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LEADERS' MANAGEMENT OF CREATIVE IDEAS:
THE JOINT IMPACT OF ACHIEVEMENT GOALS AND POSITION POWER

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ABSTRACT

We examined the joint impact of leaders' achievement goals and position power on their integrative management of creative ideas delivered by a subordinate or a superior. In two studies, we found that relative to mastery goal leaders and low-power performance goal leaders, high-power performance goal leaders were less likely to integrate creative ideas with their own ideas.

INTRODUCTION

In the present dynamic environment of global competition, creativity – the generation of novel and useful ideas about organizational products, practices, or procedures (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004) - has become crucial for organizations to survive and prosper (Kraatz & Zajac, 2001; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1997). To enhance organizational flexibility in order to meet the creativity and innovation demands, power, resources, and responsibility are more decentralized (Schilling & Steensma, 2001), which elevate the role of leaders in middle management positions (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). As these leaders connect vertically related groups (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, & Turner, 1968), they are important linking pins for integrating creative ideas and suggestions from different hierarchical directions (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Likert, 1961).As such, an important issue is to what extent leaders are able and willing to integrate creative ideas proposed by others with their own ideas. In particular, it is critical to understand why and when leaders are willing to integrate bottom-up or top-down generated creative ideas.

In the present research, we argue and demonstrate that leaders in high-power positions may be more affected by internal states than leaders in low-power positions (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Guinote, 2007; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Furthermore, based on the achievement goal approach to achievement motivation (Elliot, 2005), 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. Specifically, *performance goals* reflect the desire to outperform others and to demonstrate superior competence, whereas *mastery goals* reflect the desire to develop and gain competence by acquiring new skills and mastering new situations (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

Accordingly, in this study we show that leaders' willingness to integrate creative ideas might be a function of both leaders' achievement goals and their relative position power. In a field-based survey (Study 1) and an experimental study (Study 2), we propose and test the notion that the

relationship between leaders' achievement goals and integrative idea management is moderated by leaders' relative position power.

LEADERS' POSITION POWER VIS-À-VIS SUBORDINATES AND SUPERIORS

Considering the importance of creativity for organizations to survive and prosper, leaders may be expected to welcome creative ideas, irrelevant whether these ideas are voiced by either subordinates or superiors. However, as middle leaders' relative position power differs in the hierarchical structure vis-à-vis subordinates and superiors, the leader-subordinate and leader-superior relations are likely to have different power dynamics (Festinger, 1957). Position power (or formal power), stemming from one's position in a hierarchy, is defined as the legitimate authority to control and use organizational resources and to allocate desirable and undesirable outcomes to others (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; French & Raven, 1959; Pfeffer, 1981).

When a subordinate voices creative input, the leader has a relative high-power position and thus can decide whether to provide or withhold resources and support to the creative input (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007). As high-power leaders lack constraints, they can devote their undivided attention to the pursuit of their own goals (Guinote, 2007). In contrast, because of their dependency toward powerful superiors, low-power leaders have greater constraints and more concerns which may direct their attention away from their own goals and towards the power-related aspects of the situation (e.g., Guinote, Brown, & Fiske, 2006).

INTERPLAY OF ACHIEVEMENT GOALS AND POSITION POWER

As leaders in high-power positions have fewer constraints and greater freedom to act than leaders in low-power positions (Guinote, 2007), we expect that the integrative idea management of leaders in high-power positions will be more affected by their own achievement goals.

Performance goal leaders are focused on outperforming others, particularly by demonstrating their superiority (e.g., Dweck, 1986). As such, integrative management of creative ideas voiced by subordinates might be perceived by performance goal leaders as a demonstration of inferior rather than superior competence. As for high-power performance goal leaders few constraints have to be taken into account (Galinsky et al., 2008), they can act in ways that help to obtain their performance goals. In contrast, low-power performance goal leaders have more constraints to take into account when reacting to ideas provided by their superior (Galinsky et al., 2008). That is, given superior's power to reward and punish leaders (Roberto, 2003), rejecting or dismissing superior's creative input might lead to negative consequences for leaders. Furthermore, seriously considering and accepting creative ideas voiced by a powerful superior is aligned with performance goal leaders' expectations about the superiority of superior's competence attributed to his or her higher position in the formal hierarchy. Taken together, compared with high-power performance goal leaders vis-à-vis subordinates, low-power performance goal leaders may be more willing to integrate superiors' creative ideas with their own ideas.

Mastery goal leaders are focused on developing and gaining competence by acquiring new skills and mastering new situations (e.g., Dweck, 1986). Rather than an interest in evaluative information grounded in interpersonal standards, mastery goal leaders' focus is on the development of their competences as a leader itself (e.g., Butler, 1993; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Given this focus on intrapersonal standards and self-development, either high or low power mastery goal leaders might view creative input as a potentially useful source of diagnostic information that may have potential for leadership development. As such, the creative input can facilitate their growth

and development as a leader even though it may challenge the current state of affairs in the managerial domain they are responsible for. Their main focus will be on the content of the creative input, regardless of their own position power in relation to the creative input sender. Hence, mastery goal leaders are likely to show relatively high intentions to integrate creative ideas, irrespective of the power position of the provider of the creative idea.

In sum, we expected that relative to mastery goal leaders and low-power performance goal leaders vis-à-vis superiors, high-power performance goal leaders will display weaker intentions to integrate creative ideas voiced by subordinates with their own ideas.

LEADERS' INTEGRATIVE INTENTIONS AND ACTUAL INTEGRATING BEHAVIORS

According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), intentions are the primary driver of specific behaviors. Accordingly, we expect intentions of leaders to integrate voiced creative ideas with their own ideas to be positively related to their actual integrative behaviors. In line with these models in which intentions predict behavior (e.g., Ajzen, 1991), we expect that the interaction between achievement goals and position power will affect leaders' actual integrating behavior through its effect on leaders' integrating intentions. Specifically, we predict a pattern of mediated moderation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) indicating that the interaction effects of achievement goals and position power indirectly affect actual integrating behavior through integrating intentions.

STUDY 1

Sample, Procedure and Measures

In Study 1 we tested the effect of position power on the relationship between leaders' achievement goals and their intentions to integrate creative ideas in a sample of actual leaders who were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Our final sample was $N = 149$ (70 female, $M_{age} = 34.8$ years, $SD_{age} = 11.1$). The respondents' mean total work experience was 15.2 years ($SD = 11.4$) and mean work experience in a supervisory position was 6.6 years ($SD = 5.9$).

The questionnaire first assessed participants' achievement goals. They were then asked to think about a recent situation in which a subordinate voiced a creative idea that challenged their own established ideas after which their tendencies to integrate the creative idea with their own ideas was assessed. Next, participants were asked to think about a recent situation in which a superior voiced a creative idea that challenged their own established ideas. Participants then also had to indicate their tendencies to integrate the creative idea with their own ideas. We counterbalanced the order of the questions and included in our analyses a dummy variable to check possible order-effects. All participants answered both the questions about the subordinate and the superior.

Mastery goal (α = .85) and *performance goal* (α = .91) were measured using the three-item subscales of Elliot, Murayama, and Pekrun's (2011) achievement goal questionnaire. We adapted the items to fit the work context (i.e., for mastery goal: My aim is to perform better in my work than I have done in the past; i.e., for performance goal: My aim is to outperform other colleagues in my work). Response categories ranged from 1 (*not true*) to 7 (*extremely true*).

Intentions to integrate ideas was measured using three items based on the problem solving subscale of the conflict management questionnaire developed by De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, and Nauta (2001). After presenting the stem "When a subordinate/superior voices a creative idea

that challenges my own established ideas, I do the following:" participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the items that followed (i.e., I examine ideas from both sides to find a mutually optimal solution). The response categories ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Items were averaged to create an index for intentions to integrate ideas voiced by a subordinate ($\alpha = .84$) and intentions to integrate ideas voiced by a superior ($\alpha = .81$).

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this first study was to test whether leaders' differential effects of performance goals and mastery goals on their intentions to integrate creative ideas were dependent on their relative position power. We found that both performance goals and mastery goals were positively related to their intentions to integrate creative ideas voiced by superiors with their own ideas. However, when subordinates voiced creative ideas, only mastery goal leaders were positively related to intentions to integrate those ideas.

<div align="center">STUDY 2</div>

Sample, Procedure and Measures

In this experimental study, we experimentally induced and contrasted leaders' achievement goals and position power in order to examine their relative and interactive effects on leaders' intentions and actual behavior to integrate creative ideas voiced by a subordinate or superior with their own ideas.

One hundred Dutch business school undergraduates (of whom 57.6% were male; $M_{age} = 20.3$, $SD_{age} = 1.9$) participated for 7 euro or partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (Achievement goal: performance vs. mastery) × 2 (Position power: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure. Participants were presented with a marketing scenario. The participants were assigned to the role of the company's marketing manager, who was responsible for positioning and selling fast food products on the market. In the scenario, the organization had developed a new product, so-called fat-free fries, and a project team was composed to successfully introduce the product to the market. The project team consisted of three subordinates, the CEO, and the marketing manager operated as the team leader. As the team leader, the marketing manager had assigned the team members the task of developing informational sentences that could be used for applying the strategy toward marketing the new product.

After participants had given preference to the informative sentences sent by two subordinates, the participants received an email from a third member of the project team, named Anne (a Dutch unisex name). In the email, this team member 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. Given its novelty and potential usefulness in the context of the company, Anne's proposal can be considered a creative idea for renewing the marketing strategy (Amabile, 1996; Shalley et al., 2004). The dependent variables and the manipulation checks were then assessed. Before leaving, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Achievement goal manipulation. The manipulation took place after the participants had given preference to the informative sentences sent by two project team members and before they received an email message from the third member of the project team, named Anne. 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.

Position power manipulation. The position of the third team member (Anne) who voiced the creative input varied, thereby creating two different position power conditions. In one condition Anne was a subordinate of the marketing manager (*high-power position condition*), whereas in the other condition Anne was the superior of the marketing manager (*low-power position condition*).

Intentions to integrate ideas ($\alpha = .83$) was measured using the same scale as in Study 1.

Actual integrative behavior. After participants received the email from Anne, they had the opportunity to write a response letter by email. Two raters, who were blind to condition, individually coded each of the response letters on actions taken by the leader using a coding scheme that ranged from 1 (*will not integrate the idea with own idea*) to 5 (*will integrate the idea with own idea*). Agreement among raters was good (Cohen's $\kappa = .82$).

Results

We conducted a 2 (Achievement goal: performance vs. mastery) X 2 (Position power: high vs. low) univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) with intentions to integrate as a dependent variable. As expected, we found the anticipated interaction effect of Achievement goal and Position power for intentions to integrate creative ideas. Planned comparisons showed that high-power performance goal leaders' intentions to integrate creative ideas were lower relative to low-power performance goal leaders, high-power mastery goal leaders, and low-power mastery goal leaders. These results are in line with our expectations.

To test our mediated moderation expectation, we used the bootstrapping approach outlined by Preacher et al. (2007). In the mediator model, the interaction term (Achievement goal X Position power) was significantly associated with the mediator (integrative intentions; $B = -0.22$, $p < 0.05$). In the dependent variable model, the mediator (integrative intentions) was significantly associated with the dependent variable (actual integrative behavior; $B = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$).

Furthermore, we tested the indirect effects from achievement goal to actual integrative behavior for high-power position and low-power position separately. The results were in line with our expectations, such that the indirect effect of leaders' achievement goal on actual integrative behavior through integrative intentions only emerged when leaders' power position was high rather than low. Specifically, the interaction effect between achievement goals and position power indirectly affected actual integrative behavior with lower actual integrative behavior for performance goal leaders with high-power positions.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to demonstrate when and why leaders tend to integrate creative ideas voiced by meaningful others with their own ideas. Our results show that the interaction of leaders' achievement goals and position power significantly influence leaders' reactions and responses. In Study 1 we have shown that leaders' performance goals were positively related to their integrative intentions when a superior voiced the creative input, whereas leaders' mastery goals were positively related to their integrative intentions in response to creative ideas voiced by both subordinates and superiors. In Study 2, we replicated these findings by means of an

experiment. Specifically, we found that performance goals yielded equally favorable intentions to integrate creative ideas as mastery goal leaders when a superior proposed the creative idea. However, when subordinates voiced the creative idea, performance goal leaders were showing lower intentions to integrate the creative idea than mastery goal leaders. Furthermore, as integrative intentions were predictive of actual integrative behavior, we found support for a mediated moderation model: the interaction effects of achievement goals and position power indirectly affected actual integrative behavior through integrative intentions.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literatures on achievement goals, creativity, and leadership. Our research shows that motivational drivers, that is, leaders' achievement goal, can explain differences in leaders' integrative behavior to creative ideas proposed by meaningful others. As leadership in its core is an interpersonal influence process, the current results represent a significant contribution to the growing field of interpersonal achievement goal research by showing that leaders' achievement goal affect leaders' task-related outcomes (cf. Poortvliet & Darnon, 2010). Moreover, our results contribute to the creativity literature by showing that achievement motivational factors and position power affect leaders in the way they integrate and react to potentially novel and valuable ideas. It shows that novelty and usefulness are not sufficient for ideas to be considered, recognized, and finally, implemented. Finally, our studies contribute to the literature of leadership behavior by investigating leaders' reactions to creative input voiced by different sources. As such, we contribute to an emerging line of leadership research documenting how leaders have to deal with different power influences. This study contributes to the literature that investigated the combination of both influences (Floyd & Lane, 2000), by demonstrating the impact motivational factors can have on leaders' upward and downward reactions.

Strengths, 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 position power jointly determine leaders' reactions to voiced creative input. However, suggestions for improvement to leaders are not exclusively reserved for *creative* input. That is, leaders can be provided with feedback on any kind of work-related matter that is not creative in nature. It is possible that the differential reactions of performance goal leaders and mastery goal leaders will also emerge in response to, for example, feedback on leadership behaviors that subordinates or superiors give to the leaders. Therefore, future research may be focused on exploring differential reactions of leaders to other kinds of voice input.

Our research findings show that it is not only novelty and usefulness that determine whether voiced creative ideas will become part of the 'legitimate' repertoire of thoughts and routines of the leader. We showed that leaders' achievement goals and their relative position power also affect their reactions and behaviors to valuable creative ideas. By taking these factors into account, meaningful and potentially crucial ideas for organization's survival and prosperity may be preserved. We hope that the present study provides an impetus for further research on this topic.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR(S)