

Ingratiation within Organizations

Marie-Claire Villeval

We study a model of ingratiation, in which a decider has to select one agent in a group for a promotion. All players first express their opinions on certain issues, then the agents learn the decider's opinion, and finally they report their opinions to the decider. The reported opinion of an agent may differ from his preliminarily expressed opinion, which is formally represented by an ingratiation function. The agents have also to perform a task. The deciders can learn the performance of their agents at the task as well as their opinions before assigning payoffs. This model is tested experimentally. In the Baseline treatment, deciders can observe the agents' opinions and their performance in a quiz before assigning promotions and agents cannot modify their initial opinions. In the Ingratiation treatment, agents can change their initial opinions after learning that of their decider. Finally, to control for pure conformity effects, in the Random treatment agents can change their opinion but promotions are assigned randomly. Beyond imitation, we find evidence of high ingratiation indices, and we show that the deciders' promotion functions are largely driven by the agents' reported opinions. The effect is stronger when opinions are about a polemic statement.