

DOES PERCEIVED INSINCERITY INFLUENCE MANAGERIAL RATINGS OF PERFORMANCE AND PROMOTABILITY?

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Abstract:

The purpose of this investigation was to evaluate the moderating effect of the supervisor's perceived insincerity of their subordinate's influence attempts on the relationship between supervisor perceptions of supervisor-subordinate similarity, liking, and influence, and the outcomes of performance and promotability. Data on 203 subordinates from 59 managers of a state agency were used to test the study hypotheses. The results indicate that the relationships between promotability and similarity and liking, and between performance and liking were attenuated by supervisor perceptions that the subordinates were insincere in their influence attempts. Implications for the importance of sincerity in interactions with others and directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: *Insincerity, Influence, Career success*

INTRODUCTION

The topic of career success has attracted great attention among organisational researchers (e.g., Dirk & Eline, 2013; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), and while the list of predictors usually includes various objective individual, job-context, organisational, and environmental factors, researchers are increasingly focusing on the subjective (Breland, Treadway, Duke, & Adams, 2007; Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Podolny & Baron, 1997) determinants of career success such as influence attempts (Chopin, Danish, Seers, & Hook, 2012; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008; Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009). Early research on influence attempts looked at both upward influence by subordinates (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Wayne & Liden, 1995; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) and the supervisor's perception of the success of the influence attempt within the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Wayne & Graen, 1993). Researchers noted that influence attempts are only successful to the extent that the supervisor perceives the subordinate's influence to be genuine (Liden & Mitchell, 1988; Schlenker, 2012). Further, reactions of the supervisor are more positive overall when subordinate influence attempts are sincere. For example, more challenging tasks, promotions, and reciprocal behaviours may accrue for those who appear sincere (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

Research has identified the conditions necessary for subordinate's influence attempts to appear genuine and also that lead to ultimate career success. That is, individuals must not only use appropriate influence tactics, but the leader or supervisor must perceive the influence attempts as genuine and indicative of the requisite personal attributes (e.g., intelligence, integrity, perseverance) necessary for career progression in the organisation. Past research has shown supervisors are more likely to comply with subordinate influence attempts under two conditions. First, the supervisor must be aware of the subordinate's characteristics (e.g., competence, honesty, credibility) and second, these qualities must be believable (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). As Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas and Lux (2007) suggest, it is just as important to understand the "what" of influence attempts as it is the "how" of influencing effectively. Therefore, in order for career success to be possible, the individual must not only be skillful at influencing upwards (Ferris *et al.*, 2007), but the supervisor must believe that the person is using that influence in an ethical manner by adhering to commonly accepted ethical codes of conduct.

Schlenker (1980) suggested individuals are motivated to portray images with the highest possible return but this may be tempered by the possibility of failing to achieve a desired image. Those who are successful enjoy not only interpersonal rewards such as approval and friendship, but they also may gain material extrinsic rewards including salary increases and promotions (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The supervisor

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is the gatekeeper to future advancement, and as the primary rater, can either promote a subordinate or obstruct the path of promotion for a subordinate. These decisions are often made under conditions in which completely objective information is lacking. Thus, subjective information will factor into performance and promotion decisions.

The purpose of this study is to investigate one form of subjective information, the sincerity of the influence attempts of subordinates as viewed by supervisors. Past research has established positive relationships between subordinate similarity, liking, and influence and performance and promotability ratings by the supervisor (Chen, 2014; Huang, Zhao, Niu, Ashford, & Lee, 2013). In this study, we examine these relationships along with the moderating effects of insincerity of these relationships. Specifically, it is proposed that supervisors who believe that their subordinates lack sincerity in their influence attempts, are more likely to rate those individuals lower and recommend them less for promotion (a moderating effect). We use social identity theory as our overarching framework within which we argue that insincerity limits these positive relationships.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Schlenker (1980) described self-presentation as the act of creating and maintaining specific identities to others. He suggested people are motivated to control the images they present to others since others will respond based on those identities. Individuals attempt to create their social identities consistent with their primary roles (e.g., salesperson, husband, employee) and those identities are developed to project a variety of aspects about themselves to specific audiences. In general, people create identities consisting of desirable attributes (e.g., responsible, competent, attractive) and by so doing produce a public self that is similar to their ideal selves (Singh, Kumra, & Vinnicombe, 2002). People will more likely be successful in projecting their desired images to the extent these attribute or images adhere to their self-concept.

In the workplace, individuals are motivated to create social identities that help them meet their career goals. They may do this by working hard, helping others, exerting effort, and appearing friendly. For some, these behaviours are natural extensions of their true selves. Others, however, may attempt to artificially enhance how others see them. These attempts may be viewed by supervisors as insincere or not genuine. Supervisors may view these attempts as insincere if they believe the motive is simply to get ahead or to make themselves look good.

Ferris and Judge (1991) defined employee influence behaviour as conscious attempts to manage or control the meanings shared by others in order to influence managerial and organisational resource allocation decisions. Attempts

to influence can take a number of different forms (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980), and multiple classifications of influence tactics have been presented and tested (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Farmer & Maslyn, 1999; Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990). However, using influence tactics in the workplace does not necessarily equate to the *successful* use of influence tactics in the workplace (Bolino, Klotz, & Daniels, 2014). Successful influence occurs when the targets of the influence cannot discern insincerity. When a subordinate appears genuine and the supervisor does not doubt his or her sincerity, the influence attempt will be more likely to have the desired effect. For example, supervisors, who believe subordinates use of influence behaviours is for the good of the organisation rather than self-interest, will enhance the performance ratings of their subordinates (Huang *et al.*, 2013).

PERFORMANCE AND PROMOTABILITY ANTECEDENTS

Consistent with social identity theory (Schlenker, 1980), subordinates enact a variety of behaviours to enhance their identities at work in the eyes of their supervisors. They attempt to present themselves in accordance with the values of the audience, i.e., supervisors (Snyder, 1987), in an effort to secure valued outcomes such as strong performance ratings and promotions. Past research has shown that subordinate behaviours designed to increase the supervisor's *liking* for them can have a positive effect on promotability ratings (Shaughnessy, Treadway, Breland, Williams, & Brouer, 2011) and performance ratings (Huang *et al.*, 2013; Vilela, González, Ferrín, & del Río Araújo, 2007). Perceptions of *similarity* between the subordinates and the supervisor also can have a favourable effect on promotability ratings and performance ratings (Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997). For example, Strauss, Barrick and Connerley (2001) found a positive effect on performance ratings among supervisor-subordinate dyads in which the supervisors perceived they were similar in terms of personality. Supervisors also appear to be more lenient in their ratings when evaluating subordinates who attended the same alma mater (Chen, 2014) or who have similar work styles (Yin & Tuttle, 2005). The use of *influence* by subordinates also has a positive effect on performance ratings and promotability (Bolino *et al.*, 2014; Carlson, Carlson, & Ferguson, 2011; Thacker & Wayne, 1995). Given that liking, influence and perceived similarity (e.g. Ferris, Frink, Gilmore, & Kacmar, 1994; Judge & Ferris, 1993; Wayne & Liden, 1995) consistently have been found to be positive predictors of subordinate job performance ratings, we predict:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived subordinate (a) similarity, (b) influence, and (c) liking will be positively related to subordinate performance ratings.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived subordinate (a) similarity, (b) influence, and (c) liking will be positively related to perceptions of subordinate promotability.

THE MODERATING EFFECT OF INSINCERITY

In constructing their social identities, individuals ask the question “How do others wish to see me?” They then attempt to construct an identity consistent with the answer. In general, people hope to be viewed positively with socially desirable qualities (Schlenker, 2012). They enact behaviours that are both desirable and believable. These behaviours are beneficial (and thus desirable) to the extent they enable individuals to reach their goals. Individuals are further motivated to create identities that are believable in order to reach their goals. They must make claims that are credible. Thus, constructing desirable identities occur when individuals can reasonably expect favourable consequences by appearing authentic and diminish the chances of unfavourable consequences by appearing unauthentic.

In his overarching theory of social identity, Schlenker (2012) distinguished between self-expression and self-presentation. Self-expression occurs as the actor portrays his or her true self and is considered spontaneous and genuine. Self-presentation occurs as a result of social pressures, may appear inauthentic, and requires more effort. Nonetheless, individuals effective at creating desirable identities through self-presentation enjoy more favourable work outcomes including superior interview ratings (Higgins & Judge, 2004) and advancement opportunities (Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992). Appearing sincere is a critical component in generating a desirable social identity. As prescribed by social norms, individuals must appear sincere, ethical, and reliable and there should be little or no discrepancy between their claims and accomplishments. When individuals fail at creating a favourable social identity, it also may be the result of *overdoing* it such that their claims are not believable. For example, providing one’s supervisor with a barrage of compliments each day while attempting to make oneself appear kind and caring may backfire in that the compliments most likely will be perceived as fake. Although the supervisor has somewhat positive views of this subordinate, the overuse of this tactic may cause the supervisor to assign less favourable performance ratings or promotion recommendations. While supervisor liking, influence, and perceptions of similarity can positively enhance supervisors’ ratings of subordinates, appearing inauthentic may limit the effectiveness of these antecedents. Formally stated we predict:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived subordinate insincerity will moderate the positive relationship between (a) supervisor similarity (with the subordinate), (b) supervisor perceptions

of subordinate influence, and (c) supervisor liking (of the subordinate) and performance ratings such that when perceived insincerity is high, these relationships will be weaker.

Hypothesis 4: Perceived subordinate insincerity will moderate the positive relationship between (a) supervisor similarity (with the subordinate), (b) supervisor perceptions of subordinate influence, and (c) supervisor liking (of the subordinate) and promotability ratings such that when perceived insincerity is high, these relationships will be weaker.

METHOD

Participants

Fifty-nine managers in a state agency agreed to participate in this research. Data were obtained via a paper and pencil survey instrument completed during work hours in a training workshop. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to analyze data gathered from 203 observations (supervisor ratings) of subordinates working in full-time positions within the agency. Each supervisor rated an average of 3 subordinates (std. dev. = 1.5). The distribution had a mode of 3 and a range from 1 - 9 (subordinates rated). The mean age of the 59 supervisors who rated the 203 subordinates was 42.07 years (s.d. = 9.64). These supervisors had an average job tenure of 136 months (s.d. = 81.59). The supervisors were primarily Caucasian (66% Caucasian, 20% African American, 10% Hispanic, and 4% Asian) and the supervisor group included 37% females and 63% males. The mean age of subordinates was 46.62 years (s.d. = 10.25). The subordinates were primarily Caucasian (73% Caucasian, 14% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 1% Asian, and 5% who identified as “other”) and included 48% females and 52% males. Our analyses were consistent with Dawson’s (2014) description of how moderators should be tested and interpreted. They were also consistent with the data analytic approach of other organisational politics studies previously published (e.g., Chang, Rosen, Siemieniec, & Johnson, 2012; Harris, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2007; Wiltshire, Bourdage, & Lee, 2014). Additionally, following Conway and Lance (2010), we believe that the use of self-reported data in this research is appropriate because supervisor ratings of sincerity, performance and promotability are necessarily subjective and perceptual, making self-reports the theoretically most relevant measurement method. We also tested the construct validity and the potential for conceptual overlap of our measures using structural equation modeling and multiple model tests.

Measures

Subordinate similarity: Six items from Turban and Jones (1988) were used to measure supervisor/subordinate similarity. The scale utilized a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) and included items such as, “This subordinate and I hold similar attitudes concerning work-related issues,” and “My subordinate and I are similar in terms of our outlook, perspectives and values.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .93.

Subordinate influence: Five items from Thacker and Wayne (1995) were used to measure supervisor/subordinate influence. The scale utilized a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) and included items such as, “This subordinate is often able to influence my opinion,” and “I am usually receptive to any suggestions for change in our work group made by this subordinate.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .80.

Subordinate liking: Three items from Wayne and Ferris (1990) and Wayne and Liden (1995) were used to measure supervisor/subordinate liking. The scale utilized a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) and included items such as, “I like this subordinate very much as a person,” and “I think this subordinate would make a good friend.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .90.

Subordinate insincerity: We created six items to measure insincerity. The scale utilized a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) and included the following items: “This subordinate manipulates information in order to make himself/herself look good,” and “This subordinate is a brown-noser or ingratiator,” “This subordinate tries to get on my good side in order to get ahead,” “This subordinate is genuinely friendly and pleasant (reverse coded),” “This subordinate tends to exaggerate or brag about his/her accomplishments” and “The reason this subordinate is nice to others is to get on their good side.” To confirm that the items produced a unidimensional scale, we ran an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS 22. We used a principle axis factor analysis and an oblimin rotation. A single factor solution, with an Eigenvalue of 3.19 that explained 65% of the variance, resulted. The item loadings ranged from .92 to .51. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .91.

Performance: Five items from Wayne and Liden (1995) were used to measure supervisor ratings of subordinate performance. The scale utilized a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating supervisor ratings (e.g., 1=very ineffective, 7=very effective or 1=unacceptable, 7=outstanding) and included items such as, “What is your view of your subordinate’s performance in terms of overall effectiveness,” and “Rate your subordinate’s overall level of performance.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .92.

Promotability: Seven items from Thacker and Wayne (1995) were used to measure supervisor ratings of subordinate promotability. The scale utilized a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) and included items such as, “I believe this subordinate will have a successful career,” and “I believe this subordinate has high potential.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .91.

ANALYSIS

The design of our study created a nesting effect. Specifically, subordinates were nested within supervisors because supervisors rated the insincerity, liking, similarity, influence, performance, and promotability for more than one subordinate. We used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, & duToit, 2011) to model the hypothesized relationships and account for the non-independence in our data. We ran each set of HLM analyses twice, once for each dependent variable. We used Snijders and Bosker’s (1999) formula to calculate our variance explained.

RESULTS

As can be seen in Table 1, supervisor perceptions of subordinate similarity, influence, and liking are positively and significantly related to performance and promotability ratings. Additionally, subordinate insincerity was negatively and significantly related to performance and promotability ratings. To ensure that the independent and dependent variables discriminated from one another, a series of analyses using LISREL 9.1 were conducted. The first model estimated was a 6-factor confirmatory factor analysis with one factor for each of our scales. Results showed that the model fit the data ($X^2(449) = 978$, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .07, CFI = .90). The first alternative model collapsed the three independent variables - similarity, influence, and liking - into one factor creating a 4-factor model. Results demonstrated that the measurement model fit better than the alternative model ($X^2(458) = 1204$, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .08, CFI = .86) and the chi-square difference test was significant ($X^2_{diff}(9) = 226$, $p < .01$). In the last alternative model we estimated collapsed the dependent variables - performance and promotability ratings - into one factor producing a 5-factor model. Once again, the results demonstrated that the measurement model fit better than the alternative model ($X^2(454) = 1234$, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .08, CFI = .86) and the chi-square difference test was significant ($X^2_{diff}(5) = 256$, $p < .01$). Results from the alternative model tests offer support for the discriminant validity of our scales.

Table 2 provides the HLM results for both performance and promotability. As can be seen on the left side of Table 2, the only significant main effect for performance ratings was similarity. This significant value was positive, suggesting that as the supervisor's perceptions of similarity increase, so do performance ratings. Thus, Hypothesis 1a was supported, but 1b and 1c were not. As can be seen on the right side of Table 2, similarity and liking were significant predictors of promotability, but the main effect for influence was not significant. Both of the significant values were positive suggesting that as the supervisor's perceptions of similarity and liking increase, so do promotability ratings. Thus, Hypothesis 2a and 2c were supported, but 2b was not.

With respect to the moderating effect of insincerity, only the interaction between liking and insincerity significantly predicted performance ratings. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were not supported. We graphed (see Fig. 1) the significant interaction at high (+1sd) and low (-1sd) levels of insincerity. As can be seen in Fig. 1, when subordinates are viewed as sincere (i.e., low insincerity), the relationship between liking and performance ratings is positive. However, when subordinates are viewed as highly insincere,

the relationship between liking and performance ratings is flat. Thus, Hypothesis 3c was supported as the positive relationship between liking and performance was weaker for subordinates deemed highly insincere.

Turning to the moderating effect of insincerity on promotability ratings, we find that both similarity and influence were significant, but liking was not. Thus, Hypothesis 4c was not supported. The graphs for the significant interactions can be found in Fig. 2 for similarity and Fig. 3 for influence. As can be seen in Fig. 2, the relationship between similarity and promotability was positive. However, when subordinates were viewed as highly insincere, the promotability ratings were weaker than when subordinates were viewed as sincere (i.e., low insincerity). These results offer support for Hypothesis 4a. Fig. 3 shows a negative relationship between influence and promotability for individuals viewed as sincere, which is opposite what we predicted. As predicted, the relationship between influence and promotability was flat (i.e., weaker) when individuals were considered highly insincere. These results offer partial support for Hypothesis 4b.

Table 1: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Promotability	5.07	1.08					
2. Performance	5.14	1.01	0.74***				
3. Similarity	4.82	1.12	0.81**	0.67**			
4. Influence	5.00	0.88	0.73**	0.59**	0.78**		
5. Liking	5.53	1.09	0.64**	0.46**	0.70**	0.57**	
6. Insincerity	1.78	1.13	-0.46**	-0.43**	-0.41**	-0.36**	-0.39**

N = 203. ** p < .01

Table 2: Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results

Predictor	Dependent Variables					
	Performance			Promotability		
		SE	p		SE	p
Similarity	.37	.17	.03*	.69	.13	.00*
Influence	.02	.16	.92	-.16	.16	.32
Liking	.11	.13	.38	.23	.09	.02*
Insincerity	-.40	.24	.09*	-.55	.26	.04*
Similarity X Insincerity	.04	.06	.56	-.15	.07	.03*
Influence X Insincerity	.11	.07	.11	.28	.08	.00*
Liking X Insincerity	-.08	.05	.03*	-.06	.06	.32

N = 203.

Fig. 1: Interaction of Liking and Insincerity on Performance

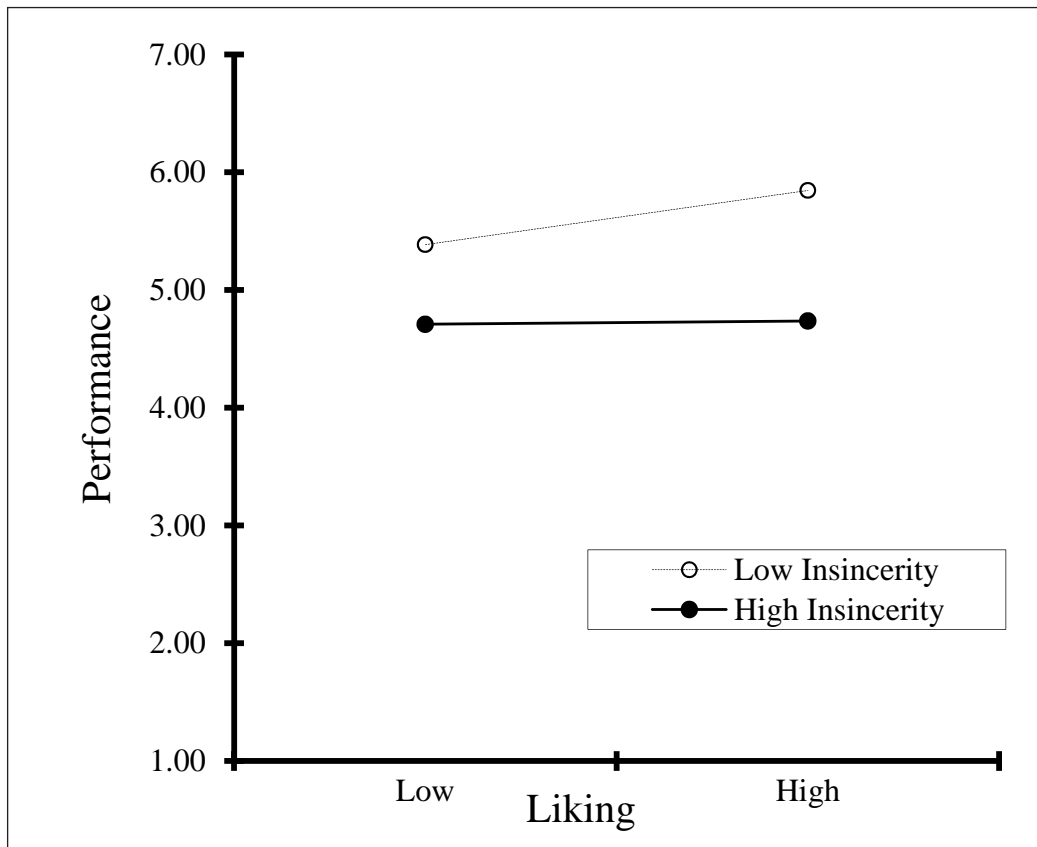


Fig. 2: Interaction of Similarity and Insincerity on Promotability

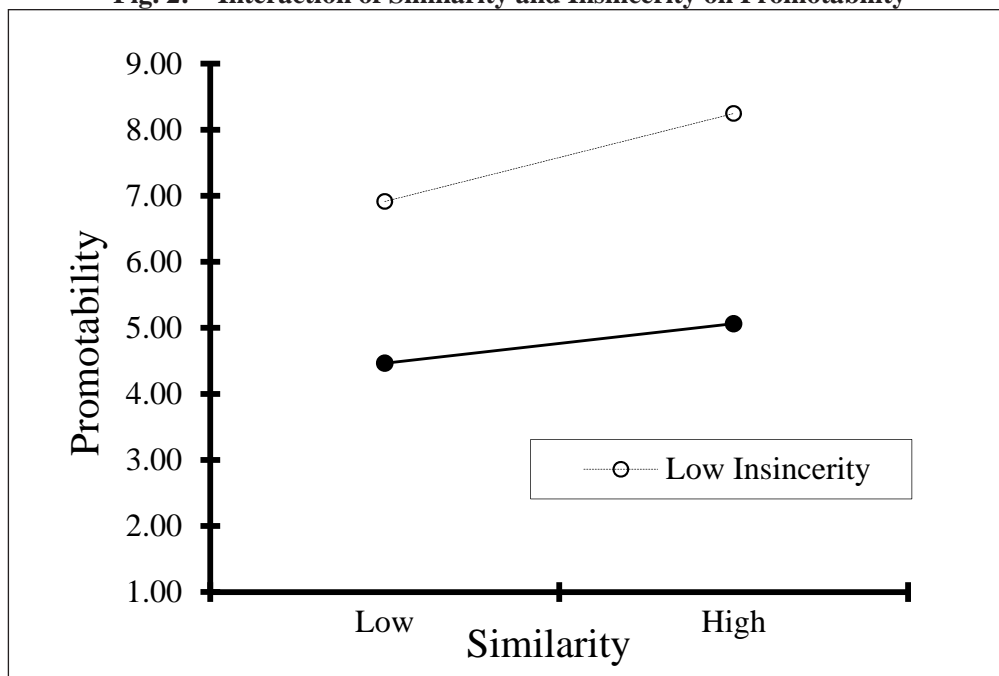
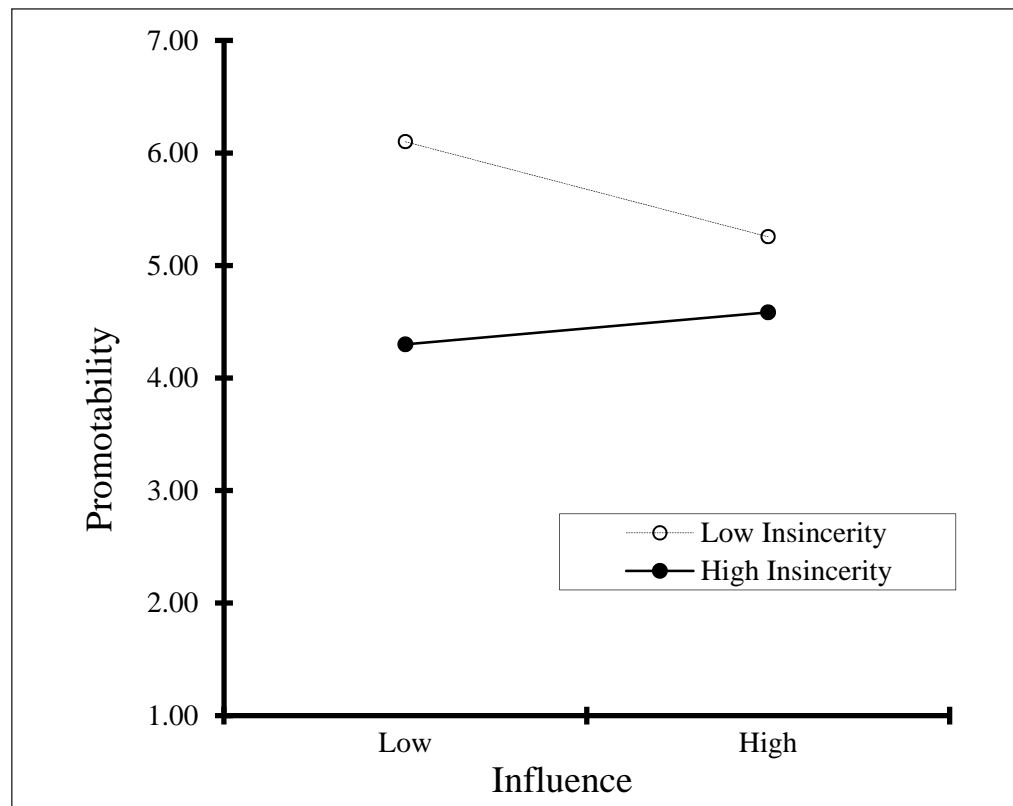


Fig. 3: Interaction of Influence and Insincerity on Promotability

DISCUSSION

Subjective bias is inherent in performance ratings and promotion decisions in organisations. Our study explored whether subordinates, whose influence attempts appeared insincere, were unable to sway the subjective bias in their favour. Results confirmed some of the positive relationships between supervisor's perceptions of similarity, influence, and liking and performance and promotability ratings. In addition these relationships were weaker when subordinates were viewed as insincere. Interestingly, only the relationship between similarity and performance ratings was significant suggesting that supervisors who see themselves in their subordinates rate their performance high. The similar-to-me effect (Byrne, 1971) offers an explanation for this result. Those whom the raters see as similar to them fare better in performance reviews because they are essentially rating themselves and these ratings provide consensual validation (Byrne, 1971). Pulakos and Wexley (1983) provided an alternative explanation in that many individuals have high occupational self-esteem and thus would enhance ratings for those they perceived as similar to themselves.

The similar-to-me effect carried over to the promotability ratings. However, we also found that supervisors who liked their subordinates also rated their promotability high. In addition, we found that perceptions of insincerity served

as a boundary condition for these positive relationships. Specifically, the relationships between liking and performance and similarity and influence and promotability were weaker when subordinates were viewed as insincere in their influence attempts. These findings align with social identity theory (Schlenker, 1980; 2012) in that those who fail at effectively creating desirable identities receive less favourable outcomes than those who are effective. Specifically, those who appear authentic and sincere in their self-presentations received higher ratings while those perceived as insincere received lower ratings. It could be that insincerity is closely related to career derailment in addition to recently identified traits including defensiveness, rigidity, and hostility (Feruzan, Campbell, McCartney, & Gooding, 2013).

There are a number of study limitations, however, that bear mentioning. The data were cross-sectional, and as such, causality cannot be tested or inferred. Collecting data over time as well as from multiple respondents would strengthen the conclusions drawn. Additionally, we created the scale we used to measure the supervisor's perception of insincerity in this study. Although our analyses demonstrated the items produced a single factor and were reliable, we did not explore the convergent or discriminant validity of our scale.

There are several strengths in our study. One strength is that the current study tested a major theoretical relationship in the Ferris *et al.* (2007) political skill framework, namely the

link between perceived or apparent sincerity and influence outcomes. Researchers have often suggested that influence attempts are only successful if the supervisor perceives the subordinate's influence to be genuine (Liden & Mitchell, 1988; Schlenker, 2012); we found that insincerity attenuated the positive relationship between supervisor liking and subsequent subordinate performance ratings, and between supervisor similarity and influence and evaluations of promotability. This focus on insincerity was long overdue. Our analyses used HLM to address the nesting factor in our data, and multiple models were tested to ensure that the study independent and dependent variables discriminated from one another. We used multiple supervisor ratings of outcomes (performance appraisal and promotability ratings) that are critical to potential career progression. Since the supervisor is usually the gatekeeper for future advancement, subordinates need to understand how sincerity, or a perceived lack of sincerity, can affect their career prospects in the short and long term.

The assertion made by this study that individuals who are perceived to be insincere take a "hit" when performance appraisals and promotion decisions are made, is worth further investigation. One area for future investigation is examining whether employees' use of specific influence tactics with sincerity may affect performance and promotability ratings. Our study examined the use of subordinate influence in general, though not the use of individual tactics. These might include examining the sincerity of opinion conformity and favour rendering. Honesty-humility, a similar construct to sincerity, has proven to be a significant predictor of contextual performance ratings (Oh, Le, Whitman, Kim, Yoo, Hwang & Kim, 2014). Thus, sincerity also may be explored for its direct effects on performance ratings and career advancement rather than as a moderator. This research examined positive outcomes, yet negative outcomes may be influenced by insincerity as well. For example, subordinates who are perceived to be insincere in their influence efforts may be perceived as more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviours. Taking time to engage in self-presentation that comes across as phony may be viewed as wasting time or taking time away from critical work tasks. Even the hint of insincerity may cloud others' perceptions of performance, and the effects of a diminished personal reputation may be all it takes to keep an individual from rising to the top of the organisation.

An additional area that warrants further research involves using subordinate perceptions of their own sincerity in their interactions with their supervisors. Employee self-perceptions of their own authenticity in interacting with customers have been shown to effect service satisfaction (Wang & Groth, 2014). Thus employee self-ratings of sincerity also may be an important predictor of career success. Schlenker (2012) referred to sincere and honest interactions as self-expression

in which individuals express their true feelings and opinions. Self-presentation is more likely to be perceived as insincere by others. However, over time self-presentation behaviours may become scripted such that they become more authentic. Thus, longitudinal research that focuses on how supervisor perceptions of subordinate sincerity change over time may be an interesting area for future research. It is possible that as supervisors become more familiar with their employees over time, they come to view them as more genuine. For example, "that's just how Tom is" may become may be an excuse accepted by the supervisor for behaviours that appear insincere.

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