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Don't judge a leader by their reluctance

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Abstract

Organizations invest over $166 billion annually in high-potential employees (HiPos), yet many programs fail to identify the right candidates, with failure rates up to 40%. This study addresses the misrecognition of HiPos, focusing on reluctance to lead (RTL) as a key factor. RTL can lead to competent individuals being overlooked. Moderate RTL can enhance leadership by promoting power-sharing and follower self-leadership, which is characterized by humility and a servant mentality. This registered report investigates whether HR professionals' HiPo selection biases against RTL harm leader effectiveness through three studies. We will develop and validate an RTL scale (Study 1), investigate the impact of RTL on HiPo selection (Study 2), and examine the relationship between RTL and leadership effectiveness (Study 3). By understanding RTL's role in misrecognition and its association with effective leadership, this research aims to diversify the HiPo pool, support reluctant leaders' development, and promote diversity and inclusion in leadership selection.

KEYWORDS
atypicality, HiPo designation, HiPos, misrecognition of HiPos, reluctance to lead

1 | INTRODUCTION

Organizations spend more than $166 billion annually to invest in high-potential employees (HiPos) and to develop their leadership pipelines (Church et al., 2021; Westfall, 2019). Receiving a return on investment from HiPos requires effectively recognizing their true potential (Terry et al., 2022). However, HiPo programs led by human resource management often fail to invest in the "right" candidates for the leadership pipeline. Research indicates that the failure rate for HiPo designations reaches up to 40% (Martin & Schmidt, 2010), and half of the senior hires fail in less than 2 years (Bauer, 2011; Hogan et al., 2018). These striking findings highlight a problem of fallible judgment process in HiPo designation, which entails two related issues: (1) individuals with potential being overlooked in consideration of HiPo designation (i.e., misrecognition), and/or (2) people who lack potential are assigned HiPo status. In this registered report, we aim to address the first issue, namely the misrecognition problem (Finkelstein et al., 2018), and focus on the role of "reluctance to lead" (RTL) as one of the contributing factors.

RTL is "the hesitation of a HiPo individual to exercise leadership before or after the leader role occupancy" (Aycan et al., 2024, p. 2). Successful candidates who appear reluctant to take on leadership roles may not enter the organization's radar (Aycan et al., 2024). HR practitioners likely misconstrue reluctant candidates as lacking potential, and this may create a missed opportunity for the organization. Indeed, there is limited evidence to suggest that reluctance could be a resource for leadership (Tussing, 2018). Moderate levels of RTL can reduce self-indulgent behaviors and enhance empowering leadership by promoting power-sharing and follower self-leadership. Reluctant leaders, characterized by humility and a focus on the collective good, lead with a servant mentality, fostering trust and strong team relationships (Aycan et al., 2024).

In this registered report, we tackle the research question of whether HR professionals' HiPo selection process involves bias against RTL, which may ultimately harm leader effectiveness. If the relationship between reluctance and leader effectiveness is found, it would have a clear message for HR professionals to look at these cases more closely in the HiPo selection process. This would be an important step toward reducing the misrecognition of HiPos (Finkelstein et al., 2018).

What may be the reasons for HR professionals' misrecognition of HiPos? A lack of clear and established assessment tools (Church et al., 2015) and biased evaluations about what potential looks like are among the reasons for misrecognition (Finkelstein et al., 2018). To dig deeper into these evaluation biases, our study focuses on RTL as contributing to the problem of misrecognition by HR professionals. Research reveals that people with RTL face biased evaluations as being less competent and less prototypical for leadership roles since they violate the expected leader characteristics, such as being confident, ambitious, and decisive (Schuh et al., 2014; Tussing, 2018). Indeed, research shows that decision-makers' implicit leadership theories significantly impact who is identified as HiPo (Finkelstein et al., 2018). More specifically, employees who provide atypicality leadership characteristics may be overlooked for inclusion in the HiPo group (Samdanis & Özbilgin, 2020) even if they have the latent potential for successful leadership if given a chance to partake in HiPo programs (Erbil & Özbilgin, 2024).

Focusing on RTL is also important considering HRM's dual mandate to balance "social advocacy" with "business effectiveness" by promoting diversity and inclusion in all aspects of work life, including leadership (cf., Burns et al., 2023). HiPo selection process tends to leave out atypical employees (e.g., female, ethnically diverse, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more, disabled) who are likely to have higher RTL (compared to those representing the Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic population; Samdanis & Özbilgin, 2020; Özbilgin & Erbil, 2024).

In this registered report, we will design three studies. Study 1 will be dedicated to the development and validation of a scale measuring RTL. Study 2 will juxtapose candidates' competencies versus reluctance through experimentally manipulated cases to investigate the main and interaction effects of both criteria on the likelihood of being selected for the HiPo program. Study 3 will take a step further and investigate the relationship between reluctance and effectiveness in leadership through a matched sample of leaders/managers and their employees.

Study 3 will allow us to see whether the HR professionals' fallible judgment process examined in Study 2 is indeed a misrecognition problem for organizations.

By investigating the role of RTL in contributing to the problem of misrecognition by HR professionals and its association with leadership effectiveness, we aim to make several contributions. First, by focusing on reluctant individuals, HR professionals may enlarge and diversify the pool of HiPos from which more effective leaders are to be selected. Second, organizations can help high-potential but reluctant employees ease their RTL via a series of leadership and organization development interventions to harness their potential. Third, acknowledging that reluctant employees are likely to expose biases even in the presence of contradictory evidence (i.e., HiPo indicators), HR professionals may act on their social advocacy and promote diversity and inclusion.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | Recognition of talent: Indicators of high potential

Organizations today place substantial emphasis on implementing talent management practices, as these will aid them in identifying and developing future leaders, namely high potentials (HiPos; McDonnell et al., 2017). Talent management processes involve the evaluation of the potential of employees to recruit and retain the right people in the talent pool (Terry et al., 2022; Vardi & Collings, 2023). HiPos are expected to create higher value for the organization relative to other employees (Church et al., 2021). Their projected career trajectory involves progression from individual-contributor roles to leadership (Finkelstein et al., 2018). As such, they are provided with exclusive and specialized developmental resources (e.g., mentorship, career coaching, stretch assignments, and training) to maximize their talent (Finkelstein et al., 2018).

Traditionally, organizations focused on employees' past and current job performance as key indicators for identifying HiPos (Church et al., 2021; Silzer & Church, 2009; Vardi & Collings, 2023). However, this approach has been criticized as suboptimal for its predictive validity since past and current job performance may predict success for the same types of roles and tasks but not necessarily success in future leadership roles that require different skills and abilities (Silzer & Church, 2009). More recently, comprehensive frameworks of potential have been introduced in the literature (Finkelstein et al., 2018; Silzer & Church, 2009). One of the most cited frameworks in strategic talent management literature for assessing potential is the Blueprint of Leadership Potential (Silzer & Church, 2009). The framework describes the critical building blocks of potential, including personality characteristics (e.g., resilience, assertiveness), cognitive capabilities (e.g., intelligence, strategic thinking), learning skills (e.g., learning agility, openness to feedback), motivation skills (e.g., career ambition, risk-taking), leadership competencies (e.g., managing people, collaboration) and functional/technical skills (e.g., digital, analytics; Silzer & Church, 2009, p. 400). Church et al. (2015) examined 80 companies and revealed that the two most commonly assessed criteria for HiPo identification were leadership competencies (75% of the companies) and learning ability/agility (56%).

Based on these findings, we will include two *HiPo indicators* in our research: (1) leadership competencies and (2) learning ability/agility. Leadership competencies include managing, motivating, inspiring, and developing others. Organizations predict an employee's potential by assessing their leadership predispositions, which are deemed early indicators of leadership effectiveness (Church & Silzer, 2014). Employees' learning ability/agility goes beyond cognitive abilities (i.e., intelligence) and includes cognitive and behavioral factors such as pattern recognition abilities, counterfactual thinking tendencies, and feedback-seeking behaviors (Dries et al., 2012). Aligned with the Blueprint of Leadership Potential framework (Church et al., 2015; Church & Silzer, 2014), we expect HR professionals to be inclined to select candidates who are portrayed as high in these indicators.

H1 There is a positive relationship between the evaluation of a candidate's HiPo indicators (i.e., leadership competencies and learning ability/agility) and the likelihood of HR professionals' selection of the candidate for the HiPo program.

2.2 | The misrecognition problem: Are we missing the "talent"?

While successful recognition of potential brings out better organizational outcomes, failure in recognition yields harmful results for the organizations (Erbil & Özbilgin, 2024). For example, research indicates that successful recognition of true potential yields a 48% increase in profitability and a 22% increase in productivity (Gallup Global Survey, 2015). On the contrary, inaccurate determination of potential leads to leadership failures and has substantial costs between $1 million and $2.7 million per executive (Hogan, 2017). Unfortunately, although the results blatantly show the importance of recognizing the right talent, organizations still fail to recognize the true potential for two-thirds of the time (e.g., Hogan et al., 2018).

Drawing on Bourdieu (2000), we mobilize the concept of misrecognition, which he defines as a process through which webs of social relations (in this case, HR professionals) decide the terms of inclusion for a group (Morillas, 2023), underestimating their knowledge, skills, and abilities, that is, their knowledge capital. One of the main contributors to a high failure rate resulting from HR professionals' misrecognition of high potential is the biased evaluations of what the potential looks like (Finkelstein et al., 2018; Swailes, 2013; Terry et al., 2022). Swailes (2013) indicates that recognition of HiPo is not "a neutral and normative activity that is free of biases where those with the most promise will get the best chances to rise to the top" (p. 35). Biases in the HiPo selection process are partly rooted in people's assumptions and beliefs about leadership (Finkelstein et al., 2018; Swailes, 2013). These assumptions and beliefs about leadership, namely *leadership prototypes*, reflect the composite of attributes expected of a leader (Lord et al., 1984), such as being confident, decisive and ambitious (Koenig et al., 2011). Recognition and appraisal of high potential are likely to occur when an employee's unique qualities strongly align with these attributes (Hogan et al., 1994). Thus, we assert that since RTL (i.e., hesitations and indecisiveness about leadership) does not go along with the popular picture of leadership itself, it will serve as a source of bias for evaluators and jeopardize a fair and accurate identification of talent. Indeed, limited research indicates that reluctant individuals are exposed to biased judgments as less competent and less prototypical for leadership roles and, in turn, less inclined to seek and be chosen for positions of power (Grant & Shandell, 2021; Tussing, 2018).

2.3 | The role of RTL in the misrecognition of HiPos

RTL is the hesitation of HiPos to accept or exercise leadership roles. Despite its connotation with unwillingness, RTL represents an ambivalence that incorporates one's positive (i.e., interest) and negative (i.e., reservation) attitudes toward leading (Aycan et al., 2024). Due to its ambivalent nature, feeling reluctance does not necessarily deter an individual from accepting a leadership role (Aycan et al., 2024). Reluctant individuals may still embark on leadership roles and become successful. From religious texts to modern history, there are numerous inspiring examples of reluctant but successful leaders. One significant example from the Bible is Moses. When called by God to lead the Israelites, he insisted that he was not qualified enough to lead because of his difficulty in speaking (King James Bible, 1769/2023, Exodus 4:10–14). Similarly, when the political leaders appointed George Washington to lead the nation, he expressed his RTL with his words, "About 10 o'clock, I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity and, with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York… with the best dispositions to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations." (Lossing, 1856, p. 85, cited in Chappel, 2023). These examples indicate that individuals with potential can experience a desire to serve their communities but simultaneously experience significant hesitations to lead.

We argue that RTL has a dynamic nature; its level may change over time (Aycan et al., 2024). People can remain reluctant while practicing the role even after they gain additional skills and experiences because the complexities involved in leadership may increase as people get more experienced and move into senior roles. RTL may,

therefore, not diminish over time because it is not just limited to competency-related factors (e.g., skills, experience) but also involves dynamic context-related factors. It is further possible for an individual to initially have a low reluctance to take on the leadership role but develop reluctance in the role. For example, practicing the leadership role in an organization going through a major transformation or crisis (e.g., mergers and acquisitions; COVID-19) may evoke reluctance in someone who did not have it before getting into the role. Indeed, research has shown that those who feel low RTL may develop reluctance over time and vice versa (Bucher et al., 2023). Therefore, we assert that some individuals may consistently experience reluctance, while others may experience it after the role occupancy due to changing circumstances.

RTL may stem from various reasons. A primary reason is the lack of salience in leader identity (Epitropaki, 2018), defined as "a sub-component of one's working self-concept that includes leadership schemas, leadership experiences and future representations of oneself as a leader" (Epitropaki et al., 2017, p. 107). Day and Lance (2004) emphasized the significance of incorporating the leader identity into one's overall self-schema for leadership development. Another reason that RTL may be rooted in is individuals' concerns about the work-family conflict (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Özbilgin et al., 2011). Indeed, a recent public poll revealed that 40% of the employees expressed reluctance in leadership roles due to concerns about work-life imbalance (Visier Consulting, 2023). These individuals are concerned that their role as leaders may interfere with their nonwork roles (e.g., family roles, community roles, leisure roles; Frone, 2003).

Other factors associated with RTL may involve the limitations imposed by individuals' life conditions (e.g., having care responsibilities), organizational characteristics (e.g., undergoing a major restructuring), and/or socio-cultural factors (e.g., working in power hierarchical work organizations; Aycan et al., 2024). In their conceptual paper, Aycan et al. (2024) shed light on how different contexts (e.g., individual, organizational, and socio-cultural) interface with RTL to modulate its levels.

RTL may mask the true potential in the HiPo designation process. HR professionals may overlook reluctant employees who do not enter their radar, and favor those who seem eager to take on leadership roles. In other words, in the HiPo designation process, the true potential may be masked by RTL and fail to conform to the expected attributes of a leader (e.g., decisive; confident, Koenig et al., 2011). HR professionals may perceive high-potential but reluctant candidates as lacking motivation and confidence in their leadership ability due to their assumption that an ideal leader candidate would be eager and free of self-doubts (Tussing, 2018). Consequently, how confident a candidate appears influences how competent they are perceived by evaluators (Anderson et al., 2012). However, reluctant candidates may simultaneously feel confident about their leadership abilities and hesitant about leading due to concerns about various contextual factors discussed above. This misperception, in turn, leads HR professionals to overlook a reluctant candidate when considering their potential. Thus, we propose that high-potential but reluctant employees may be perceived as lacking leadership potential, decreasing HR professionals' likelihood of selecting these employees for the HiPo program.

H2 There is a negative relationship between the evaluation of a candidate's RTL level and the likelihood of HR professionals' selection of the candidate for the HiPo program.

On the contrary, HR professionals may be attracted to those employees who show less reluctance, actively seek out opportunities, and consistently engage in self-promotion (Chamarro-Premuzic, 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis captures the interaction effects of HiPo indicators and the reluctance of a candidate.

H3 There is an interaction effect between the evaluation of a candidate's RTL and HiPo indicators on HR professionals' perception, in such a way that those candidates who are moderate in HiPo indicators and high in RTL are least likely selected for leadership roles by HR professionals, whereas those who are high in HiPo indicators and low in RTL are selected the most of the same.

We will test these hypotheses according to the extent to which a candidate is portrayed as "typical" for the leadership position based on their gender (Samdanis & Özbilgin, 2020). We will explore the effect of typicality by testing the hypotheses (H1 to H3) for male and female candidates.

2.4 | Reluctance to lead and leader effectiveness

As mentioned before, we are interested in the question of whether HR professionals' HiPo selection process involves bias against RTL, which may be a critical resource for leader effectiveness. So far, the discussion of the construct suggests that RTL may have an intuitively negative connotation causing biases in HR professionals. However, we expect that moderate levels of RTL may enhance leader effectiveness (Tussing, 2018).

The power invested in leadership may corrupt people (Robinson, 2010; Sturm et al., 2021). There is no shortage of abusive and dark leaders (Mackey et al., 2021). We draw on the approach-inhibition theory of power to explain this specific inclination (Keltner et al., 2003). A fundamental principle of the approach-inhibition theory of power posits that the legitimacy and stability of power position is linked to a less threatening environment, liberating individuals from social constraints (Keltner et al., 2003). This attracts individuals to power positions and reduces inhibition and vigilance. For example, priming individuals with a high-power mindset has been shown to increase individuals' involvement in automatic information processing (Song & Cu, 2023), devaluation of the perspectives, opinions, and contributions of others (Tost et al., 2013), and hoarding of resources for themselves (Hays et al., 2021).

We assert that moderate levels of RTL would serve as a control mechanism for the negative effects of the power inherent in the leadership role (Yukl & Gardner, 2019). Moderate levels of RTL may also decrease self-indulgent behaviors and increase empowering leadership since individuals with some reluctance should be keen to transfer the power to followers and foster their self-leadership. Moreover, since RTL can prevent over-confidence, reluctant leaders might be less likely to believe they can handle everything alone and, thus, more likely to involve followers in decision-making processes, which in turn improves decision quality and timeliness (Patacconi, 2009). Indeed, limited research evidence showed that a moderate amount of RTL was associated with leadership effectiveness through empowering leadership (Tussing, 2018).

We expect a curvilinear relationship between RTL and leader effectiveness. At very low levels of RTL, one would have no hesitation in exercising the excessive sense of power that comes with the leadership role. Over-confidence makes leaders more vulnerable to making mistakes by having self-enhancing delusions (Colvin et al., 1995), inhibiting advice-taking (Tost et al., 2012), and reducing systematic, deliberate modes of information processing (Keltner et al., 2003). Research shows that the characteristic of an effective leader involves a *combination* of being reserved and ambitious (Collins, 2001). Research also indicates that individuals expressing doubt about their leadership performance frequently outperform those without such concerns (Shipman & Mumford, 2011).

In contrast, at very high levels of RTL, one's self-doubt would result in indecisiveness and inhibit goal pursuit (e.g., Hooijberg et al., 1997). Those reluctant to lead may show reservations about taking action and committing to an action, shirk responsibility, or delay making decisions (e.g., Destradi, 2017; Goodwin, 2020; Tussing, 2018). From an organizational point of view, both high and low expressions of RTL would be a liability. Therefore, moderate levels of RTL may be a resource for current and future leaders. We expect this effect to be the same for both male and female leaders. Hence, we propose:

H4 Reluctance to lead has a curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship with leader effectiveness.

The research program presented in this registered report has several potential contributions to the scientific literature on talent management. First, the focal variable, RTL, is a novel and understudied construct that has

important implications for talent management and leadership. The proposed research (Study 1) would be the first attempt to develop a validated measure of this construct. Second, the research (Study 2) will contribute to the nascent literature on the black box of HiPo selection by exploring the biases of HR professionals in selecting candidates using multiple criteria. Third, the proposed study (Study 3) will investigate whether these biases pose a threat to leadership effectiveness. Figure 1 depicts the misrecognition problem and shows the interactions between the concepts and the hypotheses.

3 | RESEARCH METHODS PROTOCOL

3.1 | Study 1

3.1.1 | Overview

Our first study will be dedicated to developing and validating a measure of RTL and employing the following procedure. First, we will generate an item pool by conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with employees to gain insight into how RTL manifests itself and what the possible roots behind it may be (see Appendix 1 for interview questions). We will utilize Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure to employ a thematic analysis of qualitative data to discern the dimensions of the construct (i.e., reasons or root causes for RTL). For each of these dimensions (e.g., RTL due to perceived lack of leadership competency, family- or organization-related circumstances), we will develop 2–3 items for the initial item pool. For example, competence-based reluctance can be tapped by the following item: "I am not sure if my competencies would be sufficient to accept the leadership role."

The selection of the items from the initial pool will be achieved through collecting data from a panel of employees. Item selection criteria will include each item's (1) normality of distribution (e.g., skewness and kurtosis of items), (2) factor loading, and (3) respondents' rating of item clarity and ease of responding.

Second, the remaining items will be validated against several measures of related constructs by collecting data from a separate group of employees. The newly developed RTL measure is expected to correlate positively with Worries about Leadership (Aycan & Sheila, 2018) and Neuroticism (Goldberg, 1992). The new measure would also be expected to correlate negatively with Motivation to Lead (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), Generalized self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), and Narcissism (Ames et al., 2006).
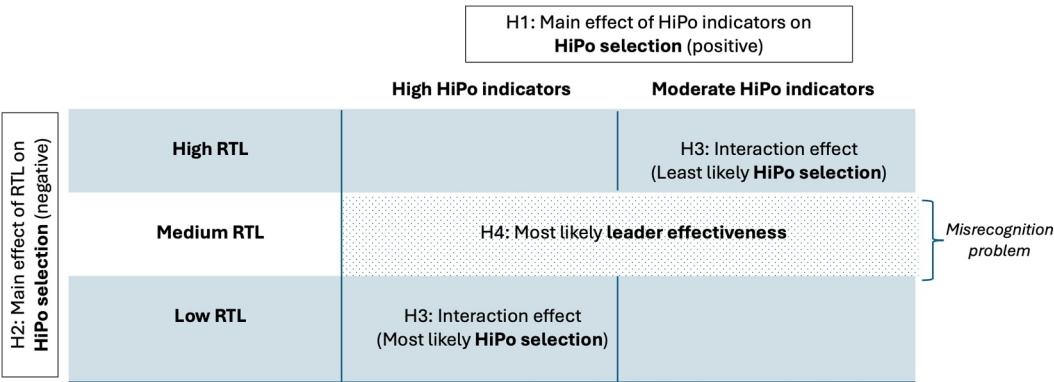

FIGURE 1 Misrecognition problem: Summary of hypotheses.

3.1.2 | Sample

To develop an item pool, we will conduct semi-structured interviews with 10 employees with managerial/leadership roles (current leaders) and 10 employees without such roles (leader-to-bes), using purposive sampling methodology (Robinson, 2014). Interview questions that are addressed to leader-to-be's and current leaders will be similar, with minor changes in wording (see Appendix 1 for interview questions).

To validate the RTL measure, we will use two separate samples for the item selection and scale validation phases. We will use an online data-collection platform (e.g., Prolific) to collect the data. The first sample for item selection will be comprised of participants with and without managerial/leadership roles. The sample size will be determined based on the number of items to be included in the analysis. For example, if there will be 25 items in the initial pool, we will recruit 250 respondents (10 respondents per item).

The second sample for scale validation is calculated with a power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). Based on an expected small to medium effect size of 0.20, an alpha level of 0.05, and a desired power of 0.80, the analysis indicated that a sample size of 193 participants would be required.

3.1.3 | Measures

Worries about leadership
We will use the 16-item measure developed by Aycan and Shelia (2019). Respondents will be instructed to imagine that they were being offered a leadership position in the organization they work for and indicate the extent of their worries about the given items such as "being exposed to more criticism" (i.e., worries about failure); "being unable to balance work and family" (i.e., worries about work-life imbalance); and "hurting others' feelings in the work context by the decisions I make" (i.e., worries about harm) on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (to a very little extent) to 5 (to a very large extent).

Motivation to lead
We will use Chan and Drasgow's (2001) 27-item scale to measure motivation to lead. Sample items include "I am the type of person who likes to be in charge of others" (i.e., affective), "I am not afraid to take on leadership roles, even there are risks involved" (i.e., non-calculative), "I feel that I have a duty to lead others when I am asked" (i.e., social-normative). Items will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Neuroticism
Goldberg's (1999) 10-item measure will be used to assess neuroticism. Sample items include "I am filled with doubts about things," "I panic easily," and "I have frequent mood swings." A 5-point Likert scale will be used, ranging from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate).

Generalized self-efficacy
We will use Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) 10-item scale to measure generalized self-efficacy. A sample item is "I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities." A 4-point Likert scale will be used, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (exactly true).

Narcissism
To measure narcissism, we will utilize Ames et al.'s (2006) 16-item narcissistic personality inventory (NPI). NPI retains the forced-choice format. Choosing the narcissistic option scores a point, and the total score can range from 0 to 16. A sample item is "I like to be the center of attention," versus "I prefer to blend in with the crowd."

3.2 | Study 2

3.2.1 | Overview

In this study, we will adopt an experimental policy-capturing design to test our hypotheses (H1 to H3). Policy-capturing is a form of experimental vignette methodology studies focusing on implicit decision processes (Aiman-Smith et al., 2002). Participants are asked to respond to a series of hypothetical cases in which the independent variables are manipulated. Decisions are then regressed on the independent variables to determine the relative weight assigned to each independent variable when making the decision (Aiman-Smith et al., 2002). This method enables the researcher to mimic complex decision-making contexts in real life by including multiple variables in the vignettes and forcing the participants to make decisions based on trade-offs (Auspurg & Hinz, 2015).

In our study, participants will be asked to play an HR partner role and make decisions on HiPo selection in a fictitious company. They will be told to review the profiles of several employees involving information regarding the assessment of supervisors using multiple criteria. These criteria are manipulated in each profile. There will be two levels of leadership competencies (high vs. moderate), two levels of learning ability/agility (high vs. moderate), two levels of RTL (high vs. low), and two conditions of typicality (male vs. female; see Appendix 2 for levels of cues and their corresponding explanations). The indicated levels of HiPo indicators (i.e., moderate and high) are based on the fact that employees with "low" HiPo indicators would not be considered for a HiPo position, but those with "moderate" HiPo indicators would stand the chance of being included in the HiPo program. We will manipulate the typicality of the candidate by utilizing "male" and "female" emojis.

Appendix 3 provides an example of a hypothetical candidate profile that participants will review. Participants will be asked to review each candidate's profile and decide to what extent they would select the candidate for the HiPo program immediately after reviewing each profile.

We will utilize a full-factorial design that completely crosses all possible combinations of each independent variable with their two levels. Thus, there will be 16 candidate profiles in total. Two replicated candidate profiles will also be included to assess within-rater judgment consistency, bringing the total number of candidate profiles each participant has to react to 18 (Aiman-Smith et al., 2002). Profiles will be presented in a fully randomized sequence to limit presentation order effects.

3.2.2 | Sample

Participants will consist of HR professionals. A power analysis is conducted for a two-tailed independent F-test (i.e., linear multiple regression) using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the necessary sample size for the study. Based on an expected small effect size (0.10), an alpha level of 0.05, and a desired power of 0.80, the analysis indicated that a sample size of 151 participants would be required. Due to the nature of the policy-capturing methodology, we will obtain 2416 data points from 151 participants to drive our findings. Data will be collected using multiple methods. First, we will contact professional associations of HR to solicit their collaboration in this research project. In exchange, we may promise to deliver a webinar on psychological and cultural biases in recruitment and selection. Second, we will contact the HR directorate of a Fortune 500 Holding, which has 60 plus companies across a wide range of industries, and ask them to send our survey to all the recruitment and selection professionals. If additional data will be required, we will use an online data-collection platform (e.g., Prolific) to target HR professionals. All participants will complete the survey anonymously. The administered survey will include attention and manipulation check questions (Oppenheimer et al., 2009) that will help us to exclude the careless responders. Participants who answered this question correctly will be included in the final sample.

3.2.3 | Measures

Participants will be asked to indicate their gender, age, education, socio-economic background, and tenure in the HR job. In addition to these demographic questions, the online survey will have the following parts.

Likelihood of selection for the HiPo program
After reviewing each candidate profile explained above, participants will be asked to rate to what extent they would select the candidate for the HiPo Program. (1—extremely unlikely; 5—extremely likely).

Manipulation check
We will ask participants two questions for a manipulation check. First, they will be asked to rate the candidate's level of HiPo indicators in the profile on a 5-point scale (e.g., 1—low learning ability/agility; 5—high learning ability/agility). Second, they will do the same to rate the reluctance (1—low reluctance; 5—high reluctance).

3.3 | Study 3

3.3.1 | Overview

Our third study will investigate the relationship between RTL and leader effectiveness. It will be a field study with a matched sample of managers and their employees. The sampled managers will be asked to complete a survey to measure their RTL levels. Randomly selected 3–5 employees reporting to each manager will evaluate leadership effectiveness.

3.3.2 | Sample

Participants will comprise people currently holding managerial/leadership positions in organizations and employees reporting to each manager. While managers/leaders will provide ratings for their own RTL, randomly selected 3–5 employees reporting to each manager will evaluate the manager's leadership effectiveness. A power analysis is conducted using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the sample size. Based on a medium effect size (0.30), an alpha level of 0.05, and a desired power of 0.80, the analysis indicated that a sample size of a minimum of 84 managers/leaders and 252 employees (i.e., a minimum of three employees for a manager/leader) would be required. The employees are required to work with the manager for at least 6 months. We will recruit these participants through the alumni association rosters of our affiliated universities, leveraging this network to ensure a robust and relevant sample. The administered online survey will be completed anonymously and include attention check questions (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). Participants who fail to answer these questions will be excluded from the final sample.

3.3.3 | Measures

Reluctance to lead
The newly developed and validated measure of RTL from Study 1 will be used. The final set of items will be responded to using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Leader effectiveness

Employees reporting to the manager will rate the manager's effectiveness by using the Outcomes of Leadership inventory from Bass and Avolio's (2000) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, which is measured by three sub-scales (i.e., generates extra effort, is productive, generates satisfaction). A sample item for each of the subscales is "My leader increases others' willingness to try harder," "My leader is effective in meeting organizational requirements," and "My leader uses methods of leadership that are satisfying," respectively. Employees will indicate their level of agreement with statements on a Likert-type 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.4 | Analytic techniques

Our first study will employ item analysis (i.e., normality check for items and exploratory factor analysis) and scale validation analysis (i.e., bivariate correlational analysis) to ensure the reliability and validity of the scale. Our second study will employ the ordinary least squares regression (OLS) analytic technique to determine the relative weight assigned to each independent variable when making the HiPo selection decision. We will also conduct a post hoc analysis of whether HR professionals' demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age) effect choice decisions using Hierarchical Linear Modeling, which allows for simultaneous testing of both within- and between-person analysis (Aiman-Smith et al., 2002). Our third study will also utilize OLS. To further probe the results, we will follow Nelson and Simonsohn's (2014) guidelines to identify and analyze the non-linear relationship (i.e., inverted U-shaped) between RTL and leader effectiveness.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Group 1. Before the leader role occupancy (questions for those who are not yet in the leadership role)

1a. Think about a time when you were offered a leadership role in your current organization. When did it happen? What was the role?

Note to the interviewer: If the interviewee has not been offered a formal leadership role before, the following question will be asked as an alternative:

1b. Imagine that you are offered a leadership role in your current organization. When may it happen? What can be the possible future leadership role?

2a. At the time when it happened, to what extent did you experience hesitations in accepting the leadership role?

Note to the interviewer: If the interviewee has not been offered a formal leadership role before, the following question will be asked as an alternative:

2b. At the time when it will happen, to what extent do you think you may experience hesitations in accepting the leadership role?

Probe for everyone if their explanation is insufficient: Can you please talk me through your thoughts, feelings and attitudes and tell me about anything and everything that has passed/may pass your mind when considering this offer?

Please elaborate a bit more. For example, do you experience hesitations such as, "Would I be successful in this role?," "Am I the right person for this role?," "Considering the financial package I will receive, is it worth embarking on this stressful role?," and/or "Do I want to undertake the extra responsibility that comes with the leadership role?."

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3. Can you identify the underlying reasons behind your hesitation about assuming a leadership role? What were/are these reason(s)?

Probe: In other words, what triggered your hesitations?

For example, some individuals may hesitate to assume leadership roles due to reasons such as, "this role may harm my interpersonal relations with my peers," "I do not want to take the burden of responsibility of others," "the task requires extensive travel requirements, and I am concerned that this may negatively affect my work-life balance," and/or "I think I lack the competencies/confidence required for the leadership role." "I do not feel that this is the right role for me," "I would not feel comfortable or authentic in a leadership role."

4. How do these hesitations about assuming a leadership role manifest themselves at work? For example, do these hesitations lead to situations such as refraining from opportunities for leadership development (e.g., leadership training, stretching assignments) or avoiding your boss so that you don't need to come up with an answer to the offer?

Group 2. After the leader role occupancy (questions for those who are already in the leadership role)

1. Have there been times when you experienced or are currently occasionally experiencing hesitation in practicing your leadership role in your current organization?

If yes, what kind of hesitations?

If the interviewee mentions hesitations regarding decisions made about the job, provide additional explanation:

As a leader you need to make decisions, and you may feel hesitant about the accuracy of these decisions. This is not what I am currently interested in. What I am interested in is the hesitations about your fit to the leadership role.

Let me elaborate the difference between the two.

We can't always be sure if our decisions are right as we move towards our goals. Surrounding conditions have much to do with whether or not you can implement the decisions as planned. Market dynamics, team structure, and/or political dynamics can sometimes hinder the direct implementation of your decisions. At such times, we may experience hesitations about whether we do the right thing or should do it differently. Apart from hesitations in work-related decisions, are there any hesitations you experience in practicing your role of leadership?

Probe: For example, do you experience hesitations about your fit to the leadership role such as, "Am I successful in this role?," "Does this organization need a different leadership approach at its current stage?," "Am I the right person for this role?," "Considering the financial package I receive, is it worth continuing this stressful position?" or "As our organization undergoes significant transformation, should I continue or step down from a leadership role during this risky period?."

2. If yes, what kind of hesitations are experienced while practicing your role?

Probe: Can you please talk me through your thought process and tell me about anything and everything that has passed on your mind while practicing your role?

Probe: Please elaborate a bit more. For example, do you experience hesitations such as, "Am I successful in this role?," "Am I the right person for this role?," "Considering the financial package I received, is it worth pursuing this stressful role?" and/or "Do I want to undertake the extra responsibility that leadership role requires?"

3. Can you identify the underlying reasons behind your hesitation about practicing the leadership role? If yes, what are these reasons?

Probe: In other words, what triggers your hesitations?

For example, some individuals may hesitate to practice leadership roles due to reasons such as "I do not want to take the burden of responsibility of others," "the task requires extensive travel requirements, and I am concerned that this may negatively affect my work-life balance," and/or "I think I lack the competencies/confidence required to perform leadership effectively."

4. How do these hesitations about performing your leadership role manifest themselves at work? For example, do these hesitations lead to situations such as reservations about taking action, shirking responsibility, or slowness in making decisions?

APPENDIX 2 PROFILE CUES AND LEVELS

Profile cues and levels

Leadership competencies

High: She/he:

- …Has extensive skills in managing people when she/he is given a role to lead a team assignment
- …Is very good at managing small ad hoc task forces
- …Is very good at keeping others motivated through crisis times

Moderate: She/he:

- …Has moderate levels of skills in managing people when she/he is given a role to lead a team assignment
- …Is moderate at managing small ad hoc task forces
- …Is moderate at keeping others motivated through crisis times

Learning ability/agility

High: She/he:

- …Is very good at learning from experiences and translating those experiences into applicable knowledge
- …Has a high eagerness and ability to learn new skills to perform under unknown or challenging conditions
- …Scores high in pattern recognition abilities, counterfactual thinking skills, and feedback-seeking behaviours

Moderate: She/he:

- …Is moderate at learning from experiences and translating those experiences into applicable knowledge
- …Has a moderate level of eagerness and ability to learn new skills to perform under unknown or challenging conditions
- …Scores moderate in pattern recognition abilities, counterfactual thinking skills, and feedback-seeking behaviours

Reluctance to lead

High: She/He:

- …Sometimes feels encouraged and sometimes feels discouraged about accepting a formal leadership role
- …Is hesitant about seeing herself/himself as a leader
- …Feels doubtful that she/he is ready for a leadership role

Low: She/he:

- …Consistently feels encouraged about accepting a formal leadership role
- …Feels confident about seeing herself/himself as a leader
- …Feels certain that she/he is ready for a leadership role

A P P E N D I X 2   (Continued)

Profile cues and levels

Atypicality

   Female: Female emoji icon and she/her pronouns are utilized

   Male: Male emoji icon and he/him pronouns are utilized

APPENDIX 3

PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS AND AN EXAMPLE OF A CANDIDATE PROFILE

What is your role in this exercise?

Excelsior is a consulting company. You will be asked to play an HR partner role who makes critical decisions on **high-potentials (HiPo)** selection in that organization.

HiPo selection is part of the strategic talent management process by which organizations identify, develop, and retain their best employees who will be included in the future leadership pipeline.

Those HiPo employees **might not yet possess** what is needed in future leadership roles. Still, they show the potential to develop leadership skills over time successfully. HiPos will be provided with extra and specialized developmental opportunities to maximize their potential to get ready for future leadership roles.

Who will you evaluate?

You will shortly see profiles of several employees.

Employees in these profiles are approximately of similar age and have similar tenure.

The information presented to you will include the candidate's gender and the supervisor's assessments of the candidate's:

- **leadership competencies,**
- **learning ability/agility,**
- **reluctance vs. aspiration about leadership roles**
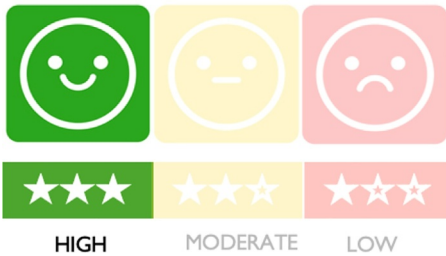
Are you being tricked?

You will see 18 profiles of employees. The profiles may look very similar to you and the task may feel repetitive and tricky.

Please note that **profiles are different,** and there is no trick. 😌

**Person1**

Learning Ability/Agility

Explanation of this rating—that is, high:

She:

- …Is very good at learning from experiences and translating those experiences into applicable knowledge.
- …Has a high eagerness and ability to learn new skills to perform under unknown or challenging conditions.
- …Scores high in pattern recognition abilities, counterfactual thinking skills, and feedback-seeking behaviours.

Leadership Competencies
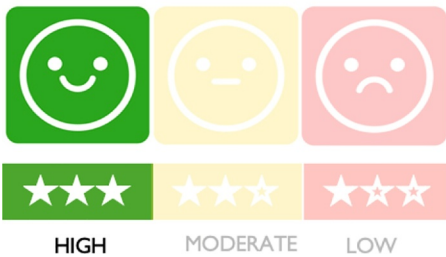
Explanation of this rating—that is, high:

She:

- …Has extensive skills in managing people when she is given a role to lead a team assignment.
- …Is very good at managing small ad hoc task forces.
- …Is very good at keeping others motivated through crisis times.

Reluctance to lead

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Explanation of this rating—that is, high:

She:

- ...Sometimes feels encouraged and sometimes feels discouraged about accepting a formal leadership role.
- ...Is hesitant about seeing herself as a leader.
- ...Feels doubtful that she is ready for a leadership role.