

# You can't always get what you want? Leadership expectations of intrapreneurs

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the leadership expectations of young employees in intrapreneurial jobs.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Group interviews were conducted with 42 young intrapreneurs and 13 leaders of a Dutch ICT consultancy firm. Data were coded and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software.

**Findings** – The authors find ten different expectations on leadership. Young intrapreneurs expect to have a personal connection, sufficient feedback, ample freedom, and trust, clear directions when asked and a leader who is a role model.

**Research limitations/implications** – This qualitative study was conducted in one organization. It however sheds a first light on expectations of employees with intrapreneurial job requirements.

**Practical implications** – In order to motivate and guide young intrapreneurs, direct supervisors should aim not to breach expectations. By getting to know their employees on a personal basis, taking the time to coach them in their career goals, showing intrapreneurship themselves, focusing on an open relationship, and providing a challenging and dynamic environment, direct supervisors build a strong and cooperative relationship.

**Originality/value** – This paper is one of the first to look at the relationship between direct supervisors and intrapreneurial employees. Doing so, it also expands the current knowledge of Implicit Leadership Theory by exploring expectations of young intrapreneurs and adds to the full-range leadership theory by showing the importance of investigating its subdimensions.

**Keywords** Transformational leadership, Intrapreneurship, Implicit Leadership Theory, Leadership expectations, Young employees

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

You cannot expect your employees to exceed the expectations of your customers if you do not exceed your employees' expectations of management Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks.

In today's dynamic context, organizations seek new ways of gaining a competitive advantage. Traditionally top management teams were the drivers of renewal, however more and more emphasis is put on intrapreneurial individuals who renew and innovate from the bottom up (De Jong *et al.*, 2015). Intrapreneurship is even claimed to be part of many employees' job descriptions (Accenture, 2015). Young people are more willing to take the risks that are connected to intrapreneurship (Kacperczyk, 2012) and they find it easier to depart from the customary (Goll *et al.*, 2008). Accordingly, companies attract young and dynamic employees to fill intrapreneurial jobs. However, intrapreneurship requires a specific organizational support system (Ireland *et al.*, 2006). And particularly young employees might not live up to the challenge without proper support and encouragement, and accordingly leave the organization (Kacperczyk, 2012).

Prior research has indeed shown the benefits of a broader supportive intrapreneurship culture (e.g. Kuratko *et al.*, 1990). More specifically, management support is seen as one of the most important drivers for intrapreneurship (Elenkov and Manev, 2005). For example,

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the willingness of top management to facilitate and support (Hornsby *et al.*, 2009) and their commitment and style (MacMillan, 1986) is shown to enable intrapreneurship in employees. Direct supervisors usually have a stronger impact on employee behavior than top management (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013). However, in intrapreneurship research, direct supervisors have received little attention (Deprez, 2017). Therefore, it is unsure how these leaders can best support intrapreneurship in their employees. In this research, we thus investigate the expectations toward leadership by young employees in intrapreneurial jobs.

Expectations toward leaders have received ample attention in literature. A relevant framework in this respect is offered by Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT). ILT focuses on the unspoken expectations employees have about their leaders (Eden and Leviatan, 1975). Fulfilled expectations lead to positive outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, in-role, and extra-role performance (Suazo *et al.*, 2008). Unfulfilled or breached expectations, on the other hand, negatively impact job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Bal *et al.*, 2010). People from different cultural backgrounds (Sy, 2010) and job titles (Smothers *et al.*, 2011) appear to have different expectations and thus require different things from their leaders to fulfill these expectations. Today little is known about the specific needs and expectations of young employees in intrapreneurial jobs. Therefore, in order to be able to fulfill these employees' expectations, a first important step is investigating these needs and expectations.

Using a qualitative research design, we performed group interviews with 56 individuals within a large Dutch IT consultancy organization. This organization has a focus on intrapreneurship, as they view employees' renewal initiative as key to their success. As such, intrapreneurship is even said to be part of their job descriptions. Furthermore, they exclusively select young, highly educated, and intrapreneurial individuals for their prestigious traineeship, thus providing us with an opportunity to investigate our research question. This paper contributes to the previous literature in two ways. First, it expands the knowledge on how to manage young talent in intrapreneurial jobs. As such, it may aid (HR) managers to increase the intrapreneurship in their organization. Second, this research adds to the expanding knowledge on leader expectations. More specifically, it highlights the ILTs of young employees in intrapreneurial jobs. Last, we add to the current knowledge on transformational leadership, by discussing how focusing on its different subdimensions could be necessary in different contexts.

## Theoretical framework

### ILT

This research focuses on the leadership expectations of young employees in intrapreneurial jobs. Expectations about leaders stem from the conceptualization of an ideal leader (Ehrhart, 2012). According to Lord *et al.* (1984), each person has a cognitive representation of a prototypical leader, including ideal characteristics and abilities. This representation, termed ILT, is activated when an employee interacts with a leader and is shaped by this individual's perceptions and expectations (Lord and Maher, 1991; Offermann *et al.*, 1994). When encountering leaders, employees automatically compare them to this prototype, to judge their effectiveness (Probert and James, 2011). When leaders live up to these expectations, it positively impacts affective commitment, mental health, and work engagement (Parzefall and Hakanen, 2010).

One of the most widely used ILT operationalizations is based on the work of Offermann *et al.* (1994) and consists of eight dimensions: six prototypic, namely sensitivity, dedication, charisma, attractiveness, intelligence, and strength, and two antiprototypic, namely tyranny and masculinity. These dimensions have been successfully found in both student and organizational settings (Epitropaki and Martin, 2004). However, their relative relevance in contexts could change as leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon that is time, place,

and person specific (Osborn *et al.*, 2002). Thus, more and more researchers have investigated ILTs in specific contexts. Most attention has been given to different cultural contexts. For example, the GLOBE project (Chokar *et al.*, 2013; House *et al.*, 2002) showed substantial differences in expectations toward leaders, however also consistent patterns across societal cultures. Furthermore, different organizational and functional contexts, e.g. private and public universities (Smothers *et al.*, 2011), salesmen and engineers (Sy *et al.*, 2010), and expatriate employees (Stock and Genisyürek, 2012) also demonstrate different leader expectations.

#### *Intrapreneurial job and behavior*

Today, the business world glorifies the intrapreneurial spirit of employees. Intrapreneurship, or entrepreneurship within existing organizations (Antoncic and Hisrich, 2003), is even claimed to be present in up to 75 percent of companies (Accenture, 2015). This can entail intrapreneurial projects for a selected number of employees (e.g. Virgin Group – Cook, 2015), allowing sufficient time for experimentation (e.g. Google – Block, 2015), or requiring employees to continuously innovate and improve existing products and services as part of their job description (e.g. Microsoft – Gates, 1990; and Amazon – Hof, 2004). As a whole, these jobs are characterized by autonomy, task variety, and external contacts (Stam *et al.*, 2012). Intrapreneurial behaviors are a combination of proactive, innovative, and risk-taking behaviors (De Jong *et al.*, 2015) used to create more value than anticipated with the resources they have at hand (Stevenson and Jarillo, 2007). Including these behaviors as part of a job description improves their favorable evaluation (Ashford *et al.*, 1998), and can lower the threshold for individuals who are less inclined to act in this way (Ireland *et al.*, 2009).

Organizations, especially in industries such as finance, retail, and IT, are inclined to attract young employees when they want to increase or re-boost intrapreneurship (Posthuma and Campion, 2008). Given their limited experience, young employees are presumed to see the organizational context with “new eyes,” and as such spot opportunities where others do less so. According to some authors, younger individuals are less rigid and more risk oriented (Wiersema and Bantel, 1992), and have less commitment to the status quo (Goll *et al.*, 2008). Young talents are therefore recruited with the expectation to take initiatives for renewal. As organizations often rely on young employees to fill in these intrapreneurial jobs, we chose to investigate their leadership expectations in this research.

#### *Leadership expectations of employees in intrapreneurial jobs*

While certain leadership styles have been found to impact perceptions of job characteristics (for a review, see Parker *et al.*, 2017), little is known about the leadership styles that are best suited for intrapreneurial jobs. Furthermore, current research on team leaders of intrapreneurial employees has been scarce. The few studies that have been conducted, mainly focus on facilitating the efficiency of the intrapreneurial process and disregard personal differences (Deprez, 2017). However, previous research does reveal a higher need for achievement and autonomy (Rauch and Frese, 2007), focus on independence and flexibility (Major *et al.*, 2006), and enjoy turbulence (Crant, 2000) for intrapreneurs. All aspects that could be particularly difficult to manage by leaders.

Looking at age-related expectations, previous research yields mixed results. For example, while some young employees desire personal attention (Chen and Choi, 2008) and support from supervisors (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007), others expect freedom (Jurkiewicz, 2000). These differences could thus be related to personality, rather than to mere age (Deprez *et al.*, 2015). Expectations form and develop throughout the life span (Rousseau, 2001). Young employees have idealized expectations (Vos *et al.*, 2003). Older employees’ expectations are built on experience and thus resistant to new impressions (Rousseau, 2001). Investigating young intrapreneurs should thus provide an “untainted” or “pure” view of intrapreneurs’ expectations. In general, it is very challenging to fulfill employees’ expectations (Low and Bordia, 2011).

The nature of young employees in these intrapreneurial jobs could add even more to this. Concluding, our research question is as follows:

*RQ1.* What do young employees in intrapreneurial jobs expect from their leaders?

Up to date, to the best of our knowledge, only two studies investigated the effect between leadership styles and employees' intrapreneurial behaviors: one on transformational leadership (Moriano *et al.*, 2011) and one on authentic leadership (Valsania *et al.*, 2016). It's not surprising that one of the few studies investigating this relation focused on transformational leadership, as this component of "full-range leadership theory" proposed by Avolio *et al.* (1999) still is one of the most studied leadership styles (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). And even though many have found that transformational leadership positively impacts innovative behavior, a behavior closely related to intrapreneurship (e.g. Nederveen Pieterse *et al.*, 2009; Peterson *et al.*, 2009), others find mixed results. For example, a meta-analysis by Rosing *et al.* (2011) discusses how transformational leadership yields different results depending on the phase of the innovative process (e.g. meta-analysis by Rosing *et al.*, 2011). However, most research aggregates the four subsaspects of transformational leadership (idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation) into an aggregated scale. This lack of differentiation could also be the cause of these differing results as there are quite some differences in the perceptions of these different subsaspects (Verschueren, 2014). Furthermore, the other two components of the full-range leadership theory, i.e. transactional and passive-avoidant leadership received far less attention related to innovation (Rosing *et al.*, 2011), and they are also usually aggregated. The different subsaspects of full-range leadership theory could thus prove an interesting framework while investigating the expectations of employees in intrapreneurial jobs. This leads to a second research question:

*RQ2.* Which aspects of the full-range leadership theory do young employees in intrapreneurial expect most from their leaders?

## Research site and methods

### *The IT company[1]*

For this study, we wanted to select an organization with intrapreneurial jobs. Consultancy is generally considered a very competitive sector, where employees work independently on projects. We chose a Dutch IT consultancy company that is known for its innovative and efficient approach. This company is part of a global IT market leader. Worldwide, they pride themselves in finding innovative solutions that fit the needs of each specific customer demand. Intrapreneurship is greatly emphasized in The IT Company. The job description of young consultants consists of the following tasks: developing new products, or adjusting existing ones to best fit the customers' needs (and not specifically their initial request); managing their own project to create the most value for the resources they get; and allowing room for growth in new software, while improving existing one. Their job description thus requires them to seek for ways to create the most value possible with the resources at hand (proactive), creating or adapting products (innovative), and really fulfill a customer's need, risking resources and reputation when this need is not fully compatible with the customer's initial requests (risk). Furthermore, employees receive high flexibility and autonomy in their jobs and job content is tailored to personal needs, thus structurally enabling intrapreneurship. Trainees mostly work independently on projects and as such their performance is easy to track. Bottom-up-driven improvements are highly valued and evaluated as high performance.

### *Sample and procedure*

Prior to these interviews, moderators and observers were briefed on their role as the facilitator, the scope of the research, and the context of the company. In order to ensure maximum

similarities between these groups, moderators also received a standardized introduction text and structured interview questions prior to these group interviews. Moderators ensured that all participants were able to express their opinions and asked additional questions to get deeper insights into the topics. The order of questions varied in each subgroup in order to prevent sequence effects. Furthermore, observers focused on group dynamics, kept track of time, audiotaped, and transcribed the interviews for further analyses.

In total, we interviewed 56 individuals: 42 employees in intrapreneurial jobs (in six groups) and 14 of their direct supervisors (in two groups). These group interviews were conducted simultaneously in separate rooms. Each group interview lasted about 40 minutes (ranging from 36 to 45 minutes), combining into a total of 5 hours and 22 minutes of recorded materials. The interviews with the intrapreneurial employees were used to provide answers for our research questions. The group discussions with the direct supervisors, on the other hand, were used to describe the company context and to ensure the intrapreneurial nature of the job descriptions.

### Data analysis

The audiotapes were transcribed per verbatim by the researchers. The transcribed texts were coded by assigning codes to text segments that represent key information, tentatively grouping similar codes, and later aggregating cluster concepts. Due to the limited previous empirical research related to our research questions, the analyses for our first research question were conducted following the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). This entails continuous interaction between data collection and concepts to develop theory. As such, analyses were not a linear, but an iterative process. Throughout the coding process, the researchers systematically reviewed materials, to adjust tentative concepts and variables. Where there was incongruence, we discussed until consensus. To facilitate the analysis, the researchers used qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo 11). Observer transcripts provided additional information used to discard any negative process effects. In order to improve the readability and clarity of our results section, we chose to use the word “intrapreneur” in discussing our findings, to denote employees in intrapreneurial jobs.

For our second research question, instead of developing a codebook based on the principles of grounded theory, we used the subaspects of the full-range leadership theory as theoretical concepts. The coding process was similar as for the previous research question. We used the same transcribed text, and coded it using the new codebook. During the coding process, the research team systematically discussed the quotes that could be interpreted in different ways and debated until consensus arose on the coding. Exemplary quotes and definitions for all full-range leadership-related concepts can be found in Table II, in the results section below.

## Results

### *Expectations of young employees in intrapreneurial jobs*

The summarized results for our first research question are represented in Table I, the five most prevalent categories will be discussed in greater detail in the next paragraph.

#### 1. Have personal attention and connection:

I want my leader to show genuine interest in me. I find it impossible to be just a number in the crowd.  
I want him to get to know me on a personal level. To ask how I'm doing on and outside the job.

Our interviewees often discussed despising being a number. They require a personal connection with their leader and colleagues. They share personal information and both work-and non-work-related stories. Next to more formal interaction, they find it very important that their leader stops by with a cup of coffee, invites them for drinks after work,

Content clusters	Description	Exemplary quote	Number of respondents
(1) Have personal attention and connection	Build a personal, informal relationship. Provide the possibility of personal discussions and interactions	I need a genuine interest from my manager. That she's not just connecting when she expects some bumps on the road, but that she takes an interest in me, as a person	22 (52%)
(2) Provide feedback	Receiving both positive and negative feedback from a manager	I want my manager to tell me what I need to further develop and how. Initiative for this contact should be a two way street, it shouldn't be too fixed	20 (48%)
(3) Give freedom and trust	Allow and entrust trainees with content and process autonomy	I enjoy working with my manager. I have the freedom to say which direction I want to go. I determine my own planning. My manager tells me he sees I'm working hard and that he trusts my judgement. That keeps me going	17 (40%)
(4) Provide clear directions when asked	Help trainees to make decisions and facilitate challenging interactions when asked	It's important to know the boundary conditions and limits of my projects and that I have the freedom to operate within these. But when in doubt, my manager should help me to bite the bullet	13 (31%)
(5) Be a role model	Encourage intrapreneurial behavior through actions, words or both	When I look at my manager, I see someone who has accomplished a lot. Her career is a real success story, and I aim to follow in her footsteps	12 (29%)
(6) Challenge to grow	Provide challenges in the current job that ensure personal growth and fit future career aspirations	I ask my managers to keep me in the loop on professional opportunities within the company. I want to know if and when they're thinking about me, what they see as my professional next steps and how my current and next projects fit this developmental path	10 (24%)
(7) Show appreciation	Verbally or physically show appreciation (especially when tasks are tedious)	I would prefer that my manager shows me his appreciation. A bottle of wine, some flowers, a giftcard. Heck, even a pat on the back would be a boost for me	9 (21%)
(8) Provide transparent information	Proactively share information on the company context and opportunities	I currently miss an overview of opportunities. When I see colleagues getting specific projects that I would have wanted, I get no explanation as to why I wasn't asked. I wasn't even aware that those projects existed. More transparency would be nice	6 (14%)
(9) Give expert advice	Provide insight into own past learning experiences and give personal expert opinion	I enjoy asking a second opinion from my manager. He's always truthful with me and he openly discusses his take on things without binding me to his suggestions	3 (7%)
(10) Add to informal and decentralized context	Promote informal communication with self and other managers	The context here is very informal. I appreciate it that my manager allows me to contact partners with questions, without him thinking that I go "over his head")	3 (7%)

**Table I.**  
Summary of results

or has short conversations with them when they cross each other in the hallway. They want to be heard when they have problems. For example, one trainee indicated his leader came up to him and asked how he was doing when he was looking tired. Even though it was a personal problem, his leader took the time to listen and help him where possible. This personal contact also makes it easier for our interviewees to be more vulnerable toward their leader (e.g. when receiving developmental feedback).

2. Provide feedback:

Like everyone, I have some major blind spots. To me it's very important that my leader discusses these with me. It's the only way I can learn and grow. Because my leader gives me the feeling that I'm doing well, I am especially interested in discussing my weaknesses. It helps me to keep becoming better in my job.

In general, our interviewees indicate a strong need to learn and to grow. Receiving both positive and negative feedback is a main source of energy for them. However, our interviewees generally agree that their need for both types of feedback changed throughout their employment. In the first couple of months of their employment, they felt unsure about themselves. As such, they felt a strong need for positive feedback in that stage. Once they felt they were doing a good job, they found it easier to show vulnerability toward their leader and also discuss their "points of development." Even more so, after a couple of positive feedback conversations, our interviewees felt they needed this "negative" feedback because it was the only way for them to grow. The young intrapreneurs also felt strongly that feedback should not be limited to the "official" moments, but was part of the day-to-day interaction with their leader.

3. Give freedom and trust:

I do not want to be managed. I want to find my own way and take risks how I see fit. I want to define how I get appraised. My leader trusts me and acknowledges that this is the best way to increase my productivity.

Our interviewees mention a high level of freedom and autonomy as a major driver for and the most important way to show intrapreneurship. They prefer working for leaders who allow scheduling their time, pursuing their interests, and making decisions. Thus, they prefer to take full ownership, some even without consulting their leader at all. These intrapreneurs enjoy finding their own way and appreciate that they are allowed to fail and take risks as long as they learn from it. They attribute their freedom to trust and appreciation from their leader.

Despite the general flexibility, some projects require more repetitive or less interesting tasks. In this case, they are not able to get freedom and autonomy. Our interviewees point out that in such cases, leader openness and sincerity about their suboptimal conditions buffers the negative effects of low autonomy. Furthermore, they indicate the positive buffering effect of appreciative messages and promised autonomy in future assignments.

4. Provide clear directions when asked:

I'm very driven to do my job well. I want to go above and beyond. However, in my enthusiasm, I sometimes do not estimate correct timings or I get lost in too many new ideas and possibilities. I'm lucky to have a leader who gives me all the freedom I desire, but also guides me and helps me make decisions when I need her to.

Next to absolute freedom, some interviewees require three types of directions. First, they need a leader to "protect them against themselves." For example, when they have too many ideas and tend to get carried away, a leader is the ideal person that facilitates their process, without making them feel controlled. Second, physically working in clients' offices, interviewees experience conflicts. For example, when multiple client contacts all insist on different, sometimes contradictory tasks, leaders help facilitate a solution and improve their

working conditions. Last, leaders set broad general guidelines, deadlines, and processes which allow young professionals to focus less on the administrative aspects and to focus their creativity on content.

Thus, while intrapreneurs prefer autonomy and freedom, this works best within certain boundaries. Leaders facilitate this and to provide clear directions, but only when asked.

5. Be an inspirational role model:

My leader is very flexible. If I contact him, he's always able to help me within 24 hours, regardless of his schedule. This is perfect as sometimes I get stuck and instantly need new input.

Leaders set a good example. Our interviewees describe them as being open to input, responsive to feedback, independent, creative, proactive, and flexible. While for most interviewees, the positive effect of role modeling was rather implicit, some also indicated it more explicitly. Three interviewees, for example, stated that they mirror the behaviors of their leader. Next to the behavioral aspect, leaders also verbally encourage intrapreneurship. In coaching, young professionals are inspired to take even more initiative. Leaders reward intrapreneurship implicitly (e.g. by investing more in coaching and career management of young professionals who show these behaviors) as well as explicitly (e.g. providing additional training and verbal praise). While most young professionals give examples of either behavioral or verbal role modeling, modeling both (i.e. when they show behavioral integrity) is most beneficial.

*Expectations of the full-range leadership theory*

For our second research question, we conducted additional analyses, based on the full-range leadership theory. The summarized results for this research question are represented in Table II. The results will be discussed in greater detail in the paragraph below.

When looking at the results in Table II, a few trends arise. First, it becomes apparent that mainly transformational leadership is expected from leaders. This seems congruent with the overall interest in transformational leadership when it comes to stimulating initiative-seeking behaviors. However, while transactional and passive-avoidant leadership are generally regarded less positive, we did notice that our respondents do mention these as expectations, be it less than the transformational leadership.

Second, looking at the subaspects of the full-range leadership theory, all of our respondents generally expect a leader to show individual consideration. More specifically, many respondents discuss how they want a coach, someone to aid them in their development. "A minimum requirement for leaders is that they actually take an interest in me. That they take the time to meet up, get to know me and my career goals, and help me grow." In general, as also mentioned in the previous section, the focus on growth and development is very prevalent with our interviewees. They feel that coaching them in this regard is one of the main responsibilities of their leader. "If my leader only had time for one task, it would be to coach me. I do not need an expert, I'll get knowledge elsewhere. I need someone to track my development, keep me on my path and work with me towards the future."

Third, next to the overall focus on individual consideration, about one-third of the interviewees also expect idealized influence from their leaders. They often mentioned the ideal attributes and norms in a leader; more specifically: being an honest, open, flexible, proactive, and powerful. Our respondents often referred to the specific role modeling behaviors in this regard, which open the way for them to also be the best they can be. "I like it when my supervisor is not afraid to be vulnerable and share his own weaknesses. It helps me to open up myself too." About equal attention was put on contingent rewards. Those who did discuss the latter did so because they felt that while their performance should be easy to track, today in their organization, leaders often do not actually do so. "All too often our appraisal talks are as such: I know you did a lot of hard work but I cannot find any proof in your file, thus I cannot



**Table II.**  
Summary of results  
for the second  
research question

Content clusters	Description	Exemplary quote	Number of Respondents
<i>Transformational leadership</i>			
(1) Idealized influence	Socialized charisma of the leader (being perceived as confident, powerful, and focusing on ideals and ethics). Actions centered on values, beliefs, and a sense of mission	My ideal leader is open and transparent. Honest. Not make meaningless promises they can't keep. Being a role model themselves	14 (33%)
(2) Individual consideration	Advising, supporting, and paying attention to the individual needs of followers, allowing them to develop and self-actualize	I want my leader to know me and my work. To have a genuine interest in me. To search for new projects or promotions that would best suit my developmental process	29 (69%)
(3) Inspirational motivation	Energizing followers by viewing the future with optimism, ambitious goals, and communicating that this vision is achievable	I want someone who I can look up to. Who inspires and motivates me	1 (2%)
(4) Intellectual stimulation	Appeal to followers' sense of logic and analysis by challenging to think creatively and find solutions to difficult problems	I want to be stimulated. Someone I can brainstorm me. Who can trigger me to solve complex problems. Who sets the bar a bit higher every time	5 (12%)
<i>Transactional leadership</i>			
(1) Contingent reward	Clarifying role and task requirements and providing material or psychological rewards contingent on fulfillment of contractual obligations	I need my manager to show appreciation. It doesn't even have to be a bonus, a bottle of wine would be great too	10 (24%)
(2) Management by exception (active)	Active vigilance of a leader whose goal is to ensure that standards are met	I want my manager to tell me how to do my job. To teach me to be efficient and make sure I'm good at what I do	4 (10%)
<i>Passive/avoidant leadership</i>			
(1) Management by exception (passive)	Leaders only intervene after noncompliance has occurred or when mistakes have already happened	Especially when I just started, I wanted a manager who watched me and how made sure to interfere when I did something wrong	3 (7%)
(2) Laissez-faire	Absence of a transaction or interaction of sorts with respect to leadership	I prefer to have my freedom. Just leave me be. If I really need a supervisor, I will let you know, but until then, I'd rather just do things on my own	4 (10%)

appraise you. Ideally, I want to be valued for all the hard work I actually do. Appraisals should be transparent.” Even though it is likely that other intrapreneurs also feel that there performance is invisible, it is possible that in this specific instance we have an overrepresentation of the importance of focusing on contingent rewards due to some company specific frustrations in our interviewees.

Last, some aspects of the full-range leadership theory hardly received any attention at all. Virtually no interviewees mention inspirational motivation, very little discuss the subdimensions of management by exception. This could indicate that for employees working in intrapreneurial jobs, not all aspects of the full-range leadership theory are worth putting effort in as a leader. Thus, while previous research has emphasized the importance

of being a transformational leader, in our case inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation could be irrelevant for employees in intrapreneurial jobs. More specifically, our respondents mostly described that their job hold sufficient challenge or they seek this challenges more by themselves: “I do not want any manager to hold my hand and give me jobs. I’ll go out and seek interesting things to do by myself. My boss should not be responsible for me being able to learn in my job.”

## Discussion

The present study contributes to the literature on ILT by examining the leader expectations of 42 young employees working in intrapreneurial jobs in an IT consulting company. This research wanted to gain insight into how they want to be managed and what they expect from their leaders as fulfilling these expectations has an important impact on employee behavior and wellbeing. We analyzed our data first using the grounded theory framework, and using the full-range leadership theory.

### *Theoretical contributions*

This research adds to the current research knowledge in three ways. First, we add to the existent knowledge on ILT. More specifically, while there has been some research on implicit leader theories for different job types (e.g. salesmen and engineers (Sy *et al.*, 2010) and university workers (Smothers *et al.*, 2011)), little to nothing was known about the expectations of employees in intrapreneurial jobs. Thus, in this research, we investigated leadership expectations in a setting that was not previously the focus of such research. Doing so, we noticed that mainly the sensitivity dimension of the original ILT model, which refers to a compassionate, understanding, warm and helpful leader, and charisma, which refers to a leaders as an enthusiastic, dynamic, and inspiring role model (Offermann *et al.*, 1994), were deemed important for intrapreneurs. The other ILT dimensions, such as dedication, attractiveness, intelligence, and strength, received substantial less attention. While some researchers found similar ILTs over different employee groups (Epitropaki and Martin, 2004), our research does seems to show the importance of the context specific investigation of ILTs.

Second, doing so, we also add to the scarce current knowledge on the connection between intrapreneurship and leadership. In this study, we found evidence for some core aspects of intrapreneurs that is congruent with the previous research (a preference for autonomy and freedom, and having a great need to develop themselves and learn new skills and competences; Crant, 2000). However, this view can be nuanced as a result of our research findings. For example, while intrapreneurs do prefer challenge, employees in intrapreneurial jobs seem to find sufficient challenge in their tasks. The role of the leader should thus not be to add additionally to this, but rather to keep a long-time career perspective in mind.

Last, we also add to the existent knowledge on the full-range leadership theory. More specifically, we investigated the different expectations that are related to the different subaspects of this theory. Doing so, we showed that while most research on full-range leadership theory aggregates its subaspects. More specifically, transformational leadership scholars generally aggregate idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation into the overarching transformational leadership scale. Similarly, transactional and passive-avoidant leadership scholars generally do not mention subaspects (i.e. contingent reward and management by exception (active) for the former, and management by exception (passive) and laissez-faire for the latter). However, our research demonstrates that not all subaspects are deemed equally important to our interviewees. We thus find that there is actually real value in looking at the differences within these aggregated scales, more specifically focusing on these subaspects. Following the different emphasis on these subaspects, it could be interesting for other researchers to

also further differentiate between these subscales instead of investigating transformational leadership as a whole. Also, leaders only have limited amount of energy and time to invest in their employees. Supervisors of employees in intrapreneurial jobs should focus on individual consideration, before anything else. Informal interpersonal contact is important for young intrapreneurs, as they especially dislike hierarchies and bureaucracies (Sørensen, 2007). However, the idealized preferences of these young intrapreneurs might also be subject to other age effects. For example, for employees in early career stages, it is normal to feel unsure and need extra encouragement (Busch *et al.*, 2008) and to want to grow (Wong *et al.*, 2008). There might thus be an overestimation of some effects, due to age.

#### *Limitations and future research*

Our study is not without limitations. Although leadership perceptions of intrapreneurs could be logically generalizable to other industries, our sample is limited to an IT consulting company. Therefore, it would be interesting to replicate this study in different intrapreneurial contexts, such as, for example-tail or other service companies. Also, we opted to investigate young intrapreneurs. We expected to find a “purer view” of intrapreneurial expectations, as their young age makes expectations untainted by experience and compromise. However, it is unsure if these expectations (e.g. the high need for feedback) are generalizable for older intrapreneurial individuals as well, or whether they are subject to the above mentioned age effects.

Additionally, while some expectations were discussed very often (e.g. the need for feedback and freedom – 20 and 17 times, respectively; or importance of individual consideration – 29 times), others emerged less often (e.g. the need for expert advice and an informal context – both three times; or inspirational motivation once). This could imply that also within the group of young intrapreneurs, expectations differ. More specifically, while the results of this research shed a light on certain expectation trends, it is possible that these expectations do not fit all the intrapreneurs’ perspective.

Last, this research opted for the use of group interviews. Group processes have the benefit to help people explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview or surveys (Kitzinger, 1995). They have the added benefit of giving a good overview of generally accepted trends within a group, in an efficient manner. However, doing so, they have the potential risk of inducing group biases on the results (Patton, 2005). Future research could use individual interviews or survey methods to build on this study.

#### *Practical implications and conclusion*

Based on our results, we can draw five best practices for (HR-)managers seeking to retain and get the best results from intrapreneurs. First, leaders should spend as much time and effort getting to know their employees as possible. Having a genuine interest and bonding on a personal level is the ideal way to be able to better understand the needs of your employees. It helps leaders to be the coach these employees desire.

Second, challenge intrapreneurs to grow and learn. Given the challenging nature of their projects, leaders should not necessarily stimulate them intellectually. However, helping them to move from one interesting project to the next, and keeping an eye out for new opportunities is highly appreciated. If not possible, at least provide time and opportunity for continuous reflection and feedback on the tasks that are at hand. An intrapreneurial focus can be useful in ever task, even if it is to a small extent.

Third, companies should allow leaders to play an important role. As intrapreneurs prefer autonomy, leaders should grant this. However, this can be difficult, as organizations have specific protocols, rules, and regulations. Even then, or especially then, leaders should be allowed to create a certain level of autonomy within the boundaries of their team, to keep their intrapreneurs motivated. For example, formally juniors were not allowed to give presentations to the boards of their customer companies. However, it is an option that

project leaders allows competent juniors to do this anyhow, while they are present. Doing so, they grant autonomy and trust to their employees, while sheltering their employees from the negative effects of official policies.

Next, leaders should be open and sincere. Leaders are one human and as such will definitely have their flaws. Also, they are not always able to provide fun and interesting tasks or cannot share interesting information at the right moment in time. Openness about this will make intrapreneurs trust their leaders more, making them feeling confident to take risks and initiative.

Last, it is possible that amongst intrapreneurs, expectations differ, e.g. according to their personality or current personal situation. In conducting this research, it became clear that most employees know very well what they do and do not expect. The easiest way for leaders to meet individual expectations is to build an open and personal relationship in which all employees are comfortable to share information, and use it as the basis of a strong cooperation.

In conclusion, our study explored the leader expectations of young intrapreneurs in an IT consulting company. Doing so, this research aimed to shed a light on the leadership behaviors which are preferred by young employees in intrapreneurial jobs. The results from this study highlight that leaders and organizations are wise to provide sufficient feedback, freedom, trust, and support to young intrapreneurs.

## Note

1. All proper names are pseudonyms, including the name of the firm.

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### Further reading

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