EXPERTISE INDIVIDUATION AMELIORATES THE DARK SIDE OF STATUS HIERARCHIES IN TEAMS

ABSTRACT

Status hierarchies are often thought to be functional for team coordination and performance. However, status hierarchies often fail to realize such purported coordination benefits, and the psychological processes explaining this dark side of status hierarchies are poorly understood. We address this gap by proposing that a status hierarchy can threaten team members’ distinctiveness and self-esteem, and create anxiety among members about the ability and willingness of themselves and others to coordinate with the team. We test whether these self-esteem deficits, and associated coordination anxiety, can be overcome when teams have high intra-team expertise individuation, where each member has identified their own unique expertise profile within the team. A survey experiment and a field experiment involving 80 start-up teams show that expertise individuation can help teams overcome the psychological dark sides of team status hierarchies.