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Abstract

We applied the social evaluation framework to investigate the traits desired in an "ideal" follower, which were compared to the traits desired in an "ideal" leader. Across three studies and five samples, both differences and similarities in role-specific preferences mapped onto the Vertical-Horizontal dimensions of the social evaluation framework in ways that aligned with the demands of each role. Traits higher on the Horizontal-morality facet (e.g., cooperative, dutiful) and lower on the Vertical-assertiveness facet (e.g., confident, ambitious) differentiated ideal follower preferences from ideal leader preferences. Focusing on the traits most strongly desired in relation to each role, traits that supported social coordination and collective goal attainment (i.e., work ethic, cooperativeness) were prioritized in relation to ideal followers, whereas intelligence was prioritized for ideal leaders. Trustworthiness was equally valued across both roles. Moreover, we differentiated between necessary and luxury traits by adjusting the budget individuals could allocate towards the desired traits. Investments in necessary versus luxury traits further supported the social evaluation framework and highlighted the need to account for the facet-level distinctions within the Vertical (assertiveness, ability) and Horizontal (morality, friendliness) dimensions. Further, these findings were found to be robust across manipulations (e.g., the target's gender and hierarchical level).

Public significance statement*:* The current findings document similarities and differences in trait valuation for followership and leadership. Ideal follower preferences reflect a strong moral character (i.e., strong cooperative orientation, work ethic, trustworthy), whereas ideal leader preferences constitute a blend of qualities that signify their willingness to use their abilities (i.e., intelligence) for the good of the collective (i.e., trustworthy).

Keywords: Agency, Communion, Followership, Leadership, Trustworthiness

Mapping the Traits Desired in Followers and Leaders onto Fundamental Dimensions of Social Evaluation

Given the complex nature of followership and its interdependence with leadership, researchers have called for integrative analyses that consider both followership and leadership because of their implications for recruitment, selection, and other organizational decisions (Steffens & Haslam, 2020). Research on interpersonal relationships highlight that such decisions are shaped by the relative value people attach to traits, which may not always align with what is effective or optimal for satisfying and productive outcomes (Eastwick et al., 2014). In modern organizational landscapes, this has important implications for understanding *who* and *what types of behavior* are rewarded.

Implicit theories of followership (IFTs) and leadership (ILTs), which are cognitive schemas and social scripts representing the traits associated with followership and leadership (Lord et al., 2020), provide a starting point for considering the attributes people may attend to when envisioning their "ideal" follower in comparison to their "ideal" leader[1]. Indeed, researchers have gained insight into the traits of prototypical and ideal followers (Sy, 2010; Junker et al., 2016) and leaders (Offermann & Coats, 2018), as well as how such lay beliefs can shape leader-follower relationships (Goswami et al., 2020). An important caveat of prior work, however, is that researchers have primarily studied the traits of ideal followers (Junker et al., 2016) and ideal leaders (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014) separately. As IFTs and ILTs focus on core attributes rather than boundary-defining features (Lord et al., 2020), studying follower and leader preferences in isolation does not afford empirically grounded conclusions about the features that differentiate ideal followers from ideal leaders. Moreover, different sets of traits

[1] Consistent with research on ideal romantic partner preferences (Eastwick et al., 2014), we use the term ideal follower preferences and ideal leader preferences to denote the constellation of attributes individuals desire in either a follower or leader. As ideal preferences represent individuals' beliefs about what they want in a potential follower or leader, they are distinct from traits possessed by effective followers and leaders.

have been included when studying preferences of ideal followers and ideal leaders, which limits the ability to compare how traits are differentially prioritized based on the salient role, and the magnitude of such role-based differences.

To what extent do preferences for an ideal follower differ from those of an ideal leader? On the one hand, being a follower versus a leader implies distinct expectations and demands associated with each position. Whereas followers translate expectations and directives into tangible outcomes, leaders are responsible for uniting, coordinating, and motivating group members, (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015). Moreover, communal traits may be less prioritized in leaders (Vial & Napier, 2018), whereas agentic traits are stereotypically associated with leaders (Koenig et al., 2011), and evolutionary theorizing emphasizes that individuals engage in follower roles because they do not possess the agentic characteristics that enable them to emerge as leaders (Bastardoz & van Vugt, 2019). On the other hand, empirical research alludes to the potential overlap in ideal preferences for followers and leaders. Traits identified as ideal amongst followers (e.g., Junker et al., 2016) share many similarities with traits desired in ideal leaders (e.g., Nichols & Cottrel, 2014), including both communal traits (e.g., cooperativeness) and agentic traits (e.g., intelligence and thinking ahead). These findings highlight that it would be an oversimplification to suggest that differences in ideal preferences for followers and leaders are only due to differences in either agency or communion.

Understanding the specific features that distinguish ideal followers from ideal leaders is crucial, as ideal preferences shape relationship initiation decisions and how people evaluate others (Eastwick et al., 2014). As collective success depends on how followers and leaders jointly work together toward a shared purpose (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), an integrative approach can thus lay the foundation for work into the processes involved in claiming and granting leader and follower identities (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Moreover, as organizations have become more adaptive and fluid in the knowledge era of work, people have had to adjust to more flexible and

dynamic role responsibilities. Perhaps more than ever, people are navigating roles of leadership and followership.

The current paper advances the literature by generating and testing theoretically informed predictions about which characteristics are differentially valued in ideal followers and ideal leaders. Despite widespread recognition of the interdependent nature of leading and following, along with how both roles jointly contribute to collective outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 214), previous research has yet to unify such traits preferences for both ideal followers and ideal leaders within a single theoretical framework. To move beyond work that has primarily focused on which traits are desired in relation to each role, we sought to experimentally compare these role-based preferences to gain insight into which traits are differentially valued in an ideal follower versus an ideal leader. We review existing work and propose there is indeed overlap in the traits preferred among ideal followers and leaders, but there are also important differences. Here, we used the facet-level distinctions within the Vertical (assertiveness, ability) and Horizontal (morality, friendliness) dimensions of social evaluation (Abele et al., 2021) to categorize these role-based differences.

The Vertical-Horizontal Dimensions of Social Evaluation Framework

The Vertical-Horizontal framework advanced by Abele et al. (2021) offers a unifying theoretical lens to organize and understand which traits maximally discriminate between the preferences for ideal followers and leaders. The Vertical and Horizontal dimensions and their corresponding facets integrate principles from prominent models of social evaluation (e.g., dual perspective model of agency and communion, Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; behavioral regulation model, Leach et al., 2007; stereotype content model, Fiske et al., 2002) and provides a common language for the dimensions of such evaluations. The Vertical-Horizontal distinction was introduced to resolve key points of tension across multiple models of social evaluation and perception, such as differences in how dimensions are labelled and organized (i.e., agency-

communion, competence-warmth, sociability, morality), which dimensions are prioritized in social judgements (i.e., processing speed and subjective weight assigned to different dimensions), and the structural and functional associations between the dimensions. As they represent broad sociofunctional dimensions under which other traits and motives can be subsumed (similar to the Big Five), these concepts provide a framework to classify which traits are differentially *valued* when comparing preferences for ideal followers to ideal leaders.

The Horizontal dimension represents "getting along" and an orientation toward social harmony and solidarity with others—integrating the concepts of morality (Goodwin et al., 2014), sociability (Leach et al., 2007), and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). A controversy between these perspectives is the extent to which warmth and communion signify morality (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2014), which is resolved by a faceted approach that distinguishes *morality* (e.g., trustworthiness, honesty, humility) from *friendliness* (e.g., sociability, friendly; Abele, 2022). In contrast, the Vertical dimension represents "getting ahead" through hierarchical differentiation and draws from the concepts of agency (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Koch et al., 2016) and competence (Fiske et al., 2002, Leach et al., 2007, Yzerbyt et al., 2005). Housed within this superordinate dimension are the *assertiveness* and *ability* facets. Assertiveness represents the traditional notion of agency (e.g., assertive, ambitious, dominant, and confident), whereas ability includes traits (e.g., intelligent, skilled, competent, efficient) reflected in the competence dimension of social evaluative models. In summary, the Horizontal (morality, friendliness) and Vertical (assertiveness, ability) dimensions are fundamental to social judgements and carry distinct social consequences.

We sought to understand the traits that differentiate preferences for ideal followers from ideal leaders, focusing on the facets of Horizontal-morality and Vertical-assertiveness. To identify relevant traits, we reviewed the literature on ideal follower and leader preferences. Instead of exclusively choosing traits based on their alignment with the facets of social

evaluation, our approach involved assessing how the Vertical-Horizontal dimensions could be effectively utilized to categorize traits that have been previously associated with ideal follower and leader preferences. Using Nichols and Cottrell's (2014) research on ideal leader preferences as a foundation[2], we identified traits that were theoretically relevant to followership and leadership, while also gaining broad coverage of personality models (e.g., Big Five, McCrae & Costa, 1997; HEXACO, Ashton & Lee, 2007). Our analysis of previous work on ideal preferences revealed that most traits could be classified according to one of these facets, with two important exceptions. First, although openness did not clearly map onto the social evaluation framework, we retained it due to it providing coverage of a broad domain of personality that would otherwise be overlooked. Openness was also justified based on its relevance to ideal leader preferences, as was supported by Nichols and Cottrell's (2014) findings. Only selecting traits that mapped onto the facets of social evaluation would have led to exclusions of traits identified in past work, which would not provide a comprehensive test of how well the facets account for trait valuation in relation to such role-based preferences. Second, certain traits provide diagnostic information about more than one facet. For example, the trait of work ethic is relevant to both the Horizontal-morality and Vertical-ability facets. Its linguistic origin from the term 'conscience' signifies a sense of responsibility and ethical behaviour (Gössling, 2003). Simultaneously, it provides information about an individual's willingness to invest effort and persist in the pursuit of goals (Ashton & Lee, 2007; McCrae & Costa, 1997). Importantly, none of the identified traits were indicative of both the Horizontal-morality and Vertical-assertiveness facets. This distinction is significant as it aligns with our theorizing about the role-based

[2] We conducted two pilot studies using a broader set of traits informed by this same logic. We began with 16 traits, with 13 derived from research on ideal leader preferences (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014), with slight wording modifications for two traits (calmness instead of emotional stability, sociability instead of extraversion), and three additional traits informed by work specific to follower preferences, such as work ethic, dutifulness, and humility (Benson et al., 2016; Junker et al., 2016; Sy, 2010). We explain the decision-making process of moving from 16 to 10 traits in Study 1.

differences in trait valuation, specifically focusing on the relevance of morality and assertiveness. Table 1 includes a summary of studies that support the extent to which identified traits are indicative of one or more of the facets representing the Vertical-Horizontal distinction. In cases where the literature was mixed regarding a particular trait, we note this in our classification scheme.

Which Traits Maximally Discriminate Between Ideal Follower and Leader Preferences?

Based on the Vertical-Horizontal framework, we propose that the morality facet of the Horizontal dimension is highly relevant to distinguishing ideal follower preferences from ideal leader preferences. People seek information about the morality facet to assess the benevolence of intentions and willingness to prioritize collective needs ahead of personal ones (Abele et al., 2021). We propose that this closely aligns with the role-specific demands of followership. Followership entails deference to someone else's claim to authority and a willingness to cooperate with others to ensure collective goal attainment (Bastardoz & van Vugt, 2019). Evaluations of the morality facet reflect inclinations to depend on and trust others (Goodwin et al., 2014). Although being collectively oriented is valued in both ideal followers and leaders (e.g., Junker et al., 2016; Nicholls & Cottrell, 2014), the distinct demands associated with following and leading help to explain why communal traits closely relate to the follower prototype (Braun et al., 2017). The relevance of morality facet is also apparent in research on attributes associated with being a 'good subordinate', such as cooperativeness, hard-work, and honesty (Beehr et al., 1994). Overall, theory and empirical evidence provide a basis for predicting that traits associated with the morality facet should carry greater subjective weight when envisioning an ideal follower in contrast to an ideal leader (Hypothesis 1).

Table 1

Overview of Traits Included in Studies 1-3

Trait	Definition	Supportive evidence for inclusion	Diagnostic information in terms of fundamental dimensions and facets	Relevant Hypotheses
Dutifulness	Obeys rules and orders	Leaders require followers to defer to their claims to leadership and thus this trait should sharply distinguish between role[1, 2] but it does not appear to be among the most valued traits of an ideal follower.[3, 4, 5]	Horizontal -morality (Abele et al., 2022)	H1 – Valued more in an ideal follower than ideal leader.
Cooperativeness	Willingness to compromise and get along with others	Among the most valued traits of ideal followership (i.e., cooperative, and team-minded)[1, 3, 4, 5]. Facilitating social cooperation is a primary function of followership[6] and less valued among ideal leader preferences[7].	Horizontal - morality Horizontal – friendliness (Abele et al., 2021; Abele, 2022)	H1 – Valued more in an ideal follower than ideal leader. H3 –Prioritized as one of the most desirable traits in an ideal follower.
Work ethic	Tendency to persist on tasks and work hard	Included to represent conscientiousness (e.g., industriousness facet in the Big Five[8] and diligence facet of the HEXACO[9]), which is positively correlated with team member performance.[10]	Horizontal – morality Vertical-ability (Abele, 2022; Miraucourt et al., 2022)	H1 – Valued more in an ideal follower than ideal leader. H4 – Prioritized as one of the most desirable traits in an ideal follower.
Assertiveness	A willingness to take charge and speak up in social situations	Desired more strongly in high-level leaders than low-level leaders but was not among the most valued leadership attributes.[7]	Vertical – assertiveness (Abele, 2022; Yzerbyt et al., 2022)	H2 – Valued more in an ideal leader than ideal follower.
Ambitiousness	A strong desire and determination to succeed	Similar to the above evidence for assertiveness.	Vertical – assertiveness (Louvet et al., 2016)	H2 – Valued more in an ideal leader than ideal follower.

Confidence	Tendency to have a positive self-regard	Similar to the above evidence for assertiveness.	Vertical – assertiveness (Abele, 2022; Yzerbyt et al., 2023)	H2 – Valued more in an ideal leader than ideal follower.
Intelligence	Ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills	Strong positive association with leader effectiveness[11] and ideal leader preferences[7].	Vertical – ability (Abele et al., 2021; Yzerbyt et al., 2023)	H5 –Prioritized as one of the most desirable traits in an ideal leader.
Trustworthiness	Tendency to be honest and avoid corruption, cheating, and fraud.	Highly valued trait in an ideal leader[7] and ideal follower.[3, 4, 5]	Horizontal – morality (Abele et al., 2021; Brambilla et al., 2021)	H6 – Prioritized as one of the most desirable traits in an ideal follower. H7 – Prioritized as one of the most desirable traits in an ideal leader.
Trustingness	Tendency to trust other people	Included in work evaluating ideal leader preferences based on relevance to promoting positive interpersonal relations[7]. Although not among the most valued traits of an ideal follower[3, 4, 5], as a trait within the friendliness facet it should feature more prominently in ideal follower preferences than leader preferences.	Horizontal – friendliness (Abele et al, 2021)	Included for breadth of trait coverage.
Openness	Receptive to new ideas.	Included in work evaluating ideal leader preferences, but not among one of the most valued traits[7]. Component of both the five-factor[8] and HEXACO[9] models of personality and linked to leader emergence and effectiveness[12].	No clear classification	Included for breadth of trait coverage.

Note. Theoretical and empirical support for the relevance of specific traits to leadership and followership: [1]Van Vugt et al. (2008); [2]DeRue and Ashford (2010); [3]Benson et al. (2016); [4]Junker et al. (2016); [5]Agho (2009); [6]Bastardoz & van Vugt (2019); [7]Nichols and Cottrell (2014); [8]McCrae and Costa (1997); [9]Ashton and Lee (2007); [10]Bell (2007); [11]Judge et al. (2004); [12]Judge et al. (2002). Theoretical and empirical support for the classification of traits in relation to the facets of the Vertical-Horizontal dimensions: [a]Abele et al. (2021); [b]Abele (2022); [c]Brambill et al., 2021; [d]Louvet et al. (2016); [e]Miraucourt et al. (2022); [f]Yzerbyt et al. (2023). Although 'assertiveness is a conceptual label that represents multiple traits within the Vertical- assertiveness domain, the trait of assertiveness has a concrete definition that can be distinguished from dominance, confidence, and ambition (Abele et al., 2021).

The assertiveness facet of the Vertical dimension should be particularly salient when considering the demands specific to leading others, as opposed to followership. Leadership encompasses tasks such as delegating responsibilities, acting decisively, persuading others, expressing a vision, and motivating others (Burke et al., 2006). Although the Vertical dimension broadly correlates with hiearchical indicators like status, prestige, and power (Abele et al., 2021), it is the facet of assertiveness that primarily drives the evaluation of high-status and low-status individuals (Yzerbyt et al., 2022). The assertiveness facet signifies a person's level of agency, reflecting their capacity for intentional and self-directed action (Abele et al., 2021). It is often associated with leadership, as leaders are often distinguished by their ability to take charge, initiate actions, and influence others (Judge et al., 2009). Indeed, confident and assertive individuals tend to emerge as leaders, regardless of their effectiveness in such roles (Ames & Flynn, 2007; Nevicka et al., 2011). Taken together, traits specific to the Vertical-assertiveness facet should be assigned greater subjective weight when envisioning an ideal leader when compared to an ideal follower (Hypothesis 2).[3]

Which Traits are Most Strongly Desired in Relation to Each Role?

Whereas we have theorized that specific facets within the Vertical-Horizontal dimensions should discriminate between ideal follower and ideal leader preferences, this is not the same as predicting which traits will be the most desirable in each specific role. Put another way, a trait may not maximally discriminate between ideal followers and leaders (i.e., magnitude of difference in valuation for a trait as a function of a role) but can be highly valued for a specific role (i.e., the degree to which a trait is prioritized above other traits within a specific role).

[3] We focus our discussion on the facets that differentiate preferences for an ideal follower from an ideal leader. In contrast to the morality facet, friendliness does not uniquely map onto the demands of followership or leadership. Individuals can fulfill expected tasks and facilitate social coordination without being affable, warm, and sociable. In addition, traits that solely map onto the Vertical-ability facet do not appear to be a good candidate for differentiating ideal leader preferences from ideal follower preferences. The Vertical-ability facet signifies an individual's ability to effectively accomplish tasks (Abele et al., 2021), which is relevant to both ideal leader preferences (Cottrell et al., 2014) and ideal follower preferences (Agho, 2009; Junker et al., 2016).

Building on our hypothesis regarding ideal follower preferences, evolutionary perspectives on leader-follower dynamics suggest that certain traits relevant to the horizontal-morality dimension (i.e., cooperation with others and work ethic) may be valued more than others. For example, previous research has demonstrated that a core function of followership is to facilitate social harmony via cooperation with others (Bastardoz & van Vugt, 2019; van Vugt et al., 2008). Consistent with this point, team levels of effective followership buffer against relationship conflict (Baird & Benson, 2022). Similarly, several studies point to cooperativeness as a likely candidate for one of the most desirable traits in an ideal follower (Agho, 2009; Junker et al., 2016). Nonetheless, followers who are other-oriented but lack the abilities necessary to advance group goals cannot adequately fulfill their core role function. A willingness to work hard and persist (i.e., strong work ethic) should also be salient and highly valued in an ideal follower. As the ability to work hard and persist should potentiate the social benefits of communion in interdependent relationships (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), we hypothesize that both cooperativeness (Hypothesis 3) and work ethic (Hypothesis 4) will be prioritized over other traits in an ideal follower.

Turning to ideal leader preferences, certain traits along the vertical-ability dimension might be valued over and above others. More specifically, research specifically points to individuals highly valuing *intelligence*. Leadership involves numerous complex tasks (e.g., strategic planning, decision-making, motivating members, coordinating with external parties) and meta-analytic findings show a moderate positive association between intelligence and leadership (Judge et al., 2004). The most direct evidence is from Nichols and Cottrell (2014) who found individuals tended to prioritize intelligence above traits such as assertiveness, confidence, and ambition when envisioning an ideal low-level leader (i.e., leader who frequently interacts with subordinates) and an ideal high-level leader (i.e., leader who is high in the hierarchy and responsible for higher-level organizational strategy and decisions). Accordingly,

we hypothesize that intelligence will be prioritized over other traits in an ideal leader (Hypothesis 5).

Trustworthiness as a Highly Valued Trait in Ideal Followers and Ideal Leaders

Trustworthiness (a trait diagnostic of high morality, Goodwin et al., 2014) is a key feature of human sociality because it enables individuals to rely on one another and coordinate mutually beneficial goals (Cottrell et al., 2007). Leaders and followers both strongly depend on one another. A leader's trust in their follower is a foundation to higher quality leader member exchange (Rockstuhl et al., 2012). If a follower is perceived to be untrustworthy, a leader may struggle to delegate or empower that individual to undertake important organizational tasks. An untrustworthy follower may thus hinder one's ability to lead effectively and disrupt communality (Bastardoz & van Vugt, 2019). As such, we hypothesize that trustworthiness will be prioritized over other traits in an ideal follower (Hypothesis 6).

Although we theorized the primacy of Horizontal-morality over Vertical-assertiveness when contrasting ideal follower to ideal leader preferences, it has been well established by research that trustworthiness is also strongly desired in leaders (Agho, 2009; Nichols & Cottrell, 2014). Leaders who possess strong agentic qualities but are untrustworthy may be perceived as selfish or malevolent (Ames & Flynn, 2007). Put another way, individuals must trust a leader to use their knowledge and skillset to advance collective interests. This interdependence between leaders and followers is the basis for our final hypothesis: Trustworthiness will be prioritized over other traits in an ideal leader (Hypothesis 7).

Methodological Considerations when Discerning the Subjective Value Assigned to Different Traits

Given our interest in documenting the relative value assigned to different traits when considering ideal follower and leader preferences, examining the desirability of traits in a follower (or leader) in isolation from other traits may not provide a complete picture of trait

valuation. For example, a leader may prefer an ideal follower to have a certain level of confidence. If a follower is untrustworthy, however, confidence may become irrelevant from the leader's perspective. As an example of how leaders are cognizant of the combination of traits possessed by followers, qualitative findings suggest leaders desire independence and critical thinking in their followers, but also want followers to possess a strong collective orientation and a keen sense of when it is appropriate to be proactive in their role (Benson et al., 2016). Accordingly, methods should be equipped to uncover the importance hierarchy of which traits are prioritized over others (Cottrell et al., 2007).

One strategy is having individuals rank-order traits based on their importance to followership or leadership (e.g., Agho, 2009). Although rank-ordering prompts individuals to consider a range of characteristics relevant to an ideal follower or ideal leader, participants may deemphasize traits that are readily sufficient in their day-to-day workplace interactions and overemphasize traits for which there is greater variation in the workplace (Li et al., 2002). An alternative methodological approach is needed to enable conclusions about the relative value afforded to traits, and the extent to which such traits are differentially valued in ideal followers and ideal leaders.

To address the limitations of both questionnaire-based approaches and studying follower preferences in isolation from leader preferences, we used a decision-making paradigm to identify the relative value assigned to traits (i.e., which traits are prioritized or de-emphasized) when envisioning an ideal follower and an ideal leader. Randomly assigning individuals to design either an ideal follower or ideal leader also helps to ensure the manipulated factor (i.e., target role) is exogenous and thus protects against the issue that differences in the dependent measure (i.e., trait desirability) are being driven by unmodeled participant characteristics (for a review, see Antonakis et al., 2010). Li et al. (2002) developed a method to identify which traits are valued when choosing among conflicting preferences, which is a promising approach to

evaluate the previously described hypotheses. In its original form, this decision-making paradigm had participants purchase traits using a constrained budget to design their ideal long-term mate. Subsequently, this has been adapted to evaluate broader interpersonal preferences (Cottrell et al., 2007) and ideal leader preferences (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014). Given that traits do not exist in isolation, an advantage of this paradigm is individuals must consider (1) the relative value they are willing to assign to each trait due to the forced choice design, and (2) the implications of how multiple traits combine within a person. Following Li et al.'s (2002) approach to operationalizing trait desirability, the magnitude of the difference in budget allocation decisions for each trait offers insight into which traits are more strongly valued in ideal followers than ideal leaders (Hypotheses 1-2). As it pertains to within-role comparisons, when a larger proportion of the budget is allocated to a trait relative to others, this is akin to a trait being prioritized within a given role (i.e., Hypotheses 3-7). As noted by Li et al. (2002), "rating traits one at a time, unconstrained, may not reveal trade-offs normally made when people select mates, whose traits come in bundles" (p. 948). Although possessing one trait does not necessarily exclude the presence of another, evaluating a person's readiness for a role requires individuals to consider trade-offs and prioritize certain traits over others when making a decision. In an organizational context, a hiring manager might encounter a situation in which they need to choose between a person who they perceive as highly trustworthy and moderately intelligent, versus someone who is viewed as highly intelligent and moderately trustworthy. Few would argue that intelligence and trustworthy are not desirable traits, but such a situation would highlight which trait is prioritized when choices are constrained. Traditional questionnaire-based approaches are ill-suited to unpacking such questions.

Another feature of Li et al.'s (2002) experimental method is the ability to systematically alter the resources available to the decision-makers. Drawing from economics principles (Varian, 1984), providing an increasingly large budget via a within-subject design enables

insight into which traits are prioritized under scarcity conditions, and how priorities change under conditions of abundance. To use an example of material wealth, a person with minimal resources may spend most of their budget on the necessities of life (e.g., water, food, basic shelter), but then shift to spending more on luxury items as resources become abundant. Accordingly, this method may help distinguish between the traits viewed to be indispensable in an ideal follower, and the traits prioritized only once such necessities are satisfied.

Potential Boundary Conditions of Ideal Preferences

Integrating a connectionist perspective (Lord et al., 2001), it is important to consider how contextual constraints, such as gender and hierarchical level, may activate distinct role-based preferences. Although our main predictions (described above) focus on generalized preferences in relation to ideal followers and leaders, connectionist models highlight that the desirability of traits in ideal followers and leaders are dynamic and context specific (Foti et al., 2008).

Gender is a potentially important contextual cue due to a well-established literature showing that women may encounter prejudice in leader roles due to gender-based stereotypes. Both descriptive norms (i.e., such roles are stereotypically masculine) and injunctive norms (i.e., leadership behaviors evaluated less favorably in women than men due to a perceived gender role violation) can both play a role in how women's leadership may be perceived differently (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Just as the social roles of men and leaders overlap due to stereotypes of agency (i.e., the masculine leader stereotype; Koenig et al., 2011), research also alludes to an overlap between the social roles of women and followers (Braun et al., 2017). Individuals may rely on such stereotypes and devalue certain traits when envisioning an ideal female leader or an ideal male follower. However, empirical findings on the effects of gender stereotypes are nuanced. Ma et al. (2022) found that women who possessed competent agency were viewed favorably, and it was only those who possessed dominant agency who experienced an agentic disadvantage.

Using the terminology offered by the social evaluation framework together with our theorizing, such stereotypes would primarily affect trait valuation of the Vertical-assertiveness facet for leaders. Complicating matters further, an analysis of polling data in the United States suggests that although stereotypic views of women's communion have increased over time, perceptions of women's competence and intelligence have increased to the point where there are no gender differences for these attributes (Eagly et al., 2020). If intelligence and trustworthiness are indeed among the most desired traits for leaders, these should not vary as a function of gender when considering ideal preferences. Overall, despite the lack of a concrete basis from which to generate directional hypotheses, including target gender as a potential boundary condition enables insight into the degree to which gender stereotypes have implications for ideal follower and leader preferences.

We considered hierarchical level as an additional factor as a means of disentangling the effects of relative versus absolute hierarchical position. Occupying higher hierarchical rank confers greater control over resources (i.e., power) and carries distinct role expectations (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). As direct evidence for the relevance of hierarchy to ideal preferences, Nichols and Cottrell (2014) found that interpersonal traits (e.g., emotional stability) tended to be desired more in low-level compared to high-level leaders, whereas dominant traits (e.g., ambition) tended to be desired less. However, as the rater's role *relative* to the leader was not made explicit, it is not clear whether these results are driven by one's absolute position in the hierarchy or the distance between a leader and follower. In accord with construal-level theory, there is research showing that communicating an abstract vision is viewed positively when enacted by a hierarchically distant leader, whereas concrete feedback is more appreciated from a proximal leader (Berson & Halevy, 2014). This suggests it is important to jointly consider the hierarchical level of both the target and the rater. Indeed, even though one may have a fixed structural position in a hierarchy, employees frequently shift between roles of leading and

following depending on the situational demands and one's interaction partner. For example, middle managers frequently alternate between distinct behavioral orientations due to their role as a conduit between senior management and junior organizational members (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017). We theorized that occupying a higher or lower position in a hierarchy relative to a co-worker should activate distinct trait preferences for that person—and this relative comparison should take primacy over the target's absolute position in an organizational hierarchy. Evaluating whether the traits desired in a mid-level manager change as a function of the rater's perspective (i.e., a subordinate who views a manager as their leader vs. an organizational director who views a manager as their follower) provides a strong test of whether distinct traits are prioritized when a follower role, rather than a leader role, is salient.

Overview of the Current Research

Following two pilot studies, we conducted three experimental studies and meta-analyzed the effect size estimates to disentangle ideal follower preferences from ideal leader preferences. Across all studies, we randomly assigned participants to either design their ideal follower or ideal leader using three different budgets. In the final two studies, we tested boundary conditions of ideal follower preferences (and how they differ from ideal leader preferences) by manipulating target gender and hierarchical level. Adapting a paradigm used to evaluate mate preferences (Li et al., 2002), the combination of a forced-choice design with different budgets enabled us to evaluate which traits were prioritized under scarcity conditions (i.e., low budget), and how spending patterns changed as additional resources became available. Our first hypotheses focus on between-role comparisons. Specifically, we predict that individuals envisioning an ideal follower (compared with an ideal leader) will spend a greater proportion of their budget (i.e., indicative of a stronger desire) on Horizontal-morality traits (H1). Further, we expect that individuals envisioning an ideal leader (compared with an ideal follower) will spend a greater proportion of their budget on Vertical-assertiveness traits (H2). The second set of

hypotheses centered on which traits are prioritized above others within each role. That is, we expected certain traits to be prioritized above others in relation to an ideal follower (i.e., H3 = cooperativeness, H4 = work ethic, H6 = trustworthiness) and ideal leader (i.e., H5 = intelligence, H7 = trustworthiness). As an alternative method for identifying which traits are prioritized, we also examined the degree to which spending patterns changed as the budget increased. Li et al. (2002) proposed changes in spending patterns across budgets may distinguish between necessities (i.e., traits that receive a higher proportion of a more constrained budget than a larger budget) versus luxuries (i.e., traits that receive a higher proportion of a larger budget than a more constrained budget).

Study 1

Participants were randomly assigned to design their ideal follower or ideal leader to determine which traits are desired in both roles, and relatedly, whether such preferences differ between the two roles. We collected two samples to pilot test the protocol in-person (N = 140) and a subsequent online (N = 197) study as a preliminary test of our hypotheses (available at https://osf.io/y4cpd/; findings were largely consistent with those reported here in Study 1). Study 1 used a subset of the traits derived from this pilot work to examine traits that saliently distinguish between ideal follower and ideal leader preferences, and to document which traits are most strongly desired in each respective role. Grounded in our pilot work, we retained 10 of the 16 original traits based on the theoretical importance of specific traits (e.g., cooperativeness, dutifulness, work ethic, intelligence, trustworthiness), whether a trait was highly valued across one or both target roles (e.g., humility and courage both received a small proportion of the budget and thus were excluded), and whether a trait was differentially valued across target roles (e.g., whereas assertiveness and dutifulness differed based on the target role, sociability showed minimal differences). Of all the Horizontal-Friendliness traits originally included (sociability, supportiveness, compassionate), only trustingness was carried forward. As such, participants

allocated their budget across ten traits: ambitiousness, assertiveness, confidence, cooperativeness, dutifulness, hard-working (i.e., work ethic), intelligence, openness, trustingness, and trustworthiness.

Method

Transparency and Openness

Across all studies, we report all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures. The studies were not pre-registered, but all data and syntax needed to reproduce analyses, sensitivity power analyses, and research materials are available at https://osf.io/y4cpd/. For all studies, sample size was determined before any data analysis. Whereas an a priori power analysis informed our second pilot study and Study 1 (detailed below), we tripled the sample size for Studies 2 and 3 based on the additionally manipulated factors. Sensitivity power analyses were conducted for the least sensitive focal tests (i.e., between-subject comparisons) via G*Power 3 with an alpha significance level of .05 and power criterion of 80% (Faul et al., 2009).

Participants

Participants in either the United States or Canada were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in the Fall of 2018, in exchange for $1.50 USD and took approximately ten minutes to complete. In total, 196 participants were retained for the main analyses after excluding those who did not complete the budget paradigm (n = 25) or failed one of the attention check procedures (n = 28, detailed below). Participants ranged from 19 to 72 years of age (M_{age} = 35.28, SD = 10.61) and self-reported their ethnic identity (Caucasian = 75.0%; Black = 7.1%; Asian = 7.1%; Hispanic = 5.6%; East Indian = 1.0%; Mixed or other = 2.6%) and gender (69.4% men; 30.6% women). The sample size targeted in Study 1 was the same as our second pilot study (N = 200, see supplemental file for the original power analysis). The resultant sample fell slightly below this target, with a sensitivity power analysis showing the

experiment could reliably detect effect sizes of d = 0.36 when comparing specific trait preferences for followers and leaders.

Procedure and Materials

Ethics approval and consent was obtained across all studies. Participants were randomly assigned to design an ideal follower (n = 96) or ideal leader (n = 100), but they allocated their budget across ten traits using a three-factor mixed model design. The target role (follower vs. leader) was a between-participant factor, whereas the budget condition (i.e., low, medium, high) and trait (i.e., ambitiousness, assertiveness, confidence, cooperativeness, dutifulness, hard-working (i.e., work ethic), intelligence, openness, trustingness, and trustworthiness) were within-participant factors. Participants were randomly assigned to envision themselves as either a leader (in the designing a follower condition) or member (in the designing a leader condition) of a team that must work together on tasks in pursuit of a collective goal. Based on their condition, participants were instructed to consider the characteristics they would want in an ideal follower or leader within their team. We defined the target role based on whether participants were designing an ideal follower (i.e., "By follower, we mean someone who is acting in relation to you as their leader") or an ideal leader (i.e., "By leader, we mean someone who is responsible for directing and guiding the group toward their objectives"). Our definition of the follower role was derived from Uhl-Bien et al.'s (2014) conceptual definition of "followership is the characteristics, behaviors and processes of individuals acting in relation to leaders" (p. 96). We constructed the vignette to emphasize task and outcome interdependence because such teams entail frequent and meaningful social interactions. Although we used a vignette to maintain experimental control, the framing of the task allowed participants to consider a context relevant to their own experiences. The complete set of instructions provided to participants are available at the following link: https://osf.io/y4cpd/

In a series of three tasks, participants designed their ideal follower or leader by purchasing traits across three budgets. In a sequential order, participants were given three independent budgets: 10 dollars (i.e., low budget), 20 dollars (i.e., medium budget), and then 30 dollars (i.e., high budget) to spend on their ideal follower or leader. The definition for each trait was embedded within the online survey. For each budget, the target person (i.e., follower or leader) began at the lowest possible percentile on each trait, and participants were able to increase any of the target's attributes by 1 decile point (e.g., 0 percentile to 10th percentile) by spending a dollar of their budget.

Attention Checks

Instrumental manipulation checks were used to identify and exclude non-diligent participants. Participants were asked to recall who they built out of three options (i.e., ideal leader, ideal follower, I do not remember) and to indicate which characteristic was not available to purchase (i.e., intelligence, confidence, trustworthiness, physical attractiveness). Participants were excluded for incorrectly responding to either attention check (follower condition = 17; leader condition = 11).

Analysis Strategy

To evaluate (1) whether individuals prioritized distinct traits when designing a follower relative to those designing an ideal leader, and (2) which traits were most strongly desired for each role, we performed a role (between) by trait (within) mixed split-plot analysis of variance (ANOVA). Role consisted of two levels—follower or leader—while trait consisted of ten levels. We evaluated if the amount spent on each trait differed as a function of the target role (i.e., trait x role). Following Li et al. (2002), this analysis focused on the low-budget condition to identify which traits are prioritized when choices as constrained (i.e., scarcity conditions)[4].

[4] We examined spending patterns in the medium and high budget conditions in a separate analysis to evaluate changes in spending across budgets. Nevertheless, we also conducted an omnibus ANOVA, which

The percentage of the low budget spent on each trait (e.g., 2 dollars spent on intelligence in the low budget condition = 20%) indexes the importance of each trait and was the dependent measure. Between-subject contrasts were used to evaluate whether the low budget proportion spent on each trait differed when designing a follower versus a leader.

Within-participant contrasts evaluated which traits received a higher proportion of the low budget when designing a follower or leader. In accord with researchers who applied this decision-making paradigm to study mate preferences (Li et al., 2002) and the importance of trust (Cottrell et al., 2007), we compared the proportion of the low budget spent on each trait hypothesized to be essential in an ideal follower (i.e., morality-based traits of cooperativeness, trustworthiness, work ethic) to the average proportion of the budget spent across the remaining traits. The same procedure was used to compare the proportion of the budget spent on each trait hypothesized to be essential in an ideal leader (i.e., intelligence, trustworthiness) to the remaining traits. Given the numerous within-participant and between-participant contrasts, we used an adjusted α of .01 across all studies.[5] For the between-participant contrast, we report the Hedges's g, which is a corrected effect size. For the within-participant contrasts, we report the partial eta-squared (η^2_p). We conducted the same analyses in subsequent studies, with slight modifications to the number of traits and conditions.

To determine whether spending patterns changed as additional income became available, we compared the percentage spent on each trait in the low budget condition to the percentage

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revealed a significant interaction between trait and budget, $F(11.05, 2144.35) = 3.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .02$, meaning that spending patterns on specific traits varied as a function of budget. The three-way interaction between trait, budget, and condition was not significant, $F(11.05, 2144.35) = 1.69$, $p = .070$, $\eta^2_p = .01$, meaning spending patterns did not change across budgets in different ways for participants designing an ideal follower compared to an ideal leader. Complete statistics are available in the supplemental file.

[5]Mauchly's test indicated the assumption of sphericity was not met for any of the studies (Study 1 = $\chi^2 = 282.96$, $p < .001$; Study 2 = $\chi^2 = 581.41$, $p < .001$; Study 3 = $\chi^2 = 535.61$, $p < .001$) which is likely due to the nature of the experiment (i.e., forced-choice decision-making paradigm). Accordingly, we applied the Geisser-Greenhouse correction (Study 1, $\varepsilon = 0.77$; Study 2, $\varepsilon = 0.81$; Study 3, $\varepsilon = 0.81$) to the model degrees of freedom and the error degrees of freedom. Additional descriptive statistics for all studies are available at https://osf.io/y4cpd

spent on that same trait in the medium budget and high budget conditions. As such, traits with a significant negative change are considered priorities (i.e., a smaller percentage of the budget is spent on priorities once additional income becomes available), whereas traits with a significant positive change are considered luxuries (i.e., a larger percentage of the budget is spent on luxuries once additional income becomes available). The rationale for focusing on the proportion of the budget rather than the number of tokens is illustrated with the following example: if one person earns $100,000 per year, whereas another person earns $10,000 per year, although the individual with a larger budget may spend more dollars on food, they will likely spend a smaller proportion of their budget on food. A limitation to operationalizing necessities and luxuries in this manner is it focuses on relative levels of spending across budgets for a given trait, rather than the percentage spent on different traits. This can lead to situations in which a trait would not be considered a necessity (or luxury) if a consistently large (or small) proportion of tokens is spent on a trait across low, medium, and high budgets. To avoid misleading conclusions, it is important to consider changes in spending in combination with the proportion of the budget allocated to each trait. Separate repeated measures ANOVA (trait x budget) were conducted to evaluate spending changes when designing a follower and leader.

Results

Differentiating Ideal Follower from Ideal Leader Preferences

Spending varied across traits, $F(6.95, 1347.77) = 24.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .11$, and the trait by condition interaction was significant, meaning participants differed in how they allocated their budget when designing a follower versus a leader, $F(6.95, 1347.77) = 12.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .06$. Figure 1a displays the proportion of the initial budget spent on each trait in relation to both target roles. As predicted (H1 and H2), the between-subject contrasts (see Table 2, column[b] – column[a]) showed participants designing a follower—relative to those designing a leader—spent significantly more on cooperativeness ($p = .004$, Hedges's $g = 0.43$), dutifulness ($p < .001$,

Hedges's g = 0.65), and work ethic (p < .001, Hedges's g = 0.74), but spent significantly less on assertiveness (p < .001, Hedges's g = 0.82), confidence (p < .001, Hedges's g = 0.55), and intelligence (p < .001, Hedges's g = 0.42). No significant differences were observed for ambitiousness (p = .270, Hedges's g = 0.17), openness (p = .036, Hedges's g = 0.30), trustingness (p = .663, Hedges's g = 0.06), or trustworthiness (p = .341, Hedges's g = 0.14).

Which Traits Are Prioritized for Each Role

Supporting H3, H4, and H6, participants designing an ideal follower spent significantly more of their budget on work ethic (M = 21.98, SD = 13.58), $F(1, 95) = 89.72$, p < .001, η^2_p = .49, cooperativeness (M = 15.63, SD = 11.22), $F(1, 317) = 44.57$, p < .001, η^2_p = .32, and trustworthiness (M = 12.60, SD = 12.07), $F(1, 95) = 15.41$, p < .001, η^2_p = .14, than the combined average of the remaining traits (M = 7.11, SD = 2.70).

Supporting H5, individuals designing a leader spent more of their budget on intelligence (M = 16.20, SD = 13.84) than the combined average of the remaining traits (M = 9.09, SD = 2.09), $F(1, 99) = 20.91$, p < .001, η^2_p = .17. The comparison between trustworthiness (M = 11.10, SD = 9.94) and the average of the remaining traits was non-significant despite trending in the expected direction, $F(1, 99) = 3.21$, p = .076, η^2_p = .03.

Distinguishing Necessity and Luxury Traits

For those designing a follower, spending patterns changed across the three budgets, $F(10.42, 989.74) = 2.64$, p = .003, η^2_p = .03. Pairwise comparisons only revealed a significant proportional increase in spending on openness from the medium to high budget ($M_{\text{difference}}$ = 1.11, 95% CI [0.31, 1.91], p = .007). None of the traits received proportionally less tokens as the budget size increased (ps > .01).

For those designing a leader, spending patterns also changed across budgets, $F(8.26, 818.17) = 2.10$, p = .032, η^2_p = .02. Whereas spending proportionally decreased for assertiveness (low to medium budget: $M_{\text{difference}}$ = -2.75, 95% CI [-4.44, -1.06], p = .002), significant increases

were observed for dutifulness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = 1.85, 95% [0.61, 3.09], p = .004), openness (low to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = 2.67, 95% [1.18, 4.15], p = .001) and trustingness (low to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = 1.83, 95% [0.51, 3.12], p = .007). The full set of the comparisons across budgets is available at https://osf.io/y4cpd.

Auxiliary Analysis: Grouping Traits by their Respective Facets

Rather than evaluating the proportion of the budget allocated to each trait, an alternative to testing Hypotheses 1 and 2 is to create spending averages based on grouping traits according to the Vertical-assertiveness, Vertical-ability, Horizontal-morality, and Horizontal-friendliness facets. Analyzing the data in this manner leads to the same core conclusion: Spending varied across the facets, F(2.93, 568.35) = 31.29, p < .001, η^2_p = .14, and there was a significant interaction between the facets and condition, meaning that participants differed in how they allocated their tokens when designing a follower versus a leader, F(2.93, 568.35) = 12.11, p < .001, η^2_p = .06. As predicted by H1 and H2, the between-subject contrasts showed participants designing a follower—relative to those designing a leader—spent significantly more on horizontal-morality (Mean difference = 5.48, p < .001, Hedges's g = 1.17), but spent significantly less on vertical-assertiveness (Mean difference = -4.87, p < .001, Hedges's g = 0.67). Complete details are available in the supplemental file, including the results of this auxiliary in Studies 2 and 3.

Discussion

As predicted, Horizontal-morality traits (e.g., cooperativeness, dutifulness) were more strongly desired in an ideal follower than leader, whereas Vertical-Assertive traits (e.g., assertiveness, confidence) were more strongly desired in an ideal leader than follower. Focusing on within-role comparisons, cooperativeness, trustworthiness, and work ethic were prioritized relative to other traits in an ideal follower—all of which are diagnostic of high Horizontal-morality. However, it should be noted that work ethic is also diagnostic of high Vertical-ability.

Figure 1

Budget Allocation in Study 1 (Panel A) and Study 2 (Panel B) for an Ideal Follower and Idea Leader

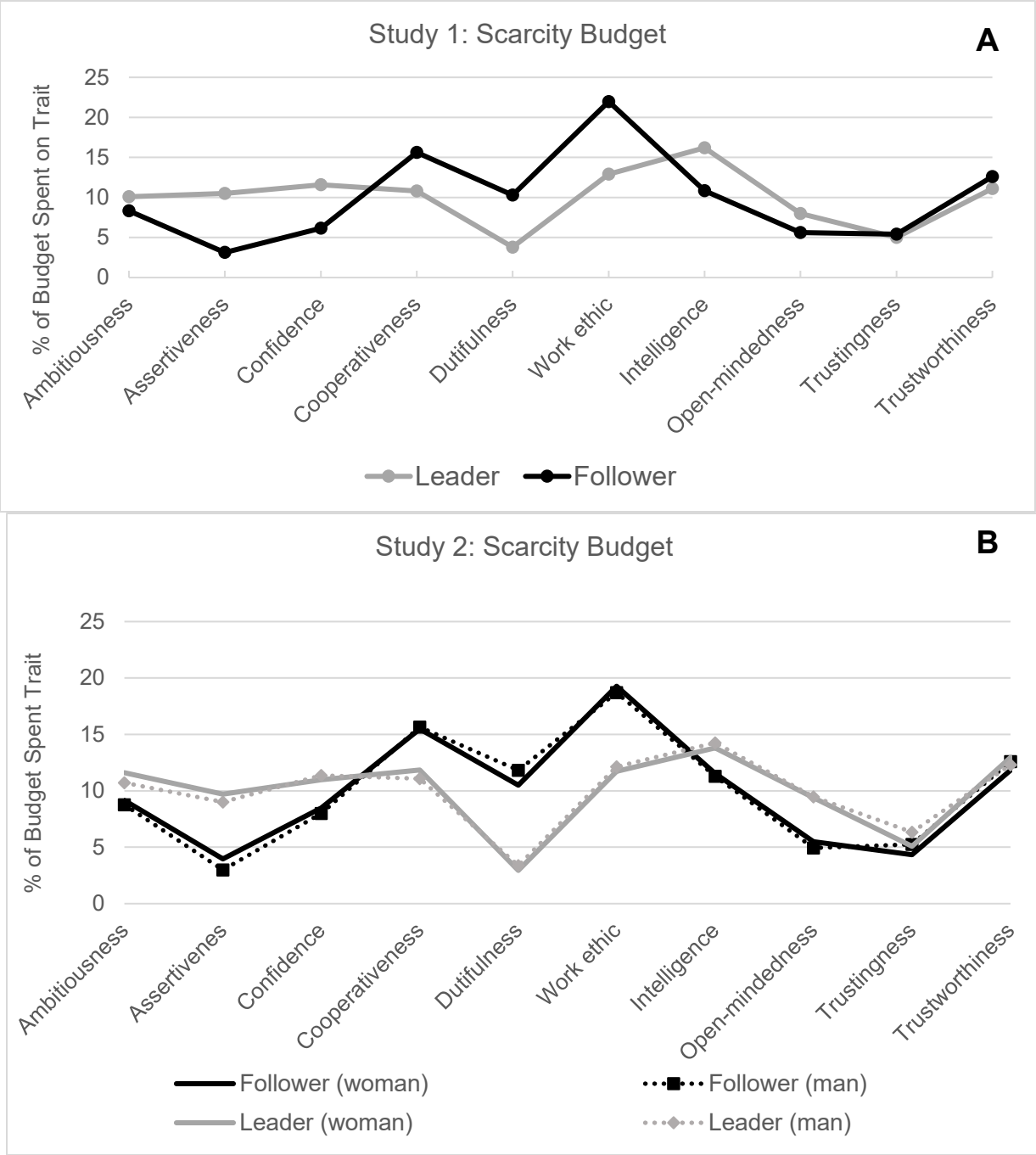


Table 2

Study 1: Percentage of Tokens Allocated to Each Trait as a Function of Low, Medium, and High Budgets

	Leader (n = 100)			Follower (n = 96)		
	Low budget[a]	Medium Budget	High Budget	Low budget[b]	Medium Budget	High Budget
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SE*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
1. Ambitiousness	10.10 (10.29)	9.45 (8.38)	9.77 (7.51)	8.33 (12.02)	7.03 (7.06)	6.91 (6.60)
2. Assertiveness	10.50 (10.30)[N]	7.75 (6.79)	8.87 (7.36)	3.13 (7.58)	2.71 (4.47)	3.44 (4.55)
3. Confidence	11.60 (11.26)	10.00 (7.59)	10.23 (6.57)	6.15 (8.26)	6.20 (6.06)	6.88 (5.94)
4. Cooperativeness	10.80 (11.07)	10.70 (7.59)	10.13 (6.14)	15.63 (11.22)	13.54 (8.11)	13.19 (7.29)
5. Dutifulness	3.80 (6.32)[L]	5.65 (6.54)	5.17 (4.75)	10.32 (12.69)	10.83 (9.78)	10.94 (9.56)
6. Work ethic	12.90 (10.85)	13.70 (8.49)	12.57 (5.92)	21.98 (13.84)	19.48 (9.45)	19.27 (8.14)
7. Intelligence	16.20 (13.84)	15.90 (9.30)	15.23 (7.20)	10.83 (11.67)	12.86 (10.30)	12.01 (8.24)
8. Openness	8.00 (8.17)[L]	10.00 (7.00)	10.67 (5.86)	5.63 (7.51)[L]	6.25 (6.53)	7.36 (7.16)
9. Trustingness	5.00 (6.11)	5.65 (5.44)	6.83 (5.59)	5.42 (7.24)	6.98 (7.80)	6.56 (6.37)
10. Trustworthiness	11.10 (9.94)	11.20 (7.56)	10.53 (6.31)	12.60 (12.07)	14.11 (8.91)	13.44 (7.21)

Note. N = 196. Between-subject planned contrasts for differences spent on each trait when designing a follower versus a leader = column[b] – column[a]. In the low budget column for each respective role, traits with a superscript N were classified as a necessity, whereas traits with a superscript L were classified as a luxury.

Intelligence was uniquely prioritized in relation to ideal leaders—a trait mapping onto the Vertical-ability facet. This pattern of results broadly supported the theorized predictions that differences in ideal leader and ideal follower preferences can be understood through fundamental dimensions of social evaluation.

Nonetheless, two findings contravened expectations. First, our prediction regarding trustworthiness in the context of ideal leader preferences was not supported. Second, spending patterns changed across the three budgets, but not in ways that fully aligned with expectations. For ideal followers, none of the traits received a disproportionate amount of the lower budgets than the higher budgets (i.e., necessities). For ideal leaders, only assertiveness emerged as a necessity. Although no specific predictions were made regarding luxury traits, dutifulness and trustingness were viewed more as luxury traits specifically in relation to ideal leaders, whereas openness was viewed as a luxury trait in relation to both roles. One potential issue is the statistical power relevant to evaluating the changes in spending across time. We evaluate these issues in subsequent studies with a larger sample.

Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to replicate and extend the results of Study 1 with a larger sample and by examining the role of target gender. Although communion is stereotypically associated with women, and agency is stereotypically associated with both men and leaders (i.e., the masculine leader stereotype; Koenig et al., 2011), previously reviewed literature raises the possibility that such prejudice toward women leaders may not be evident when considering ideal preferences (Eagly et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2022), particularly given the primacy of intelligence in Study 1. To address these questions, Study 2 examined whether ideal follower and leader preferences are robust to manipulations of the target's gender.

Method

Participants

We recruited participants from MTurk (all of whom were in United States or Canada) and a research participation pool at a large Canadian university, throughout 2019 and 2020. Out of the 612 participants recruited through MTurk in exchange $1.50 USD, 510 were retained for the main analyses after excluding those who did not complete the entire budget paradigm (n = 19) or incorrectly responded to either attention check procedures (n = 83). Participants reported their age ($M_{\text{age in years}}$ = 39.09, SD = 11.88) and self-identified their gender (53.7% men, 46.3% women) and ethnicity (Caucasian = 80.0%; Asian = 8.2%; Black = 7.3%; Hispanic = 3.5%; Middle Eastern = 0.2%; other = 0.8%). Most of the sample was employed in full-time work (91.9%). Out of the 147 undergraduate students who participated in exchange for course credit, 140 were retained for the main analyses after excluding 7 for a failed attention check ($M_{\text{age years}}$ = 18.92, SD = 0.48; 64.3% women, 35.7% men; Caucasian = 37.1%; Asian = 35.7%; Black = 2.1%; East Indian = 7.9%; Hispanic = 2.1%; Middle Eastern = 8.6%; South Asian = 3.6%; Other = 2.9%). Data were collected on their current level of paid work experience (none = 22.1%; less than 1 year = 25.7%; 1-2 years = 15%; 2-3 years = 16.4%; more than 3 years = 20.7%). Although participants from Mturk compared to undergraduate students are arguably more representative of individuals who would be evaluating prospective followers and leaders in the workplace, using two distinct samples enables us to evaluate *constraints of generality* as it pertains to the traits that people prioritize in followers and leaders (Simons et al., 2017). A similar pattern was observed when conducting the primary analyses with each sub-sample separately, and when including sample source as an additional between-subject factor. As such, we combined both samples to maximize statistical power. A sensitivity power analysis showed the experiment could reliably detect an effect size of f = 0.11 for the interaction between target role and gender, and an effect size of d = 0.20 when collapsing across conditions and comparing specific trait preferences for followers and leaders.

Procedure and Materials

We used the same budget allocation paradigm described in Study 1 but factorially manipulated the target's role (i.e., follower, leader) and gender (i.e., woman, man). Participants were randomly assigned to design a follower who was a woman (n = 164) or man (n = 154), or a leader who was a woman (n = 163) or man (n = 169). Rather than directly informing the participant they would be evaluating a man or woman, we indirectly manipulated gender by embedding a stereotypically common name (i.e., Karen for the woman and Kevin for the man) alongside the description of the target's role. We selected these names as they are phonetically similar and are both in the top 25 names of female (Karen) and male (Kevin) births (Social Security Administration, 2022). As in Study 1, participants were given an initial budget of 10 dollars (i.e., low budget), then 20 dollars (i.e., medium budget), and finally 30 dollars (i.e., high budget) to spend on their ideal follower or leader.

Attention Checks

Similar to Study 1, participants were asked to recall which role they built and to indicate which characteristic was not available to purchase. In addition, we asked participants to recall the name of the person they were asked to envision out of four options (i.e., Daryll, Kevin, Karen, Sarah)[6]. Participants were excluded for incorrectly responding to either attention check: follower (woman) = 23; follower (man) = 31; leader (woman) = 20; leader (man) = 16.

Results

Study 2 followed the same analyses as Study 1, with the addition of evaluating the role of target gender as an additional between-subject factor. We performed a role (between) by gender (between) by trait (within) mixed split-plot ANOVA. Role (follower, leader) and gender (woman, man) each consisted of two levels, while trait consisted of ten levels (same traits as Study 1). We evaluated if the amount spent on each trait differed as a function of the target role (i.e., trait x

[6] We assumed participants would infer that Kevin/Karen represented a man/woman due to the popularity of these names for male and female births but did not explicitly ask participants if they believed they were envisioning a man or woman.

role) and target gender (i.e., trait x gender), and the interaction between these factors and spending on specific traits (i.e., target role x target gender x trait). This allowed us to discern whether differences based on the target's role (i.e., follower, leader) varied according to the gender of the target (i.e., ideal male leader vs. ideal female leader, ideal male follower vs. ideal female follower).

Ideal Follower and Leader Preferences as a Function of Target Gender

Spending varied across traits, $F(7.31, 4724.75) = 75.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .10$, and the interaction between trait and role was significant, meaning spending differed based on whether a person was designing a follower or leader, $F(7.31, 4724.75) = 36.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .05$. The interaction between trait and gender was non-significant, meaning that target's gender, however, did not influence how participants allocated their budget across traits, $F(7.31, 4724.75) = 0.57$, $p = .788$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. The higher-order interaction between target gender, target role, and trait was also non-significant, $F(7.31, 4724.75) = 0.30$, $p = .960$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. Figure 1b displays the proportion of the initial budget spent on each trait across all four conditions. Given the absence of gender effects, we collapsed across gender for the subsequent contrasts.

The between-subject contrasts (see Table 3, column^b – column^a) showed participants designing a follower—relative to those designing a leader—spent significantly more on cooperativeness ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.39$), dutifulness ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.65$), and work ethic ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.67$), but spent significantly less on assertiveness ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.70$), confidence ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.98$), and intelligence ($p = .002$, Hedges's $g = 0.24$). No significant differences were observed for ambitiousness ($p = .012$, Hedges's $g = 0.20$), trustingness ($p = .106$, Hedges's $g = 0.13$), or trustworthiness ($p = .606$, Hedges's $g = 0.04$).

Table 3

Study 2: Percentage of Tokens Allocated to Each Trait as a Function of Low, Medium, and High Budgets

	Leader (n = 332)			Follower (n = 318)		
	Low budget[a]	Medium Budget	High Budget	Low budget[b]	Medium Budget	High Budget
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
1. Ambitiousness	11.14 (11.84)[N]	9.38 (7.30)	9.50 (6.26)	8.96 (10.26)[N]	7.66 (7.35)	7.85 (5.84)
2. Assertiveness	9.34 (9.72)	8.36 (7.26)	8.50 (5.82)	3.49 (6.70)	3.69 (4.52)	4.16 (4.25)
3. Confidence	11.17 (10.69)[N]	9.80 (7.96)	9.57 (6.02)	8.24 (9.23)	7.70 (6.26)	8.20 (5.42)
4. Cooperativeness	11.45 (9.73)	10.99 (7.11)	10.92 (5.86)	15.56 (11.32)[N]	13.71 (7.00)	13.25 (6.30)
5. Dutifulness	3.16 (5.76)[L]	4.32 (5.21)	5.06 (4.64)	11.13 (10.08)	11.43 (7.76)	11.21 (6.52)
6. Work ethic	11.93 (10.04)	12.85 (7.22)	12.79 (6.08)	18.99 (11.05)[N]	18.10 (7.85)	16.96 (6.60)
7. Intelligence	14.04 (11.29)	14.40 (8.03)	13.78 (6.47)	11.42 (10.24)	12.09 (8.30)	12.50 (6.79)
8. Openness	9.43 (9.00)	10.42 (7.15)	10.27 (5.93)	5.22 (6.49)[L]	6.38 (5.53)	6.95 (4.91)
9. Trustingness	5.72 (7.48)[L]	7.05 (6.21)	7.64 (5.39)	4.78 (6.96)[L]	6.10 (5.87)	6.35 (5.53)
10. Trustworthiness	12.62 (10.26)	12.42 (7.87)	11.97 (6.67)	12.20 (10.96)	13.13 (7.91)	12.58 (6.65)

Note. N = 650. The descriptive statistics are derived from collapsing across the two leader conditions (woman, n = 163; man, n = 169) and two follower conditions (woman, n = 164; man, n = 154). Between-subject planned contrasts for differences spent on each trait when designing a follower versus a leader = column[b] – column[a]. In the low budget column for each respective role, traits with a superscript N were classified as a necessity, whereas traits with a superscript L were classified as a luxury.

Participants designing an ideal follower spent significantly more of their budget on work ethic (M = 18.99, SD = 11.05), $F(1, 317) = 253.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .44$, cooperativeness (M = 15.57, SD = 11.32), $F(1, 317) = 122.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .28$, and trustworthiness (M = 12.20, SD = 10.09), $F(1, 317) = 49.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .14$, than the combined average of the remaining traits (M = 7.61, SD = 2.55). With regard to designing a leader, participants spent more on intelligence (M = 14.03, SD = 10.04), $F(1, 331) = 47.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .13$, and trustworthiness (M = 12.62, SD = 10.25), $F(1, 331) = 28.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .08$, than the combined average of the remaining traits (M = 9.17, SD = 1.98).

Distinguishing Necessity and Luxury Traits

Given the lack of gender effects, we followed the same analysis described in Study 1. For those designing a follower, spending patterns changed across the three budgets, $F(11.49, 3643.44) = 6.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .02$. Pairwise comparisons indicated a significant proportional decrease in spending on ambitiousness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.31, 95% CI [-2.08, -0.53], p = .001), cooperativeness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.86, 95% CI [-2.99, -0.72], p = .001), and work ethic (medium to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.14, 95% CI [-1.78, -0.50], p = .001). There was a significant proportional increase in spending on openness ($M_{difference}$ = 1.16, 95% CI [0.46, 1.87], p = .001) and trustingness ($M_{difference}$ = 1.32, 95% CI [0.65, 1.99], p < .001) from the low to medium budget.

Spending patterns also changed across budgets when designing a leader, $F(11.82, 3912.78) = 5.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .02$. Spending proportionally decreased for ambitiousness ($M_{difference}$ = -1.76, 95% CI [-2.81, -0.71], p = .001) and confidence ($M_{difference}$ = -1.37, 95% CI [-2.31, -0.44], p = .004) from the low to medium budget. In contrast, spending proportionally increased for dutifulness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = 1.16, 95% CI [0.60, 1.72], p < .004; medium to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = 0.74, 95% CI [0.27, 1.20], p =.002) and trustingness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = 1.33, 95% CI [0.62, 2.03], p <.002). The full set of the comparisons across budgets is available at https://osf.io/y4cpd.

Discussion

Study 2 provides further evidence for the Horizontal-Vertical concepts as a framework for differentiating ideal follower preferences from ideal leader preferences. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were broadly supported. People possessing multiple traits diagnostic of high morality (cooperativeness, dutifulness, work ethic) may be pulled toward roles of followership because of how strongly their characteristics align with ideal follower preferences, alongside how strongly such characteristics differentiate ideal followers from ideal leaders. Even though traits high on the Vertical-assertiveness facet were not among the most valued traits for leaders, they strongly differentiated ideal leader preferences from ideal follower preferences. As such, those lacking such characteristics might be pushed away from leadership roles.

As hypothesized with regard to the most prized traits among ideal follower preferences, cooperativeness, work ethic, and trustworthiness emerged as the three most desired traits, which supported Hypotheses 3, 4, and 6. With regard to ideal leader preferences, both intelligence and trustworthiness emerged as the two most strongly desired traits, supporting Hypotheses 5 and 7. Moreover, despite the persistence of stereotypic views of women being more communal and men being more agentic (Eagly et al., 2020), the target's gender did not impact which traits were prioritized when envisioning an ideal follower or leader. That is, a person's hierarchical role dictated trait spending patterns—irrespective of the target's gender. Stereotypic gendered views around agency and communion tend to be equally endorsed by both men and women (Eagly et al., 2020), there is also work showing distinct workplace dynamics between men and women (e.g., Elsesser & Lever, 2011). As the current study was not suitably powered to evaluate a higher-order interaction between participant gender and target gender, future researchers may benefit from exploring the extent to which gender (dis)similarity between perceivers and targets shape preferences.

Using a larger sample, several traits emerged as necessities related to ideal follower preferences, which were not observed in Study 1. Two traits diagnostic of Horizontal-morality—

cooperativeness and work ethic—could be classified as necessities due to proportional decreases in spending. Unexpectedly, people also allocated more of their initial budget to ambitiousness relative to a larger budget. One key difference is ambitiousness was only afforded 8.96% of the low budget, whereas cooperativeness and work ethic received 15.56% and 18.99% respectively. Thus, it is perhaps a misnomer to suggest that ambitiousness is prioritized over and above other traits. Instead, this may reflect that although leaders may view a modicum of ambitiousness (i.e., desire and determination to succeed) as necessary for followers to be effectively contribute to the collective direction of the group, too much ambition could undermine their own leadership (Benson et al., 2016). For ideal leader preferences, ambitiousness and confidence emerged as necessities. Although this differs from Study 1, the traits classified as necessities for ideal leader preferences across studies were diagnostic of the Vertical-assertiveness facet.

Study 3

Study 3 examined the degree to which hierarchical level impacted trait preferences for an ideal follower and ideal leader. We manipulated the hierarchical position of both the rater and the target (e.g., 1st level, 2nd level, 3rd level of an organizational hierarchy) to address the following interrelated questions: First, does the direction of the hierarchical comparison activate role-specific preferences that overshadow one's absolute position in the hierarchy? Whereas it may seem obvious that having an employee envision an ideal mid-level manager would activate traits preferences consistent with the leader role, we theorize that having an organizational director envision the same target (i.e., mid-level manager) would activate trait preferences consistent with a follower role given the direction of the hierarchical comparison. This design also enabled us to examine if such role-specific preferences were robust to a target's absolute position in the hierarchy (e.g., preferences for a mid-level vs. high-level leader) and the psychological distance between the rater and target (e.g., the number of hierarchical levels between the rater and target).

Method

Participants

We recruited participants with supervisory responsibilities in their current workplace role and who were fluent in English using Prolific in the winter of 2021. Participants received $1.88£ in exchange for completing the study. Out of the 601 who completed the experiment, 534 were retained due to passing all the attention check procedures (described below). Participants reported their age (M_{years} = 31.44, *SD* = 9.52) and self-identified their gender (67.0% men, 32.8.3% women, 0.2% non-binary) and ethnicity (Caucasian = 77.0%; Asian = 5.0%; Black = 2.6%; Hispanic = 10.9%; Middle Eastern = 1.1%; other = 2.2%). A sensitivity power analysis showed the experiment could reliably detect an effect size of *d* = 0.22 when comparing specific trait preferences for followers and leaders, and an effect size of d = 0.38 for planned pairwise comparisons (e.g., manager as a leader, *n* = 88; manager as a follower, *n* = 89).

Procedure and Materials

Two key modifications were made to the budget allocation paradigm. First, participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in which we varied the hierarchical relationship between the rater and target person. Three conditions focused on ideal follower preferences: (a) a team manager designing their direct report (i.e., associate), (b) an organizational director designing their direct report (i.e., team manager), and (c) an organizational director designing an associate. Three conditions focused on ideal leader preferences: (d) an associate designing their immediate leader (i.e., team manager), (e) a team manager designing their direct leader (i.e., organizational director), and (f) an associate designing their organizational director. As there were no conditions in which the rater and target were the same hierarchical position, we did not employ a full-factorial design.

The instructions were accompanied by a graphical depiction of an organizational chart outlining each role and their hierarchical relation to one another, with the organizational director sitting atop the hierarchy, followed by team managers, and finally, associates at the base of the hierarchy. The second change pertained to the size of the budget. Although our protocol

paralleled prior work evaluating changes in spending patterns (Li et al., 2002), a larger final budget may increase our ability to observe changes in spending patterns. As such, we increased the size of the medium (30 tokens) and high (50 tokens) budgets.

Attention Checks

In addition to the attention checks described in Study 2, we added an instructional manipulation check prior to the budget paradigm wherein participants were asked to select "mostly disagree." In total, 67 participants were excluded for incorrectly responding to either attention check: follower (associate from perspective of manager) = 10; follower (manager from perspective of organizational director) = 13; follower (associate from perspective of organizational director) = 22; leader (manager from perspective of associate) = 10; leader (organizational director designed by manager) = 9; leader (director designed by associate) = 3.

Results

We performed a role (between) by rater perspective (between) by trait (within) mixed split-plot ANOVA. Role (director, manager, associate) and rater perspective (director, team manager, associate) each consisted of three levels, while trait consisted of ten levels (same traits as in Studies 1 and 2). Although both the rater and target manipulations had three levels (i.e., associate, team manager, organizational director), there were no conditions in which the rater and target were the same hierarchical position (i.e., team manager envisioning an ideal team manager) due to our interest in ideal follower and leader preferences. We evaluated if the amount spent on each trait differed as a function of the target role (i.e., trait x role) and rater perspective (i.e., trait x rater perspective). Most importantly, we were interested in the higher-order interaction between target role, rater perspective and trait because this indicates whether spending patterns for a target varied as a function of the rater's hierarchical relationship to that target (i.e., ideal follower versus ideal leader).

Ideal Follower and Ideal Leader Preferences based on Hierarchical Level

Table 4 displays the proportion of the initial budget spent on each trait across all six conditions. Spending varied across traits, $F(7.33, 3868.61) = 67.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .11$, and there were significant interactions between both trait and target role, $F(14.65, 3868.61) = 2.38$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .01$, and trait and rater's perspective, $F(14.65, 3868.61) = 2.41$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .01$, and there was a higher-order interaction between trait, target role, and rater perspective, $F(7.33, 3868.61) = 3.12$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .01$. Accordingly, we conducted targeted analyses focusing on specific combinations of conditions[7].

To determine whether preferences for a team manager shifted based on whether the follower or leader element of their role was salient, we compared spending patterns of an organizational director designing a team manager (i.e., ideal follower preferences) with those of an associate designing their team manager (i.e., ideal leader preferences). As displayed in Table 4 (column[f] – column[a]), when a team manager's follower role was salient—relative to when their leader role was emphasized—participants spent significantly more on dutifulness ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.66$) and work ethic ($p = .004$, Hedges's $g = 0.44$), but spent significantly less on assertiveness ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.57$), open-mindedness ($p = .004$, Hedges's $g = 0.47$), and trustingness ($p < .001$, Hedges's $g = 0.67$). No significant differences were observed for ambitiousness ($p = .320$, Hedges's $g = 0.15$), confidence ($p = .130$, Hedges's $g = 0.24$), cooperativeness ($p = .111$, Hedges's $g = 0.24$), or trustworthiness ($p = .724$, Hedges's $g = 0.06$). Similar results were observed when comparing the two conditions that most closely resembled Studies 1 and 2 (i.e., a team manager designing an associate versus an associate designing their team manager).

[7] An alternative approach would be to collapse across conditions to create a single between-subject factor that represents designing an ideal follower or ideal leader. This approach leads the same conclusions from Studies 1 and 2, such that spending varied across traits, $F(7.32, 3891.84) = 67.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .11$, and there was a significant interaction between trait and role condition, meaning that participants differed in how they allocated their tokens when designing a follower versus a leader, $F(7.32, 3891.84) = 12.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .02$.

Table 4

Study 3: Percentage of Tokens Allocated to Each Trait by Target Role and Rater Perspective in the Low Budget Condition

	Leader (n = 275)			Follower (n = 259)		
	Ideal Team Manager: Perspective of Associate[a] (n = 88)	Ideal Director: Perspective of Associate[b] (n = 97)	Ideal Director: Perspective of Team Manager[c] (n = 90)	Ideal Associate: Perspective of Team Manager[d] (n = 92)	Ideal Associate: Perspective of Director[e] (n = 78)	Ideal Team Manager: Perspective of Director[f] (n = 89)
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SE*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
1. Ambitiousness	10.11 (8.90)	12.06 (11.81)	14.56 (11.33)	9.67 (9.66)	11.28 (12.73)	11.80 (12.75)
2. Assertiveness	10.80 (9.85)	10.62 (9.98)	10.56 (10.10)	6.09 (8.64)	8.46 (8.23)	5.84 (7.36)
3. Confidence	11.14 (9.76)	10.00 (11.55)	11.00 (9.25)	7.93 (8.33)	7.82 (8.32)	8.99 (8.53)
4. Cooperativeness	11.70 (8.61)	12.99 (9.81)	13.56 (9.87)	13.91 (9.60)	13.59 (9.93)	14.04 (10.63)
5. Dutifulness	2.61 (4.42)	2.47 (4.57)	2.56 (5.31)	7.61 (8.56)	7.82 (9.89)	7.42 (9.24)
6. Work ethic	10.80 (9.73)	10.00 (9.13)	11.11 (12.76)	15.98 (11.49)	13.08 (10.48)	15.51 (11.38)
7. Intelligence	14.66 (10.61)	14.02 (9.43)	14.44 (10.82)	15.98 (10.49)	14.74 (10.66)	15.17 (10.78)
8. Openness	9.43 (7.64)	9.28 (8.32)	8.00 (7.96)	5.98 (7.42)	7.31 (9.21)	5.96 (7.19)
9. Trustingness	7.05 (7.45)	5.15 (6.63)	4.56 (7.96)	3.37 (5.79)	3.33 (6.17)	3.03 (5.09)
10. Trustworthiness	11.70 (8.05)	13.40 (11.89)	9.67 (9.65)	13.48 (11.90)	12.56 (9.86)	12.25 (9.14)

Next, we examined whether ideal follower and leader preferences varied as a function of the hierarchical relationship between the rater and target. Specific to ideal leader preferences, participants in an associate role (i.e., lowest level of the hierarchy) either designed a team manager or organizational director. Across all comparisons, the hierarchical level of the leader did not elicit differences in trait spending, all *p*s > .01 (see Table 4, column[b] – column[a]). Similarly, ideal follower preferences did not differ based on the hierarchical level of the rater (i.e., manager or director; column[d]– column[e]) or the target (i.e., follower was an associate or manager; column[d]– column[f]), with all *p*s > .01 (see https://osf.io/y4cpd for all comparisons). The results reinforce how the salience of a follower or leader role—irrespective of one's organizational level—primarily drive differences in spending patterns.

For the remaining analyses, we collapsed across conditions to identify which traits were prioritized in relation to each role (see Table 5, column[b] and column[a]). Consistent with H3, H4and H6, participants designing an ideal follower spent significantly more of their budget on work ethic (M = 14.94, SD = 11.18), $F(1, 258) = 67.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .21$, cooperativeness (M = 13.86, SD = 10.03), $F(1, 258) = 60.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .19$, and trustworthiness (M = 12.78, SD = 8.35), $F(1, 258) = 36.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .13$, than the combined average of the remaining traits (M = 8.35, SD = 2.45). With regard to designing a leader and supporting H5 and H7, individuals spent more of their budget on intelligence (M = 14.36, SD = 10.25), $F(1, 274) = 53.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .16$, and trustworthiness (M = 11.64, SD = 10.13), $F(1, 274) = 11.87$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$, than the combined average of the remaining traits (M = 9.25, SD = 1.81).

Distinguishing Necessity and Luxury Traits

As in prior studies, we compared the percentage spent on each trait as the budget size increased. For ideal follower preferences, spending across traits changed across budgets, $F(10.81, 2790.02) = 8.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that participants spent proportionally less on ambitiousness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = -2.20, 95% CI [-3.32, -1.08], $p < .001$), cooperativeness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.71, 95% CI [-2.73,

Table 5

Study 3: Percentage of Tokens Allocated to Each Trait as a Function of Low, Medium, and High Budgets

	Leader (n = 275)			Follower (n = 259)		
	Low budget[a]	Medium Budget	High Budget	Low budget[b]	Medium Budget	High Budget
	M (*SD*)			*M* (*SD*)		
1. Ambitiousness	12.25 (10.91)[N]	10.73 (6.86)	10.60 (5.13)	10.89 (11.73)[N]	8.69 (6.29)	8.81 (5.15)
2. Assertiveness	10.65 (9.94)[N]	9.52 (6.25)	9.29 (4.83)	6.72 (8.14)	6.64 (5.27)	6.61 (4.37)
3. Confidence	10.69 (10.25)	9.47 (5.80)	9.68 (4.84)	8.26 (8.38)	8.03 (5.20)	8.55 (4.40)
4. Cooperativeness	12.76 (9.46)[N]	10.79 (6.09)	10.85 (4.84)	13.86 (10.03)[N]	12.15 (5.80)	11.64 (4.59)
5. Dutifulness	2.55 (4.76)[L]	4.47 (4.42)	5.27 (4.11)	7.61 (9.17)	7.98 (6.28)	8.53 (5.37)
6. Work ethic	10.62 (10.60)	11.39 (6.61)	11.47 (4.68)	14.94 (11.18)[N]	15.47 (6.64)	14.28 (4.53)
7. Intelligence	14.36 (10.25)[N]	14.23 (6.15)	13.27 (4.52)	15.33 (10.61)[N]	15.07 (6.99)	13.77 (4.78)
8. Openness	8.91 (7.99)[L]	10.17 (5.92)	10.66 (4.50)	6.37 (7.92)[L]	7.88 (5.65)	8.80 (5.02)
9. Trustingness	5.56 (7.40)	7.48 (5.77)	7.78 (4.61)	3.24 (5.66)[L]	5.23 (4.68)	6.49 (4.34)
10. Trustworthiness	11.64 (10.14)	11.76 (7.44)	11.12 (5.07)	12.78 (10.38)	12.87 (7.00)	12.53 (5.34)

Note. The descriptive statistics are derived from collapsing across the three leader conditions and three follower conditions. In the low budget column for each respective role, traits with a superscript N were classified as a necessity, whereas traits with a superscript L were classified as a luxury.

-0.70], p = .001), work ethic (medium to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.19, 95% CI [-1.79, -0.59], p < .001), and intelligence (medium to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.30, 95% CI [-1.95, -0.66], p < .001). Participants spent proportionally more on openness (low to medium: $M_{difference}$ = 1.51, 95% CI [0.64, 2.37], p = .001; medium to high: $M_{difference}$ = 0.92, 95% CI [0.79, 1.74], p < .001) and trustingness (low to medium: $M_{difference}$ = 1.98, 95% CI [1.29, 2.68], p < .001; medium to high: $M_{difference}$ = 1.26, 95% CI [0.79, 1.74], p < .001).

For ideal leader preferences, spending patterns also differed across budgets, F(10.69, 2927.74) = 8.80, p < .001, η^2_p = .03. As the budget increased, participants spent proportionally less on ambitiousness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.53, 95% CI [-2.54, -0.51], p = .003), cooperativeness (low to medium budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.98, 95% CI [-2.93, -1.02], p < .001), assertiveness (low to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = -1.36, 95% CI [-2.39, -0.33], p = .010), and intelligence (medium to high budget: $M_{difference}$ = -0.97, 95% CI [-1.53, -0.40], p = .001). Proportionally more was spent on dutifulness ($M_{difference}$ = 1.93, 95% CI [1.34, 2.52], p < .001), openness ($M_{difference}$ = 1.26, 95% CI [0.47, 2.05], p = .002), and trustingness ($M_{difference}$ = 1.92, 95% CI [1.16, 2.67], p < .001) from the low to medium budget (see https://osf.io/y4cpd for all comparisons).

Discussion

Study 3 sampled from workplace supervisors and showed how ideal preferences varied as a function of whether the target occupied a higher (vs. lower) hierarchical relationship than a co-worker. Traits were differentially valued in a team manager when rated from the perspective of an organizational director (i.e., ideal follower preferences) than a subordinate (i.e., ideal leader preferences). Moreover, neither ideal follower preferences nor ideal leader preferences shifted as a function of the target's absolute position in the hierarchy nor the psychological distance between the rater and target. Together, this suggests the hierarchical relationship between two individuals (i.e., whether a person is a direct report) was the primary factor in shaping which ideal preferences emerged. Similar to Studies 1 and 2, Horizontal-morality traits

and Vertical-assertiveness traits strongly differentiated ideal follower preferences from ideal leader preferences.

We increased the budget in Study 3 to better represent a situation in which the level of the necessity traits was satisfied and thus gain insight into how spending patterns may eventually shift toward luxury traits (i.e., traits that are afforded more attention once necessities are met). Similar to Study 2, ambitiousness, cooperativeness, and work ethic emerged as necessity traits for ideal followers. Once again, ambitiousness met our criteria as a 'necessity', but only received 10.89% of the initial budget, meaning only a modest amount of the budget was dedicated to increasing ambition. In addition, intelligence was also prioritized under scarcity conditions and received 15.33% of the budget, which alludes to the foundational importance ascribed to intelligence in the workplace.

For ideal leaders, ambitiousness, assertiveness, and intelligence could be classified as necessities, which dovetails with theorizing about the overall value of intelligence and the salience of traits within the Vertical-assertiveness facet. Unexpectedly, spending patterns for cooperativeness also fit the criterion of a necessity. Finally, it is worth noting that spending on trustworthiness in relation to ideal followers and ideal leaders did not change as the budget size increased, which may reflect the consistently high value afforded to trustworthiness across budgets (i.e., trustworthiness received a large proportion of the initial budget and there was no decrease in spending on trustworthiness).

Meta-Analytic Integration of Effect Size Estimates

Given small inconsistencies in the pattern of results across studies (e.g., Hypothesis 7 was not supported in Study 1 but supported in Studies 2 and 3), we used a random-effects model to pool effect size estimates from all the samples, including the two pilot samples, using the *meta* package in R (Balduzzi et al., 2019). The Hartung-Knapp-Sidik-Jonkman method was used because it produces more robust estimates (Inthout et al., 2014). Figure 2 visually depicts the

magnitude of differences between ideal follower and ideal leader preferences (along the y-axis) and the valued afforded to each trait (along the x-axis).

Table 6 summarizes the magnitude of the differences between ideal follower and ideal leader preferences (i.e., between-participant contrasts). Based on the 95% confidence intervals, the pooled effect size estimates showed individuals spent significantly more on cooperativeness, dutifulness, and work ethic (i.e., traits high on the Horizontal-Morality facet) but less on ambitiousness, assertiveness, and confidence (i.e., traits high on the Vertical-Assertiveness) when designing an ideal follower than ideal leader, which supports H1 and H2.

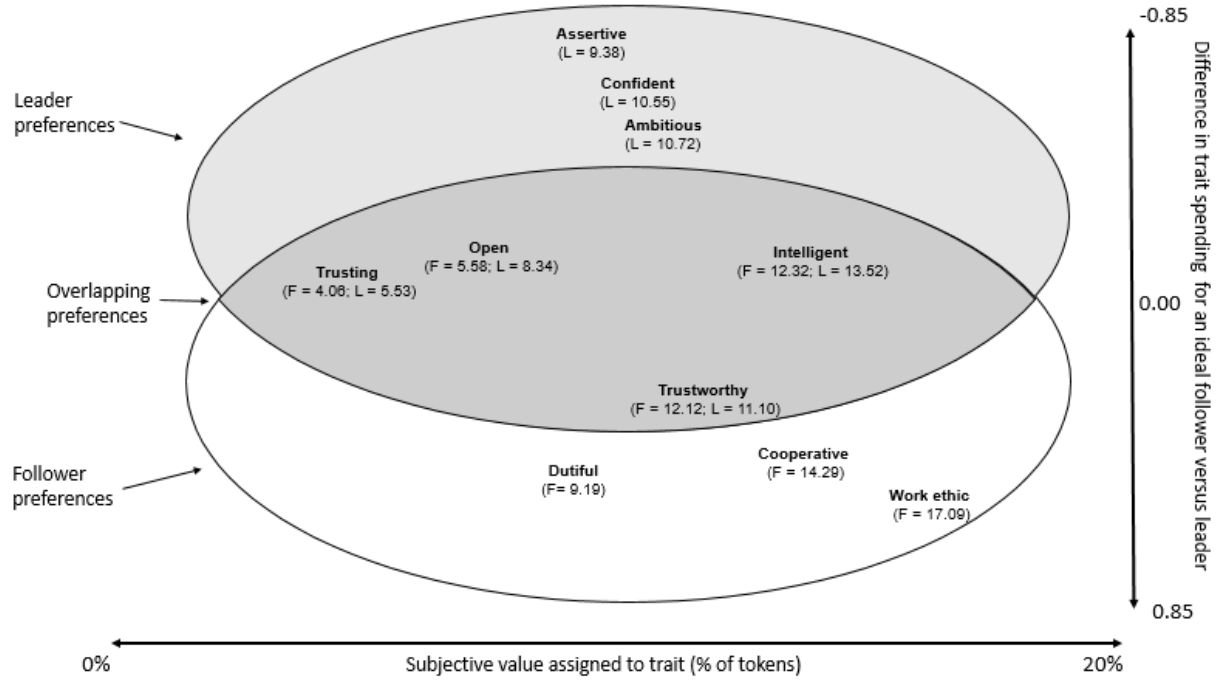
Moving to within-participant contrasts, participants designing an ideal follower spent more of their budget on work ethic (Hedges's g = 1.41, 95% CI [0.84, 1.97], p = .002, τ^2 = .18, I^2 = 90.9%), cooperativeness (Hedges's g = 1.00, 95% CI [0.72, 1.27], p < .001, τ^2 = .04, I^2 = 61.9%), and trustworthiness (Hedges's g = 0.77, 95% CI [0.53, 1.01], p < .001, τ^2 = .03, I^2 = 48.8%) than the remaining traits, supporting H3, H4, and H6. Participants designing an ideal leader spent more of their budget on intelligence (Hedges's g = 0.69, 95% CI [0.62, 0.75], p < .001, τ^2 = .00, I^2 = 0.0%) and trustworthiness (Hedges's g = 0.38, 95% CI [0.17, 0.58], p = .007, τ^2 = .02, I^2 = 42.0%) than the remaining traits, supporting H5 and H7.

General Discussion

Given the complex nature of followership and its interdependence with leadership, researchers have called for integrative analyses that consider both followership and leadership (Steffens & Haslam, 2020). Heeding this call, the current paper maps similarities and differences in trait valuation for followership and leadership to specific facet-level distinctions among the Vertical and Horizontal dimensions of social evaluation. When contrasting the value ascribed to traits in an ideal follower compared to an ideal leader, it was evident that Horizontal-morality traits (e.g., cooperative, dutiful) were more valued than Vertical-Assertiveness traits (e.g., assertive, ambitious, confident). Highlighting the importance of the

Figure 2.

Summary of traits differentially and similarly priortized when envisioning an ideal follower and ideal leader



Note. All numbers are derived from aggregated means using the initial budget condition across samples. Numbers in brackets represent mean % of token assigned to each trait when designing either a follower (i.e., F) or leader (i.e., L). As a between-subject design was used across studies, the subjective value assigned to a trait with respect to ideal follower preferences is not diametrically opposed to the value assigned to that same trait for ideal leader preferences (and vice versa). Differences in trait spending for an ideal follower versus leader is the bias corrected standardized mean difference depicted in Table 6. Follower-specific preferences correspond to the Horizontal-morality facet (i.e., unshaded area), whereas leader-specific preferences correspond to Vertical-assertiveness facet (i.e., light-grey area)

Table 6

Meta-Analysis of Differences in Trait Spending for an Ideal Follower versus an Ideal Leader

	Proportion of Low Budget Spent on Traits				
	Hedges's g	95% CI	*p*	τ^2	I^2
1. Ambitiousness	-0.22	[-0.38, -0.06]	.017	.01	8.2%
2. Assertiveness	-0.66	[-0.87, -0.46]	< .001	.02	55.1%
3. Confidence	-0.37	[-0.65, -0.09]	.022	.04	67.3%
4. Cooperativeness	0.35	[0.14, 0.57]	.011	.02	59.3%
5. Dutifulness	0.81	[0.45, 1.15]	.003	.06	76.8%
6. Work ethic	0.54	[0.28, 0.80]	.004	.03	64.0%
7. Intelligence	-0.10	[-0.37, 0.16]	.342	.03	72.1%
8. Openness	-0.30	[-0.57, -0.03]	.039	.04	68.4%
9. Trustingness	-0.24	[-0.64, 0.16]	.169	.09	79.2%
10. Trustworthiness	0.17	[-0.08, 0.41]	.130	.03	64.7%

Note. Hedges's g refers to bias corrected standardized mean difference. τ^2 refers to the Tau-squared, which is an estimate of between-study variance. I^2 refers to the amount of variability in standardized mean differences due to heterogeneity.

facet-level distinctions, role-specific preferences were not systematically connected to the Horizontal-friendliness or Vertical-ability facets. Focusing on the relative value afforded to traits within each role, cooperativeness and work ethic were highly prized traits in ideal followers, whereas intelligence was strongly desired in ideal leaders. As predicted, trustworthiness was strongly desired in followers and leaders in both scarcity and abundance conditions. The distinct and overlapping qualities valued in ideal followers compared to ideal leaders were robust to manipulations of target gender (Study 2) and hierarchical position (Study 3). As followership and leadership represent distinct processes that operate in tandem to shape team and organizational functioning, understanding how the traits differentially valued in ideal followers and ideal leaders map onto the Vertical-Horizontal dimensions carry several implications.

A key theoretical contribution of this work is showing how the social evaluation framework advanced by Abele et al. (2021) provides a coherent model for understanding the distinct and overlapping preferences in relation to ideal followers and ideal leaders. Our comparative approach provides insight into which traits are valued above others within each role, how trait valuation differs when roles of following versus leading are salient, and how this framework can be leveraged to further advance our understanding of followership and leadership.

The Horizontal Dimension of Ideal Follower Preferences: Morality

The pattern of results supports the theoretical value of differentiating morality from friendliness within the Horizontal dimension, rather than relying on superordinate domains, such as communion, warmth, or agency (Abele et al., 2021; Goodwin et al., 2014). That is, Horizontal-morality traits (e.g., cooperative, dutiful) tended to be more valued in an ideal follower compared to an ideal leader. In contrast, traits diagnostic of the Horizontal-friendliness facet did not discriminate ideal follower preferences from ideal leader preferences, nor were they highly valued (i.e., sociability, supportiveness, and trustingness were included in the initial set of traits examined in two pilot samples). A related insight is that traits indicative of the

Horizontal-morality facet were also among the most valued traits in a follower. This pattern of results highlights an important issue that requires further examination: Although person-focused (i.e., other-oriented and relationship-building) behaviors are essential to the repertoire of an effective leader (Burke et al., 2006), individuals who possess traits indicative of the Vertical-assertiveness facet may be pushed away from followership just as much as they are pulled toward positions of leadership. It is not that a strong orientation toward considering others' interests conflicts with effective leadership, but perhaps those with a strong moral character may better fit the perception of an ideal follower.

Supporting H3, H4, and H6, the most desirable traits in an ideal follower are characterized by a strong collective orientation (i.e., trustworthy and cooperative) and work ethic. The pooled effect size estimates across studies indicate the differences in the budget spent on Horizontal-morality traits compared to the remaining traits was relatively large, with Hedges's g effect size estimates ranging from 0.77 for trustworthiness to 1.41 for work ethic. Although work ethic could be considered an interstitial trait because it enables goal-striving (Vertical-ability facet), the ability to persist and accomplish tasks is also indicative of the Horizontal-morality facet. Furthermore, work ethic was prioritized alongside cooperativeness and trustworthiness, meaning a desirable follower is someone who can be trusted to sustain high levels of effort on tasks that further collective interests. Evolutionary perspectives of leader-follower dynamics emphasize that followership plays a key role in facilitating social-coordination, which is disrupted when followers compete for status and influence (van Vugt et al., 2008). That is, individuals cannot effectively lead in the absence of followers who are willing to defer and support their claim to leadership (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Trustworthiness is one exception to the salience of the Horizontal-morality facet for distinguishing which traits are uniquely valued in relation to followers and leaders. As trust is a hallmark of positive and mutually beneficially social relationships, we predicted and observed support for the notion that trust is a core feature of human sociality and interdependent

relationships (Cottrell et al., 2007; Rockstuhl et al., 2012). That is, trustworthiness emerged as one of the most highly valued traits for ideal leaders, supporting H7. A medium-sized effect was observed for the subjective value assigned to trustworthiness compared to the remaining traits, with Hedges's g of 0.38. The importance of trustworthiness in relation to ideal leader preferences coheres with evidence that building and maintaining relationships is central to effective leadership (Burke et al., 2006). Considering this finding in conjunction with the salience of the Vertical-assertiveness facet, it is evident that individuals desire leaders who possess assertive qualities tempered by a moral foundation of trustworthiness.

The Vertical Dimension of Ideal Leader Preferences

Studying ideal preferences for followers and leaders together via an adapted decision-making paradigm revealed an asymmetry in how the Vertical-assertiveness facet relates to ideal preferences when contrasted against the Horizontal-morality facet. Traits diagnostic of Vertical-assertiveness (e.g., assertive, ambitious, confident) maximally discriminate between what is desirable in a leader compared to a follower, but these were not among the most valued traits in leaders. Traits housed within the Vertical-assertiveness dimension can be a potent social force for the collective good in situations where individuals share a common goal (Abele et al., 2016), but too much assertiveness has the potential to be disruptive and destructive, such as the case of a narcissistic leader (Nevicka et al., 2011).

Unlike the Vertical-assertiveness facet, the Vertical-ability facet did not reliably differentiate preferences for an ideal leader from an ideal follower. Although intelligence emerged as one of the most strongly desired traits in an ideal leader (i.e., within-subject comparison, Hedges's *g* of 0.69 when comparing to the remaining traits), the proportion of the budget spent on intelligence did not significantly differ between roles. This highlights how a trait's primacy relative to other attributes is not necessarily indicative of a trait being valued more in a leader than follower. Although intelligence is strongly desired in ideal leaders (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014), cognitive ability tests are strongly associated with job performance in a variety

of organizational settings (Van Iddekinge et al., 2018) and leaders desire followers who can think critically and offer alternative insights on complex issues (Benson et al., 2016). Overall, the Vertical-ability facet may take primacy relative to other facets when envisioning an ideal leader, even though it does not discriminate between ideal leader and ideal follower preferences.

Trait Valuation Across Budgets

The findings also provide insight into how traits are differentially prioritized under conditions of scarcity and abundance (i.e., a situational factor). When options are constrained, certain traits must be prioritized above others. Using Li et al.'s (2002) terminology, providing individuals with an increasingly large budget revealed unique and overlapping necessity traits for ideal followers (e.g., Study 3: ambitiousness, cooperativeness, work ethic, and intelligence) and ideal leaders (e.g., Study 3: ambitiousness, assertiveness, intelligence, and cooperativeness). Whereas the proportion spent on some traits only changed when moving from the low to medium budget (e.g., cooperativeness for ideal followers in Study 3), the proportion spent on other traits only changed when resources became particularly abundant (e.g., intelligence and work ethic for ideal followers in Study 3). This suggests varying thresholds for what constitutes adequate levels for certain traits, which then alters spending patterns. However, future work is needed to unpack this issue. A limitation of the terms 'necessities' and 'luxuries' is that a trait might receive a small proportion of the initial budget (e.g., ambitiousness for ideal followers) and a lack of continued investment as additional resources becomes available would lead to a decrease in proportional spending. With this caveat in mind, necessities can be considered the foundational building blocks for these roles. Research from preferences for romantic partners suggests that people may first seek information about these traits and be particularly sensitive to deficiencies in such 'necessities' when screening and evaluating potential candidates (Li et al., 2002). For both ideal followers and leaders, openness and trustingness were only prioritized once adequate levels of these essential traits are satisfied. Identifying luxury traits is insightful because these traits

represent the additional qualities that people covet in ideal conditions. A notable absence from the category of necessity traits was trustworthiness, which was consistently prioritized across different roles and budgets. This suggests trustworthiness is not perceived as a trait that provides diminishing returns in the context of interdependent roles. Instead, trustworthiness is a core trait that individuals prefer to maximize in others—even at the expense of other traits (as dictated by the zero-sum nature of our decision-making paradigm). As such, researchers should interpret these changes in trait valuation across budgets in combination with the level of investment made into each specific trait.

Practical Implications

Documenting the desirability of traits among followers and leaders also has practical implications for how organizations select, evaluate, and promote individuals for roles. Preferences might impact the hiring practices of leaders when selecting direct subordinates (i.e., individuals for which the follower role is highly salient, as shown in Study 3). Not only do these findings illustrate that certain traits are valued regardless of one's role (e.g., trustworthiness, intelligence), but also demonstrate significant differences in trait valuation between roles (e.g., assertiveness, dutifulness). If such preferences generalize to more ecologically valid settings, the degree to which individuals express or signal they possess traits that map onto the Vertical-Horizontal dimensions might help explain how recruiters discriminate between similarly qualified candidates, or why certain individuals might be promoted over others for leadership positions (e.g., two individuals who are highly intelligent, but one is more cooperative whereas the other is more assertive). Indeed, a potential issue is that some of the traits necessary for effective leadership, such as those that facilitate relationship-building and empowering others (Burke et al., 2006), feature more prominently in people's conceptions of an ideal follower than an ideal leader. Such insights provide a foundation for future work aimed at unpacking why some individuals emerge as leaders when they are ill-suited for the role (e.g., narcissistic individuals who undermine information sharing, Nevicka et al., 2011), whereas those who

possess traits conducive to effective leadership may be overlooked (e.g., women are underrepresented in the upper echelons of organizational management but exhibit higher levels of transformational leadership, Eagly et al., 2002).

This research also has implications on workplace interactions and how hierarchical relationships shape preferences. Study 3 suggests that such individuals might be expected to behave in ways that are conducive to maintaining social harmony when interacting with higher status individuals, but more assertively when interacting with lower status individuals. Although speculative, a leader who demonstrates relatively good moral character but lacks Vertical-assertiveness traits might be evaluated negatively or seen as overly deferential. Conversely, a follower who possesses Vertical-ability traits but lacks Horizontal-morality traits might be perceived as overambitious or competitive. As such, future research may consider testing whether strategic shifts toward specific dimensions of social behavior (i.e., Vertical, Horizontal) based on one's interaction partner correspond to more favorable role-based evaluations. From a hiring or promotion perspective, our results allude to how different trait preferences may be activated based on how a decision-maker construes their relationship with the target. For example, if an organizational director is more focused on their future relationship with a prospective team manager as a direct report, they might prioritize follower attributes rather than leader attributes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations and future research direction are worth noting. Although the budget allocation paradigm offered a high-level of experimental control and addressed shortcoming of alternative approaches (e.g., rank-order, rating traits independently), our research is constrained to the evaluation of hypothetical others. Research on romantic relationships suggest the functional validity of partner preferences (i.e., downstream consequences for actual partner evaluations) is nuanced. Eastwick et al. (2014) noted explicit ideal partner preferences have minimal predictive validity during the surface contact phase of a relationship (i.e., initial

interactions with other person) but exhibit predictive validity during the mutuality phase (i.e., both parties have entered into a mutually recognized relationship). Ideal preferences for followers (and leaders) may not be as consequential in the fledgling stage of leader-follower relationships. As acquaintanceship progresses, however, increasing levels of interdependence between two individuals should motivate individuals to contrast their ideal standards to someone whom they consider a follower (i.e., direct report subordinate) or leader (e.g., supervisor).

Researchers would benefit from continuing to incorporate methodologies that enable consideration of how multiple traits operate in tandem rather than isolation. Relatedly, understanding the information seeking strategies people employ when screening and evaluating prospective job candidates would provide insight into which traits are most salient when evaluating the suitability of someone for a followership and leadership position. For instance, a follower who is cooperative and trustworthy but lacks the ability to competently perform the tasks expected of them, such as work ethic and intelligence, is likely to be highly undesirable (and ineffective) in a follower role. Person-centered approaches are particularly well-suited to address issues of how multiple traits jointly combine within people and the consequences of different combinations.

Another important future direction is to consider how these preferences might vary as a function of racial stereotypes, and the downstream implications of such effects. For example, Rosette et al. (2016) theorized that Asian and Black women leaders face unique challenges due to how the prevailing stereotypes associated with these racialized identities relate to perceptions of agentic deficiency (Black women being stereotyped as not possessing agentic competence) and agentic penalty (Asian women being stereotyped as not possessing agentic dominance). Moreover, research on ideal follower and leader traits showed how stereotypes might be more likely to emerge when raters are in competition with those they are evaluating (Kim et al., 2022).

Despite observing consistent patterns in how traits are differentially valued in an ideal follower and ideal leader, the desirability of specific traits varied across participants. Understanding how individual differences might explain such idiographic preferences for ideal followers (and leaders) is an important next step. For example, the salience of mastery goals increases the selection of agentic traits in relation to a supervisor, whereas well-being goals corresponds to selecting more communal traits (Abele & Brack, 2013). Other work has shown that individuals who have a stronger social dominance orientation or hold stronger system justification beliefs tend to view assertiveness and ability as more tightly linked together (Yzerbyt et al., 2022). Conversely, subordinates higher in narcissism may desire leaders who can help them achieve the status they so intensely desire. We only studied positive traits given our focus on ideal preferences, but it would be highly informative to examine counter-ideal preferences (e.g., Junker et al., 2016) that might function as 'red flags' or 'deal breakers' for prospective interaction partners.

Conclusion

Across five samples and a meta-synthesis, we systematically identified the traits preferred in an ideal follower and examined whether these differed from traits preferred in an ideal leader. We also examined several boundary conditions (i.e., scarcity vs. abundance conditions, target gender, hierarchical level) to understand when such preferences shifted. Followership, like leadership, is a complex social process, but distinct traits were prioritized across these roles. Although Horizontal-morality traits were disproportionally preferred when contrasting ideal follower preferences against ideal leader preferences, this is not the whole story. Whereas ideal follower preferences reflect a strong moral character (i.e., strong cooperative orientation, work ethic, trustworthy), ideal leader preferences constitute a blend of qualities that signify their willingness to use their abilities (i.e., intelligence) for the good of the collective (i.e., trustworthy). Overall, the results provide insight into the expectations and preferences individuals hold in relation to these ubiquitous and important roles.

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