



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input

Sijbom, R.B.L.; Janssen, O.; van Yperen, N.W.

DOI

[10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695](https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695)

Publication date

2010

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Academy of Management. Annual Meeting Proceedings

License

CC BY-NC-ND

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Sijbom, R. B. L., Janssen, O., & van Yperen, N. W. (2010). Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input. *Academy of Management. Annual Meeting Proceedings, 2010*(1), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

LEADERS' ACHIEVEMENT GOALS AND THEIR REACTIONS TO SUBORDINATES' CREATIVE INPUT*

ROY B.L. SIJBOM

University of Groningen, Department of HRM & OB
Nettelbosje 2, 9747 AE Groningen, The Netherlands

ONNE JANSSEN

University of Groningen

NICO W. VAN YPEREN

University of Groningen

ABSTRACT

The present experimental research examined the impact of leaders' achievement goals on their reactions to creative input provided by their subordinates. In Experiment 1, performance goal leaders were found to be less receptive to subordinates' creative input than mastery goal leaders. In Experiment 2, we demonstrated that only when subordinates' input included problem definitions alongside creative ideas for problem solutions, performance goal leaders were less receptive, and next, less supportive than mastery goal leaders. When subordinates exclusively expressed creative ideas without pointing out problems, performance goal leaders and mastery goal leaders were equally receptive and supportive to subordinates' input.

INTRODUCTION

In today's complex, dynamic, and highly competitive environment, organizations need to innovate continuously to survive and prosper. Since the foundation of all innovation is creative ideas, and it is individuals who generate ideas (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Van de Ven, 1986), the creative input provided by employees is a crucial resource in the process of organizational innovation (Amabile, 1988; Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; Kanter, 1988). The challenges of managing employee creativity effectively are considerable, and a growing body of research reveals that leaders can either make or break it (e.g., Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). That is, in hierarchical work settings, leaders have the power to recognize and devote attention and resources to the creative input put forward by subordinates, or to withhold support (Graen & Cashman, 1975).

As may be clear, leaders' perceptions and behaviors towards subordinates are inextricably bound up with their achievement pursuits in leadership situations (Kim & Yukl, 1995; e.g., Yukl, 1989). The aim of the present study is to examine how leaders' achievement goals affect their responses to subordinates' creative input. We investigated the differential effects of two distinct types of achievement goals, namely, performance goals and mastery goals, whereby we focus on approach forms of regulation only (Elliot, 2005). Leaders with *performance goals* desire to demonstrate and validate superior leadership competence, whereas their counterparts with *mastery goals* strive to develop their leadership competence by mastering new situations and acquiring new skills.

* Sijbom, R.B.L., Janssen, O., & Van Yperen, N.W. (2010). Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 8(1), 1–6.
doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695

The present research identifies leaders' achievement goals and distinct characteristics of subordinates' creative input as important factors that can clarify when and why leaders are receptive and supportive to subordinate creativity, and when and why they tend to shut the door. More specifically, we provide evidence that the differential reactions of performance goal leaders and mastery goal leaders may be triggered by the problems subordinates point out rather than the creative ideas they propose for problem solutions.

EXPERIMENT 1

Achievement Goals and Subordinate Creativity

A key to advance our understanding of leaders' reactions to subordinate creativity is to identify the achievement motivational factors that drive leaders to focus on either the instrumental or the evaluative information inherently associated with subordinates' creative input. We assumed that performance goals and mastery goals might substantially influence leaders in the ways they interpret, experience, and respond to subordinates' creative input (cf., Dweck, 1986). Specifically, as performance goal leaders strive to demonstrate superior competence towards subordinates, they might view creative ideas proposed by subordinates to solve problems in the managerial domain of the leader primarily as a negative evaluation or judgment of their leadership competence. That is, a subordinate who comes up with input for improvement implicitly or explicitly highlights that some state of affairs in a leader's managerial domain is insufficient or at least suboptimal, which is likely to frustrate the leader's performance goal of demonstrating superior leadership competence. Since this evaluative component becomes salient to performance goal leaders, they may not have an eye for the instrumental value that is also present in the subordinates' creative input. Consequently, because of the need to protect and bolster the goal of demonstrating superior rather than inferior leadership competence, performance goals may cause leaders to respond in a negative way to subordinates' creative input; that is, they may not be receptive to subordinates' creative input, and approachable for discussing it.

In contrast, leaders with mastery goals may tend to perceive subordinates' creative input as a potentially useful resource of diagnostic information and new ideas that can facilitate them to grow and improve in their managerial job. Such a focus on the instrumental value rather than the evaluative component of subordinates' creative input, is congruent with a mastery goal of further developing leadership knowledge, abilities, and domain-relevant skills. Mastery goal leaders are likely to appreciate subordinates' creative input because it can serve as an important source of problem definition and new and potentially useful ideas that can enhance their leadership competence and performance. Therefore, we expected mastery goals to guide leaders to react positively to subordinates' creative input, in the sense of listening to subordinates and being receptive to and interested in their input.

Hypothesis 1: Performance goal leaders would be less receptive to subordinates' creative input than mastery goal leaders.

METHOD

Sample, Procedure and Measures

* Sijbom, R.B.L., Janssen, O., & Van Yperen, N.W. (2010). Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 8(1), 1–6.
doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695

The participants (undergraduates, $N = 77$) were given credit points for their participation. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 44 years, and the mean age was 21.7 years ($SD = 3.6$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three achievement goal conditions (performance vs. mastery vs. no goal) of the between-subjects design.

The experiment started by presenting a marketing scenario to the participants. The participants were assigned to the role of the company's marketing manager. In the scenario, the organization had developed a new product and a project team was composed to successfully introduce the product into the market. The project team consisted of three subordinates, and the marketing manager operated as the team leader. As a team leader, the marketing manager had assigned the team members the task of developing informational sentences that could be used for the strategy of marketing the new product.

After giving preference to the informational sentences sent by two subordinates, the participants received a mail, which was used to induce the achievement goal manipulation, that is, the experimental manipulation. The manipulation consisted of three coherent aspects from which a specific achievement goal was derived. First, different information with respect to the organizational climate was given in the different achievement goal conditions. Second, the participants held and frequently expressed a personal leadership motto, which was consistent with the organizational climate. Finally, participants were assigned a specific achievement goal, which was consistent with the leader's individual motto and the organizational climate.

Following this stepwise achievement goal manipulation, the participants received an e-mail message from the third member of the project team, named Anne (a Dutch unisex name). In the e-mail, this subordinate proposed the use of another marketing strategy to introduce the new product. Anne's proposal was completely different from the common, established strategy propagated by the team leader to introduce new products. Thus, Anne's creativity input constitutes the two components of defining problems with regard to the established strategy and proposing the creative idea of using another strategy in order to solve the identified problem.

Receptiveness was assessed using three items (i.e., How likely is it that you will let Anne know that you would like to discuss the input together?) The response categories ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The items were averaged to create an index for receptiveness to creative input ($\alpha = .81$).

RESULTS

Results show that performance goal leaders were indeed less receptive to subordinates' creative input than leaders in either the mastery goal condition or the control condition. There was no difference between the latter two conditions.

DISCUSSION

Drawing from the achievement goal approach and creativity research, we investigated differential leadership reactions to bottom-up creativity input. The results of Experiment 1 suggest that achievement goals influence leaders' receptiveness to subordinates' creative input. Furthermore, mastery goal leaders responded in a similar way as leaders in the control condition. Therefore, mastery goal leaders' responses may be considered as "default". Leaders holding performance goals were less receptive to creative input provided by subordinates than leaders holding mastery goals.

* Sijbom, R.B.L., Janssen, O., & Van Yperen, N.W. (2010). Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 8(1), 1–6.
doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695

EXPERIMENT 2

As shown in Experiment 1, performance goal leaders are less receptive to subordinates' creative input than mastery goal leaders. However, as in Experiment 1, creative input typically contains two related yet distinct components, namely, problem definition and the creative idea for problem solution. In Experiment 2, we argue and demonstrate that the presence of the problem-definition component may cause performance goal leaders to not recognize the instrumental information available in subordinates' creative input. Phrased differently, when only the creative idea component is communicated, performance goal leaders may respond in a similar way as mastery goal leaders.

Specifically, when subordinates' input includes only a creative idea, performance goal leaders exclusively obtain a valuable suggestion that does not explicitly or implicitly question their leadership capabilities and competences. To be more exact, the presence of only creative ideas may not lead to perceived evaluations by performance goal leaders. As no (perceived) evaluative information is present, performance goal leaders may not be triggered to feel threatened in any kind or way by their subordinates' creative input. Hence, both performance and mastery goal leaders can be expected to be receptive to employees who exclusively put forward creative ideas.

Hypothesis 2: Performance goal leaders are less receptive than mastery goal leaders to subordinates' creative input only when it includes problem definitions.

As mentioned before, leaders can either make or break subordinates' creative input by allocating or withholding support (e.g., Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Although leaders' receptiveness reflects a willingness to consider and discuss subordinates' input, it does not cover and include behavioral intentions to provide actual support. Therefore, in Experiment 2, we included a measure containing leader behavioral intentions of providing *support* to the subordinate delivering the creative input.

Furthermore, assuming that subordinates' creative input moderates the effect of achievement goals on receptiveness (see *Hypothesis 2*), subordinates' creative input may conditionally influence the strength of the indirect effect of achievement goals on support, thereby demonstrating a pattern of mediated moderation.

Hypothesis 3: Receptiveness mediates the indirect effect of achievement goals on support, but only when subordinates' creative input includes problem definitions.

METHOD

Sample, Procedure and Measures

The participants (undergraduates, $N = 72$) were paid 5 Euros for their participation. The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 54 years, and the mean age was 21.3 years ($SD = 3.5$). The participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in a 2 (Achievement Goal: performance vs. mastery) X 2 (Subordinates' Creative Input: problem definition + creative idea vs. creative idea) factorial design, with men ($n = 54$) and women ($n = 18$) equally divided across the conditions.

* Sijbom, R.B.L., Janssen, O., & Van Yperen, N.W. (2010). Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 8(1), 1–6.
doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695

The procedure of Experiment 2 was similar to Experiment 1, with one crucial difference. In Experiment 2, an extra factor was included, namely Subordinates' Creative Input. In one condition, the input was identical as in Experiment 1 and contained problem definitions about the established strategy as well as the creative idea of using a different strategy instead (*problem definition + creative idea condition*). The input in the second condition only included the creative idea of using an alternative strategy (*creative idea condition*).

Receptiveness was assessed using the same measure as in Experiment 1.

Support was measured using a three-item scale developed by Gordijn, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, and Dumont (2006). The items were adapted to fit the research context (i.e., To what extent do you want to support the input?). Items were averaged to create an index for support ($\alpha = .79$). The correlation between receptiveness and support was .64.

RESULTS

As expected, performance goal leaders were found to be less receptive than mastery goal leaders to subordinates' creative input only when it includes problem definitions; when only a creative idea was proposed, performance goal leaders and mastery goal leaders did not significantly differ in their receptiveness. These results fully supports *Hypothesis 2*. The same holds for support.

Hypothesis 3 was that receptiveness mediates the interaction effect of achievement goals and subordinates' input on support. To test this hypothesis, we applied the analytic methods for testing mediated moderation models outlined in Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). In the mediator model, the interaction term (achievement goal x subordinate input) was significantly associated with the mediator (receptiveness) ($B = -1.33, p < .001$). In the dependent variable model, the mediator (receptiveness) was significantly associated with the dependent variable (support) ($B = .67, p < .001$).

Furthermore, we tested the *conditional indirect effect* at the two conditions of subordinate input: problem definition and creative idea, and a creative idea only. As expected, when subordinate input contained both problem definition and a creative idea, the indirect relationship between achievement goal and support was significant ($p = .003$). When subordinate input only contained a creative idea, there was no indirect relationship between achievement goal and support, which supports *Hypothesis 3*.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to examine the influence of leaders' achievement goals on their reactions to creative input provided by subordinates. We have shown that performance goal leaders were less receptive (Experiment 1 and 2) and less supportive (Experiment 2) to subordinates' creative input than mastery goal leaders when the input included both problem definitions and creative ideas for problem solutions. However, performance goal leaders were as receptive and supportive as mastery goal leaders when subordinates put in exclusively creative ideas without pointing out problems in current courses of action in leaders' managerial domain (Experiment 2). Finally, the results supported the hypothesized mediated moderation model, demonstrating that the magnitude of the indirect effect of achievement goals on support through receptiveness was contingent upon characteristics of subordinates' creative input.

* Sijbom, R.B.L., Janssen, O., & Van Yperen, N.W. (2010). Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 8(1), 1–6.
doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literatures on achievement goals, leadership, and creativity by providing a fine-grained understanding of when, how, and why performance and mastery goals influence leaders in their reactions to subordinates' creative input. As such, we extend previous achievement goal research by highlighting leaders' achievement goals as an important motivational source of their reactions to subordinates' creative input. Moreover, our research contributes to the leadership literature by investigating leader reactions to subordinate creativity rather than following mainstream leadership research on how subordinates are influenced by the leader (Yukl, 2009). As such, we contribute to an emerging line of research documenting how subordinates affect leader reactions by engaging in proactive behavior (Grant et al., 2009), taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), or taking initiatives (Frese & Fay, 2001). Thus, the present research identifies leaders' achievement goals and distinct characteristics of subordinates' creative input as important factors that can clarify when and why leaders are receptive and supportive to subordinate creativity, and when and why they tend to shut the door.

Limitations and Future Research

The purpose of the present study was to clarify why performance goal leaders and mastery goal leaders differ in their reactions to *creative* input. We have argued and demonstrated how achievement goals and specific characteristics of creative input jointly determined leaders' reactions to subordinate creativity. However, although creativity encompasses the two basic elements of problem definitions and creative ideas for problem solutions, defining and upwardly voicing problems to leaders is not exclusively reserved for subordinates' creative input. That is, subordinates can provide leaders with feedback on any kind of work-related matters that is not creative in nature but does include problem definitions that can be interpreted as instrumental or evaluative in nature. This implies that the differential reactions of performance goal leaders and mastery goal leaders to problem definitions in subordinates' creative input might not be exclusive for the creativity domain. It might be that those differential reactions will also emerge in response to, for example, feedback on leadership behaviors that subordinates give to their leaders. Therefore, future research may focus on exploring differential reactions of leaders to other kinds of subordinate input.

Our findings show that leader reactions to subordinate creativity are contingent upon leaders' achievement goals and the content of subordinates' creative input. The results provide initial support for a new leadership research paradigm in which creativity-focused feedback is bottom-up rather than top-down. Furthermore, this research provides a foundation of experimental evidence for the relationship between achievement goals and reactions of leaders to subordinates' creative input, and provides a platform for further research on the differential reactions of leaders to bottom-up creativity.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR(S)

* Sijbom, R.B.L., Janssen, O., & Van Yperen, N.W. (2010). Leaders' achievement goals and their reactions to subordinates' creative input. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 8(1), 1–6.
doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2010.54493695