



# Indirect impact of high performers on the career advancement of their subordinates



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## ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a conceptual model depicting the “indirect” impact of high performers on their subordinates’ career advancement. Although certain characteristics demonstrated by high performers are not usually linked directly to either the development or career advancement of their subordinates; we propose a model to help bridge this research gap. Our conceptual framework allows us to understand the positive relation between characteristics of high performers and their subordinates’ career advancement. For this paper, those characteristics were classified into two categories – a) job competencies and b) networking abilities. Using Social Learning Theory, we propose that high performers provide modelling stimuli based on live experiences to their subordinates. To better understand the relationship between the characteristics of the high performer and their subordinates’ career advancement, we have explored a set of moderators and mediators pertaining to the subordinate. In addition to “indirect” impact, using past literature we have also articulated the “direct” impact on subordinates’ career advancement.

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## 1. Introduction

Most research on the manager–subordinate dyad has concentrated on the impact of managers on their subordinates’ career advancement due to voluntary effort on behalf of the managers (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002; Sloan, 2007; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). However, there is limited research on the positive effect of managers in the absence of this extra-role or voluntary behaviour on behalf of the managers. In this paper we aim to conceptualise the impact of high performers’ characteristics on their subordinates’ career advancement irrespective of the voluntary effort towards their subordinates’ careers. We term this impact as “indirect” impact because the subordinates’ careers are positively influenced due to performance-related characteristics of their high performing managers. “Direct” impact would entail voluntary, intentional and extra-role effort on behalf of the manager to support and aid their subordinates’ career advancement and has been studied by several researchers in the past. The aim of this paper is to conceptually and theoretically look at the possible effects of characteristics of high performers on their subordinates’ career advancement, irrespective of the “direct” impact.

In organisations that encompass manager–subordinate dyads in their organisational structure, managers are known to have a discernible influence on their subordinates. This influence could be relevant to the subordinates’ levels of job satisfaction, performance and in numerous cases even their career advancement. A multitude of studies have suggested that managers who are involved in the betterment of their subordinates’ careers, positively impact the latter’s career advancement (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002; Sloan, 2007; Wang et al., 2005). Most studies have attributed this positive relation to the voluntary and extra-role

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endeavour of the manager to make a contribution towards their subordinates' growth and advancement (Cashman, Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1976; Jiang & Klein, 1999; McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002). Most of them are oriented towards the intentional actions of the managers that get transcended into efforts towards the betterment of their subordinates' careers. The impact that managers can have on the subordinate's careers when the former decide to support and aid the latter's career goals is a "direct" impact. In the absence of this "direct" impact, managers are indicated to have either no relation and in certain cases have a negative relation with their subordinates' career advancement (Blau, 1964; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Gouldner, 1960; Lam, Peng, Wong, & Lau, 2015; Le Blanc & González-Romá, 2012; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997).

On the other hand, the stream of literature on high performers has consistently indicated that individuals who work with high performers have a better career trajectory than others (Aguinis & O'Boyle, 2014; Backhaus & Heiner, 2014; Groysberg, Lee & Nanda, 2008; Hacker, 2000; Ichniowski & Preston, 2014; Paulus & Dzindolet, 1993; Volmer & Sonnentag, 2011). Therefore, it would be critical to understand, the impact that high performers might have if they are also in a managerial position. Not many studies, either empirical or theoretical have looked at the probable impact that high performers might have on their subordinates. This probable "indirect" impact of high performers on their subordinates' career advancement has still not been given sufficient attention. The aim of this paper is to understand what could be the impact of the characteristics of high performers on their subordinates' career advancement, with or without being actively/"directly" involved in their subordinates' careers. Through extant literature, it can be discerned that high performers across functions and industries are usually appraised better on two major success inducing characteristics – their job competencies and networking abilities. These characteristics allow them to sustain their high performance (Baker, 2000; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Katz, Tushman, & Allen, 1995; Kram, 1985; Luthans, Rosenkrantz, & Hennessey, 1985; Michael & Yukl, 1993; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Orpen, 1995; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Singh, Vinnicombe, & James, 2006; Wolff & Moser, 2009).

We suggest that the two pertinent attributes mentioned above "indirectly" impact high performers' subordinates' career advancement. This paper proposes a conceptual model that explains some of the factors that moderate and mediate this "indirect" impact of job competencies and networking abilities of high performers. We have explained this positive impact that high performers have on their subordinates' career advancement principally using the Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1971; Weiss, 1977), with the support of Social Identification Theory (SIT) (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 2010). Prior literature on impact of managers on their subordinates' career advancement has been categorised under "direct" impact. To theoretically conceptualise "direct" impact of managers on their subordinates' careers we have looked at the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Erdogan, Kraimer, & Liden, 2004; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999) and supervisory support (Babin & Boles, 1996; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Jiang & Klein, 1999; O'Driscoll & Beehr, 1994).

The implications of the paper are significant, firstly, in the context of organisational structures where the managers may not be able to participate in their subordinates' career growth and development directly due to either the design of their work or the lack of any intention to get involved in their careers. Several industries are aspiring towards a leaner middle management (Bauer, 2008; Humble, Jackson, & Thomson, 1994). This increases the span of control of managers resulting in fewer opportunities for them to be proactively involved in the subordinates' career advancement. In addition, in organisations where virtual or geographically spread teams are common, it is possible that the investment and involvement of the managers in their subordinates' growth and development might be limited due to time constraints or limited face to face interactions. Additionally, it can be assumed that any interaction is usually related to the task at hand rather than to any personal feedback regarding subordinates' careers (Howell, Neufeld, & Avolio, 2005).

Our model of "indirect" impact is based on SLT. SLT propagates that learning happens via observation and depends on the perceptibility of characteristics of the role model they are observing, rather than only through direct reinforcement. Technical and functional competencies are more apparent and easier to emulate than behavioural or attitudinal competencies at the workplace (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Motwani, Frahm, & Kathawala, 1994). Therefore, this paper becomes more applicable in organisational roles where the managers' technical and functional competencies are essential to their success, rather than the contribution of the subordinates towards their targets. In such organisations managing careers of subordinates would be a voluntary and extra-role behaviour rather than a part of their job description. Secondly, not many researchers have delved into how the job competencies and networking abilities of managers impact their subordinates' career advancement and, therefore, we would be adding to this field of literature. Theoretically, we are suggesting an additive model that could explain a positive impact on the career advancement of subordinates, with or without the presence of LMX or supervisory support (Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008; Manz & Sims, 1980). Therefore, it becomes pertinent to investigate whether there is a possibility of high performers positively impacting their subordinates' career "indirectly" due to their inherent characteristics even when they are not directly attentive towards their growth and development. Since research suggests that (Boyatzis, 1982; Casciaro & Lobo, 2005; De Janasz, Sullivan, & Whiting, 2003; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Klemp & McClelland, 1986; McKenna, 2002) proficiency in job competencies and networking abilities are the mainstays of high performers, we will explain "indirect" impact using these two characteristics. We have suggested that these characteristics would lead to the enrichment of human and social capital enrichment of subordinates, which has been proposed to lead to their career advancement. However, all subordinates working under high performers will not have the same degree of "indirect" impact. Therefore we have introduced mediating and moderating factors that affect the variation in the "indirect" impact. These factors have been discussed in the section on "Framework integrating mediators and moderators affecting "indirect" impact". While elucidating the relationship between job competencies of high performers and their subordinates' career advancement, we have looked at mediators and moderators based on SLT. Similarly, the mediator and the moderator explaining the relationship between networking abilities of high performers and their subordinates' career advancement have been introduced on the basis of the literature on employee networking.

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