

# The Effects of Tyrannical Leadership on Efficiency in Small Group Task Performance

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## Abstract and Literature Highlights

This study examines both the relationship between tyrannical leadership and small group task performance, and the potential mediating effects of communication apprehension and self-esteem. Aasland, Skogstand, Notelaers, Nielsen, and Einarsen (2010) found that tyrannical leadership in management is more prevalent than previously known and that tyrannical leaders often negatively affect group performance (Aryee, Sun, Chen and Debrah, 2008). However, less is known about other factors that may impact the leader-follower relationship. This study further explores the relationship between leadership style and efficiency by looking at potential mediating variables of communication apprehension (CA) and self-esteem. Rubin, Rubin, and Jordan (2009) showed that positive classroom instruction reduces student CA. In addition, people with higher self-esteem were less likely to yield to leaders and more likely to emerge as leaders themselves, leading a group to follow and therefore overcome the leader already in place (Andrews, 1984). This study employs an experimental design placing college student participants in groups under the direction of either a constructive leader or a tyrannical leader and measures group efficiency between the two groups. CA and self-esteem are measured using McCroskey's Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (1985) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale (1989).

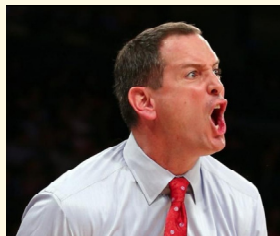
## Research Questions & Results

**RQ1: Is perceived group efficiency associated with a) tyrannical and b) constructive leadership?**

- ❖ Participants with the tyrannical leader rated their efficiency 11% higher than participants with the constructive leader.
- ❖ Participants with the constructive leader scored 8% higher on the NASA task and 12.5% higher on the puzzle task.

**RQ2: Is the relationship between leader type and perceived group efficiency mediated by a) individual self esteem and b) individual communication apprehension?**

- ❖ Participants with the constructive leader revealed a lower perceived group efficiency compared to participants with the tyrannical leader.
- ❖ Participants with the tyrannical leader scored lower on self esteem; however, these participants reported a higher perceived group efficiency.
- ❖ Participants with the constructive leader had higher self esteem scores; however, they rated their group efficiency low.
- ❖ Both groups scored similarly in communication apprehension.



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(Above) Mike Rice  
Tyrannical Leader

## Definitions

- ❖ Tyrannical Leadership: Repeated behavior that obtains results for the organization at the expense of subordinates.
- ❖ Constructive Leadership: Repeated behavior that obtains results for the organization while enhancing well-being of subordinates.
- ❖ Communication Apprehension: individual's level of fear or anxiety with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1997).

### Constructive:

*"We could have had better communication during the tasks."*

### Tyrannical:

*"Not being b\*\*\*\*ed at."*

Group Member Perceptions on how Task Efficiency could be Improved

## Methods

- ❖ 7 undergraduate participants completed two tasks
- ❖ 2 x 2 between subjects design
- ❖ Small group tasks lead by a Tyrannical or Constructive Leader
- ❖ Leaders had mirroring scripts for all interactions developed from Thoroughgood's destructive leadership typology
- ❖ Pre-survey consisted of:
  - ❖ Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1989)  
*I take a positive attitude toward myself:*  
Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree
  - ❖ McCroskey's Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1985)  
*I'm afraid to speak up in conversations:*  
Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree
- ❖ Post Survey collected participants' perceptions of group efficiency



[http://media.npr.org/assets/img/2011/12/19/kimjongun\\_custom-49fa9156583d1bec292b256dc2a5a7adb75502e1-e6-c10.jpg](http://media.npr.org/assets/img/2011/12/19/kimjongun_custom-49fa9156583d1bec292b256dc2a5a7adb75502e1-e6-c10.jpg)

(Above) Kim Jong Un  
Tyrannical Leader

## Discussion & Implications

- ❖ These results justify an opposition to tyrannical leadership behaviors due to the creation of a false impression of efficiency while decreasing actual efficiency.
- ❖ Participants in the constructive group felt responsible for inefficiencies, while participants in the tyrannical group blamed inefficiencies on the leader's behavior
  - ❖ Participants with a tyrannical leader blamed inefficiencies on the negative comments and behaviors of the tyrannical leader and looked to establish an in-group leader
  - ❖ Participants with a constructive leader noted a lack of communication as the cause for inefficiencies and worked with the constructive leader to complete tasks
- ❖ Higher perceived efficiency could be attributed to participants banding together against the tyrannical leader.
- ❖ Future studies can model and expand this experimental design and expand participant pool to allow for some generalization of data.

## Acknowledgements

- ❖ We would like to thank Professor Martha Fay, our Faculty Supervisor, for all her support and guidance.
- ❖ We thank the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs for supporting this research, and Learning & Technology Services for printing this poster.