

Be like me: the effects of manager–supervisor alignment

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines whether managerial capability fit between line managers, middle managers and top-level managers enhances effectiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – Effectiveness data and managerial capability ratings from more than 1,600 manager–supervisor dyads were collected in the United States and Germany. Polynomial regression was used to study the relation between manager–supervisor fit and managerial effectiveness.

Findings – Our results indicate that the fit of managerial capabilities between a manager and his/her supervisor predicts the effectiveness of this manager. The most effective managers show particularly high managerial capabilities that are in line with predominantly high managerial capabilities of their supervisors. Two aspects are important: the manager–supervisor fit and the absolute capability level that both possess. The results further indicate that the importance of the manager–supervisor fit varies across lower, middle and top-level management dyads.

Research limitations/implications – This study contributes by advancing research on managerial capability fit conditions between managers and their supervisors as a central element in viewing and managing effectiveness.

Practical implications – This article informs managers, supervisors and HR professionals about pitfalls in organizations that degrade effectiveness.

Originality/value – This article shows how the alignment between managers and their supervisors relates to effectiveness in a large-scale study across different hierarchical levels.

Keywords Manager-supervisor, Fit, Managerial capabilities, Managerial effectiveness, Congruence theory

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Managerial capabilities seem particularly important in today's fast-changing management world as capabilities drive managerial behavior and are more malleable than other management predictors like traits or values (Boyatzis and Saatcioglu, 2008). Despite considerable progress in understanding managerial capabilities over the years (Howell and Shamir, 2005), *alignment of capabilities between managers from different hierarchical levels and its effect on organizations* have not been the center of attention. This is particularly inexplicable as the competency alignment between the top, middle and line management



should facilitate an organization's innovation and goal achievement due to a common understanding which fosters communication between the management levels (Chen *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate whether the alignment between the capabilities of managers from different hierarchical levels boosts or limits managerial effectiveness. With this study, we offer insight on how the manager–supervisor capability fit impacts managerial effectiveness under three different circumstances: (1) when the manager has lower capabilities than the supervisor, (2) when the manager has higher capabilities than the supervisor or (3) when both are at the same capability level. Furthermore, we enhance understanding on whether manager–supervisor fit is similarly important across different managerial capabilities and hierarchical levels.

We contribute to the body of research on managerial capabilities which illustrates the need for managers of different hierarchical levels to align their capabilities with subordinates to enhance outcomes. Our insights help to understand the effects of different patterns of manager–supervisor combinations. We believe that understanding the fit of managerial capabilities between managers from lower, middle and top management assists organizational performance and drives a manager's empowerment.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Relationships in terms of fit (or alignment) versus misfit (or non-alignment) between supervisors and subordinates have been studied extensively, primarily with a focus on values and traits rather than capabilities. In their comprehensive literature review, Kim *et al.* (2019) and Zhang *et al.* (2012) showed that supervisor–subordinate alignment plays a central role in subordinates' work outcomes. This alignment can either directly influence subordinates' outcomes or enhance the impact of other outcome-related factors.

Regarding the direct effect of alignment on outcomes, Atwater *et al.* (2005) and Taylor *et al.* (2012) demonstrated that supervisor–subordinate fit positively affects managerial and leadership performance. When supervisors and subordinates are aligned, the subordinates find their work more satisfying and their environment more trustworthy (Posner, 2010), while at the same time the supervisors perform better (Atwater *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, alignment enhances subordinates' corporate social responsibility (Groves, 2014), commitment (Caldwell *et al.*, 2004) and confidence (Kim *et al.*, 2019).

In management, often ambivalent relational situations occur. On the one hand, managers act in their role as supervisors when interacting with their subordinates (here: supervisor–subordinate dyad). On the other hand, most managers also work in subordinate roles as they report to other, higher-level managers who represent their direct supervisors (here: manager–supervisor dyad). In this study, we focus on the manager–supervisor relationship, which is a distinct supervisor–subordinate dyad where both, the supervisor and subordinate, hold managerial responsibility. To highlight this fact, we subsequently use the term manager–supervisor relationship and differentiate three dyads. First, we study capability alignment between line and middle managers (lower management dyads) followed by alignment between middle and top managers (middle management dyads). Third, we observe alignment between top and executive managers (top management dyads). In each dyad, the lower-level manager is termed *manager*, while the higher-level manager is termed *supervisor*. As research is relatively silent about the relational interaction between managers of different hierarchical levels, our subsequent literature review mainly draws on findings from dyads in which a subordinate has no managerial duties. Transferring the previously summarized positive effects of alignment on subordinate outcomes to our management dyads, we assume that alignment between managers and their supervisors will positively relate to managers' effectiveness.

Conversely, few studies shed light on the effects of misalignment between subordinates and supervisors (Soltani and Wilkinson, 2010). Most existing studies find primarily negative effects (Kuenzi *et al.*, 2019). Among the few studies that focus on management characteristics rather than broader attitudes or values is Soltani and Wilkinson's (2010) investigation which demonstrates that when supervisors and subordinates are not aligned subordinates pursue their own interests rather than company objectives. Similar effects were described for supervisor–subordinate misalignment on management philosophy (Bondarouk *et al.*, 2016). Transferring these results to our manager–supervisor dyads, we suggest misalignment negatively relates to managers' effectiveness.

From the findings summarized above it becomes evident that prior research almost exclusively focuses on alignment/misalignment between attitudes, values or personality, yet the more observable and malleable capabilities are not addressed. Little research examines alignment between dyads in which both individuals fulfill management roles, and even fewer studies investigate the relevance of alignment/misalignment on managerial effectiveness. This study aims at closing all three of these research gaps as it focuses on a management-only sample, measures managerial effectiveness and focuses on managerial capabilities.

3. Managerial capabilities

Existing taxonomies on managerial capabilities differ, among others, with regard to their relevance for industries (Wickramasinghe and De Zoyza, 2009), bandwidth-fidelity level and number of relevant capability categories (e.g. Bartram's, 2005 "Great Eight"). While there is still no common understanding of the most important management capabilities, grouping them into three major categories is widely accepted and common practice (Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005). In this study, we rely on these capability categories and thus briefly describe them:

- (1) Task-oriented managerial capabilities primarily focus on "increasing efficiency and process reliability" (Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005, p. 363).
- (2) Relations-oriented managerial capabilities are concerned with establishing healthy, mutually beneficial and productive relationships among individuals inside or outside of the organization.
- (3) Change-oriented managerial capabilities focus on improving innovativeness and adapting to internal and external changes in the environment.

4. Study overview

A recent review and meta-analysis show that aligned dyadic relationships at work enhance individual outcomes (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). We transfer this finding to the management context and propose that manager–supervisor alignment on managerial capabilities enhances manager effectiveness. Our proposition roots in congruence theory (Holland, 1997), which states that behavior and subsequent *outcomes* are determined by (1) the interaction between an individual's characteristics and (2) the work environment in which he/she operates. Supervisors and their means of interaction are important aspects of this work environment which is why manager–supervisor interaction should affect managerial behavior and subsequent effectiveness. According to congruence theory, aligned managers receive diverse benefits, such as more positive feedback, which again boosts their confidence and directs them toward desired outcomes. Additionally, aligned managers are also more accepted which makes it easier for them to unleash potential to achieve outstanding performance (Holland, 1997). Concluding, we assume that manager–supervisor fit on task,

relations- and change-oriented capabilities is beneficial and enhances effectiveness with the resulting hypotheses:

- H1. Managers' effectiveness is particularly high when their overall managerial capabilities are in line with their supervisors' capabilities.
- H2. Managers' effectiveness is particularly high when their task-oriented managerial capabilities are in line with their supervisors' capabilities.
- H3. Managers' effectiveness is particularly high when their relations-oriented managerial capabilities are in line with their supervisors' capabilities.
- H4. Managers' effectiveness is particularly high when their change-oriented managerial capabilities are in line with their supervisors' capabilities.

Anzengruber *et al.* (2017) showed that task-oriented and relations-oriented capabilities are most important for effectiveness at the lower and middle management, while in top management change-oriented and relations-oriented capabilities predominantly enhance effectiveness. In light of this finding, the question arises whether manager–supervisor alignment differently influences effectiveness at lower, middle and top management. Based on the varying importance of capabilities for the top, middle and lower management we propose that manager–supervisor capability fit is differently important across varying hierarchical levels. This presumably holds true for fit on task-, relations- and change-oriented capabilities. Therefore, the following is stated:

- H5. The link between managerial effectiveness and manager–supervisor capability fit varies across different hierarchical levels.

5. Method

5.1 Sample and procedure

Overall, 1,921 manager–supervisor dyads from one multinational company in the high-tech sector (United States, Germany) were asked to participate, whereof 1,619 provided complete data (response rate: 84%). In sum, 81% were male and 19% female, which is common ratio in the male-dominated high-tech industry. Overall, 828 were from Germany and 791 from the USA. The respective company is known for its relatively strict and traditional hierarchical organization which facilitates separating the various management levels and makes it well suited for the purpose of this study.

According to DeChurch *et al.*'s (2010) management definition, the dyads were divided into 436 lower management, 854 middle management and 329 top management dyads. The average tenure was 18.03 years (SD = 9.13) for managers in the lower management dyads, while it was 20.64 years (SD = 9.95) and 19.79 years (SD = 9.64) for those in the middle and top management dyads, respectively. In terms of working area, 542 led marketing, sales and product management teams, whereas 460 managed research and development (R&D) units, 151 headed manufacturing units, 149 supervised finance departments, another 101 managers led information technology (IT) departments and the remaining managers carried out general management functions. Table 1 shows the demographics of the sample.

In the lower management dyads, line managers and their supervisors from the middle management rank were studied. In the middle management dyads, we examined middle managers and their supervisors from the top management level. Finally, in the top management dyads, top managers and their supervisors from the executive management level were studied.

To test our hypotheses, data on (1) the capability fit between the managers and (2) their direct supervisors and (3) data on the managers' effectiveness were collected. Capability fit

Table 1.
Demographics of the
sample

	Lower management	Middle management	Top management	Total
Total	436	854	329	1,619
Male	339	701	272	
Female	97	153	57	
Country		Nationality		
Germany	828	German		817
United States	791	American		774
		Other		28
Job family representation				
Research and development	266	Information technology		101
Engineering	194	Manufacturing		80
Sales	157	Quality		71
Finance	149	Strategy		66
Marketing	143	Project management		61
Product management	123	General management		29
Customer service	119	Other		60

was evaluated in three steps. First, we assessed the managers' managerial capabilities. Notably, the managers did not rate their own capabilities, but this was done by their direct supervisors. Second, the capabilities of the supervisors were assessed. To avoid same-source biases, the supervisors' capabilities were also assessed by their direct supervisors representing the next higher level of the hierarchy. Consequently, in this study no self-ratings are used, but rather other-ratings are utilized, and the sample comprises exclusively managers, albeit from three different hierarchical levels. Third, to calculate capability fit, the managers' capabilities were contrasted to the supervisors' capabilities. Participant confidentiality was protected throughout the whole process.

To examine the effect of manager-supervisor fit on managerial effectiveness, the latter was measured in terms of an annual effectiveness evaluation. This evaluation was conducted within a standardized process by the human resources (HR) departments and was commonly used for decisions on the managers' promotion, salary increase and developmental plan. [Table 2](#) provides additional information on the effectiveness evaluation and the capability ratings. Notably, all data were gathered online within a larger study on capabilities.

5.2 Measures

5.2.1 Criterion: managerial effectiveness. In this study, we build on the work of [Lowe et al. \(1996\)](#) and define managerial effectiveness as the level of a manager's goal attainment within the last 12 months. It was measured in a three-step process by independent, three-person consortia representing the HR departments. First, each consortium saw the goals that had to be met by its managers. These goals were agreed upon annually, represented the company's understanding of effectiveness and were set in agreement with the managers. In this instance, goals referred to financial goals, leadership goals, learning goals and customer satisfaction goals. Second, each HR consortium studied information on the goal attainment of its managers by inspecting the managers' balance sheets, client and customer feedback. Third, each HR consortium discussed its managers' level of goal attainment to finally rate their overall effectiveness. In line with previous research ([Debnath et al., 2015](#)), critical

Construct of interest	Rated by ⇒	Rating source	Sample item of measurements	Management (management) dyads
Managerial capabilities of <i>top</i> managers	Rated by ⇒	Executive managers*	Item for <i>change</i> -oriented capability: "He/She spots chances for change and plans systematically"	Top management. → Dyads of <i>top</i> and <i>executive</i> managers
Managerial capabilities of <i>middle</i> managers	Rated by ⇒	Top managers	Item for <i>relation</i> -oriented capability: "He/She empowers his/her employees"	Middle management. → Dyads of <i>middle</i> and <i>top</i> managers
Managerial capabilities of <i>line</i> managers	Rated by ⇒	Middle managers	Item for <i>task</i> -oriented capability: "He/She regularly monitors the goals that have to be achieved"	Lower mgt. → Dyads of <i>line</i> and <i>middle</i> managers
Managerial effectiveness of all managers	Rated by ⇒	HR-consortia including 3 people	In how far did the manager attain his/her goals within the last 12 months?	–

Note(s): *Executive managers only provided capability ratings but did not receive some. Line managers reported to middle managers; middle managers reported to top managers; top managers reported to executive managers

Table 2. Overview of the constructs, rating sources, sample items and management dyads

incidents were used to define five different levels of effectiveness on a vertical, behaviorally anchored rating scale. The value 1 was assigned to the lowest effectiveness, indicating clear underachievement, while the value 3 represented general goal achievement, and 5 indicated a strong overfulfillment of the set goals for the last 12 months.

5.2.2 Predictors: managerial capabilities. Managerial capabilities served as predictor variables. We measured task-, relations- and change-oriented capabilities using Yukl *et al.*'s (2002) behaviorally anchored scale, which was slightly modified to serve the company's context. Each capability was assessed through three behavioral items, which were based on critical incidents. The items were completed on a Guttman scale ranging from 1 (lowest capability level) to 7 (highest possible capability level). Table 2 provides sample items. Each of the task-, relations- and change-oriented capabilities was computed by calculating the arithmetic mean of the associated items. Finally, an overall score for managerial capability was calculated by using the arithmetic mean of all capabilities. Importantly, the managers' capabilities were rated by their direct supervisors who represented the next higher management level. To assess manager–supervisor capability fit, the supervisors' capabilities were also measured using the very same measurement and procedure. Therefore, capability ratings were also provided by the next higher management level (see Table 2).

5.3 Data analysis

Polynomial regressions with subsequent response surface analyses were performed to study the influence of manager–supervisor capabilities fit on effectiveness. Following Edwards' (2002) procedure, the control variables were entered into the regression in a first step. In a second step, the manager's and supervisor's pooled capabilities were entered into the regression (main effects). In a third step, the squared manager and supervisor capabilities and the product of the manager and supervisor capabilities were added (higher order effects). A significant ΔR^2 between step two and three indicated nonlinear effects.

To clarify the nature of the regressed relationships, response surface analyses were conducted revealing four salient surface features. First, the slope of the line of perfect fit

(i.e. when manager capabilities equal supervisor capabilities) was estimated by calculating $a_1 = (b_1 + b_2)$, where b_1 was the unstandardized beta coefficient for supervisor capabilities and b_2 was the unstandardized beta for manager capabilities. The slope of the line of perfect fit indicates if and how the manager–supervisor capability fit relates to effectiveness.

Second, the curvature along the line of perfect fit was computed using the formula $a_2 = (b_3 + b_4 + b_5)$, where b_3 was the unstandardized beta for the squared supervisor capabilities, b_4 was the unstandardized beta for the cross product of supervisor and manager capabilities and b_5 was the unstandardized beta for the squared manager capabilities. The curvature along the line of perfect fit indicates whether the slope of the line of perfect fit is (non)linear (if a_1 significantly differs from zero but a_2 does not, the slope is linear).

The third and fourth step included calculating the slope and curvature along the line of *misfit*, which is perpendicular to the line of perfect fit. Both analyses help to understand how the discrepancy between manager and supervisor capabilities relates to effectiveness. The slope along the line of *misfit* indicates how the direction of the discrepancy relates to effectiveness (i.e. are managers' capabilities higher than supervisor capabilities or vice versa). It was assessed by calculating $a_3 = (b_1 - b_2)$. The curvature along the line of *misfit* indicates how the degree of discrepancy between manager and supervisor competencies relates to the effectiveness. It was assessed by calculating $a_4 = (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)$. All ratings were centered on the scale midpoint of 3 to ease interpretation (Edwards, 1994).

6. Results

Table 3 indicates satisfying-to-good internal consistencies for all capabilities. The correlations between the three capabilities justify using an overall capability value.

6.1 How manager–supervisor alignment relates to effectiveness

In all subsequent regressions, the control variables tenure, hierarchy, gender (male = 0; female = 1) and nationality (USA = 0; Germany = 1) were entered in a first step (Dokko *et al.*, 2009; Gentry *et al.*, 2013). In a second step, the manager and supervisor capabilities were added. In a third step, the squared capability values and the interaction term between the parties' capabilities were entered. Subsequent response surface analyses depict how manager and supervisor capabilities relate to each when a manager is seen as particularly effective. Table 4 summarizes the regression results, while Figures 1a–d display the response surface analyses.

6.1.1 *Overall managerial capability proficiencies.* Table 4 shows that the total regression including the overall score for managerial capabilities accounted for $R^2 = 13\%$ ($F = 25.64$, $p < 0.01$). Importantly, each step of the regression added incremental validity. Subsequent response surface analyses showed that the slope of the line of agreement is significant while the curvature is not ($a_1 = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$ vs. $a_2 = 0.06$, $p > 0.05$; see Figure 1a). Therefore, we conclude that in order to be seen as a highly effective manager both is needed: high manager and supervisor capabilities as well as alignment between them. These results support hypothesis 1, which states that a manager's effectiveness is particularly high when managers and supervisors are aligned at a high level of capability.

To test whether the manager–supervisor fit is important across different managerial capabilities, separate analyses were performed for task-, relations- and change-oriented capabilities.

6.1.2 *Task-oriented capability proficiencies.* The regression including task-oriented capabilities accounted for a total of $R^2 = 12\%$ ($F = 22.74$, $p < 0.01$) of the variance in manager effectiveness. Importantly, each step of the regression added incremental validity. Taken together with the results of the response surface analyses from Figure 1b, we conclude

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	Supervisor capabilities			Manager capabilities			Control variables						
			EFF	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
				Ov	<i>T</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>C</i>	Ov	<i>T</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>C</i>	Ten	Gen	Nat	Hier	
1	Manager managing effectiveness (EFF)	3.52	0.65	-												
<i>Supervisor capabilities</i>																
2	Overall capabilities (Ov)	3.44	0.56	0.17**	0.90											
3	Task-oriented capabilities (<i>T</i>)	3.66	0.66	0.15**	0.91**	0.76										
4	Relations-oriented capabilities (<i>R</i>)	3.40	0.58	0.16**	0.89**	0.71**	0.80									
5	Change-oriented capabilities (<i>C</i>)	3.27	0.63	0.18**	0.91**	0.73**	0.73									
<i>Manager capabilities</i>																
6	Overall capabilities (Ov)	2.87	0.59	0.35**	0.35**	0.31**	0.29**	0.36**	0.91							
7	Task-oriented capabilities (<i>T</i>)	3.07	0.61	0.31**	0.31**	0.27**	0.26**	0.31**	0.91**	0.77						
8	Relations-oriented capabilities (<i>R</i>)	2.86	0.67	0.31**	0.29**	0.24**	0.25**	0.30**	0.92**	0.76**	0.82					
9	Change-oriented capabilities (<i>C</i>)	2.69	0.65	0.32**	0.36**	0.33**	0.29**	0.36**	0.91**	0.75**	0.76**	0.76				
<i>Control variables</i>																
10	Tenure (Ten)	19.77	9.75	-0.08*	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.05*	-0.01	-0.04	-	-0.10**			
11	Gender (Gen)	0.19	0.39	0.00	-0.07**	-0.07**	-0.05	-0.07**	-0.05*	-0.06*	-0.01	-0.09**	-0.07**			
12	Nationality (Nat)	0.91	2.38	0.02	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.03	-0.01	-0.09**	0.02		
13	Hierarchy (Hier)	1.95	0.69	0.12**	0.50**	0.53**	0.34**	0.47**	0.34**	0.31**	0.29**	0.06*	0.34**	-0.05*	-0.01	

Note(s): **p* < 0.05. ***p* < 0.01. CV = Control variables (tenure, gender, nationality)

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations and internal consistency for all variables in use

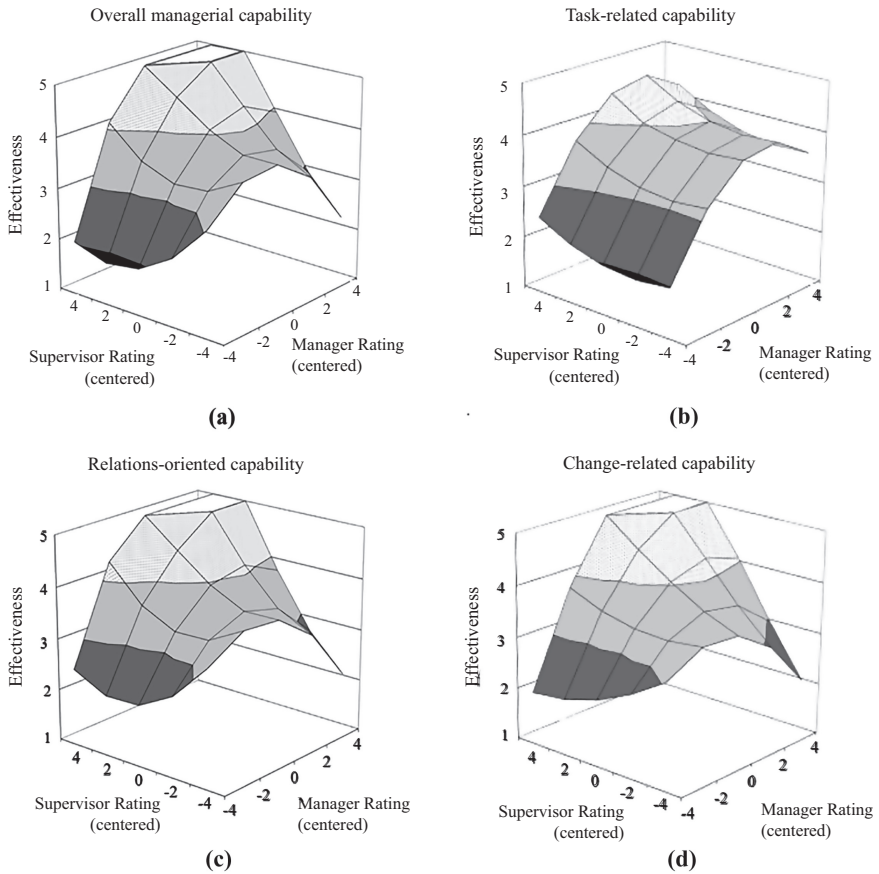


Figure 1.
How manager–
supervisor fit relates to
effectiveness

that a managers' effectiveness is particularly high when manager and supervisor are both high and aligned regarding their level of task-oriented capabilities ($a_1 = 0.27, p < 0.05$ vs $a_2 = -0.05, p > 0.05$). Thus, [hypothesis 2](#) is fully supported.

6.1.3 Relations-oriented capability proficiencies. [Table 4](#) shows that the regression model including relations-oriented capabilities accounted for a total of $R^2 = 11\%$ ($F = 21.71, p < 0.01$) in a managers' effectiveness variance. Again, every single step of the regression added incremental validity. Similar to results on the task-oriented capabilities, the response surface analysis in [Figure 1c](#) shows that both, high relations-oriented capabilities of supervisors *and* managers are required to be regarded as a greatly effective manager (significant slope of agreement $a_1 = 0.52, p < 0.05$). These results support [hypothesis 3](#).

6.1.4 Change-oriented capability proficiencies. [Table 4](#) shows that the total regression model including change-oriented capabilities accounted for $R^2 = 12\%$ ($F = 22.32, p < 0.01$) of the variance in manager effectiveness. Notably, each step of the regression added validity. The significant a_1 value of the response surface analysis ($a_1 = 0.45, p < 0.05$ vs $a_2 = 0.07, p > 0.05$) suggests that the higher the supervisor's *and* the manager's change-oriented capabilities the more effective the manager is perceived ([Figure 1d](#)). Moreover, the negative a_4 value ($a_4 = -0.13, p < 0.05$) indicates that the smaller the differences between a supervisor

Step	Overall managerial capability proficiencies				Task-oriented capability proficiencies				Relations-oriented capability proficiencies				Change-oriented capability proficiencies						
	<i>b</i>	(SE <i>b</i>)	β	ΔR^2	<i>b</i>	(SE <i>b</i>)	β	R^2	ΔR^2	<i>B</i>	(SE <i>B</i>)	β	R^2	ΔR^2	<i>b</i>	(SE <i>b</i>)	β	R^2	ΔR^2
1	4.06**	(0.09)			3.50**	(0.08)				3.94**	(0.08)				4.04**	(0.09)			
2	0.25**	(0.06)	0.22**	0.10**	0.20**	(0.05)	0.18**	0.02**	0.09**	0.20**	(0.06)	0.20**	0.11**	0.08**	0.22**	(0.07)	0.22**	0.02**	0.02**
3	-0.07**	(0.03)	-0.16**	0.13*	-0.07*	(0.03)	-0.14*	0.12**	0.01*	-0.06**	(0.02)	-0.16**	0.11**	0.01*	-0.06*	(0.03)	-0.15*	0.12**	0.01*
	0.09	(0.06)	0.12		0.00	(0.04)	0.01			0.09*	(0.06)	0.14*			0.09*	(0.04)	0.16*		
	0.04	(0.04)	0.05		0.02	(0.03)	0.02			0.04	(0.03)	0.06			0.02	(0.03)	0.02		

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, CV = control variables (tenure, gender, hierarchy, nationality)

Table 4. Results of the polynomial regression analyses for the overall, task-oriented, relations-oriented, change-oriented capability proficiencies

and his/her manager's capabilities the more effective will the manager be seen. These results fully support [hypothesis 4](#).

To test whether manager-supervisor fit is similarly important for different hierarchical levels, separate analyses were performed for the lower, middle and top-level management.

6.2 Manager-supervisor alignment for different hierarchical levels

6.2.1 Lower management. The results in [Table 5](#) and [Figures 2a-c](#) show that the manager-supervisor fit is particularly important in lower-level management. While alignment on change- ($a_2 = -0.28, p < 0.05$) and relations-oriented ($a_1 = 0.60, p < 0.05$; $a_2 = -0.29, p < 0.05$) capabilities enhances manager effectiveness, it is *misalignment* on task-related capabilities ($a_2 = -0.25, p < 0.05$; $a_3 = 0.20, p < 0.05$) that impacts effectiveness in lower-level management.

6.2.2 Middle and top management. Results in [Table 5](#) and [Figure 2](#) suggest that in the middle management those with the highest and best-aligned relations-oriented capabilities are seen as the most effective managers ([Figure 2d](#); $a_1 = 0.37, p < 0.05$). Additionally, the effectiveness of those in the top management is related to manager-supervisor fit on task-oriented capabilities ([Table 5](#): $\Delta R^2 = 2\%$ in step three, $p < 0.05$). [Figure 2e](#) shows that in order to be seen as highly effective in a top management position it is important to have both high manager and supervisor task-oriented capabilities as well as a fit between these capabilities ($a_1 = 0.44, p < 0.01$).

In conclusion, the results for the lower, middle and top-level management show that the importance of the manager-supervisor fit for effectiveness varies across different hierarchical levels. While the effectiveness of those in the lower management is related to manager-supervisor fit in task-, relations- and change-oriented capabilities, the importance of the manager-supervisor fit for those in the middle and top management is restricted to relations- and task-related capabilities, respectively. Consequently, results largely support [hypothesis 5](#) and show that the link between a manager's effectiveness and manager-supervisor fit varies across hierarchical levels.

7. Discussion

Many previous studies explored the circumstances under which managers were seen as highly effective. In this study, we focused on the manager-supervisor relationship, which is a distinct supervisor-subordinate dyad where both, the supervisor and subordinate, hold managerial responsibility. We used the term manager-supervisor relationship and differentiated three dyads (lower, middle and top management dyads). In each dyad, the lower-level manager was termed *manager*, while the higher-level manager was termed *supervisor*. Our research results indicate that both manager-supervisor capability fit and the absolute capability level predict the effectiveness of managers. Additionally, the importance of the manager-supervisor fit for effectiveness varies across different hierarchical levels. Taken together, our study suggests that it is not helpful to only investigate the capabilities of a manager to determine his/her effectiveness. Instead, our results show that the manager-supervisor capability fit plays a central role in a manager's work outcome.

7.1 Theoretical implications

Our research answers recent calls to explore managerial capabilities in addition to frequently studied traits and values ([Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005](#)) and contributes to the field of leadership and organizational development. The main theoretical implications of this study are threefold. First, while most prior studies on managerial capabilities were conducted from a single-sided perspective and thus only explored whether capabilities are positively or

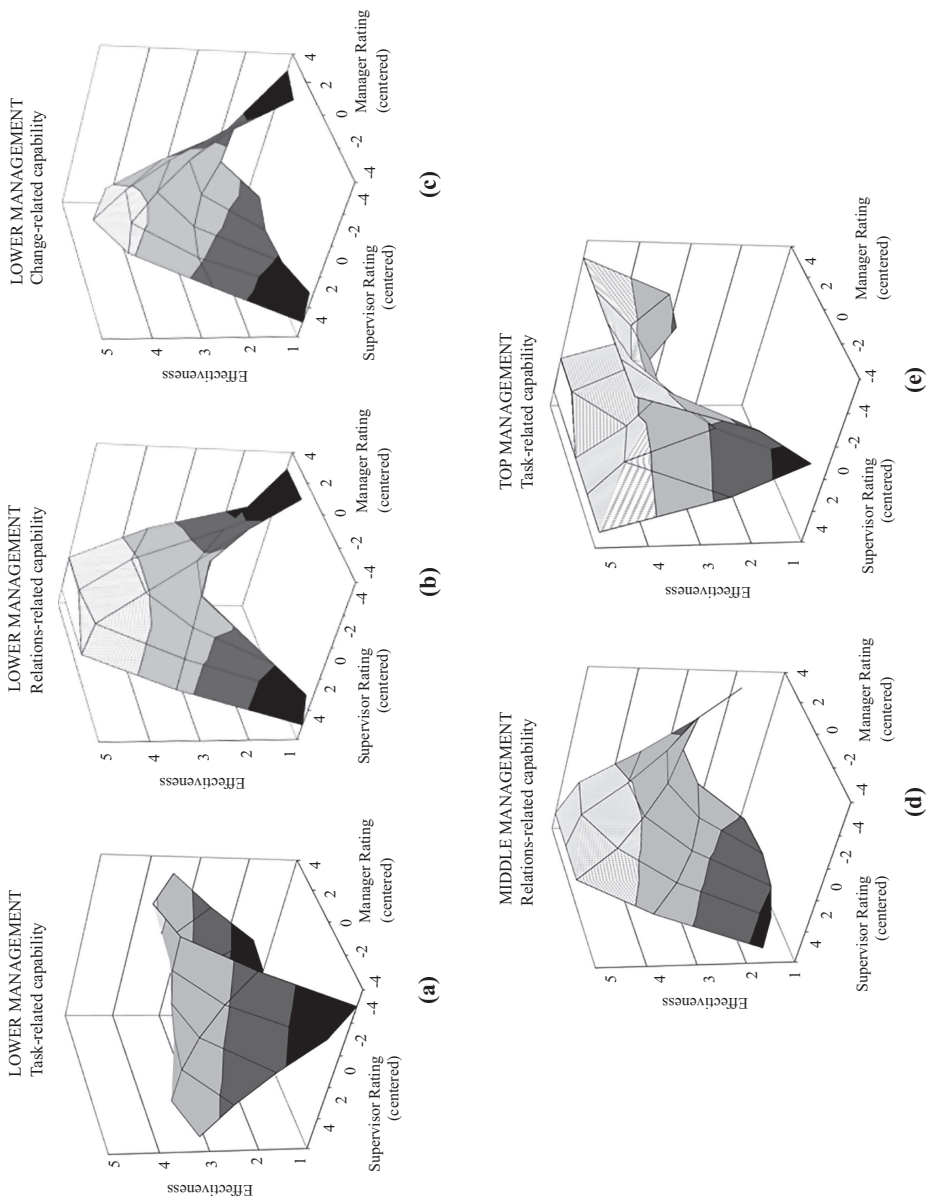


Figure 2. Manager-supervisor fit for lower, mid and top management

Table 5.
Statistically significant
results of the
polynomial regression
analyses for the lower,
middle and top
management

	Step	Task-oriented capability proficiencies				Relations-oriented capability proficiencies				Changes-oriented capability proficiencies						
		<i>b</i>	(SE <i>b</i>)	β	ΔR^2	<i>b</i>	(SE <i>b</i>)	β	R^2	ΔR^2	<i>b</i>	(SE <i>b</i>)	β	R^2	ΔR^2	
Lower management	1	Constant	3.70**	(0.13)		0.01	0.01		0.01	0.01	3.88**	(0.19)		0.01	0.01	
	2	Manager capability	-0.10	(0.14)	-0.08	0.07*	0.05**	0.17	(0.14)	0.18	0.12**	-0.01	(0.17)	0.12**	0.12**	0.01
	3	Supervisor capability	-0.11	(0.17)	-0.08	0.07*	0.05**	0.42**	(0.21)	0.26**	0.18	0.18	(0.18)	0.13**	0.01*	0.05**
Middle management	1	Constant	-0.12	(0.05)	-0.25**	0.08*	0.01*	-0.08*	(0.04)	-0.21*	0.13**	-0.13**	(0.04)	0.01*	0.07**	0.02*
	2	Manager*Supervisor capability ²	-0.12	(0.12)	-0.15	0.22**	0.12	0.31**	0.22**	(0.12)	0.31**	0.13	(0.13)	0.23	0.23	0.23
	3	Supervisor capability ²	-0.01	(0.12)	-0.02	0.00	(0.11)	0.00	0.00	(0.11)	0.00	-0.03	(0.09)	-0.05	-0.05	
Top management	1	Constant	3.65**	(0.11)		0.00	0.00	3.96**	(0.08)		0.01	0.01		0.01	0.01	
	2	Manager capability	0.19	(0.15)	0.15	0.19*	0.08	0.19*	(0.08)	0.19*	0.12**	0.19*	(0.08)	0.11**	0.11**	
	3	Supervisor capability	0.26	(0.15)	0.18	0.19*	(0.09)	0.19*	0.19*	(0.09)	0.13**	-0.07**	(0.03)	0.13**	0.01*	
		Manager*Supervisor capability ²	-0.10	(0.09)	-0.11	-0.20**	0.08	(0.06)	0.14	0.08	0.08	(0.06)	0.14	0.14	0.14	
		Supervisor capability ²	0.06	(0.16)	0.04	0.02	(0.04)	0.02	(0.04)	0.04	0.04	(0.04)	0.04	0.04		
		Supervisor capability ²	0.32	(0.13)	0.16**											

Note(s): **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01. CV = Control variables (tenure, gender, nationality)

negatively related to manager effectiveness (Anzengruber *et al.*, 2017), this study enriches the research by introducing a multisided perspective. In fact, not only the importance of a second party's capabilities was explored but also the dyadic fit between the manager and this second party. Notably, the capability fit was not approached in a linear manner, as done in many previous studies, but was addressed with polynomial regressions allowing to reveal nonlinear effects. Using polynomial regressions instead of simple mean differences or agreement categories, for instance, led to the finding that once managers showed at least medium-level task-oriented capabilities the fit with their supervisor's capabilities became less important for their effectiveness compared to when they showed only low task-oriented capabilities. Similarly, polynomial regression revealed that it is not the agreement but rather the *disagreement* between a manager's and supervisor's task-oriented capabilities that impacts effectiveness in the lower-level management. Consequently, this study contributes to a more nuanced picture on how capability fit affects managerial effectiveness and further fills a shortfall of research in the field of managerial capabilities.

Second, although previous work has recognized the importance of better understanding the effects of alignment/misalignment between managers and supervisors (Soltani and Wilkinson, 2010), studies in this regard remain relatively scarce. Hence, we introduce managerial capability fit conditions between managers and their supervisors as a mechanism that fosters a deeper understanding of this underresearched field. We do so by using a management-only sample, providing a unique contribution to the managerial capability literature. In addition, we enhance existing research by revealing that nonaligned manager–supervisor dyads produce negative results – irrespective of the managers' hierarchy level. This outcome adds to the current understanding of the effects of misalignment between subordinates and supervisors (Soltani and Wilkinson, 2010; Kuenzi *et al.*, 2019). This study encourages further research in this area and raises the question under what additional circumstances misalignment can be valued by a supervisor or a manager.

Finally, we advance the literature by showing that managerial effectiveness varies among the hierarchies. In detail, while the effectiveness of those in the lower management ranks is related to manager–supervisor fit in task-, relations- and change-oriented capabilities, the importance of the manager–supervisor fit for those in the middle and top-level management is restricted to relations- and task-related capabilities, respectively. Understanding such hierarchal dynamics is desirable from a conceptual standpoint to further enhance congruence theory. Importantly, two forms of alignment or fit exist (Muchinsky and Monahan, 1987). Supplementary fit describes that a person fits into some environment because he/she shows characteristics which are similar to others in this environment. Complementary fit describes that an individual's characteristics complement others in the same environment. Our study provides evidence that supplementary rather than complementary fit between managers and supervisors enhances effectiveness across hierarchical levels.

7.2 Practical implications

The finding that managers' effectiveness declines when they show higher relations- and change-oriented capabilities than the supervisors has practical implications for both management development and recruiting. Within management development, managers should be sensitized that their effectiveness is not exclusively driven by their own capabilities but also by how synchronized they are with their supervisors and subordinates. Simply knowing this might help to avoid pitfalls in organizations that degrade effectiveness. For management recruiting, our findings suggest matching managers from one organizational level with supervisors of the next higher level; think about a “train the trainer” sort of model. Only when a manager resembles his/her supervisor's capabilities will this manager be effectively evaluated. This information is particularly relevant when managers are

deliberately hired or promoted due to unique capabilities. At first glance, they might be evaluated as less effective despite the circumstance that their misalignment probably nourishes change and innovation processes. In addition, it may be difficult to evaluate managers when an evaluator does not have or know enough about the capabilities they are attempting to assess (e.g. consider an undergraduate student or intern attempting to assess the capabilities of the top-level management team).

From the perspective of a manager, our insights help when choosing a job with a particular supervisor. Only if a manager realizes that he/she has a much higher proficiency profile than the future supervisor, he/she can act with caution since this condition negatively influences the perception of his/her effectiveness. Here a possible explanation might be that supervisors with inferior capabilities might feel threatened and consequently misinterpret a manager's well-intentioned behavior as refused obedience which consequently might result in lower effectiveness ratings, probably even to punish the manager for disobedience (DeChurch *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it is most likely that complimentary capabilities will only be valued when supervisors perceive misalignment as a source for innovation, change or creativity.

Based on our findings, we encourage those responsible for management development and recruiting to critically reflect upon the conditions that lead to manager effectiveness ratings. One way to start this reflection could be by additionally considering the capability fit between managers and their supervisors when evaluating their effectiveness or recruiting them. This could further stimulate a joint discussion on the developmental need of the manager and may also facilitate perspective-taking as well as mutual appreciation among all parties involved.

7.3 Limitations and conclusions

The purpose of the study was to contribute to identifying what can elevate or limit the perceived effectiveness of managers. In line with other findings from management research (Bergner *et al.*, 2016), we conclude that supplementary fit between managers enhances their effectiveness. Consistent with prior research (Anzengruber *et al.*, 2017), there are three major limitations. One major limitation is that all managers and supervisors are from the same company and do not represent populations for all companies. Further studies could build on our results by adding customer capability data and data from various other companies to the analysis. Second, the data were gathered only at one point in time. A longitudinal sample would have a better exploratory power over time and could clarify the relationship between the study variables in more detail. Third, we did not examine cross-effects between hierarchies. Further investigation of these aspects could expose additional areas of fit between individuals in organizations that can boost or inhibit performance.

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