

New Directions in Leadership Research Conference

INSEAD

2nd and 3rd June 2017

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Paper title:

Ranking Low, Feeling High: How Hierarchical Position and Experienced Power Promote Prosocial Behavior in Response to Procedural Justice

Abstract:

Research shows that power can lead to prosocial behavior by facilitating the behavioral expression of dispositional prosocial motivation. However, it is not clear how power may facilitate responses to contextual factors that promote prosocial motivation. Integrating Fairness Heuristic Theory and the Situated Focus Theory of Power, we argue that in particular, organization members in lower (vs. higher) hierarchical positions who simultaneously experience a high (vs. low) sense of power respond with prosocial behavior to one important antecedent of prosocial motivation, that is, the enactment of procedural justice. The results from a multisource survey among employees and their leaders from various organizations (Study 1) and an experiment using a public goods dilemma (Study 2) support this prediction. Three subsequent experiments (Studies 3-5) show that this effect is mediated by perceptions of authority trustworthiness. Taken together, this research (a) helps resolve the debate regarding whether power promotes or undermines prosocial behavior, (b) demonstrates that hierarchical position and the sense of power can have very different effects on processes that are vital to the functioning of an organization, and (c) helps solve ambiguity regarding the roles of hierarchical position and power in Fairness Heuristic Theory.