achieving career success by being conformists. This is not to say, however, that in some organizations conformity is not prized as an attribute. It has been my experience that such organizations typically suffer from an abuse of power at the top that encourages sycophancy (Bedeian, 2002b) and, over time, they come to experience the so-called “cesspool syndrome” (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1998), wherein incompetence can perversely lead to success.

## 24. Leader Emergence and Extraversion

Moving on, it seems to me that the leadership literature is also conflicted on an additional point as to why HSMs, relative to LSMs, are thought to be more likely to emerge as leaders. You attribute this increased likelihood to evidence suggesting HSMs are apt to be more extraverted than LSMs. What seems odd is that research likewise indicates that individuals in work contexts seek evidence of conscientiousness from others, but are indifferent to indications of extraversion (Williams, Munick, Saiz, & FormyDuval, 1995). This finding is further convoluted with data showing that impression–management (à la HSMs) is correlated with bias scores of agreeableness and conscientiousness (Pauls & Stemmler, 2003). This suggests the possibility that, to the extent self-monitoring theorists have fallen into the trap of taking people at their word, the conclusions of previous investigations into leadership and self-monitoring that have depended on self-report data may be suspect. Further, as Pauls and Stemmler specifically conclude, whereas impression managers may attempt to portray themselves according to their exaggerated pretensions, they are seldom able to fully to comply with their ideals in everyday life (p. 271).

Reflecting on my own experiences, two thoughts occur. First, it has been my experience such pretensions on the part of HSMs generally lead to conflict and resentment within a work group. How

this jives with the notion that an HSM orientation (as opposed to a “what-you-see-is-what-you-get” LSM orientation) is conducive to furthering effective long-term working relationships is beyond me. Second, it also seems possible that, because of their inability to fulfill their exaggerated pretensions, HSMs are not only more likely to evidence a self-enhancement bias, but also a harsh or negativity bias in judging and dealing with others. Amabile and Glazebrook (1981) have speculated on this possibility, suggesting that a tendency to derogate others in the interests of self-enhancement may be one approach HSMs use to control the images they project in social interactions and, thus, conclude “it might be wise to accept ‘with a grain of salt’” their evaluations of others. Simply put, for me, such antics rob HSMs of the moral authority required to be an effective leader and, I suspect, would likewise do little to further, as you speculate, their efforts to negotiate high-quality exchanges with their workplace associates.

I am aware in using the term “self-enhancement” in the preceding paragraph that, as you have noted, Gangestad and Snyder (2000) suspect HSMs operate under a status-oriented impression-management motive rather than a self-enhancement motive, which you view as being inimical to effective leadership. You further suggest that it is reasonable to think of HSMs as having a stronger drive for status, as well as being better able to balance this drive with a desire to be popular. From what little I seem to know, and in line with what you have reasoned elsewhere (Day & Kilduff, 2003, pp. 210–211), I see status-cultivating activities as a tactic for enhancing one’s self. Further, how drives for popularity on the part of HSMs mesh with their tendencies to seek less committed and stable social bonds seems difficult to reconcile with a supposed yearning to be popular. In speculation, Gangstead and Snyder (2000) offer that HSMs “may be more invested in negotiating status with unequal-status social structures than in establishing and maintaining equal-status bonds,” whereas LSMs “may be particularly invested in close social relationships in which they and their partners can be trusted” (p. 547). How this plays into your conclusion that this difference somehow makes HSMs “better at getting along and getting ahead” is something I’ll definitely have to think about further. I guess I see investing in relationships centered on trust as being more conducive to effective leadership than those in which the participating parties (e.g., leaders and followers) attempt to use one another to enhance their status.

## 25. Conclusion

Whereas it is no doubt obvious that there is much more I don’t comprehend with regard to self-monitoring and leadership, I have already over imposed on your good graces and will thus close. In re-reading what I have written, it does occur to me that discussions of this nature generally seem to be cast in extremes. Comments such as “HSMs are this” and “LSMs are that” strike me as caricatures rather than descriptions of real life. Viewed dichotomously, it has been estimated that HSMs comprise 41 percent of the population, with the remaining 59 percent being LSMs (Snyder, 1986, p. 162). As I noted in my initial letter, however, my reading of the self-monitoring literature suggests that most people are neither high nor low self-monitors. Hence, I questioned the notion that most people are either-or, one or the other, as they move throughout their lives. You’ve stressed the importance of context when focusing on self-monitoring and, although, self-monitoring is generally construed as an individual difference variable, of temporal and situational stability, I likewise suspect, as you say, “context really matters.” Thus, for what I believe is the great majority of people who fall within the middle range, self-monitoring

serves an adaptive function. Most people are able to adapt their interpersonal style to the social context of a particular situation and in so doing face life's many daily ups and downs.

As for those who may be following our correspondence, I can only suggest that they keep a wide-open mind when trying to square findings from the self-monitoring theory literature with what is known about leadership. Not all the right angles are hospital-bed neat nor the linkages straight. In particular, a lack of information regarding the long-term effects of self-monitoring on either leader emergence or effectiveness, especially in naturally occurring interactions, and the question of what happens to HSMS when they must present true and honest images to other people, are two blanks that await empirical inquiry. In closing, let me thank you for your patience in guiding me through the self-monitoring maze. I have benefited greatly from your work and insights.

Sincerely,  
Arthur G. Bedeian  
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#### Letter 4

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Dear Art:

Yet another provocative letter from you! Again you raise many important issues in considering the relationship between self-monitoring and leadership. In further exploring the question of whether chameleons can lead, I think there are two critical distinctions that should be emphasized: (a) The difference between leader emergence versus leader effectiveness; and (b) taking a broader perspective on the nature of leadership processes, especially with regard to formal versus informal leadership. Please allow me to elaborate a bit on each of these. Doing so will help (I hope) in clarifying how I see the issues covered in your most recent letter.

In my previous letter I attempted to summarize what I thought was pertinent research on the role of leader emergence as compared with leadership effectiveness. In short, the kinds of personal qualities and behaviors that get you recognized as a leader may be different from those that contribute to successful performance as a leader. Thus, there is a central leadership paradox regarding the emergence of leaders and their ultimate effectiveness. Whereas we know a good deal about those personal qualities and behaviors that predict who tends to emerge as leaders (including self-monitoring), we know relatively little about leader effectiveness. This is no doubt due in large part to

the complex nature of the effectiveness construct (Connolly, Conlon, & Deutsch, 1980). Do high self-monitors have a difficult time “delivering the goods” as leaders? I think that is a distinct possibility (especially in very visible, formal leadership positions) but there is a dearth of empirical research that supports this hypothesis.

The other distinction concerns formal versus informal leadership. A number of the examples that you provided of “corporate icons” (e.g., Welch, Grove, Bossidy) are clearly very visible leaders who held (or presently hold) formal leadership positions. But much of the work of leadership occurs informally by people well below the CEO level and who hold no official leadership title. There is an emerging appreciation of the role of informal leadership processes in making things happen. Anyone can participate in informal leadership because it doesn’t require a position or a title. Because of their noted ability to get along with others and to build social capital through relationships, it is not surprising that high self-monitors tend to emerge as informal leaders more often than low self-monitors.

As mentioned, these are two overarching points that I wanted to re-emphasize before addressing the issues highlighted in your letter. Now let me turn my attention to those.

## **26. Interpersonal Expectations**

I stated in my first letter that high self-monitors are more highly motivated and better able to meet others’ expectations than low self-monitors. You qualified this statement saying that you are uncomfortable with the belief that high self-monitors are better able to meet others’ expectations **as leaders**. Big difference! This gets into the emergence/effectiveness issue directly. Meeting others’ interpersonal expectations gets one recognized as a leader (or potential leader), which is important because it increases the likelihood of allowing oneself to be influenced. We are less likely to allow ourselves to be influenced by those who do not appear to be leader-like in our eyes. What is not known is whether that same individual who meets the interpersonal expectations to be seen as a leader subsequently meets the leadership expectations of that person. People expect all kinds of things from their leaders, but most especially they expect their leader to bring about successful outcomes (see the discussion of performance cue effects in my previous letter). Are high self-monitors more likely to be effective and successful leaders according to this outcome-based criterion? That is exactly the kind of question that awaits empirical test.

Another aspect of this issue of interpersonal expectations needs further clarification. The wording and tone of some of your comments leads me to believe that you view high self-monitors as inherently duplicitous. I don’t think that is necessarily the case at all. Often the interpersonal expectations of others are aligned rather than misaligned. For example, most people want others to be friendly and supportive, open and engaging. High self-monitors are better at tailoring their self-presentations in ways that meet these expectations. The behaviors they use to do this may vary across situations. However, I do not believe (or have seen any evidence) that high self-monitors are completely disingenuous or duplicitous in their social interactions. Implying that high self-monitors have some sort of character flaw because they are likely to be flexible in how they meet others’ interpersonal expectations is bordering on the kind of caricature that you correctly warn against drawing.

## 27. Trust and Flexibility

Although this might seem a little off-point, please bear with me because I think it is relevant to the issues of trust and flexibility. As part of its fundamental doctrine on leadership (Field Manual No. 1, 2001, <http://www.adtdl.army.mil/cgi-bin/atdl.dll/fm/1/ch1.htm#1-5>), the U.S. Army highlights that their leaders need to be both adaptive and self-aware:

Self-awareness and adaptivity are symbiotic. A self-aware leader who is not adaptive cannot learn to accept change and modify behavior brought about by changes in the environment. However, adapting without self-awareness is changing for change's sake—without understanding the relationship between abilities, duties, and the environment.

Adaptivity as the Army defines it is similar to the notion of flexibility as you and I have proposed it. I believe that we are in agreement that high self-monitors are more flexible (and thus more adaptive) than lows. Correct me if I am wrong, but I get the sense that you believe that it is the low self-monitor who is likely to be more self-aware. So it appears that we are faced with yet another paradox with regard to self-monitoring and leadership—or are we? Research on the topic of managerial self-awareness (Church, 1997) found that high self-monitors were more self-aware than lows; furthermore, self-awareness was significantly related to high potential status as a manager. Those managers that were identified as high potentials were more self-aware than average potential managers. If you buy into the Army's claim that the ideal "type" of Army leader is adaptive and self-aware, it is the high self-monitor who is more likely to fit that type. I doubt that you would argue that those Army leaders singled out as having high adaptivity and self-awareness—men such as MacArthur, Ridgway, Grant, and Sherman (oops, sorry!)—could be accused of doing things that were popular rather than right.

Whether or not you agree with the Army's assessment of what it takes to lead is not as important as the point that these types of motives or characteristics rarely if ever work alone. Rather, there are constellations of motives that guide our behavior. It is also easy to slip into the mindset that those who are adaptive and self-aware will always be high self-monitors. We are talking about human behavior where we know that the correlations between personality and behavior hardly ever exceed .30 and are usually much lower (unless you "correct" the heck out of them in a meta-analysis). Our science is one that is based on tendencies and not absolutes.

## 28. Self-Determining Freedom and Authenticity

It is a mistake to conclude that high self-monitors are without values because they tend to operate under a status-enhancement motive and engage in more effective impression management. Instead, I think that they have well-entrenched values around the importance of getting along with others. As noted in my previous letter, Hogan and his colleagues have noted that this type of motive or value is quite important (do I dare say adaptive?) from an evolutionary perspective. Also, impression management is not ipso facto deceitful or manipulative. It can be beneficial not only to the actor but also to the audience (see Moberg, 1989).

I also feel compelled to comment on your observation that it is the low self-monitor who has the stronger desire to build close social relationships. This may be so; however, it comes at a cost. The

literature on social networks has shown that developing and maintaining strong ties with others is a time-consuming and effortful process. We do not have an unlimited store of the resources needed to have very many close relationships with others. Whereas it is more likely the case for low self-monitors to be guided by the desire to build close social relationships of mutual trust, the number of such relationships is necessarily small. This limited number of close relationships may be insufficient for effective leadership. It may be the individual who fosters many weak ties that connect otherwise unconnected individuals who builds the type of social capital that is needed to for successful adaptation in turbulent environments. At minimum, the work of Ron Burt has shown that individuals who occupy structural holes (i.e., those who connect unconnected others) are more likely to get ahead than those embedded in a network of strong ties with redundant connections (Burt, 1992). Again the evidence points to the superior ability of the high self-monitor to get along and get ahead, which puts them in more of an advantageous position when it comes to leadership.

### **29. Profiles in Courage**

Every society has its heroes, and ours is no exception. Are these heroes more likely to be low or high self-monitors? I think any answer to that question is mostly speculation. But I do believe that there are many ways to enact—or participate in—leadership. Taking on the heroic task of bringing about change for the greater good could be certainly seen as one form of effective leadership but it is not the only form of effective leadership. Let's not slip back into the “Great Man” [sic] approach to leadership! We need more research on how the non-heroic forms of leadership contribute to better individual, team, and organizational outcomes.

### **30. Conformity and Followership**

Is a prolific management scholar necessarily a leader? Perhaps an intellectual leader of sorts; however, their accomplishments are primarily with the pen (or word processor these days). Perhaps it is a different type of leadership that is a function of the relationships and interpersonal networks that facilitate the accomplishment of shared work. I do concur with you that too much conformity on the part of any potential leader is unlikely to be successful in the long run. But some level of conformity is necessary for leadership to occur at all. I am sure that you are aware of the “herding cats” phenomenon! Through their motive tendencies to get along with others (i.e., conform), high self-monitors may be more effective at participating in leadership than those who adopt a take-me-or-leave-me interpersonal attitude.

### **31. Leadership Emergence and Extraversion**

It appears from the wording of several assertions in this section that you equate high self-monitoring with pretentiousness or exaggerated pretensions. I do not necessarily believe that high self-monitors engage in making *undeserved* demands (the hallmark of pretentiousness), nor am I certain that they make more demands on others—deserved or undeserved—than low self-monitors. How is seeking associations with powerful or reputable others an undeserved demand? I guess this is where I am the one

who is a little slow on the uptake! I agree with you on the point that the drive for status enhancement might be accurately construed as self-enhancement or a version of it, but I do not believe that this equates to self-aggrandizement in the negative sense. Indeed, a piece of sound advice that is usually given to aspiring leaders is to surround oneself with a capable (and frank) team of others and then listen to them. This might suggest that some combination of high and low self-monitors as part of a leadership team could prove to be the most effective overall strategy.

In conclusion, I thank you for the thought-provoking exchange. Clearly, there are many unresolved issues with regard to the relationship between self-monitoring personality and leadership. Not only do I echo your encouragement to other researchers to keep an open mind about this relationship, I especially encourage others to consider a broader perspective on leadership than is traditionally held. As a field (both in terms of practice and research), we need to get beyond the notion that great leadership occurs only when a single individual directs and supports others in achieving some goal—whether it is completing a simple task or pursuing a broad vision. Certainly that is one form of effective leadership but it is not the only one. High self-monitors, in particular, may have the kinds of human and social capital needed to participate most effectively in the non-conventional forms of leadership that I have alluded to. Of course, one of the biggest challenges they will likely face is how to forge and maintain effective leadership relationships with low self-monitors (and vice versa). Ultimately, I believe that there is much potential in the links that form between high and low self-monitors. One difficulty lies with getting them to first appreciate each other!

Sincerely,  
David V. Day

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