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Wisse, Barbara; Barelds, Dick P.H.; Rietzschel, Eric F.

Published in:
 Personality and Individual Differences

DOI:
[10.1016/j.paid.2015.03.020](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.03.020)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
 Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
 2015

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Wisse, B., Barelds, D. P. H., & Rietzschel, E. F. (2015). How innovative is your employee? The role of employee and supervisor dark triad personality traits in supervisor perceptions of employee innovative behavior. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 82, 158-162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.03.020>

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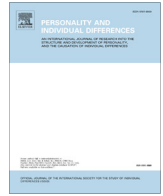
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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

How innovative is your employee? The role of employee and supervisor Dark Triad personality traits in supervisor perceptions of employee innovative behavior



Barbara Wisse*, Dick P.H. Barelids, Eric F. Rietzschel

University of Groningen, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 June 2014

Received in revised form 22 January 2015

Accepted 6 March 2015

Available online 24 March 2015

Keywords:

Dark Triad
 Innovative behavior
 Creativity
 Narcissism
 Machiavellianism
 Psychopathy

ABSTRACT

Organizational researchers have focused on the potential benefits of the Dark Triad personality traits (i.e., psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism) in organizational contexts. The current research builds on this research, examining the link between employee and supervisor Dark Triad traits and perceived employee innovative behavior (idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation) on the work-floor. Regression analysis on the data of 306 pairs of employees and their supervisors revealed that employee Machiavellianism was negatively related and employee psychopathy was not related to supervisor ratings of employee innovative behavior. In addition, a positive relationship between employee narcissism and supervisor ratings of employee innovative behavior emerged. However, this effect was weakened by supervisor narcissism: only when supervisors themselves were low on narcissism did employee narcissism foster positive perceptions of employee innovative behavior (specifically idea promotion). We discuss the value of differentiating between the three Dark Triad traits and the subscales of innovative behavior in order to more fully understand supervisors' assessments of their employees.

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1. Introduction

The *Dark Triad* is a term used to describe a constellation of three sub-clinical personality traits: Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). All three are short-term, self-serving, exploitive social strategies that correlate positively with disagreeableness and the use of dishonest and manipulative behaviors (Jonason & Webster, 2010). *Machiavellians* are characterized by their cynical and misanthropic beliefs, their callousness, their striving for agentic goals (i.e., money, power, and status), and their use of calculating, deceitful, exploitative manipulation tactics (Christie & Geis, 1970; Rauthmann, 2012). *Psychopaths* are described as individuals who are short of empathy and feelings of guilt. It has been argued that they lack a moral compass and therefore have no qualms about interpersonal manipulation and the display of anti-social behaviors. Moreover, they are impulsive and thrill-seeking (Hare, 2003). *Narcissists*, finally, have a strong sense of entitlement and a constant need for attention and admiration. They are arrogant, consider themselves to be superior to

others, and strive strongly for power, prestige, and status (Neuvicka, Ten Velden, De Hoogh, & Van Vianen, 2011; Raskin & Terry, 1988).

Although the three traits are generally considered to be socially undesirable, recent research suggests that in organizational contexts, people may actually benefit from having these traits. For instance, it has been found that narcissistic individuals are more likely to emerge as leaders and are also perceived to be more effective as leaders (Brunell et al., 2008; Neuvicka, Ten Velden et al., 2011), that psychopathy in managers is positively associated with ratings of charisma and presentation style (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010), and that Machiavellianism in employees is positively related to career commitment (Zettler, Friedrich, & Hilbir, 2010). These findings suggest that having these traits may be helpful in securing a successful career, and that—in the business context—it may pay off to confidently strive for one's own personal goals with little or no regard for others.

The present study expands this line of research by focusing on how employee Dark Triad personality traits may affect supervisor perceptions of employee innovative behavior. Employee innovativeness, or the intentional generation, promotion, and realization of new ideas within a work role, group or organization (Janssen, 2001), is essential for most contemporary work organizations. To cope with global competition and environmental uncertainty,

* Corresponding author at: University of Groningen, Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, 9712 TS Groningen, The Netherlands.

E-mail address: b.m.wisse@rug.nl (B. Wisse).

organizations need employees to ‘go the extra mile’ and to exceed their standard work behaviors by engaging in innovative behavior (Janssen, 2001). Moreover, a supervisor’s positive assessment of an employee’s innovative behavior is important for employees, as it may substantially influence a supervisor’s overall assessment of the subordinate’s performance and her or his subsequent career success (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). In addition to studying employee traits, the current study also includes supervisor Dark Triad personality traits, in order to investigate how the congruence (or lack thereof) between supervisors’ and employees’ Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism shapes supervisor perceptions of the innovativeness of employees. By doing so, we hope to add insight to the—so far—limited understanding of how supervisor and employee personality may concurrently affect performance assessments of employees in general, and perceptions of innovative behavior in particular.

1.1. Dark Triad traits and their relationship with innovative behavior

Although few studies speak directly to the relationship between employee Dark Triad personality and perceptions of innovative behavior, there is some work that may help us to generate hypotheses on the matter. Most of this research focused on the effects of narcissism and creativity. Creativity (or the production of useful and novel ideas) is considered to be the starting point of innovation, and is also one of its facets (West, 2002). Narcissists are drawn to artistic careers (Jonason, Wee, Li, & Jackson, 2014) and although they are not always more creative than non-narcissists, they tend to think they are (Furnham, Hughes, & Marshall, 2013; Goncalo, Flynn, & Kim, 2010). Moreover, they are skilled at persuading others to agree with them (also see Watts et al., 2013), suggesting that they are apt at eliciting positive perceptions of their competency in idea promotion (the second facet of innovative behaviors). Indeed, it has been found that more narcissistic students are judged as being more creative than less narcissistic students when asked to pitch creative ideas, partly because narcissists are more charismatic, witty, and enthusiastic (Goncalo et al., 2010). Arguably, when no objective information about an idea’s creative quality is available, narcissists’ self-aggrandizing behaviors can be very convincing, especially because they fit with commonly held prototypes of highly creative people (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003; Goncalo et al., 2010). CEO narcissism is also positively associated with managerial attention to, and adoption of, biotechnical innovations (Gerstner, König, Enders, & Hambrick, 2013). Explanations that have been offered are that narcissists’ strong confidence allows them to invest aggressively in new technology, or that they expect that such investments will be seen as daring and worthy of admiration. Based on this previous research, we hypothesize that employee narcissism will be positively related to supervisor perceptions of employee innovative behavior (H1).

While research strongly suggests a relation between employee narcissism and innovative behavior, there is little theoretical or empirical basis for developing hypotheses regarding the role of Machiavellianism and psychopathy. Arguably, the psychopathic or Machiavellianistic personality type does not fit as well with the creative stereotype (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003) nor does it go hand in hand with an interest in artistic endeavors (Jonason et al., 2014). In addition, particularly Machiavellianism and psychopathy (more so than narcissism) correlate negatively with communal tendencies (becoming connected and getting along with others; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013a). Indeed, Rauthmann and Kolar (2013b) argue that “it may seem that Machiavellianism and psychopathy form a “Malicious Two”, as these traits are uniquely related to stronger malevolence and negative perceptions from others as compared to narcissism which is perceived as

“brighter.”(p. 585)”. Given that positive assessments of an employee’s innovative behavior may be rooted in her or his similarity to the creative personality (stereo)type and in her or his ability to generate positive perceptions, one might expect Machiavellianism and psychopathy to be negatively related to perceptions of employee innovative behavior. However, some evidence points to a positive relationship, at least for psychopathy. Primary psychopathy (characterized by emotional bluntness and callousness) has been found to be positively related to self-perceived entrepreneurial creativity (although not to entrepreneurship through innovation and invention; Akthar, Ahmetoglu, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2013). In addition, positive correlations between psychopathy and peer ratings of individuals’ ability to be creative/innovate have been reported (Babiak et al., 2010). In sum, the existence of a relationship between Machiavellianism and psychopathy on the one hand and perceived employee innovative behavior is—so far—unclear. To address this gap in the research literature, this study will examine their relatedness in an exploratory fashion.

1.2. Supervisor and employee congruence in Dark Triad personality traits

Goncalo et al. (2010) found that groups with two narcissistic members (out of four) outperformed groups with fewer or more narcissistic individuals in objective creative performance. They reasoned that because narcissists crave attention and recognition, competition between a few narcissistic group members could cause the group to engage in more elaborate and novel ways of information processing—and hence idea generation (e.g., De Dreu, Nijstad, & van Knippenberg, 2008). However, we expect that in *hierarchical dyadic interactions*, in which the one person is asked to evaluate the performance of the other, feelings of competition may lead to a less positive assessment of the other person’s behavior. That is, if supervisors score high on narcissism, they are probably less appreciative of an employee whom they perceive to be stealing their thunder, as this clashes with their self-absorbent, egocentric nature. In fact, narcissists are known to aggress against those who threaten their ego and to perceive them as less competent and likeable (Jones & Paulhus, 2010; Kernis & Sun, 1994). Competition is especially likely to flare up in the idea promotion stage of innovation, because this is the most public or interpersonal stage. That is, the promotion of innovative ideas requires interaction with other individuals and hence provides the narcissistic individual with a stage to shine, something that they need in order to uphold their grandiose self-image (Nevecka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011). We therefore expect the interactive effects of employee and supervisor narcissism to be most pronounced in this stage. We hypothesize that the positive relationship between employee narcissism and supervisor perceptions of employee innovative behavior (particularly idea promotion) will be less pronounced when the supervisor is more narcissistic (H2). Because previous research has not looked into the interactive effect of supervisor and employee Machiavellianism and psychopathy on perceptions of innovative behavior, we will address the issue exploratively in the current study.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

We obtained the data of 306 pairs of Dutch employees and their direct supervisors. Most worked in commercially oriented (service) organizations (e.g., shops, financial institutions, health care organizations, etc.). A total of 43.3% of the employees and 58.2% of the

supervisors were male. Employees' mean age was 34.44 ($SD = 13.47$) and supervisors' mean age was 42.56 ($SD = 11.69$). Most employees and supervisors indicated having worked more than 5 years for their current employer (42.6% and 66.0%, respectively). Generally, employees and supervisors worked more than 25 h a week (53.3% and 77.1%, respectively).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Dark Triad

Both employees and their direct supervisors completed a Dutch version of the 12-item Dirty Dozen scale (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Participants indicated how much they agreed (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) with statements assessing Machiavellianism (4 items; e.g., "I have used deceit or lied to get my way"), psychopathy (4 items; e.g., "I tend to lack remorse"), and narcissism (4 items; e.g., "I tend to want others to admire me"). Items were averaged into the three subscales. Although the Dirty Dozen scale is a short measure to assess the Dark Triad personality traits, it appears to have good construct validity and sound structural properties (Jonason & Luévano, 2013). Similarly to findings in other studies, the 4-item scales demonstrated low to good internal consistency (range α 's = .60–.85).

2.2.2. Perceived employee innovative behavior

We used Janssen's (2001) nine-item scale of individual innovative behavior in the workplace. Immediate supervisors rated how often the focal employee performed the behaviors associated with one of the three subscales (1 = *never*; 7 = *always*): idea generation (3 items; e.g., "Generating original solutions for problems"), idea promotion (3 items; e.g., "Mobilizing support for innovative ideas"), and idea realization (3 items; e.g., "Transforming innovative ideas into useful applications"). Items were averaged into a single overall construct as well as the three separate subscales. The total scale, and all subscales, demonstrated good internal consistency (range α 's = .88–.94).¹

2.2.3. Controls

We controlled for frequency of contact between employee and supervisor (during and after work hours) and length of collaboration, because previous research suggests that the positive effects of narcissism may fade when people get to know each other better (cf., Campbell & Campbell, 2009).

2.3. Procedure

Data were collected as part of a study on the role of personality in the workplace. Research assistants used their own work environment, their personal network and that of acquaintances to get into contact with employees and supervisors. In addition, they actively visited business and shopping centres. Potential participants were approached via email, through phone calls, or face-to-face contact. We stressed the fact that participation was voluntary and that data would be treated confidentially. If employees and supervisors were interested in participating, they were asked to fill out the paper-and-pencil questionnaires without consulting their colleagues, subordinates or supervisor, and to return the questionnaires in the enclosed envelope. This envelope was then picked up by the research assistant or returned by mail. Because people often filled out the questionnaires during work hours, we kept the survey short and to the point. However, in most cases participants also had the option to fill in the questionnaire during their free time (e.g., during lunch breaks or at home).

3. Results

Table 1 contains overall descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the study variables. Note that, although the Dirty Dozen is at times criticized for the high correlation between Machiavellianism and psychopathy (Miller et al., 2012), in our sample this correlation is moderate and comparable to the correlations between the other pairs of Dark Triad traits.

3.1. Perceived employee innovative behavior

We performed a regression analysis with the three employee Dark Triad personality traits, the three supervisor Dark Triad personality traits (all standardized), and the interactions between congruent traits (i.e., the interaction of employee narcissism with supervisor narcissism, and so on) as predictors, and employee innovative behavior (overall measure) as the dependent variable (see Table 2). We controlled for frequency of contact and length of collaboration. Our analysis yielded a negative main effect of employee Machiavellianism, no main effect of employee psychopathy, and a positive main effect of employee narcissism. This indicated that employees scoring high on Machiavellianism were perceived as displaying less innovative behavior, and that employees scoring high on narcissism were perceived as displaying more innovative behavior. We found no main effects of supervisor Dark Triad personality traits. In line with our expectations, we also found a significant interaction of employee and supervisor narcissism. Simple slopes analyses (at 1 SD above and below the mean) showed that employee narcissism was associated with higher ratings of employee innovative behavior when supervisors were low in narcissism ($\beta = .31$, $b = .36$, 95% CI = [0.15, 0.57]), but not when supervisors were high in narcissism ($\beta = .04$, $b = .05$, 95% CI = [−0.16, 0.26]).

3.2. The subscales of perceived employee innovative behavior

Because of the multifaceted nature of innovative behavior (Janssen, 2001), we also conducted analyses (identical to the one reported above) with the innovation subscales as dependent variables. For the idea generation subscale, as for the total scale, we found a negative effect of employee Machiavellianism ($\beta = -.15$, $b = -0.18$, 95% CI = [−0.33, −0.02]), and a positive effect of employee narcissism ($\beta = .17$, $b = 0.21$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.36]). In addition, we found a main effect of supervisor narcissism ($\beta = .13$, $b = 0.15$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.31]) indicating that supervisors perceived their employees to generate more ideas when leaders themselves were more narcissistic. The leader and follower narcissism interaction was not significant ($\beta = -.09$, $b = -0.10$, 95% CI = [−0.24, 0.03]).

For the idea promotion subscale, we again found a negative effect of employee Machiavellianism ($\beta = -.15$, $b = -0.19$, 95% CI = [−0.35, −0.03]) and a positive effect of employee narcissism ($\beta = .15$, $b = 0.20$, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.36]). We also found a significant interaction of employee and supervisor narcissism ($\beta = -.16$, $b = -0.20$, 95% CI = [−0.35, −0.06]). Simple slopes analyses (at 1 SD above and below the mean) showed that employee narcissism was associated with higher ratings of employee idea promotion when supervisors were low in narcissism ($\beta = .32$, $b = 0.42$, 95% CI = [0.19, 0.65]), but not when supervisors were high in narcissism ($\beta = -.02$, $b = -0.03$, 95% CI = [−0.26, 0.20]).

For the idea realization subscale, the effect of employee Machiavellianism failed to reach significance ($\beta = -.12$, $b = -0.16$, 95% CI = [−0.33, 0.01]). We did find a positive effect of employee narcissism ($\beta = .17$, $b = 0.23$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.40]). The interaction

¹ Specific details are available upon request.

Table 1
Descriptives, Cronbach's alpha's, and correlations for the study variables.

	M (SD)	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7a	7b	7c
1. Employee Machiavellianism	2.02 (1.13)	299	(.85)	.37**	.39**	.08	.14*	.12*	-.10	-.09	-.10	-.09
2. Employee psychopathy	2.85 (1.12)	299		(.60)	.37**	-.04	.08	.07	-.03	-.00	-.01	-.05
3. Employee narcissism	3.53 (1.21)	299			(.81)	.01	.05	.06	.10	.11	.09	.09
4. Supervisor Machiavellianism	2.18 (1.11)	300				(.80)	.41**	.32**	-.03	-.00	-.01	-.06
5. Supervisor psychopathy	2.89 (1.09)	300					(.61)	.35**	-.10	-.09	-.11	-.06
6. Supervisor narcissism	3.42 (1.20)	300						(.78)	.03	.10	-.00	.03
7. Innovative behavior (IB sum)	4.13 (1.18)	301							(.94)	.92**	.91**	.91**
7a. IB – idea generation	4.25 (1.21)	301								(.90)	.77**	.77**
7b. IB – idea promotion	4.24 (1.30)	300									(.90)	.72**
7c. IB – idea realization	3.90 (1.35)	299										(.88)

Note: sample sizes differ between variables because of missing values. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are displayed on the diagonal in parentheses.

** $p < .001$.
* $p < .05$.

Table 2
Regression analyses results on perceived employee innovative behavior.

	β	<i>b</i>	95% CI	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
Length of collaboration	.01	0.01	-0.10	0.11
Frequency of contact – on the job	.07	0.08	-0.05	0.22
Frequency of contact – after work hours	.13*	0.15	0.00	0.29
Employee Machiavellianism	-.15*	-0.18	-0.33	-0.03
Employee psychopathy	-.02	-0.03	-0.17	0.12
Employee narcissism	.18*	0.21	0.06	0.36
Supervisor Machiavellianism	-.02	-0.02	-0.17	0.13
Supervisor psychopathy	-.08	-0.09	-0.24	0.06
Supervisor narcissism	.08	0.10	-0.05	0.24
Supervisor × employee Machiavellianism	.04	0.05	-0.10	0.19
Supervisor × employee psychopathy	.10	0.12	-0.02	0.26
Supervisor × employee narcissism	-.12*	-0.13	-0.27	-0.01

* $p < .05$.

between leader and follower narcissism was not significant for this subscale ($\beta = -.09$, $b = -0.12$, 95% CI = [-0.27, 0.03]).

4. Discussion

This study focused on employee and supervisor Dark Triad personality traits and supervisor perceptions of employee innovative behavior. The results support and extend previous studies in several ways. Firstly, we found a positive relationship between employee narcissism and supervisor ratings of (all subscales of) employee innovative behavior. This finding is consistent with previously reported relationships between narcissism and ratings of idea generation and idea promotion, and between narcissism and the actual adoption of innovative technologies (Furnham et al., 2013; Gerstner et al., 2013; Goncalo et al., 2010).

Secondly, in contrast to the results for employee narcissism, we found that employee Machiavellianism was negatively related, and employee psychopathy was not related to supervisor ratings of employee innovative behavior. These findings are interesting, because they testify to the importance of differentiating between the Dark Triad personality traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). One factor that may explain these differential findings is that Machiavellians and psychopaths, more strongly than narcissists, lack communal tendencies and interpersonal orientations (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013a), and generate more negative perceptions in others (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013b). They score particularly high on *social engulfment*, a self-serving tendency to benefit

from another person (whether intimate partner or stranger) while barring reciprocal access to beneficial resources to the other party (Burris, Rempel, Munteanu, & Therrien, 2013). Perhaps for Machiavellians specifically, the focus on self-interested needs and the lack of willingness to contribute to others' welfare limits their innovative contributions (cf., Bechtoldt, Choi, & Nijstad, 2012). Future research may focus on whether differences in social motivations, values or tendencies explain the different effects of the three Dark Triad personality traits on supervisor ratings of behavior.

Thirdly, we found that employee narcissism fosters positive perceptions of the extent to which that employee engages in innovative behaviors (specifically idea promotion) only when supervisors were not narcissists themselves. Whereas Goncalo et al. (2010) reasoned that a mild competition between narcissistic group members can increase creative performance, our results suggest that competition between narcissists can be risky when there is a hierarchical element involved. Arguably, two narcissists are not always better than one; at least not when the assessment of innovative behavior is concerned and when the assessor has the supervisor role.

Our initial reasoning about why narcissistic supervisors would not be positively affected by employee narcissism, was that competition for other people's attention and praise may reduce the tendency to assess narcissistic employees positively. One other potential explanation is that narcissistic supervisors are less susceptible to the illusion of creativity created by narcissistic employees. In other words, narcissistic supervisors may be more adept at recognizing a narcissistic employee for what he or she is, and to recognize that this employee's ideas are not necessarily truly creative. However, the fact that the interaction was only significant for idea promotion (the most 'public' stage) suggests that it really is about competition for other's attention and admiration. However, future research is needed to shed more light on this matter.

Fourthly, while the subscales of innovative work behavior are often grouped together into an overall construct, our results suggest that it is important to analyze these subscales separately. Previous research has shown that there often is a disconnect between generating ideas and promoting, selecting, or implementing ideas, and that these may not be predicted by the same variables (e.g., Rietzschel, 2011; West, 2002). Our results complement this work and underscore the notion that a more fine-grained analysis of innovation behaviors can be highly informative.

4.1. Strengths and limitations

Beside the theoretical contributions our study has to offer, a strength is the multi-source data-set with over 300 pairs of

employees and supervisors. One potential limitation is our use of the Dirty Dozen scale by Jonason and Webster (2010). We used this short scale because most participants filled out the questionnaire at work, which posed time constraints regarding their participation. However, the measure is sometimes criticized, specifically where the measurement of psychopathy is concerned (Miller et al., 2012). Indeed, in our sample the psychopathy scale also had relatively low reliability. As such, the current pattern of findings should be replicated with other Dark Triad scales (such as NPI, MACH-IV, SRP). Moreover, the fact that most people filled out the questionnaire at work may have affected their scores, even though we promised confidentiality and anonymity. A final limitation is that our study was conducted in the Netherlands: a country with a rather individualistic culture (like most other Western countries). In such cultures, personal goals are placed ahead of collective goals and societies are considered to exist to cater to the needs of individuals (Triandis, 1995). It has been suggested that individualistic societies are more likely to engender narcissism in individuals (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Moreover, individualistic societies are considered to be more appreciative of uniqueness, which may encourage people (particularly narcissistic ones) to promote new ideas (Goncalo & Staw, 2006). Future research may focus on if and how culture may affect relationships between Dark Triad personality traits and perceptions of innovative behavior.

5. Conclusions

All in all, this research suggests that when it comes to being perceived as being innovative, employees do not always benefit from having a dark side. Only employee narcissism was found to be positively related to supervisor ratings of employee innovative behavior. However, narcissistic employees cannot always count on positive assessments of their innovative behavior from their supervisors. When supervisor themselves score high on narcissism, there is no positive relationship between employee narcissism and their perceptions of employee idea promotion. Although it has been suggested that organizations should encourage collaborations between narcissists in order to make full use of any existing creative potential (Goncalo et al., 2010), our findings suggest that narcissistic employees who want to be seen in a favorable light by their supervisor had better refrain from teaming up with a supervisor who is just like them.

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