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The bright side of hierarchies

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CHAPTER 3

WHEN AND WHY HIERARCHY STEEPNESS IS RELATED TO TEAM PERFORMANCE

Responding to recent calls, this field study among 72 work teams tested a contingency theory of the relationship between status hierarchy steepness and team performance. Across teams operating in diverse business sectors, we found that task complexity is an important moderator of this team-level relationship. When teams carried out tasks of low complexity, steeper status hierarchies were negatively related to intra-team conflict, which increased team performance. However, hierarchy steepness did not yield such clear conflict and performance effects in work teams executing more complex tasks. The findings contribute to status research by demonstrating the task conditions under which steeper status hierarchies benefit team functioning and by showing an explanatory mechanism that is driving this effect.

This chapter is based on a manuscript under review at the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*.