



The ideal employee: context and leaders' implicit follower theories

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between leaders' work context and their prototypical implicit follower theories (pIFT). The authors assume a dual structure of pIFT and argue that leader preferences for certain employee traits and behaviours are influenced by their perception of the prevailing market conditions and organizational coordination mechanisms.

Design/methodology/approach – This study was conducted via an online-questionnaire with 182 US leaders from different industries. It surveyed leader's preferences for abstract and specific employee traits and behaviours, as well as their perceptions of the explorative and exploitative elements in their work context. To test for associations of corresponding variables representing leaders' context and their employee prototype, data analysis was performed via multiple linear regression analysis.

Findings – The paper provides evidence for associations between leaders' pIFT and their work context. The data suggest that leaders who perceive their organizational work environment as formalized consider Enthusiasm ($p = 0.003$) and the pursuit of exploitative activities ($p = 0.023$) as important employee characteristics, and those who experience the market conditions as dynamic show a preference for Good Citizenship behaviours ($p = 0.027$) and the search for explorative activities ($p = 0.034$). In terms of control variables the authors found that more mature leaders favour both exploration and exploitation in employees, while managers of larger teams emphasize exploitation in their pIFT.

Research limitations/implications – The study was conducted with leaders in the USA; results are cross-sectional and representative for for-profit organizations. Potential limitations arise from a lack of generalizability of the results to others forms of organizations, cultures and work settings.

Practical implications – The paper provides the outline of an "ideal employee profile" for the leaders in the sample and describes potential implications of pIFT for organizational strategy relating to personnel-related decisions.

Originality/value – This study provides the first empirical link between leaders' ideal employee image and work context, and enables a deeper understanding of the structure and content of pIFT.

Keywords Leadership, Exploitation, Context effects, Exploration, Prototype, Implicit follower theories

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Studies about implicit follower theories (IFT) are experiencing a renaissance in leadership research. Generally, implicit theories are cognitive schemas, or organized patterns of thought that simplify information processing (Lord and Maher, 1994) by guiding and enabling our perceptions and judgments of other people on the basis of prototypes (Hall *et al.*, 1998). IFT describe assumptions and folk theories about follower characteristics, better described as "naïve theories about the way people imagine a typical follower to be" (Sy, 2010). Leaders' implicit theories about followers are

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important elements in the leader-follower relationship (Shondrick and Lord, 2010; van Gils *et al.*, 2010) and historically, we can find a variety of approaches to this phenomenon (Fiedler, 1964; Miles, 1964; McGregor, 1966; Shondrick and Lord, 2010). To date we find a handful of empirical studies about IFT. Some provide important insights into the structure and content of prototypical and anti-prototypical IFT (Whiteley *et al.*, 2012; Sy, 2010; Borman, 1987; Wernimont, 1971); others show that leaders' follower schemas can affect their judgment as well as treatment of followers (Sy, 2010; Sanders, 1999). We learned from previous research that IFT held by leaders can have positive and negative effects on the leader-follower relationship. For example, Whiteley *et al.* (2012) investigated positive associations between naturally occurring Pygmalion effects or positive IFT and follower performance, showing that positive leader expectations towards employees can positively improve their performance outcomes. However, leader's implicit theories can also have adverse effects. Categorization theorists have consistently pointed out that leaders might rely more on their IFT rather than actual, observed employee behaviours (Lord and Maher, 1994; Shondrick and Lord, 2010). In other words, in case of a mismatch between leaders' IFT and actually perceived employee characteristics, leaders might develop a bias that could potentially lead to erroneous and destructive personnel decisions in performance reviews or recruiting situations (Sanders, 1999). In summary, the relevance of leaders' mental schemas or employee prototypes is reasonably well documented in the literature and previous studies provide important insights about the structure, content and potential impact of leaders' IFT. However, despite frequent acknowledgements about the role of context in the development of implicit theories (Shondrick and Lord, 2010; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Lord *et al.*, 2001a) none of the existing studies about IFT (Whiteley *et al.*, 2012; Sy, 2010; Sanders, 1999; Borman, 1987; Wernimont, 1971) considered the role of work context, or leaders' perceptions thereof, as influencing factor on the emergence of leaders' employee schemas. For example, it is unknown if and to what degree leaders' perception of the prevailing market conditions surrounding their organizations, or the coordination mechanisms directing their work from within their organizations, may influence the development of their prototypical implicit follower theories (pIFT). With the present paper we address this gap and contribute to the field of leadership research in the following ways.

First, we respond to the demand in leadership research for a greater consideration of the social and organizational context in which leadership is embedded (DeRue, 2011; Yukl, 2009; Liden and Antonakis, 2009; Avolio, 2007). In our investigation of contextual effects on IFT we follow the interactionist approach that proposes the confinement of individual action through situational characteristics in the work environment (Meyer *et al.*, 2009). In other words, we investigated if different types of external and organizational configurations determine the criteria that render certain employee traits and behaviours more effective than others and thereby inform and mould the content of leaders' IFT. Second, we extend existing theory about the structure of IFT and offer supporting evidence for the interdependencies between context and the content of leaders' pIFT. Finally, considering the relevance of IFT for personnel related decisions, our study serves a practical purpose by providing new insights for organizations as well as future endeavours in occupational research informing public policy decisions. For example, extended knowledge about potential contextual effects on managers' employee prototypes can enable further research in respect to employers' decision-making processes, as well as their perceptions of employability, or bias affecting their selection decisions (Hogan *et al.*, 2013).

This paper is organized as follows: First, we provide a short outline of the theoretical foundations about the structure of IFT and our approach in studying organizational context effects. Second, we outline our hypotheses in respect to contextual influences on different levels of leaders' follower categorizations, and present a detailed account of our empirical study and the main results. Finally, we discuss our findings within the scope of our study, we describe its contributions and limitations before offering conclusions and future directions.

2. The dual structure of pIFT

In contrast to a neutral view on employee characteristics or central tendency prototypes that describe "how followers are", we took a goal-derived perspective on "how followers should be" (Sy, 2010) and investigated what we call leaders' pIFT. Our intention was thereby not to discover a "follower blueprint" as critically seen by Collinson (2006), or to pursue an "ideal configuration of person attributes" (Cottrell *et al.*, 2007) for the perfect employee role. Instead, our intent was to show that parts of leaders' pIFT emerge in response to a context that is constituted by a relatively specific configuration of task and behavioural cues and pressures. However, we believe that only certain aspects of leaders' employee prototype is context-sensitive as they are formed in response to leaders' individual work setting; others might be independent of context because they are abstract and universally valid for leaders in most leadership settings.

Existing studies concerned with prototypical qualities of either followers (Crossman and Crossman, 2011; Sy, 2010) or leaders (Den Hartog *et al.*, 1999) circumvent the inclusion of specific contextual effects and mostly addressed person categories on the superordinate, or abstract level. For example, we know that leaders' prototypical employee traits encompass being "hardworking", "reliable" and "loyal" (Wernimont, 1971; Sy, 2010). However, the universality of these traits renders these findings equally descriptive of many other ideal person categorizations other than followers (Cottrell *et al.*, 2007) and raises new questions about their variability. Most importantly, they do not explain individual variations in leaders' IFT and how these requirements relate to their respective work environments. We made an attempt to find answers to these questions by investigating the structure and content of IFT to identify differences in employee prototypes dependent on leaders' work settings.

In a first step, we integrated concepts from categorization theory and split leaders' pIFT into two hierarchical levels on the basis of their variation in context sensitivity. This allows us to study leaders' pIFT at the abstract level and the specific level and to investigate the impact of work context on each of them. Research on IFT goes back to Rosch (1978), whose work on categorization theory provides the foundation for our understanding of the way individuals perceive and structure incoming information about others. According to this theory, we encounter so many impressions about the world every day that we need to cognitively categorize others by ways of mental shortcuts. This involves trying to match them with existing cognitive categories that have developed around a prototype, for example "follower" or "leader" (for a review see Shondrick and Lord, 2010). Prototypes or categories are arranged hierarchically in several levels (Shondrick and Lord, 2010; Lord *et al.*, 2001b; Lord and Maher, 1994). As, applied to the prototypical follower, we assumed that the highest category level corresponds to abstract types (e.g. "follower" vs "non-follower"), while the lower category levels refer to more specific categories ("good follower" vs "bad follower"). Depending on the cascading level of abstraction, context information and prototype are

more and more interwoven because the more contextual constraints that are taken into account, the more specific the prototype becomes (Medvedeff and Lord, 2007). Accordingly, the highest category level describes leaders' most generally desired employee traits, that is, at the abstract or superordinate category level, while the lower category level refers to context-sensitive aspects, or specific/basic category level. In other words, traits that describe an ideal, prototypical follower on the abstract level are more likely to be desired in a large variety of contexts, while those on the specific category level will vary substantially.

3. Contextual effects on pIFT

The term context describes a "situational setting in which workplace phenomena occur" (Joshi and Roh, 2009). Connectionist models about implicit theories include contextual influences such as tasks, hierarchical level, national culture, age, tenure, experience and gender factors (Johnson *et al.*, 2008; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004). They hold that individuals' implicit theories keep being redeveloped through diverse situational restraints (Smothers *et al.*, 2011; Shondrick and Lord, 2010; Medvedeff and Lord, 2007; Lord and Emrich, 2001) because they are "evoked rather than found" (Hanges *et al.*, 2000). However, despite the fact that context is an often mentioned factor in organizational behaviour research in general (Uhl-Bien and Pillai, 2007; Johns, 2006) but particularly in respect to implicit leader and follower theories (Shondrick and Lord, 2010; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Lord *et al.*, 2001a), empirical research on the impact of contextual restraints on implicit theories is rare. So far, only Smothers *et al.* (2011) offered first insights into context-specific differences in implicit leader theories with their study about conceptualizations and traits of ideal leaders in private and public universities. In order to close the gap in the current literature about IFT which all but omits the inclusion of contextual factors on the development of IFT (Whiteley *et al.*, 2012; Sy, 2010; Sanders, 1999; Borman, 1987; Wernimont, 1971) we built a theoretical framework that allows the establishment of meaningful associations between market environment, organizational setting and leaders' preferences for certain employee qualities.

Exploration and exploitation

To study the effect of context there is a variety of ways to categorize work settings. Occupation, industry classification (Joshi and Roh, 2009), branches of trade or organizational culture models are examples for variables we considered. However, due to the multifaceted nature of today's organizations we discarded initial considerations of context variables such as industry or occupation because even intraindustry variation could have presented interfering factors in the analysis of associations between context and leaders' pIFT. Our search for more fundamental working principles that could apply to a large variety of work settings resulted in the literature about exploration and exploitation, two working modes with a long history in management research.

Exploration and exploitation activities emerge as organizations try to adapt to the changing constraints of the environment (Van de Ven *et al.*, 2013); in order to survive, organizations need to utilize both the "exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties" (March, 1991) in a structural and contextual manner (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Gupta *et al.*, 2006). This drives processes and decision making by organization members to simultaneously pursue a search for new, and a reliance on existing knowledge (Posen and Levinthal, 2011). Forty years ago, Drucker (1974) defined two working modes that later became exploration and exploitation

(Raisch *et al.*, 2009; Mom *et al.*, 2007; March, 1991). He described innovative work as “creating effectively and purposefully the new and the different”, and operational work as “managing what is already in existence and known, building it, exploiting its potential, taking care of its problems” (Drucker, 1974). These two working modes are suitable context variables for the purpose of this study because they present essential types of activities that are inherent to a large variety of markets, organizations and individual actions (Jansen *et al.*, 2006), and can be studied across industries, organizational cultures or task orientations.

Exploration activities are related to the creation of new knowledge, products, services, markets or customers. Exploitation, on the other hand, describes the utilization of existing information, products, services, clients and markets (Jansen *et al.*, 2006). In order to survive, organizations need to utilize both the “exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties” (March, 1991) in a structural and contextual manner (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Gupta *et al.*, 2006). The comprehensive nature of exploration and exploitation allows an application on several levels of analysis, because the tension field of renewal and preservation exists in decision-making processes, routine and non-routine activities, as well as managers’ collective and creative actions (Mom *et al.*, 2009). The topic of contextual antecedents of organizational processes and individual action is well-established in the literature of exploration and exploitation (Weibler and Keller, 2011; Jansen *et al.*, 2006; Zahra and Bogner, 1999; Dill, 1958). For example, the origin of the context variables encompassing market conditions can be traced back to Dill (1958) who defined managers’ task environment as “inputs of information from external sources” such as customers, suppliers, competitors and regulatory groups (Dill, 1958). When the term task environment experienced further differentiation into environmental dynamic and environmental competitiveness (Jansen *et al.*, 2006), it began to denote explorative and exploitative aspects of influences external to organizations (Market dynamism and Market Competitiveness, respectively). Further, coordination mechanisms refer to the formal structure of an organization, particularly ways in which rules and guidelines prescribe managers’ tasks and decision-making processes (Mom *et al.*, 2009). Besides strategy and culture, organizational structure is one of three “key organizational assets” (Zheng *et al.*, 2010). The choice of structural variables in our assessment of leaders’ inner-organizational work context is based on its comparatively permanent, visible character and the direct effects of task configuration on managerial activities (Zheng *et al.*, 2010). Organizational strategy and culture would provide equally interesting context variables for this study; however they also add additional heterogeneity amongst leaders’ assessment of work contexts through the dynamic of outside markets and differing values and norms and have been excluded as potential context variables for the current study. Furthermore, structural antecedents such as de-/centralization for facilitating of knowledge management as well as innovation and creativity have been widely studied as important mechanisms in the coordination of managerial activities geared towards creativity and efficiency (Zheng *et al.*, 2010; Mom *et al.*, 2009). In summary, we based our approach to the evaluation of leaders’ work context on the notion that exploration and exploitation are expressions of divergent organizational processes (Hotho and Champion, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2006; He and Wong, 2004; Benner and Tushman, 2003). Leaders might perceive external market conditions as either rather dynamic (explorative) or more competitive (exploitative), and the coordination mechanisms either more decentralized (explorative) or formalized (exploitative) and define the specific category level of their pIFT accordingly.

In addition to considering the tension between exploration and exploitation, or creativity and efficiency, on the system level (March, 1991) of market conditions and coordination mechanisms, we used them on the individual level of analysis by specifying explorative and exploitative aspects of their employee prototype. Thereby we take into account that individuals may encounter difficulties when trying to excel at both (Gupta *et al.*, 2006), and assume a natural tendency in individuals for the pursuit of either explorative or exploitative work behaviours. In support of our argument that context influences work behaviour, we refer to work by Weibler and Keller (2011) who found positive correlations between leaders' perception of the work environment and their own pursuit of exploration and exploitation activities. The authors showed in their study that leaders who perceived the market conditions as dynamic tend to pursue explorative activities; they explained this finding by positing that leaders' attempt to adapt to the perceived task requirements of a fast changing work context that requires creativity and innovation. If we accept the argument that leaders are positioned in a specific task environment or "problem space" (Lord, 1976) evoking certain explorative and/or exploitative work behaviours (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Mom *et al.*, 2007; Gupta *et al.*, 2006), we assume that their ideal employee schemas follow such an orientation. Here we rely on studies which show that the nature of tasks is an influencing factor in the development of implicit theories as well as person and leadership perceptions (Crossman and Crossman, 2011; van Gils *et al.*, 2010; Cottrell *et al.*, 2007; Zaccaro *et al.*, 1991; Fiedler, 1964). Since leaders hold prototypical implicit theories about followers not only on the basis of what or who they should be but also on the basis of what they expect them to do, we found justification for the argument that work and task environment can determine leaders' preference for either explorative or exploitative work behaviours in their pIFT.

4. Hypotheses building

As we see it, leaders' pIFT have an inherently dual structure. The abstract level of leaders' pIFT refers to leaders' preference for employee traits that are relatively independent of context; we assume them to be shared by a larger variety of leaders in many different work contexts. Prominent examples of the abstract level of leaders' IFT are qualities such as "hardworking", "loyal" and "productive" as found by Sy (2010) and Wernimont (1971). The specific category level of pIFT, on the other hand, represents employee behaviours that show individual level differences in their relevance to leaders. For instance, depending on work context and task requirements, leaders' employee prototype might consist of work behaviours related to creativity and innovation, as opposed to efficiency or routine oriented work activities. This notion of a dual structure of pIFT corresponds to similar concepts in the history of leader's IFT. For example, Fiedler's (1964) typology of the least preferred co-worker posits that managers recognize favourable aspects even in "poor" co-workers ("Even if I can't work with him, he may still be a very nice and valuable person"), hinting at a personal and a functional level of the way managers think of subordinates. Equally, Beehr *et al.* (1994) described an entity aspect ("liking people for what they are") and a functional aspect ("ways that the subordinate behaves that might be preferred and expected") to the leader-follower relationship, and Engle and Lord (1997) saw leader's consideration of subordinates as expression of perceived attitudinal similarity and implicit performance theories with them. Hence, our approach in the present study is based on the idea that leaders' pIFT are made up of desired traits ("what employees ideally are")

referring to the abstract category level, and desired behaviours (“what employees ideally do”) on the specific category level.

As organizations are embedded in a broader social system (Gupta *et al.*, 2006) they are strongly affected by the prevailing market conditions. Environmental aspects that influence organizational innovation and performance were classified by Jansen *et al.* (2006) into environmental dynamic and competitiveness. Characteristics of dynamic market conditions are changing customer needs, technologies and product demands requiring the development of new products and services as much as the instability of the environment and the unpredictability of change (Dess and Beard, 1984). In response to these conditions, organization members in dynamic market environments are required to pursue explorative activities (Weibler and Keller, 2011), such as the reduction of these insecurities through the search for new information. Competitive market conditions, on the other hand, feature a number of competitors and areas of competition that create great pressures in respect to efficiency, lower prices and tighter margins, requiring organization members to become experts of existing technologies, products and services in order to increase routine tasks and boost efficiency (Weibler and Keller, 2011).

Apart from the market conditions surrounding an organization, work context is also constituted by organizational coordination mechanisms, where decentralization and formalization represent a prominent focus. Formalization and decentralization describe internal formal structures that serve in the organizational (Jansen *et al.*, 2006) as well in the individual (Mom *et al.*, 2009) coordination of work activities. Decentralization refers to the degree to which organizations delegate decision responsibilities to their units and to which, therefore, leaders have decision-making authority to pursue goals and solve problems within different organizational levels (Mom *et al.*, 2009; Dewar *et al.*, 1980). Increased decentralization has been found to encourage innovation and other explorative activities in organization members, because it stimulates the awareness and willingness to pursue a wider array of opportunities to focus on long-term goals (Jansen *et al.*, 2006; Mom *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, the formalization of tasks refers to decision-making guidelines within organizations that stress existing rules and regulations, and the expectation for leaders to conform to these guidelines (Mom *et al.*, 2009). High formalization: lessens the pursuit of different opportunities by individuals as they depend greater on formal systems, requires a focus on short-term goals, and has been found to inhibit exploration activities (Jansen *et al.*, 2006).

In this study, we pursued the question of whether leaders’ perception of the work context, constituted by the prevailing market conditions surrounding their organizations and the coordination mechanisms within their organizations, affects the abstract and specific category level of their employee prototype. We look at employee traits on the abstract category level of leaders’ pIFT as less context sensitive, generally valid and relevant to leaders regardless of their work context and constructed the following hypotheses:

- H1.* Leaders will rate employee traits and behaviours on the abstract category level of their pIFT equally between all context conditions. In other words, there will be no significant associations between leaders’ perception of either market dynamic or competition and their’ preference for any of the abstract employee trait groups, nor between their perception of decentralization or formalization, and these trait groups.

Contents of pIFT on the specific category level, on the other hand, are assumed to be context-sensitive and moulded by the tension systems or force fields of situational opportunities and constraints that organizational leaders are operating under (Johns, 2006). Hence, we argue that leaders' perception of explorative (dynamic, decentralized) and exploitative (competitive, formalized) work contexts will elicit corresponding preferences for explorative or exploitative employee traits and work behaviours on the specific but not on the abstract level:

H2a. Leaders who perceive prevailing market conditions as dynamic will describe the specific category level of their pIFT in explorative terms.

H2b. Leaders who perceive organizational coordination mechanisms as decentralized will describe the specific category level of their pIFT in explorative terms.

Adversely, leaders operating in competitive markets and/or formalized coordination mechanisms were expected to emphasize the exploitative aspects of their pIFT and highlight employee behaviours such as focusing on routine activities, providing existing clients with existing products and services, relying on his or her experience and existing knowledge and pursuing activities with a short-term goal (Mom *et al.*, 2009):

H3a. Leaders who perceive prevailing market conditions as competitive will describe the specific category level of their pIFT in exploitative terms.

H3b. Leaders who perceive organizational coordination mechanisms as formalized will describe the specific category level of their pIFT in exploitative terms.

5. Method, materials and measures

Participants

A total of 442 leaders were invited to participate in this study and 182 surveys were completed, providing a response rate of 41.2 per cent. Participants, 142 men and 40 women, worked in for-profit companies in North America in a variety of different business units (engineering 33 per cent, finance 12.6 per cent, human resources 9.9 per cent, operations 13.2 per cent, purchasing 7.7 per cent, other 23.6 per cent). The industries represented in this sample are manufacturing, food services, retail trade, information, professional, scientific and technical services, healthcare, as well as entertainment and recreation. The average age was 45.4 years and all participants worked in active leadership roles at various levels (C-level 9.9 per cent, top management 6 per cent, senior management 22 per cent, middle management 43.4 per cent, associate managers 7.7 per cent, supervisors 11 per cent) and had an average leadership experience of 14.7 years (Table I). The questionnaire was administered to all participants via email linking to a secure online survey and participant names were kept anonymous to ensure confidentiality.

We used validated constructs and corresponding measures from the literature with minor semantic adaptations. We tested all constructs for internal consistency and obtained satisfying results (Cronbach's α , Table I). All items were responded to on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to strongly agree (7).

Independent variables

To capture leaders' perception of the market conditions we used an existing typology of environmental dynamism and environmental competitiveness according to

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations and
correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Market dynamism	5.22	0.86	(0.65)												
2. Market competitiveness	5.44	1.31	0.534**	(0.91)											
3. Decentralization	5.77	1.21	0.203**	-0.027	(0.93)										
4. Formalization	3.95	1.24	0.098	-0.005	-0.024	(0.78)									
5. Exploration	5.17	0.7	0.215**	0.171*	-0.051	0.145	(0.74)								
6. Exploitation	5.12	0.75	0.166*	0.105	-0.052	0.179*	0.306**	(0.81)							
7. Industriousness	6.18	0.8	0.185*	0.095	-0.046	-0.004	0.252**	0.321**	(0.72)						
8. Enthusiasm	5.43	0.73	0.047	0.006	-0.037	0.239**	0.320**	0.281**	0.036	(0.61)					
9. Good Citizenship	6.3	0.66	0.263**	0.223**	-0.017	0.191**	0.250**	0.404**	0.414**	0.177*	(0.71)				
10. Gender	1.22	0.42	0.000	-0.129	0.110	0.128	0.033	0.093	0.135	0.068	0.179*				
11. Age	45.4	8.72	0.006	0.199**	0.070	-0.118	0.138	-0.013	0.078	-0.120	0.087	0.235**			
12. Leadership experience	14.66	7.60	0.074	0.055	0.065	-0.029	0.050	-0.128	0.053	-0.064	-0.017	-0.099	0.612**		
13. Team size	15.15	11.22	0.036	0.024	0.072	0.132	0.099	0.144	0.099	-0.034	0.092	0.161*	-0.092	0.029	-

Notes: $n = 182$. Numbers in parentheses on the diagonal are Cronbach's α of the composite scales. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed

Jansen *et al.* (2006). Coordination mechanisms were measured with decentralization and formalization according to Mom *et al.* (2009) (Appendix 1).

Dependent variables

In order to measure the importance of certain traits and work behaviours for their employee prototype ("ideal employee"), leaders rated two sets of qualities. For the abstract level of their pIFT, this study used all nine traits of pIFT as identified by Sy (2010), subsequently rated individually by leaders, and arranged by us in the three trait groups: Industriousness (originally termed "Industry" and encompassing "hardworking", "productive", "goes above and beyond"), Enthusiasm ("excited", "outgoing", "happy") and Good Citizen ("loyal", "reliable", "team player"). For the specific category level, we used and adapted a typology by Mom *et al.* (2009) that measures explorative and exploitative work-related activities in relation to leaders' prototypical employee (Appendix 2).

Control variables

As several authors studying implicit leader theories have posited an influence of gender (Johnson *et al.*, 2008; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004), age (Sy, 2010; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004) and leadership experience (Whiteley *et al.*, 2012; Shondrick and Lord, 2010; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Lord *et al.*, 2001a; Lord and Emrich, 2001; Keller, 1999; Sanders, 1999; Borman, 1987; Miles, 1964; Shondrick *et al.*, 2010), we controlled for these variables in our study. We also added team size as control variable. As leaders' span of control varies with the number of subordinates they manage, their handling of coordination mechanisms changes (Kieser and Walgenbach, 2010), which in turn might affect their preference for certain employee traits and behaviours.

6. Analysis and results

Descriptive statistics

Table I shows means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations of all dependent and independent research variables. In regards to the context variables we see that market dynamism and market competitiveness are highly correlated ($\rho = 0.534$), a finding that is not surprising since complex interdependencies in the market environment bring about heightened competitive as well as dynamic pressures for organizational leaders. Wilcoxon tests[1] were conducted to evaluate leaders' perceptions of differences in the work context variables and their preferences for employee traits and behaviours (Appendix 3). Results indicated a significant difference ($z = -2.792$; $p = 0.001$) between the perception of dynamic and competitive market conditions with the mean of ranks in favour of market competitiveness (96.78), and the mean of ranks in favour of market dynamism (77.61).

In respect to the specific category level of leaders' pIFT results show correlations between a preference for exploration and exploitation ($z = -0.859$; $p = 0.39$), pointing at a balanced preference for both explorative and exploitative behaviours. A comparison of specific and abstract employee traits shows that traits encompassing Industriousness, Enthusiasm and Good Citizenship were rated higher by leaders than those referring to exploration and exploitation. Noticeable was the difference between exploration and Good Citizenship ($z = -10.958$; $p < 0.001$) with the mean ranks favouring Good Citizenship (93.47) in comparison to exploration in (25.11). A comparison of all three abstract trait categories with each other revealed that the sub-category Enthusiasm was ranked significantly lower than Industriousness and Good Citizenship behaviour

($p < 0.01$). On this basis we conclude that traits such as exciting, outgoing and happy are seen as less important to leaders than being hardworking, productive, loyal, etc., however they are still rated as more important than explorative and exploitative behaviours. Insignificant bivariate correlations between control variables age and leadership experience with exploration and exploitation show patterns that were confirmed in subsequent regression models, but seem to be obscured by statistical noise. For example, age is insignificantly correlated with exploration ($\rho = 0.138$) and negatively with exploitation, but show significant positive associations in subsequent regression models (Table III). Since these relationships were measured concurrently and we cannot rely on historical data involving these variables, we interpret this dynamic with a succeeding adjustment with other factors.

Other bivariate correlations are highly suggestive of associations later found in regression analysis results: market dynamism and exploration are significantly correlated ($p < 0.01$), and so are formalization and exploitation ($p < 0.05$); in regards to abstract employee traits we see that leaders in dynamic markets consider Industriousness and Good Citizenship as important employee traits, while formalized organizational contexts ask for Enthusiasm and Good Citizenship behaviours. Bivariate correlations between control and research variables show associations between gender and Good Citizenship ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that female leaders consider loyalty, reliability and team playing abilities more relevant in employees than male leaders.

Inferential statistics

Tables II and III show the results of our statistical models performed via multiple linear regression analysis. All independent variables were tested for potential multicollinearity problems but with values between 1.13 and 3.18 for the variance inflation factor they stayed well below the acceptable cut-off of 10 (Neter *et al.*, 1996).

Abstract category level of leaders' pIFT

Table II shows associations between the main context variables (market conditions, coordination mechanisms) and leaders' preference for the abstract trait categories Industriousness, Enthusiasm and Good Citizenship behaviour in employees. *H1* which stated that there will be no significant associations between context variables and leaders' rating of abstract employee traits was rejected. First, Good Citizenship behaviours seem to be important to leaders operating in dynamic market conditions and formalized organizational settings ($p < 0.05$); in other words, leaders in both explorative and exploitative types of work contexts appreciate loyal, reliable team players (models 1, 2 and 3). Industriousness, on the other hand, expressing traits such as hardworking, productive, goes above and beyond, are particularly important to leaders in dynamic markets (model 1), while Enthusiasm (excited, outgoing, happy) is relevant for managers particularly in formalized contexts (model 2, $p = 0.003$). Other notable associations were found between the control variables gender and age with Good Citizenship; accordingly, being a female leader ($p = 0.01$) and of higher age ($p = 0.019$) was strongly related to a preference of Good Citizenship in employees. We conclude that, although these findings are contrary to our initial understanding of the universal desirability of abstract employee traits, they support our main research argument that leaders' perception of work context could indeed play a role in the formation of their implicit employee prototype.

	Industriousness (β)			Enthusiasm (β)			Good citizenship (β)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Research variables</i>									
Market conditions									
Market dynamic	0.188*	0.18	0.044	0.012	0.215*	0.195*	0.104	0.195*	0.104
Market competition	-0.025	-0.022	0	0.013	0.096	0.182*			
Coordination mechanisms									
Decentralization		-0.084	-0.024	-0.021					
Formalization		-0.026	0.227**	0.225**					
<i>Confounders</i>									
Gender									
Male	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Female	0.137	0.146	0.021	0.005	0.0208**	0.18*	0.195*	0.195*	0.195*
Age (years)	0.143	0.13	-0.134	-0.105	0.208*	0.247*	0.225*	0.247*	0.225*
Leadership experience (years)	-0.032	-0.006	0.022	0.013	-0.145	-0.143	-0.153	-0.143	-0.153
Team size									
Small (1-10)	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Medium (11-29)	0.063	0.085	-0.033	-0.047	0.019	0.032	0.006	0.032	0.006
Large (30 and more)	0.088	0.107	-0.039	-0.058	0.049	0.06	0.032	0.06	0.032
R^2	0.067	0.043	0.018	0.067	0.133	0.092	0.158	0.092	0.158
SE	0.78	0.79	0.73	0.71	0.63	0.64	0.62	0.64	0.62

Notes: $n = 182$. β , standardized coefficients. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table II.
Contextual influences
on leaders' emphasis on
the abstract category
level of their pIFT

	Exploration (β)			Exploitation (β)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Research variables</i>						
Market conditions						
Market dynamic	0.188*		0.162	0.159		0.129
Market competition	0.02		0.03	-0.012		0
Coordination mechanisms						
Decentralization		-0.07	-0.034		-0.068	-0.04
Formalization		0.152*	0.139		0.169*	0.159*
<i>Confounders</i>						
Gender						
Male	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Female	0.034	0.021	0.028	0.065	0.055	0.057
Age (in years)	0.212*	0.232*	0.228*	0.18	0.196*	0.199*
Leadership experience (in years)	-0.115	-0.106	-0.119	-0.262**	-0.254**	-0.267**
Team size						
Small (1-10)	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Medium (11-29)	-0.008	0.002	-0.015	0.102	0.106	0.094
Large (> 30)	0.128	0.133	0.116	0.191*	0.188*	0.178*
R^2	0.081	0.07	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.12
SE	0.68	0.68	0.67	0.72	0.72	0.72

Table III. Contextual influences on manager's emphasis on exploration and exploitation in employees

Notes: $n = 182$. β , standardized coefficients. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Specific category level of leaders' pIFT

Table III shows associations between the main context variables (market conditions, coordination mechanisms) and leaders' preference for the specific employee behaviours represented by exploration and exploitation. Model 1 for exploration and exploitation, respectively, show results in respect to the effect of market conditions on leaders' preference for explorative and exploitative employee behaviours. In line with *H2a* we found positive and significant associations between dynamic market conditions and exploration ($\beta = 0.188$, $p = 0.034$).

Competitive market conditions, however, did not lead to leaders' desire for exploitation in team members leading us to reject *H3a*. Model 2 represent relationships between coordination mechanisms and the dependent variables; we found that decentralization had no effect on leaders' preference for exploration (*H2b*). Formalization, on the other hand, is associated with exploration ($\beta = 0.152$, $p = 0.044$) and exploitation ($\beta = 0.169$, $p = 0.023$) at first, with effects on exploration dropping below significance ($\beta = 0.139$, $p = 0.065$) in model 3. Finally, model 3 present results in respect to all context variables in their combined effects on leaders' preferences for exploration and exploitation. The association between dynamic market conditions and exploration dropped below a level of significance ($\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.075$), and so did the relationship between formalization and exploration ($\beta = 0.139$, $p = 0.065$). Therefore, the most robust association amongst our research variables appears between formalization and exploitation in employees ($\beta = 0.159$, $p = 0.033$), thereby confirming *H3b*. Looking at the control variables we found that with increasing age, leaders consistently favour both exploration ($p = 0.022$) and exploitation ($p = 0.043$); greater leadership experience, on the other hand, leads to leaders' reduced interest in exploitative employee work behaviours ($p = 0.005$). The significant association between team size and exploitative

employee behaviours ($\beta = 0.178$, $p = 0.028$) indicates that leaders of larger teams consider exploitation activities in employees as more important than explorative work behaviours.

7. Discussion

The principal results of the present study can be summarized as follows: in contrast to our initial expectations, leaders' work context does not only influence the specific category level of their pIFT but also the abstract level. In other words, leaders' perceptions of certain aspects in the market conditions and coordination mechanisms surrounding their daily work routines seem to affect not only their preference for certain employee behaviours but also for certain employee traits. For example, dynamic market conditions are associated with explorative behaviours and traits referring to Industriousness and Good Citizenship; formalization is related to explorative and exploitative behaviours, as well as Enthusiasm and Good Citizenship, but negatively with Industriousness. Adding all context variables up we find that leaders' perceptions of formalized coordination mechanisms have the strongest effect on their emphasis on exploitation and Enthusiasm in employees.

The fact that leaders' perceptions of organization-internal coordination mechanisms (e.g. formalization) showed stronger and more consistent effects than how they view organization-external market conditions falls in line with theories about situational strength. For example, Meyer *et al.* (2009) argued that constraints on the micro analysis level can be stronger than those on the macro level by providing stricter guidelines for behaviour. This means that the closer proximity of organizational coordination mechanisms to leaders' daily work routines elicits a stronger need for exploitative work activities than for creativity and innovation, especially as market conditions are more remote to the everyday routine of organization members. In our case it seems that leaders who perceive the overall market conditions as dynamic respond with a desire for creative and innovative employee behaviours; however, they also recognize the impact of organizational processes and routines through formalization, and consequently show the strongest requirement for exploitative activities in employees – namely maintaining the status quo, and focusing on activities that promote efficiency and routine work.

Equally noteworthy are strong effects of control variables age and leadership experience on leaders' preference for specific employee behaviours. Historically, theories and research results about the role of age and leadership experience in the development of implicit theories vary. While Epitropaki and Martin (2004) found no age-related differences in implicit leaders theories, we are reminded of an exploratory study by Borman (1987) who theorized that higher leadership experience may lead to a more differentiated category system about employees because they have encountered a wider varieties of employees in the course of their career than inexperienced leaders. The high correlation of age and leadership experience in our sample supports Borman's argument; older managers might often also be more experienced leaders and have a more complex ideal employee image embracing both explorative and exploitative behaviours in employees. However, since our results also show a strong negative correlation between leadership experience and exploitation we hypothesize that age, more than leadership experience, seems to influence a more complex employee prototype, while increased leadership experience alone might just point at a dislike towards exploitative activities in employees. Lastly, the lack of gender specific variation in leaders' preferences for exploration and exploitation in employees is

remarkable and provides material for further research. We included gender as control variable on the basis of previous research about implicit leader theories (Johnson *et al.*, 2008; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004); however, to the best of our knowledge, no historical data exist that has shown gender-related differences in regards to IFT, or even leaders' own exploration and exploitation activities. Hence, our overall findings suggest that while female leaders have strong preferences for certain abstract employee traits there is no gender-specific preference in regards to exploration or exploitation in employees.

Abstract employee traits such as Good Citizenship are also important elements in leaders' pIFT, especially for female and older leaders and those operating in dynamic market conditions and formalized coordination mechanisms. Since market dynamism follows explorative principles and formalization represents exploitative organizational aspects, we interpret our findings with the notion that Good Citizenship might be desired by leaders in both of context types (explorative and exploitative). On that basis we argue that being loyal, reliable and a team player seem to be the most desirable employee traits of all – perhaps independent of work context. The strong observed effects of gender and age on Good Citizenship were unexpected in respect to age but falls in line with previous research about gender differences in implicit leader theories. Johnson *et al.* (2008) found variations in leader prototypes based on raters' gender and sex-type, and Epitropaki and Martin (2004) found significant differences between male and female respondents on dimensions of leadership anti-/prototype in respect to traits such as understanding and sincerity. Age, on the other hand, was not indicative for differences in leadership constructs in Epitropaki and Martin's (2004) study, rendering our results related to a preference for Good Citizenship behaviours in older leaders valuable insights that pose questions for further studies into personal differences of leaders' pIFT.

The second major result of the current study pertaining to abstract employee traits is the significant association between formalization and Enthusiasm. Particularly as Enthusiasm received a low mean rating in comparison to Good Citizenship ($\mu = 6.3$) and Industriousness ($\mu = 6.18$), it is interesting that leaders in formalized organizational settings emphasized the traits "excited", "happy" and "outgoing" as important aspects of their pIFT. In an attempt to make sense of this phenomenon it may help to put it into perspective to some of the other findings of this study. For example, in contrast to Industriousness (hardworking, productive, goes above and beyond), and Good Citizenship (loyal, reliable, team player) which are rather work-related traits, Enthusiasm (happy, excited and outgoing) describes personality traits similar to extraversion in the Big Five concept (Luse *et al.*, 2013). It is imaginable that leaders in formalized work settings, who perceive their work tasks as limited by stringent rules and regulations, balance their strong task-orientation with an emphasis on positive, non-work-related personality traits in their pIFT.

Lastly, we would like to comment on leaders' preference for Industriousness in employees and the associations to their perceptions of work context. Industriousness describes a person's task-related orientation that is similar to conscientiousness in the Big Five personality concept ("organized", "efficient", "systematic", "practical"; Saucier, 1994). Our results showed that Industriousness is associated only with dynamic market conditions (model 1, $\beta = 0.188$, $p = 0.035$), but this effect disappears under consideration of other environmental conditions (model 3). We explain these results with the effect of varying complexity levels of leaders' task environment. While conscientiousness is an important predictor for job performance, it has been found to be insufficient for task performance in complex jobs (Blickle *et al.*, 2012). Transferred

to our findings it is thinkable that leaders do generally consider traits referring to Industriousness (or Conscientiousness) as somewhat important in employees, but not important enough to withstand the complexity of their work environment including market conditions and coordination mechanisms.

8. Contribution and limitations

Our study contributes to the current literature about IFT in theory and practice. The first theoretical contribution pertains to the structure of IFT. We expand existing research with insights from categorization theory and suggest viewing leaders' employee prototype in terms of a functional and an entity level. That way we gain a more precise understanding of the different types of qualities, namely traits and behaviours, leaders might be expecting from employees. The second major contribution of our study is the definition and empirical investigation of leaders' perceptions of specific context factors that affect the content of their pIFT. The utilization of exploration and exploitation principles as guidelines to study the relationships between work processes and preferred employee prototype allows a realistic and theoretically sound approach that can serve for further research on implicit theories. Third, our study provides supporting evidence for the argument that IFT held by leaders are context-sensitive on both the abstract and the specific level of their ideal employee category.

The results of this study concerning the link between leaders' perception of the organizational reality and their ideal employee image have also important practical implications for organizations and public policy. First, implicit theories about leaders and followers are practically present in all leader-follower interactions, and even before individuals join an organization they hold "varying assumptions and beliefs [...] about what leaders and followers 'look like'" (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). These images and beliefs not only influence behaviours but are difficult to overcome even if confronted with adversary information via real-time behaviours (Dunning and Sherman, 1997; Lord and Maher, 1994). Our findings add to the current literature about the relevance of implicit theories in organizations by providing new data about what it actually is that leaders in certain environments would like to see in their employees. This can help organizations learn about the underlying, implicit dynamics that guide their managers' personnel related decisions in regards to their expectations towards new and existing employees. If it is true that situational factors provide counteracting "force fields" (Johns, 2006), organizational leaders are invited to understand personnel choices by their management personnel as expression of their IFT – expressions that are formed by their perceptions of their work environment provided by the organization itself. For example, we learned that formalized environments can lead to a more exploitative employee prototype; our results allow us to speculate that personnel-related decisions such as hiring, firing or performance reviews amongst these leaders will encourage exploitative activities in employees. Most importantly, however, is that their preference did not necessarily just grow out of their personal choice, but represent a by-product of organizational processes directing their perceptions and consequently their efforts towards exploitation.

Second, knowledge about the way employers' perception of their environment can shape expectations for potential job candidates can be used in occupational research advising public policy makers. Hogan *et al.* (2013) challenge researchers to be more cognizant about what employers really want from employees and we believe our study is a first step into accommodating this request. By taking a holistic approach, we suggest studying the conditions under which individual managers make employment

related decisions. For example, it can be useful to have a thorough understanding of leaders' perception of the degree of formalization in an organization and the way it relates to the prevalent employee prototype, before moving on to investigating criteria for hiring and firing or performance evaluation processes. This could lead to a more genuine understanding for employers' needs and requirements and help researchers guide more practice-oriented public policy decisions towards further research into this matter.

There are also several limitations of the current study. First, the research study was cross-sectional therefore the results do not answer the question if changes in the work context would elicit changes in leaders' employee prototype as well. Second, our study was conducted with for-profit organizations in the USA rendering the findings non-transferrable to other types of organizations outside of the studied cultural boundaries. Third, it could be argued that the inflation potential of Common Method Variance caused by single-source bias is problematic because we rely on data collected by leaders only (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In an attempt to minimize this risk we pursued a series of ex-ante strategies to avoid CVM in the research design, for example by counterbalancing the order of questions, the use of a complex model and the omission of questions prompting socially desirable answers (Reio, 2010; Chang *et al.*, 2010). Fourth, the operationalization of the research study did not allow us to gather data of non-replies, providing a potential for systematic bias due to non-respondents. Systematic bias can be problematic when participants are unwilling to share sensitive data, fear reprimand for taking part in a study or feel pressed for socially desirable answers. These reasons do not apply in our case which is why we dismissed systematic bias as a potential flaw of this study; participation was fully encouraged by the leadership of the cooperating companies, anonymity was guaranteed and the questions did not address sensitive topics or prompt social desirability. Lastly, IFT could also be influenced by leader's personalities, rendering it subject to untested confounding effects such as the Similarity Attraction Paradigm. Based on these limitations we hope for further research into the question how work context affects leaders' pIFT. We suggest future studies accommodate the issue of (organizational) cultures, leader personality and greater diversity of organizations or, ideally, a measure of timely changes in the development of pIFT that might occur in response to changes in the work environment.

9. Conclusion

Organizations that realize that their leadership force might hold IFT that stand in contrast to organizational goals and strategies can take action on two levels: first, they can provide or change work processes to accommodate a tendency towards the preferred mode of operation, for example, by de-formalizing processes in order to encourage more exploration in leaders. Such change of processes could encourage the formation of more explorative tendencies in leaders' pIFT and enable managers to foster desired behaviours. Second, increasing awareness of attitudes and assumption about employees (Kopelman *et al.*, 2008) as well as improving positive IFT via frequent team building exercises (Whiteley *et al.*, 2012) could lead to an enhancement of these relationships. Organizations can support leaders directly via leadership training programs that initiate and increase awareness of the existence and nature of IFT and the social contexts in which they develop (Schyns *et al.*, 2011). We believe that the approach and the results of our study are encouraging for organizations that struggle with difficulties relating to interpersonal issues between leaders and followers,

as much as with mismatches between organizational strategy and its alignment with desired explorative and exploitative work processes, managerial decisions and subsequent employee behaviours. They also highlight the relevance and risk of individuals' perceptions of work context dynamics and their associations with preferences in others – perceptions which might not always reflect the “objective” reality of market and organization but nevertheless may provide important input for decision-making processes.

Note

1. Due to the skewed distribution of several variables we used the non-parametric Wilcoxon test to look for differences in medians among the variables. Normality plots of residuals conducted on all final models showed a normal distribution, allowing us to dismiss the concern about a negative impact of non-parametric data on the results of our regression analyses.

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Appendix 1. Work context

Market conditions (Jansen *et al.*, 2006, p. 1672)

Question: "How would you describe the typical market conditions surrounding your work unit?"

Environmental dynamism (based on Dill, 1958; Volberda and Van Brugen, 1997):

Environmental changes in our local market are intense.

Our clients regularly ask for new products and services.

In our local market, changes are taking place continuously.

In a year, nothing has changed in our market.*

In our market, the volumes of products and services to be delivered change fast and often.

*reverse item

Environmental competitiveness (based on Birkinshaw *et al.*, 1998; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993)

Competition in our local market is intense.

Our organizational unit has relatively strong competitors.

Competition in our local market is extremely high.

Price competition is a hallmark of our local market.

All items were measured on a seven-point scale, anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Coordination mechanisms (Mom *et al.*, 2009, p. 826)

Decentralization/Managers' decision-making authority (based on Dewar *et al.*, 1980)

Question: "How would you assess the degree of your decision-making authority in the performance of your tasks and your ability to set goals?"

I can undertake little action until my supervisor approves a decision.

If I want to make my own decisions, I will be quickly discouraged.

I have to ask my supervisor before I do almost anything.

Any decision I make has to have my supervisor's approval.

Formalization of a manager's tasks (based on Desphande and Zaltman, 1982)

Question: "To what extent are your tasks defined by rules, procedures, or regulations?"

Whatever situation arises, I have procedures to deal with it.

I have to follow strict operational procedures at all times.

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Rules occupy a central place in my work related activities.
There is a written job description for going about my tasks.
All items were measured on a seven-point scale, anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

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Appendix 2. pIFT

Specific category level (based on Mom *et al.*, 2009)

Question: "Which of the following employee activities do you consider most important?"

Exploration activities:

Searching for new possibilities with respect to products/services, processes, or markets
Evaluating diverse options with respect to products/services, processes, or markets
Focusing on strong renewal of products/services or processes
Activities in which the associated yields or costs are currently unclear
Activities requiring quite some adaptability of him/her
Activities requiring him/her to learn new skills or knowledge
Activities that are not (yet) clearly existing company policy

Exploitation activities:

Activities of which a lot of experience has been accumulated by him/herself
Activities which he/she carries out as if it were routine
Activities which serve existing (internal) customers with existing products/services
Activities in which it is clear to him/her how to conduct them
Activities primarily focused on achieving short-term goals
Activities which he/she can properly conduct by using his/her present knowledge
Activities which clearly fit into existing company policy

All items were measured on a seven-point scale, anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Abstract category level (based on Sy, 2010)

Question: "Which of the following employee characteristics do you consider most important?"

Hardworking, Productive, Goes above and beyond (subcategory: Industriousness)

Excited, Outgoing, Happy (subcategory: Enthusiasm)

Loyal, Reliable, Team Player (subcategory: Good Citizen)

All items were measured on a seven-point scale, anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Appendix 3

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context and
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	Mean rank	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Market conditions</i>			
Market dynamic	77.61	-2.792	0.005
Market competitiveness	96.78		
<i>Coordination mechanisms</i>			
Decentralization	93.28	-9.921	<0.001
Formalization	55.38		
<i>Ideal employee qualities</i>			
Abstract category level			
Industriousness	81.3	-9.484	<0.001
Enthusiasm	52.2		
Industriousness	59.43	-1.951	0.051
Good Citizenship	67.49		
Enthusiasm	38.23	-10.307	<0.001
Good Citizenship	83.62		
Specific category level			
Exploration	90.16	-0.859	0.391
Exploitation	90.89		
Abstract and specific category levels			
Exploration	64.6	-10.478	<0.001
Industriousness	88.9		
Exploration	72.37	-4.085	<0.001
Enthusiasm	89.08		
Exploration	25.11	-10.958	<0.001
Good Citizenship	93.47		
Exploitation	60.56	-10.741	<0.001
Industriousness	90.52		
Exploitation	87.63	-4.735	<0.001
Enthusiasm	89.58		
Exploitation	34.25	-11.308	<0.001
Good Citizenship	91.93		

Table AI.
Wilcoxon test results