

PhD Studentships 2025/26

Centre name:

Centre for Leadership and Followership

The Centre for Leadership and Followership offers a vibrant, international community of scholars who seek to understand ‘who leads, and who follows’ in organisations as well as the intersection of this research with key organisational behaviour topics such as identity, trust, and social networks. An important aspect of our centre is collaboration and mentorship. We have events with renowned international speakers, and work in international collaborations—all for the purpose of advancing the study of leadership and followership. Find out more about our Centre on the [Business School website](#).

We currently propose four research topics for scholarship applications. Please get in touch with the potential supervisors named below before submitting your application.

Proposed Research Topic 1

Title of proposed research topic: Being trusted too much, too little, or just right? Causes and consequences of trust meta-accuracy in leader-follower dyads

Potential supervisors:

[Prof. Bart de Jong](#)

[Assoc Prof Janey Zheng](#)

Due to its dominant focus on the *level* of trust organizational members have in each other, extant research implicitly assumes that these members are *accurate* in their assessments of how trustworthy others are, and how much they are trusted by others (Dirks & De Jong, 2022; De Jong et al., in press). There is growing interest in and evidence, however, that parties' trust perceptions may not always be accurate, and that they instead are trusting or being trusted either too much or too little than is warranted (Campagna et al., 2020; Schilke & Huang, 2018). A few studies have been done on this topic, but there's a lot we still don't know about the causes and consequences of trust (meta-)accuracy. This PhD project will therefore aim to gain more insight by studying this topic in the context of leader-follower dyads. The project will theoretically draw on attribution and information processing theories, and will utilise polynomial regression (Edwards & Perry, 1993) and the Directional and Nondirectional Difference Framework (Bednall & Zhang, 2020) to empirically analyze the data. Dyadic, cross-sectional survey data for a pilot study have already been collected in the Netherlands and can serve as a springboard for the PhD project.

References

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Schilke, O., & Huang, L. (2018). Worthy of swift trust? How brief interpersonal contact affects trust accuracy. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(11), 1181–1197.

Proposed Research Topic 2

Title of proposed research topic: Having mixed feelings about your workplace? Causes and consequences of trust ambivalence in organisations.

Potential supervisors:

[Prof. Bart de Jong](#)

[Assoc Prof Janey Zheng](#)

While extant research implicitly assumes that individuals' (dis)trust in others is a single, coherent psychological state of (negative) positive expectations, some scholars have argued that it is possible for people to experience both trust and distrust simultaneously (Lewicki et al., 1998). This phenomenon is referred to as trust ambivalence. There has been a growing interest in and evidence of emotional and relational ambivalence within the Organizational Sciences more broadly (Rothman et al., 2017; Methot et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2019), but examinations specifically focusing on ambivalence with respect to trust have been lacking. This PhD project will therefore aim to gain more insight into this topic. The project will theoretically draw on insights from the broader ambivalence literature, will utilise polynomial regression (Edwards & Perry, 1993) and the Directional and Nondirectional Difference Framework (Bednall & Zhang, 2020) to empirically analyse its causes and consequences, and will involve studies at both the between-person and within-person (e.g., daily fluctuations) level of analysis. Longitudinal survey data for a pilot study have already been collected in Ireland. Through our Centre's connections with industry, data collection in a similar organizational context within the UK is likely possible.

References

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Lee, A., Thomas, G., Martin, R., & Guillaume, Y. (2019). Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Ambivalence and Task Performance: The Cross-Domain Buffering Role of Social Support. *Journal of Management*, 45(5), 1927-1957.

Lewicki, R. J., McAllister, D. J., & Bies, R. J. (1998). Trust and distrust: New relationships and realities. *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 438-458.

Methot, J. R., Melwani, S., & Rothman, N. B. (2017). The space between us: A social-functional emotions view of ambivalent and indifferent workplace relationships. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1789–1819.

Rothman, N. B., Pratt, M. G., Rees, L., & Vogus, T. J. (2017). Understanding the dual nature of ambivalence: Why and when ambivalence leads to good and bad outcomes. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(1), 33–72.

Proposed Research Topic 3

Title of proposed research topic: Increasing inclusiveness & reducing bias at work

Potential supervisors:

Professor Maria Kakarika, [LinkedIn Profile](#)

In organizations, managers and HR professionals aim to increase inclusiveness and reduce bias. However, they often need to make quick, almost on impulse, judgments of others. Physical and health-related factors may influence such workplace judgments. For example, tattooed individuals are stigmatized (e.g., Dickson et al., 2014). They are seen as thoughtless and irresponsible (Hawkes et al., 2004), as lower-class individuals (Adams, 2009), and as less competent and warm (Henle et al., 2021), while their hireability is often reduced (Timming et al., 2017). Further, the objectification literature shows that sexualized women are objectified, i.e., seen as ‘objects’ and perceived as lacking competence and warmth (Guillen et al., 2023). Other unique characteristics of leaders such as fitness and menopause may also influence workplace judgements and behaviors (Grandey et al., 2020). Despite these important insights, research on the role these characteristics play in social perceptions in the workplace is scarce

This project aims to fill these gaps and explore the effects of physical and health-related factors in relation to workplace perceptions, personnel decisions, unconventional behaviors, leadership behaviours, high-status jobs, and male vs. female evaluators. The project requires quantitative and experimental research methods .

References

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Guillen, L., Kakarika, M. & Heflick, N (2023) Sexualize One, Objectify All? The Sexual Objectification Spillover Effect. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2758>

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Timming, A.R., Nickson, D., Re, D., & Perrett, D. (2017). What do you think of my ink? Assessing the effects of body art on employment chances. *Human Resource Management*, 56(1): 133–149.

Proposed Research Topic 4

Title of proposed research topic:

Implicit Leadership Theories, leader identity development, and leader identification

Potential supervisors:

[Professor Olga Epitropaki](#)

[Dr Anders Friis Marstand](#)

This topic addresses the question of how leadership prototypes and Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs) influence individuals' leader identity development and individuals' identification with their leader (Lord et al., 2020). Special emphasis is placed on the intrapersonal match of a person's ILTs with self-perceptions of leadership in actual organizational settings ('self-to-prototype' and 'self-to exemplar' comparisons) and implications for identity strength, self-efficacy, and leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, the topic aims to investigate the role of interpersonal match between a person's ILTs and their perceptions of their leader ('other-to-prototype' and 'other-to exemplar' comparisons) for identification with their leader. The project requires experimental and/or quantitative field studies with longitudinal data collection.

References

Lord, R.G., Epitropaki, O., Foti, R.J. & Keller Hansbrough, T. (2020). Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories and Dynamic Processing of Leadership Information. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 7(1), 49–74.

Proposed Research Topic 5

Title of proposed research topic: Leader or coworker work-family support? A behavioral perspective on how organizations can best support employee work-family balance

Potential supervisors:

[Professor Jakob Stollberger](#)

[Associate Professor Yingli Deng](#)

Recent years have seen a steep increase in employees working from home at least some days of the week (Bloom et al., 2024). As a result, management scholars increasingly realize that what happens at home exerts substantial influence on the quality and quantity of employees' work (Allen & French, 2023; Hu et al., 2023), focusing research attention on how organizations can best support their employees' work-family balance (Braun & Nieberle, 2017; Erdogan et al., 2022; Las Heras et al., 2017). Although some studies suggested that both leaders and coworkers can be sources of work-

family support (Crain & Stevens, 2018; Las Heras et al., 2017; McMullan et al., 2018), more recent research highlighted that, in some situations, coworker support is preferable over leader support (Stollberger et al., 2022). Questions a PhD research proposal will address include, but are not limited to: 1) when are supervisors or coworkers the better work-family support provider in response to employee work-family needs? 2) What specific verbal and / or nonverbal behaviors do supervisors and coworkers display that are perceived as work-family supportive? The proposal will align with the recent paradigm shift in leadership research (Banks et al., 2021; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Hemshorn de Sanchez et al., 2022; Stollberger et al., 2024).

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