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WHEN OPPOSITES HURT

SIMILARITY IN GETTING AHEAD IN LEADER-FOLLOWER DYADS AS A PREDICTOR OF JOB PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

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Abstract

When opposites hurt: Similarity in getting ahead in leader-follower dyads as a predictor of job performance evaluations

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Status-seeking behaviors are linked to executive career progression, but do leaders appreciate being surrounded by followers eager to move up in the organizational hierarchy? Building on the self-enhancement theory, we propose that leaders with high self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors give better performance evaluations to subordinates who also have willingness to get ahead behaviors. In contrast, leaders with low self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors are quite reserved about the performance of subordinates high in the getting-ahead dimension. We also propose that overall, ambitious leaders evaluate more positively their followers' performance than leaders with more modest desire to get ahead. We suggest that this effect is magnified when the status differential between the leader and the follower is reduced due to differences in age or hierarchical level (i.e., a younger leader or too few hierarchical levels between the leader and the subordinate). The results obtained by using polynomial regression and response surface techniques to analyze a sample of 138 leader-follower dyads supported our hypotheses showing a supervisor's contextual performance ratings skew rooted in leaders' desire to get ahead. We conclude by deriving the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

Keywords: getting-ahead similarity, leader-follower dyads, job performance evaluation, self-enhancement, 360-degree instruments

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Contemporary careers entail frequent job changes and role transitions that go beyond traditional onward-and-upward progress (Hall 1993). Ambitious managers are ready to take charge of their own careers by constantly looking for better conditions and increasingly challenging assignments (Hirsch 1987). As new career options develop, new interpersonal challenges arise. One challenge derives from the fact that both leaders and followers are eager to get ahead and progress in constantly changing work environments where their career aspirations might need to be reexamined on a regular basis. In fact, in today's organizations both leaders and followers are often expected to hold managerial responsibilities and lead their own projects (Charan et al. 2001). One might begin to question: Do leaders appreciate being surrounded by followers displaying getting-ahead behaviors? And if so, what kind of leaders does so?

Getting ahead can be defined as a set of status-seeking behaviors that reflect one's willingness to progress in the organizational hierarchy and to gain control over resources and other individuals (Hogan and Holland 2003, Hogan and Shelton 1998). When successful in getting ahead, people display the following behaviors: achieving results, providing leadership, exerting influence over others, communicating a vision, taking initiatives, and driving change (Conway 1999, Guillen and Saris forthcoming, Hogan and Holland 2003, Hogan et al. 1998). Throughout the paper, we refer to this set of behaviors as getting-ahead behaviors.

Research has shown that individuals displaying getting-ahead behaviors are oriented toward upward mobility (Derr, 1986) and that for middle managers, getting-ahead behaviors result in higher salary, hierarchical level, and popularity among colleagues (Guillen and Saris forthcoming). Importantly, nurturing and rewarding subordinates' getting ahead behaviors is considered a part of leaders' responsibilities (Conger and Kanungo 1988). However, giving power to followers and promoting their status-seeking behaviors can be threatening and difficult to accept for leaders themselves (Argyris, 1998).

Threatening employees can activate ego-defense mechanisms in their leaders that in turn affect how the leaders see and evaluate their employees (Fast and Chen 2009). We contend that leaders' self-perception of how effectively they can display getting-ahead behaviors affects whether they judge ambitious subordinates as threatening. Thus, to better understand job outcomes, it is crucial to examine the interplay between leaders' and followers' desire to get ahead in predicting job performance evaluations that leaders give to their followers.

The complementarity principle (Kiesler 1983) can serve to guide research to explore this issue. It has been suggested that in social encounters, people tend to exhibit complementary responses to their counterparts' expressions of dominance (Tiedens and Fragale 2003). Moreover, previous studies have reported a positive effect of complementary behaviors in constructs related to the getting-ahead dimension (i.e., such as control, dominance, and extroversion) on satisfaction with interpersonal interactions (Dryer and Horowitz 1997) and team members' evaluation of their team (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Few studies that used data specifically from leader-follower dyads have also hypothesized that complementary getting-ahead behaviors are associated with better subordinate outcomes and job performance. For example, Glomb and Welsh (2005) showed that dominance dissimilarity is positively associated with subordinate satisfaction with the leader when the leader scores higher in that dimension. Recently, Grant et al. (2011) showed that complementary extraversion levels among leaders and their team members result in a better team performance on highly structured and repetitive tasks. As the authors suggested, however, it remains to be determined whether these results can be generalized to groups with more difficult and complex responsibilities. Moreover, uncertainty about leader status is a crucial element to consider when addressing the effects of asymmetric relationships at work (Grant et al. 2011, Oxford 1986). We propose that when followers manifest their desire to get ahead through status-seeking behaviors, the uncertainty of leaders' own status becomes more salient, and leaders' motivation to protect it can influence their interactions with followers in ways that reverse the complementarity prediction.

In this article, we examine the effect of getting-ahead similarity in leader-follower dyads on supervisors' ratings of subordinates' performance. We also examine how leader-follower status differential moderates the effect of leaders' getting-ahead on performance ratings. By exploring these relationships, we make three important contributions. First, we contribute to the literature on how getting ahead behaviors relate to career success. Research has shown that powerful players in organizations may use performance evaluations as a tool for impression management (Ferris and Judge 1991) that allows them to justify their status (Greenberg et al. 2007) and thus to maintain a positive self-view (Fiske 2004, Heine et al. 1999, Pfeffer and Fong 2005). We hypothesize and show that compared to leaders low in getting ahead, leaders high in this dimension evaluate more positively the performance of their followers. By documenting a systematic skew in performance evaluations rooted in leaders' self-assessed levels of getting-ahead behaviors, we highlight how career research can benefit from paying attention to leaders' characteristics.

Second, we contribute to the body of literature on leader-follower similarity in the workplace. Research has shown that subordinates of leaders interested in having impact on others have higher morale than subordinates with leaders with other motivations (McClelland and Burnham 1976). However, the reactions of leaders toward ambitious subordinates remain unknown. In parallel, studies on social comparisons at work have shown that while ambitious subordinates compare themselves to leaders to assess their probability of success, leaders compare themselves to their followers to get a sense of personal accomplishment (Greenberg et al. 2007). It is often claimed that downward comparisons tend to be associated with positive affect (Mussweiler and Strack 2000). However, the positive psychological outcomes of making downward comparisons can disappear if subordinates are perceived as overpassing leaders' career prospects. We theorize and show that the advantages of being complementary in the getting-ahead dimension reverse when protecting leadership status is crucial as it is the case when followers themselves are expected to hold leadership responsibilities. Our results show that whether subordinates who display getting-ahead behaviors are positively viewed depends on the extent to which their leaders are also high in the getting-ahead dimension.

Third, this study advances understanding on how leader-follower status differentials operate at work. Our results suggest that leaders engage in comparisons with their subordinates to preserve their sense of power and that leader-follower status differential moderates the relationship between getting ahead and job performance evaluations. Having higher status constitutes a source of self-affirmation in itself (Lawrence 1988), and therefore, the psychological importance of leaders' downward social comparisons is lower in such situations. Our results on the latter aspect reveal a potential irony of the flat organizational structures that have become so popular: reducing the number of layers in the organizational hierarchy may actually increase the status uncertainty that leaders experience. We test our hypotheses on a sample of 138 leader-follower dyads using polynomial regression techniques and response surface modeling.

Getting-ahead motive and behaviors

Getting ahead refers to the set of behaviors displayed at work that reflect the intention to achieve status vis-à-vis other members of the group (Hogan and Shelton 1998, Hogan and Holland 2003). This alignment of the getting-ahead motive and getting-ahead job behaviors is consistent with the idea that the same content dimensions and descriptors underlie personal motivations and behaviors (Campbell 1990, Chaplin et al. 1988). Importantly, Hogan and Shelton (1998) proposed that the getting-ahead behaviors that an individual manifests at work are judged simultaneously by multiple people (e.g., the individual him or herself, the boss, direct reports, and colleagues), and that the individual's reputation reflects these different views. Particularly relevant for leadership processes are self-perceptions of own behaviors at work (Sosik 2001). Previous research has shown that these subjective perceptions (e.g., "I led our discussion", "I was in control of the situation") are more proximal antecedents—as compared, for example, to the personality dominance trait—to outcome variables such as reputation in the eyes of others (Anderson and Berdahl 2002). We build on this literature and conceptualize getting ahead as self-assessed

getting-ahead behaviors. We further propose that this self-assessment of successfully getting ahead influences how leaders perceive others and judge their performance.

Contextual performance evaluations as a means to assert leader status

Meaningful categories of performance include task and contextual performance (Motowidlo and Van Scotter 1994). While task performance is usually assessed with objective indicators (i.e., sales), contextual performance comprises those non-required voluntary employee actions that facilitate team and organizational goal achievement. Examples include helping and cooperating with others, following organizational rules and procedures, supporting and defending organizational objectives, persisting with optimism to complete own tasks, and volunteering to carry out activities that are not formally part of job (Motowidlo et al. 1997). Pearce and Xu (2012) suggested that when rating contextual performance, leaders have more scope to act to assert their status than when rating task performance. We build on this argument and predict that leader-follower getting-ahead (dis)similarity affects contextual performance evaluations.

Self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors and perceived competence to lead

Previous research suggests that the sense of power that individuals have when holding influential positions relates to self-perceived competence (Anderson and Berdahl 2002, Goodwin et al. 2000). However, being in an influential position does not always come hand by hand with self-perceived competence in one's ability to lead (Fast and Chen 2009). Leaders can suffer from insecurity if they doubt about their ability to perform their role successfully.

Role theory (Ashforth 2001, Biddle 1979) posits that getting-ahead behaviors (such as influencing or providing a vision) are essential to successful leadership (Charan et al. 2001, Ibarra et al.

2010, Kotter 1985, McClelland and Boyatzis 1982). Drawing on this research, we propose that it is particularly important for leaders to see themselves positively in the getting-ahead dimension—as the ones in charge, getting resources, and guiding their work units. After all, this is what leaders are supposed to do, and thus when leaders assess themselves highly in the getting-ahead dimension, they will have a sense of fitting the leadership role (Ibarra et al. 2010). Because getting-ahead behaviors are central to successful leadership, leaders whose self-assessed level of getting-ahead behavior is high will also have a high opinion about their leadership competence. In contrast, the discrepancy between the actual and ought self-states will cause emotional discomfort (Higgins 1987, Stone and Cooper 2001) in leaders with low levels of self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors—who will judge themselves as less competent for their roles.

Given the link between getting-ahead behavior and leadership competence, leaders with high self-assessed levels of getting-ahead behaviors may have a tendency to observe reality in a more positive light (Bandura 1977, Pfeffer and Fong 2005), focus on potential rewards while ignoring potential negative consequences (Anderson and Galinsky 2006), and focus on positive actions while deemphasizing negative feedback (Sosik 2001, see also Kunda 1990). It is also reasonable to expect that the tendency to see things in a positive light also manifests itself when leaders high in getting ahead judge others, especially if these others are essential to their professional success—as followers often are. In essence, leaders high in getting ahead will focus on what their followers do well. Consistent with this reasoning, scholars have suggested that leaders with a well-developed sense of power give better rewards to their subordinates (Keltner et al. 2003).

In contrast, leaders who perceive themselves as less competent in leadership roles are more likely to lash out against subordinates and engage in other ego-defense strategies to protect their status (Fast and Chen 2009), give threatening subordinates lower performance ratings to defend their position (Pearce and Xu 2012), and focus on punishment and social constraints (Keltner et al. 2003). Thus, leaders with low self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors will feel more insecure in their professional role and be more likely

to scrutinize their subordinates, emphasizing negative aspects of the latter's performance to protect their self-view. Therefore, we propose:

> *Hypothesis 1: Compared to leaders low in self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors, leaders who assess highly their getting-ahead behaviors give more positive contextual performance evaluations to their subordinates.*

Downward comparisons as a source of self-esteem and status legitimacy

Will leaders have positive views of subordinates who are eager to get ahead? Furthermore, will the leader's desire to get ahead change the answer to this question? To theorize on the effect of getting ahead (dis)similarity, we draw on the social comparison literature. In evaluating their chances of moving up in the leadership pipeline, individuals consider the example of other individuals in higher hierarchical positions (Gibson 2003). However, once one has attained a privileged position in the organizational hierarchy, protecting one's status becomes crucial, and thus, it is reasonable to assume that downward comparisons might increase in importance.

Leadership roles are attractive because they are usually accompanied by highly desirable outcomes such as higher salaries, more opportunities to realize one's ambitions, greater authority, and more personal challenge and stimulation (Singer 1991). Correspondingly, once people become leaders, they may thus also become willing to do whatever it takes to protect their position (Pfeffer and Fong 2005). Indeed, research has shown that status increases the degree to which individuals feel the need to be competent in their jobs (Georgesen and Harris 2006) and that individuals at high organizational levels compete to preserve their status (Chattopadhyay et al. 2010, Magee et al. 2007). Social comparisons play a protective role for leaders by helping them to affirm their way of operating (Gibson 2003), to maintain a positive self-view (Morse and Gergen 1970), and to gather information about their probability of success (Wheeler et al. 1997). Thus, leaders may approach performance evaluations with their own personal agendas geared toward maximizing their own interests (Greenberg et al. 2007).

We elaborate our hypothesis by separately considering leaders low and high in self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors. The complementarity principle (Kiesler 1983) suggests that leaders with low levels of self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors will prefer being surrounded by dominant followers. We argue that leaders who strive to preserve their status and sense of power but are not sure about their leadership competence—as reflected by their low self-assessed getting-ahead levels—may feel threatened by their dominant followers. In fact, research has suggested that leaders who find proactive subordinates threatening fail to appreciate their accomplishments (Detert and Burris 2007, Grant et al. 2009, Zhang et al. 2012). Thus, self-serving motives (Crocker 2002, Greenberg et al. 2007, Pfeffer and Fong 2005) may induce leaders low in the getting-ahead dimension downplay the performance evaluations of their ambitious followers. Contrary to the complementarity prediction, we hypothesize that leaders low in getting ahead will prefer more submissive followers who help them to feel more at ease with their own getting-ahead self-assessment.

In contrast, leaders high in self-assessed getting ahead behaviors are confident in their capacity to exert influence. The complementarity principle suggests that leaders high in getting ahead will prefer being surrounded by subordinates low in that dimension, because these followers will accept more comfortably their orders and ways of doing things (Strong et al. 1998). We predict instead that when both leaders and followers hold managerial responsibilities, leaders high in control favor ambitious followers. Several arguments support our prediction. First, their high perceived leadership competence may prevent them from judging their subordinates as a threat (Sosik 2001), and therefore, they may be more inclined to value the contributions of their subordinates (Detert and Burris 2007, Grant et al. 2009). Second, having similar subordinates (also high in getting ahead) serves for self-affirmation purposes (Greenberg et al. 2007). Third, followers are an important goal-attainment lever for their leaders (Lowin and Craig 1968). If the leader has sufficient confidence not to feel threatened by subordinates displaying status-seeking behaviors, these subordinates can constitute a real advantage for the leader because they are more likely to achieve their goals (McClelland and Boyatzis 1982). Moreover, in these cases, leaders are likely to believe that the successes of their subordinates are the result of their own efforts (Campbell and

Sedikides 1999, Miller et al. 1982), thereby protecting their positive leadership self-view. The following hypothesis summarizes our arguments:

Hypothesis 2: Leaders will more positively evaluate followers who are similar to them in the getting-ahead dimension.

The moderating role of leader-follower status differential

Social norms research (Tsui et al. 2002) suggests that as compared to followers, leaders are expected to occupy higher-status positions within their social system. If a leader of a project occupies a lower demographic or hierarchical status than his/her subordinates in the project, the leader faces a potential challenge to his/her leadership position and authority (Pearce and Xu 2012). Building on the self-enhancement theory (Fiske 2004, Pfeffer and Fong 2005), we propose that a leader-follower status differential that posits the leader in higher status groups as compared to his/her followers constitutes a source of legitimacy for the leader, whereas an unfavorable leader-follower status differential enhances the leader's feeling of insecurity, thereby increasing the need for self-justification through downward comparisons. Thus, being part of high-status groups protects leaders' self-image (Brewer and Kramer 1985) and diminishes the need to justify their leadership status. Consequently, a large leader-follower status differential favorable to the leader will protect leaders low in getting-ahead from feeling insecure, and thus reduce the skew in their performance ratings. On the other hand, for leaders belonging to groups with low relative status, protecting their dominant positions through downward comparisons may be far more relevant and the skew in the performance ratings they give to their subordinates may be more evident.

Social norms research (Tsui et al. 2002) and status characteristics theory (Troyer and Younts 1997) postulate that age and hierarchical level of leaders and followers have major relevance for determining leader-follower status differential. Leaders are expected to be older and more experienced, and to be positioned at higher formal hierarchical levels than their followers. We propose that the more

favorable leader-follower status differential is to the leader, the more secure s/he will feel in the leader role, and thus the less important is the need to justify his/her status. For example, a leader who is only one hierarchical level below the CEO and is evaluating project performance of subordinates five levels below him/her will have a different level of perceived power than a leader at that level who is evaluating subordinates who are just one level below him/her. In the first case, the leader's position places him/her at a much higher hierarchical level than his/her followers, whereas in the second case, the leader's position is less consistent with the high organizational status expected for the leader. Previous research has shown that interactions with colleagues at similar hierarchical levels are more self-threating and encourage social comparison processes more than interactions with lower-status colleagues (Campbell and Sedikides 1999). Therefore we propose that the more favorable leader-follower status differential is to the leader, the smaller is difference between performance evaluations made by leaders low- and high- in the getting ahead dimension.

Regarding leader-follower age differential, relational demography predicts that similarity in age is generally related to more positive work attitudes (Judge and Ferris 1993). However, in most organizational settings in which experience is an important criterion for promotion, older and more experienced individuals are expected to occupy higher positions in the organizational hierarchy (Tsui et al. 2002). Thus, leaders might feel less secure in their role when their subordinates are older than them. Furthermore, this insecurity might be reflected in how the leaders evaluate the subordinates' performance. Indeed, young leaders tend to judge old followers more negatively (Shore et al. 2003), and old leaders give higher performance ratings to younger followers (Ferris et al. 1991). Building on these findings, we hypothesize that:

>*Hypothesis 3a: Leader-follower hierarchical level differential moderates the relationship between getting ahead and job performance evaluations, so that a hierarchical status differential more favorable to the leader (with more levels separating the leader and the follower in the hierarchy) reduces differences in contextual performance evaluations made by leaders with high and low levels of self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors.*

Hypothesis 3b: Leader-follower age differential moderates the relationship between getting ahead and job performance evaluations, so that an age differential more favorable to the leader (with the leader being older) reduces differences in contextual performance evaluations made by leaders with high and low levels of self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors.

METHODS

Participants and procedure

One-hundred eighty eight employees of three public organizations completed online surveys. The sample consisted of highly-qualified employees with opportunities to assume leadership responsibilities in various projects. Participation in the study was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured.

The organizations administered a widely used management assessment tool to measure the getting ahead dimension as part of a development program. The participants attended an explanatory session, and rated themselves by completing the self-version of the questionnaires via the company intranet. Among these participants, thirty were leaders with respect to others. Two weeks after, each participant was rated by his/her respective leader on contextual performance by completing another on-line survey. Complete data were received for 138 leader-follower dyads. These reports constituted our final dataset. The subordinates were 33.80 years old on average (SD: 7.32) whereas the average age of the leaders was 42.00 (SD: 9.69). Of the 138 followers, 73 were female, and 65 were male. Of the 30 leaders, 16 were female, and 14 were male.

The average percentage of missing values (5.44% and 6.37% for the self-assessed getting ahead behaviors and leaders' contextual performance scores, respectively). We imputed the missing values using the mean substitution method (Roth, 1994). The average correlations of the items with and without missing values did not differ for any of the three sources used in this study.

Measures

      Getting ahead. Consistent with previous research (Hogan and Holland 2003, Guillen and Saris forthcoming, Oh and Berry 2009), we assessed getting ahead through a set of behaviors that reflect individuals' attempts to advance in their organization. These behaviors included achieving results, providing leadership, exerting influence over others, communicating a vision, taking initiatives, and driving change (Conway 1999, Guillen and Saris forthcoming, Hogan and Holland 2003, Hogan et al. 1998). Scullen et al. (2003) showed that valid behavioral latent dimensions (e.g., getting ahead) can be captured by instruments actually used by organizations and that these latent factor structures do not differ in any systematic way across different instruments. Like previous scholars (Guillen and Saris forthcoming), we used 24 items grouped in six competency dimensions to measure getting ahead (i.e., "achievement orientation," "initiative," "inspirational leadership," "influence," "change catalyst," and "conflict management") from a widely used personal and social competence assessment tool (ECI-2) (Boyatzis and Sala 2004). For all items, we used a five-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 ('the behavior is never shown') and 5 ('the behavior is consistently shown by the individual'). Sample items include "articulates a compelling vision" and "inspires others." The items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .88$).

      Contextual Performance. Contextual performance was assessed by supervisors using nineteen items drawn from the existing literature (e.g., Motowidlo et al. 1997) that refer to helping and coordinating with others, persisting, following organizational rules, defending organizational objectives and customer satisfaction. Sample items include "takes personal responsibility for meeting customer needs" and "cooperates with others." The reliability for this measure was high ($\alpha = .91$).

      Demographic variables. We obtained demographic information (gender, age, and organizational level) from personnel data. Gender was coded as a dummy variable (female = 0 and male = 1). Age was coded using integers. Organizational levels were coded on a scale from 1 to 4 for two organizations and on a scale from 1 to 10 for the third one; in all cases, the highest possible hierarchical

level was coded as 1. We computed the standardized scores for every organization to consistently measure organizational level.

Age and level differentials. We predicted that the effect of both the direction of age and level differentials (i.e., whether the leader is at a higher hierarchical level and is older than the subordinate) and their magnitude (i.e., the difference in level or age). To test our hypotheses, we conceptualized supervisor-subordinate differential as the algebraic difference between the two scores. Thus, age differences and differences in levels were computed by subtracting the standardized follower score from the corresponding standardized leader score for these two demographic variables. Negative values for age dissimilarity indicate dyads in which the participants are older than their leaders, whereas positive numbers indicate dyads in which the participants are younger. When the values for level dissimilarity are negative, the subordinates are at a lower hierarchical level than their leaders; when the values are positive, the opposite is true.

Analysis

Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) recommendations, we first assessed the fit of the proposed one-dimension measurement model of self-rated competencies using structural equations models (SEM) with LISREL. We tested a model that groups six getting-ahead competencies into one dimension against an alternative nested model with six dimensions. The CFI difference between the two models (Anderson and Gerbing 1988) and the χ^2 difference test (James et al. 1982) were used to determine which model best fits our data. We then computed the getting-ahead scores for leaders and followers by summing up the corresponding competencies. Finally, we used these scores to assess leader-follower getting-ahead similarity.

To test our hypothesis regarding getting-ahead similarity, we used polynomial regression and response surface modeling techniques (Edwards 1994, 2002, Shanock et al. 2010), which reduce methodological problems related to the analysis of difference scores (Edwards 1994). For these analyses,

all variables were standardized. Surface plots were constructed using MATLAB. Finally, because various participants share the same leader and therefore their leader scores are not independent (thus violating the ordinary least square regression assumption of independence), we computed "clustered" standard errors (Rogers 1993) that are robust to correlation across individuals with the same leader.

Results

Structure of getting-ahead competencies. We tested one- and six-factor measurement models using structural equations. The baseline model that groups six competencies into one factor fitted our data well (χ^2 (252) = 387.39, p < .01; RMSEA = .05; CFI = .96). The alternative six-factor nested model yielded a worse fit (χ^2 (258) = 473.34, p < .01; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .92). The CFI difference between the two models exceeded .01; and the one factor structure provided a significant improvement in fit over the six-factor one ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 85.95; Δdf = 6; p < .001), thus suggesting that the one-factor model for the six competencies fitted our data better than the six-factor model (James et al. 1982).

Similarity in getting ahead as predictor of contextual performance evaluations. The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are shown in Table 1. Interestingly, the follower and leader getting-ahead scores were not significantly related. The contextual performance evaluations were significantly related to leaders' getting-ahead scores and leader-follower level differential but not to followers' getting-ahead scores.

Insert Table 1 about here

To test the effect of leader-follower similarity with regard to getting-ahead behaviors, we used linear (Equation 1) and quadratic (Equation 2) polynomial regressions following Edwards (2002):

$$CPE_{LINEAR} = b_{M0} + b_{M1}L_{GAhead} + b_{M2}F_{GAhead} + e \tag{1}$$

$$CPE_{QUA} = b_{M0} + b_{M1}L_{GAhead} + b_{M2}F_{GAhead} + b_{M3}L_{GAhead}^2 + b_{M4}F_{GAhead}L_{GAhead} + b_{M5}F_{GAhead}^2 + e \tag{2}$$

where contextual performance evaluation (CPE) is the dependent variable and L_{GAhead} and F_{Ahead} are the predictors for leader and follower self-assessed levels of getting-ahead behaviors, respectively. In both models, we controlled for leader and follower age, gender, and hierarchical level.

Table 2 shows the progression of testing these models. The linear model was significant in predicting performance evaluations. However, the quadratic model better fitted the data, as the significantly higher F-value implied. We thus discarded the linear model and proceeded by interpreting the terms in the quadratic model and testing further effects.

Insert Table 2 and Figure 1 about here

To interpret the results of the quadratic model, we plotted predicted values using the response surface technique. The surface is shown in Figure 1, where contextual performance evaluations were plotted as a function of leader and follower getting ahead. We used the coefficients of the quadratic model to calculate four surface test values—the slopes and curvatures of the congruence and the incongruence lines (Edwards 2002, Shanock et al. 2010). The congruence line includes all points where leaders' and followers' getting-ahead scores are the same ($F_{GAhead} = L_{GAhead}$). In contrast, the incongruence line includes all points where the getting-ahead values are in perfect disagreement ($F_{GAhead} = - L_{GAhead}$). The coefficients were calculated as follows:

$$a_1 = b_{M1} + b_{M2} \tag{3}$$

$$a_2 = b_{M3} + b_{M4} + b_{M5} \tag{4}$$

$$a_3 = b_{M1} - b_{M2} \tag{5}$$

$$a_4 = b_{M3} - b_{M4} + b_{M5} \tag{6}$$

where a_1 (Equation 3) is the slope of the line for perfect agreement with b_{M1} and b_{M2} being the unstandardized beta coefficients for L_{GAhead} and F_{GAhead}, respectively. The curvature along the line of perfect agreement is assessed by a_2 (Equation 4), where b_{M3} is the unstandardized beta coefficient for L_{GAhead}^2, b_{M4} is the same for the cross product of F_{GAhead} and L_{GAhead}, and b_{M5} is the unstandardized beta

coefficient for F_{GAhead}^2. The slope of the line of incongruence is assessed using a_3 (Equation 5), and the curvature along the incongruence line is assessed using a_4 (Equation 6).

As shown in Table 2, the coefficients a_1, a_2, and a_3 were significant. The slope of the line of perfect agreement (a_1) was positive, suggesting that contextual performance evaluations improved as leaders' and followers' getting-ahead scores increased. The negative slope of the line of perfect disagreement (a_3) indicated that contextual performance evaluations were more positive when leaders were higher in getting ahead than followers. Overall, these results suggest that leaders high in getting ahead gave higher contextual performance evaluations than did leaders low in getting ahead, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1.

Regarding getting-ahead similarity, Figure 1 shows that contextual performance evaluations were higher in dyads where both leaders and followers scored high in getting ahead than in dyads where both parties scored low in this dimension. This result indicates that leaders high in getting ahead evaluated more favorably followers also high in this dimension than they evaluated followers low in getting ahead. Leaders low in getting ahead also gave superior contextual performance evaluations to subordinates who shared this characteristic with them. Moreover, the significant positive coefficient a_2 derived from the surface tests (Table 2) indicated that along the line of perfect agreement, F_{GAhead} and L_{GAhead} had a non-linear relationship. Contextual performance evaluations were higher at the far right and near left corners of the graph and lower toward the middle. These results indicate that contextual performance evaluations were better when both members of the dyad were either clearly high or low in the getting-ahead dimension. Overall, these results suggest that getting ahead similarity had a positive effect on leader evaluations of followers' job performance, as we predicted in Hypothesis 2.

Age and Level Differentials as moderators. To examine the hypothesized moderating role of age and level differentials, we first calculated a block variable (Heise 1972, Igra 1979) for the getting-ahead dimension including both linear and quadratic terms, i.e., $L_{GAhead}+F_{GAhead}+L_{GAhead}^2+F_{Gahead}L_{GAhead}+F_{GAhead}^2$. We then obtained the multiplicative interaction terms for the getting-ahead block variable and each of the two moderators, level differential and age differential. These interactions were included in the quadratic

model as additional predictors of contextual performance evaluations. The results are presented in Table 3. Both interactions were statistically significant, thereby supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

Insert Table 3 about here

To further interpret these interaction effects, we divided the sample into two subgroups using the median scores for level differential (-2.32) and age differential (7.00). We then tested the slopes along the line of perfect agreement, i.e., $F_{GAhead} = L_{GAhead}$ (coefficient a_1), and the line of perfect disagreement, i.e, $F_{GAhead} = - L_{GAhead}$ (coefficient a_3) separately for each subgroup. A positive value of a_1 and a negative value of a_3 would indicate that leaders high in getting ahead gave better performance ratings than did leaders low in this dimension. Thus, we expected the two coefficients to be more statistically significant in dyads were the differentials were less favorable to leaders than in dyads were the differentials were more favorable to leaders.

The results displayed in Table 3 showed that in dyads where the status differentials were less favorable to leaders, the coefficients a_1 and a_3 were positive and negative, respectively, and statistically significant. Thus, the results were consistent with our predictions for both level and age differentials. In contrast, neither a_1 nor a_3 was statistically significant in dyads with level and age differentials more favorable to leaders relative to their followers. These results indicate that as hypothesized, in dyads misaligned with social norms, leaders with low getting-ahead scores gave significantly lower performance ratings than leaders with high getting-ahead scores whereas the difference was diluted in leader-follower dyads that were aligned with social norms.

DISCUSSION

Do leaders appreciate being surrounded by followers who display leadership and status-seeking behaviors? Our results based on 138 leader-follower dyads showed that when leaders rated themselves highly with regard to getting-ahead behaviors, followers with a high desire to get ahead obtained better

contextual performance evaluations. However, when leaders rated themselves low in the getting-ahead dimension, the opposite was true: more ambitious followers received lower contextual performance evaluations. Moreover, as compared to leaders low in getting ahead, leaders with high getting-ahead scores overall gave better performance evaluations to their followers. The effect of leader getting-ahead on contextual performance evaluations was moderated by leader-follower age and hierarchical level differentials. In particular, the effect of leader getting-ahead was only observed in the dyads where, contrary to social norms, age or hierarchical level differentials were less favorable to leaders. Our study contributes to the ongoing research on leader-follower dyads at work, emphasizing the importance of taking into account the perspective of the leader and the role it plays in the assessment of job outcomes. Our findings offer meaningful theoretical contributions to different bodies of literature.

Theoretical contributions

First, by focusing on leader-follower dyads and considering the perspective of the leader in the performance evaluation process, we expand our knowledge of the mechanisms that make evaluation ratings subjective rather than objective. One of the primary contributions of our study is that it advances our understanding of how leaders assess contextual performance of their followers. Scholars have noted that a "self-bias" influences self-assessments of work-related skills and behavior. For example, previous research has studied how over-estimating or under-estimating own performance at work—relative to the perceptions of others—is related to performance outcomes (Atwater et al. 1998) and satisfaction with work relationships (Sosik 2001). Furthermore, Greenberg (1991) documented the propensity of employees to inflate their performance evaluations for self-serving purposes. However, other sources of the performance ratings skews have been largely overlooked in the literature. Our results showed that compared to leaders low in the getting-ahead dimension, those with high getting-ahead scores rated the performance of their followers more generously—thereby revealing the existence of a "leader skew"

rooted in how capable leaders see themselves to get ahead. By showing that leaders' self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors influence evaluations of performance, our results echo warnings regarding idiosyncratic leader effects (Scullen et al. 2003) in 360-degree instruments or other performance assessment tools.

Second, our results serve to distil predictions regarding the role of leader-follower similarity in the workplace and the underlying mechanisms of the role of the desire of getting ahead in predicting job outcomes. The recent emphasis on personal characteristics as essential to understanding similarity at work has resulted in a number of studies that have examined the role of similarity between supervisor and subordinates on relevant leadership dimensions (e.g., Glomb and Welsh 2005, Grant et al. 2011, Shore et al. 2003, Zhang et al. 2012). For example, scholars have examined how leader-follower personality similarity contributes to group productivity (Grant et al. 2011), follower satisfaction with leaders, organizational citizenship behavior, and work withdrawal (Glomb and Welsh 2005). However, to our knowledge, this is the first study that has examined the effect of leader-follower similarity in their desire to get ahead on how leaders evaluate the performance of their followers. Our findings suggest that follower-leader similarity with regard to the getting-ahead dimension contributes to better job performance evaluations. In addition, our results also support assertions about the difficulties of being surrounded by dissimilar people at work. If, as our study shows, leaders prefer being surrounded by similar followers, managing diverse teams effectively and equitably can constitute a real challenge.

Finally, our research presents a new perspective on the role of status differential in organizations. Our findings contribute to a better understanding of how larger status differentials favorable to the leader reduce leader anxiety regarding status maintenance in follower-leader dyads. There are now many "flat" organizations in which leaders do not have any formal authority over their followers. In fact, managers in executive development programs often voice concerns about how they can influence their followers when they do not have the formal "right" to do so. While it is as of yet uncertain how this type of organizational design affects leader satisfaction at work, our results suggest that in such organizations, leaders low in getting ahead may be less inclined to value and reward their followers who manifest a stronger desire to get ahead. In addition, our results showed that age differentials also moderate the effect of leader getting

ahead on contextual performance outcomes, making leaders low in getting ahead more generous with followers in the dyads that are more aligned with social norms (i.e., those in which the leader is older than the follower). Future research should examine the effect of leader-follower age differences in contemporary organizational contexts—such as, for example, in technology organizations—in which the traditional "old leader-younger follower" model is being defied by an increasing number of young "rising stars" who hold senior positions or even serve as CEOs.

Limitations and future directions

This research is subject to limitations that point toward directions for future research. For example, although we proposed that leaders with low getting-ahead scores protect their self-esteem by judging their followers more harshly, it is certainly possible that leaders employ other strategies to maintain a positive self-image. Managerial performance is a multifaceted construct, and we did not examine other facets that might magnify or mitigate the effects observed. For example, can leaders low in getting-ahead behaviors protect their self-image by assessing themselves generously with regard to other dimensions such as conscientiousness or openness to experience? In which type of organizations are these dimensions more important? Future research may help to answer such questions. Furthermore, our study is based on leader-follower dyads at three public institutions. Replicating our findings in private organizations is thus desirable. Private work settings need to be flexible to maintain their competitive advantage in constantly changing market conditions (Mirvis and Hall 1994). Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that leaders working in speedy private firms experience higher levels of job insecurity as compared to leaders working in more stable public institutions, which can magnify the effect of leaders' self-assessed getting ahead behaviors on their subordinates' performance evaluations.

Further laboratory and empirical studies can be used to trace the causal links between the variables we considered and, significantly, to identify additional moderators and boundary conditions for the effect of self-assessed getting-ahead. Several lines of research may be helpful in this respect. First, managerial experience may serve to boost leaders' self-efficacy and mitigate the effect of getting ahead

on performance evaluations. Second, leaders usually work with several followers, and the position of the latter relative to each other may influence the role of getting-ahead similarity. How do job performance evaluations of an ambitious subordinate compare between a team in which s/he is the only individual high in getting ahead and a team in which all subordinates are high in getting ahead? Does the number of followers that a leader has under his or her supervision play a role in how threatening a particular follower seems from the perspective of the leader? These questions can also be addressed in future studies.

On a related note, value similarity can be examined as another moderator of the effect of self-assessed getting ahead and personality similarity on performance evaluations. Value congruence has been proposed as related to higher interpersonal attraction and to job-related outcomes, although empirical research on this topic is still scarce (Edwards and Cable 2009). Future studies should explore if shared values decrease the role of getting-ahead similarity in explaining the performance ratings that leaders give to their followers. Moreover, how situational characteristics in organizations affect the importance of getting-ahead similarity remains unknown. For example, spatial distance between a leader and followers can alter leader-follower interactions (Ferris et al. 1994), and thus, remote relationships without personal contact can also play a role in how the desire to get ahead affects performance evaluations by leaders. In addition, further studies can explore how organizational incentives might modify our findings. For example, Jackson et al. (1991) suggested that at higher organizational levels situational incentives to increase team and strategic performance are more salient and can affect how people judge performance— by potentially making performance evaluations less biased.

Finally, future studies can also examine how getting-ahead similarity relates to objective measures of performance when both leaders and followers hold managerial responsibilities. Our study suggests that leaders give more generous contextual performance ratings to followers who are similar to them. However, research has shown that diversity (as opposed to similarity) yields higher objective performance levels within management teams (Jackson et al. 1991). Thus, additional research is needed to examine the interplay between getting-ahead similarity, objective performance measures, and subjective performance evaluations that leaders give to their followers who hold managerial responsibilities.

Practical implications and conclusion

Our research offers valuable practical insights. The key implications of these results relate to the leader bias in performance evaluations. First, our results suggest that the leader bias should be taken into account when interpreting supervisors' performance ratings for development purposes (through 360-degree instruments, for example). Second, to decrease the anxiety attached to the feedback process, organizations should not only train feedback receivers (Conger and Toegel 2003) but also educate those giving feedback and warn them about the benefits and risks of managerial assessment instruments. Third, many vital HR decisions, including those regarding pay, promotions, and training, are solely based on the judgments of leaders about their subordinates. Our research suggests that including other sources in job performance evaluation processes is important.

Moreover, our findings suggest that performance evaluations depend on how "competent" the leader feels with regard to getting-ahead behaviors. Subordinates may need to take this into account. The leadership literature has long noted how important it is for leaders to give feedback not only regarding what followers do wrong but also regarding what they do correctly and their talents. Our results suggest that followers may need to do the same with their leaders. Making sure that one's leader has high self-image can yield better performance evaluations. Importantly, our results also suggest that how "competent" the leader feels is relative to how competent s/he perceives others at the workplace. Thus, leaders may seek self-esteem at the cost of objectivity in evaluating others (Crocker 2002). To avoid this, organizations may want to shift leaders' goals from the individual to the collective level, and they may also want to help their leader to self-affirm.

Our results regarding the moderating effect of age differentials suggest that status norms do not have to be explicitly formalized to protect against the insecurity of leaders low in self-assessed getting-ahead behaviors. One implication is that by paying more attention to non-formalized status relationships (e.g., those related to age, gender, or culture), organizations may begin to better understand how

organizational demographics may affect leader self-image and what practices can be enacted to cultivate their perceived competence.

Finally, our research suggests that leaders are more generous with followers who are similar to them in the getting ahead dimension. In an organizational context in which managing diversity is praised and encouraged, it is crucial to make sure that subordinates who are not similar to their managers are accepted and valued. HR professionals might work on reversing the similarity effect by, for example, highlighting the collective value of complementary followers.

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TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Bivariate Correlations

	Variable	M	SD	Correlations									
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Follower getting ahead	85.03	10.85	.88									
2	Leader getting ahead	88.17	10.06	.04	.88								
3	Contextual Performance	74.21	8.71	.02	.30**	.91							
4	Level Differential	-2.17	1.18	.21*	-.08	.33**	-						
5	Age Differential	7.20	11.66	-.05	.26**	.18*	-.05	-					
6	Follower age	33.80	7.32	-.04	-.33**	-.20	.21*	-.66**	-				
7	Leader age	42.00	9.69	-.10	.07	.07	.11	.78**	-.05	-			
8	Follower gender	0.47	0.50	.18*	.16	-.07	-.10	.08	-.23**	-.08	-		
9	Leader gender	0.54	0.50	.17	.11	-.02	-.08	.09	-.05	.07	.15	-	
10	Follower level	0.20	0.71	-.26**	-.05	-.24**	-.75**	.10	-.05	.01	-.07	.02	-
11	Leader level	-1.87	0.80	.08	-.17	.26**	.81**	.01	.27**	.24**	-.21*	-.09	-.21*

Note. N = 138. Reliabilities are on the diagonal.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 2

Regression Analyses for the Effect of Getting Ahead on Contextual Performance Ratings

	Contextual Performance	
	Linear Model	Quadratic Model
Variable		
Follower Age	-.03†	-.03*
Leader Age	-.00	-.01
Follower Level	-.27	-.27*
Leader Level	.40**	.41*
Follower Gender	-.22	-.20
Leader Gender	.00	.17
Follower getting ahead	-.06	-.12
Leader getting ahead	.31*	.35**
Follower $\times$ Follower getting ahead		.17†
Squared Follower getting ahead		.00
Squared Leader getting ahead		.20**
R^2	.22	.29
R^2 Change		.07**
Surface Tests		
a_1 (slope of the line of perfect agreement)		.24†
a_2 (curvature along the line of perfect agreement)		.37**
a_3 (slope of the line of incongruence)		-.48**
a_4 (curvature along the line of incongruence)		.03

Note. In all regressions, variance and covariance matrices were adjusted using cluster option in STATA because leaders' ratings are not independent among participants with the same leader. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Adjusted R^2 and standardized coefficients are invalid in regression coefficients with cluster option.

† $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 3
Moderated Regression Analyses Predicting Contextual Performance Ratings

| Variable | Step 1 | Step 2 | Subgroups by: Leader-follower Level Differential | | Leader-follower Age Differential | |
			More favorable to leader	*Less favorable to leader*	*More favorable to leader*	*Less favorable to leader*
Follower getting ahead	-.12	-.16†	.24	-.18	-.19	-.14
Leader getting ahead	.35**	.35*	-.07	.71***	-.07	.56***
Leader × Follower getting ahead	.17†	.12	.70	.02	-.16	.07
Squared Follower getting ahead	.00	-.07	.37	-.07	-.27	-.03
Squared Leader getting ahead	.20**	.20†	1.54*	.38***	-.01	.47***
Level Differential	-.41**	-.48**	-.47	.37**	.74**	-.27†
Age Differential	.03*	.04**	.02	.06**	.05	.02
Getting ahead block × Level Differential		.04*	.10	-.04*	-.10	-.03*
Getting ahead block × Age Differential		-.01*	-.01	-.01†	.00	.00
R^2	.29	.32	.36	.31	.36	.54
Incremental R^2		.03*				
N	138	138	64	74	66	72
Surface tests						
a_1 (slope of the line of perfect agreement)			.17	.53*	.26	.42*
a_3 (slope of the line of incongruence)			.31	-.89**	-.12	-.70**

Notes. In all regressions, variance and covariance matrices were adjusted using cluster option in STATA to account for non-independence of performance ratings of followers evaluated by the same leader. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Leader level and follower age were omitted from the control set of variables because of their collinearity with the differential variables.
† $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

FIGURE 1

Response Surface for Contextual Performance Ratings

Contextual Performance Evaluation
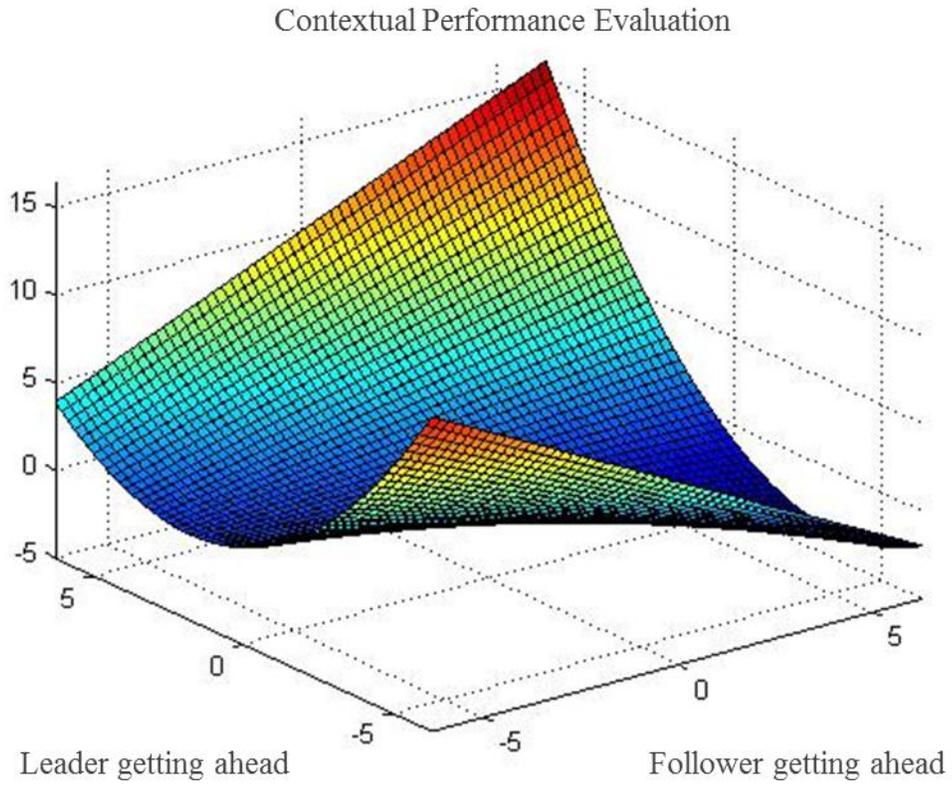
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