

ISMC 2022
17th International Strategic Management Conference**AMBIDEXTROUS LEADERSHIP AND CREATIVE TENDENCY:
TRUST IN LEADER AS MEDIATOR**Gökhan Akıncı (a)*, Lutfihak Alpkan (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, 34367, Turkey, akinci17@itu.edu.tr

(b) Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, 34367, Turkey, alpkan@itu.edu.tr

Abstract

Understanding the complexity of employee creativeness is vitally important as it is one of the most demanded skills for organizations to gain an advantage over competitors and ensure continuous improvement. Scholars have established that leadership is a critical driver of individual creativeness, however, the question of what type of leadership style better promotes creativity still needs to be investigated. Along with its opening and closing leader behaviors, ambidextrous leadership might provide a new perspective to stimulate creativity. On the other hand, being creative can be risky as it challenges the status quo. Given that creative people can be seen as troublemakers by some leaders, the perception of trust in leader may also be key to fostering creativity. In this respect, this study suggests a conceptual model for examining the separate and combined effects of ambidextrous leadership dimensions (i.e. opening and closing leader behaviors) on employees' creative tendency where trust in leader plays a mediator role. Managerial and further research implications are also discussed.

2357-1330 © 2022 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Ambidextrous leadership, creative tendency, trust in leader

1. Introduction

Employees' creativity has been a major area of interest within the field of management (Joo et al., 2013). Their ability to come up with fresh ideas for increasing efficiency and effectiveness or developing unique products, services, and processes to innovate and survive in highly competitive environments - regardless of the type of industry or organization, has been continuously gaining importance (e.g Chen & Kaufmann, 2008; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Martinaityte & Sacramento, 2013; Uçar et al., 2021a). Researchers have recently shown an increased interest especially in the relationships between different kinds of leadership styles and employee creativity (Hughes et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Uçar et al., 2021b). Although the findings have demonstrated that leaders have a key role in encouraging individual creativity and innovativeness, the statistical results are highly variable and heterogeneous (Rosing et al., 2011). This pointed out a requirement for a new definition of leader behaviors that can spark employees' creativity and innovativeness. To that end, some scholars have suggested ambidextrous leadership which involves opening and closing leader behaviors (Rosing et al., 2011). Although it is taken for granted that creative ideas are necessarily very welcome by others in the organizations, they can be seen as a threat to long-lasting organizational norms and practices (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Therefore, a safe environment for employees to express their creative ideas freely, no matter how unusual they are, is a must. In this regard, trust in leader may be a proper mechanism to encourage individuals to think outside the box without fear of being judged or ridiculed by leaders (Bidault & Castello, 2009).

Previous studies have examined the relationship between several kinds of leadership styles, such as transformational (Gong et al., 2009), moral (Gu et al., 2015), empowering (Zhang et al., 2018), transactional (Ma & Jiang, 2018), ethical (Duan et al., 2018), inclusive (Shah et al., 2021) leadership, and employee creativity. While all these studies have emphasized the importance of leadership in individuals' creativity, those leader behaviors do not particularly intend to enhance creativity. Ambidextrous leadership which mainly aims to promote innovation and creativity in organizations can fill this managerial gap (Rosing et al., 2011). So far in the literature, there has been little discussion about the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and creative tendency with possible mediators bridging this relationship. Therefore, in the light of a well-established theory of organizational behavior, an in-depth analysis of the relation between ambidextrous leadership and creative tendency might contribute to our understanding of individuals' creativeness. The present study has two research questions (a) What might be less studied antecedents of creative tendency, and (b) Is trust in leader a missing link between those antecedents and creative tendency? To investigate these questions, the assumptions and propositions of social exchange theory are quite useful as it suggests that human relations are the result of an exchange process (Blau, 1964). Namely, following a cost-benefit analysis, individuals continue or abandon their social relationships. While cost refers to time, energy, etc., benefit represents positive outcomes such as friendship, social support, and recognition. Drawing on the social exchange theory, we propose a conceptual model (see Figure 1) to further enhance our understanding of creative tendency and its potential antecedents. This model posits that the perception of ambidextrous leadership leads to trust in leader that finally affects creative tendency. In other words, if employees believe their new ideas are supported and rewarded by their leaders, they become encouraged to think freely and suggest new solutions to existing problems. Similarly, they may also expect their leaders to treat them well even if

their ideas are so extraordinary, which requires the existence of trust in leader. The paper proceeds in the following manner. It begins with a literature review on creative tendency and a discussion about its relationship with ambidextrous leadership. Then the mediator role of trust in leader is reviewed. Lastly, conclusions and implications are addressed.

2. Creative Tendency

Studies on the determinants, types and processes of innovativeness and creativity at organizational level and their impact on organizational performance are numerous (e.g. Gemici & Alpkan, 2015; Gunday et al., 2008). However, more specific studies on employee creativity are still needed. As an integral part of innovation, creativity is defined as “the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others” (Franken, 1998, p. 396). To exhibit creativity, employees come up with new ideas to improve technologies, processes, services or products (Cummings & Oldham, 1997). Scholars suggested different perspectives to explain the complex nature of creativity and our understanding. While some argued creativity is a personal trait and influenced by intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1983), other studies asserted that various mechanisms affect individual creativity (Caniëls et al., 2014). According to the componential theory of creativity (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012), three intra-individual components influence creativity, consisting domain-relevant skills (expertise, technical skill), creativity-relevant skills (flexible cognitive style, personality traits such as openness to experience) and intrinsic task motivation. In addition to those intra-individual components, the social environment as the external component has a major role in facilitating creativity. Previous studies have also established that organizational climate, leadership style, organizational culture, resources and skills, the structure and systems of an organization are the main determinants of organizational creativity (Andriopoulos, 2001).

3. Ambidextrous Leadership and Creative Tendency

Effective and appropriate leadership behaviors to attract, awaken, develop, and retain the potential of the followers to put forth positive attitudes and creative behaviors to provide and sustain organizational performance in today’s more complex and challenging environments have begun to be studied in both public and private sectors (e.g. Alpkan et al., 2020; Arda et al., 2016; Bulut & Alpkan, 2006; Elçi et al., 2012, 2013). A great deal of research has been made to investigate the effects of different leadership styles especially on innovation (Afsar et al., 2014; Javed et al., 2019) and their findings mostly highlighted the importance of leadership for creativity and innovation in organizations.

Rosing et al. (2011) comprehensive literature review and meta-analysis suggested that the effect of leadership styles such as transformational leadership, transactional leadership, initiating structure and consideration, leader-member exchange, supervisor support, participative and directive leadership on innovation varies to a great extent. Given that creativity is vital for innovation, those findings also apply to individual creativeness. For this reason, Rosing et al. (2011) proposed an effective leadership style, ambidextrous leadership, which facilitates the two main processes of innovation, namely exploration and exploitation. Ambidextrous leadership includes two types of leader behaviors, i.e. opening and closing

leader behaviors, and their interplay. Opening leader behaviors are defined as “a set of leader behaviors that includes encouraging doing things differently and experimenting, giving room for independent thinking and acting, and supporting attempts to challenge established approaches” (Rosing et al., 2011, p. 967). Motivating to take risks, encouraging experimentation with different tasks, allowing different ways of accomplishing a task, encouraging error learning and giving room for own ideas are some examples of opening leader behaviors (Rosing et al., 2011). In cases where employees need to think creatively to solve problems and come up with new solutions to them or improve processes, services or products, this kind of leadership behavior might create a favorable working environment in an organization. Results from earlier studies have also demonstrated that leaders who keep open communication to encourage followers to share their ideas freely stimulate employees’ creativity (Koh et al., 2019). Thus, opening leader behavior can support individuals to explore, in other words, make them more inclined to think creatively. Thus, we posit that;

Proposition 1: Opening leader behaviors are positively related to creative tendency.

Closing leader behaviors, on the other hand, are defined as “a set of leader behaviors that includes taking corrective actions, setting specific guidelines, and monitoring goal achievement” (Rosing et al., 2011, p. 967). Monitoring and controlling goal attainment, taking corrective action, controlling adherence to rules, paying attention to uniform task accomplishment and sanctioning errors are some examples of closing leader behavior (Rosing et al., 2011). Although it is mostly viewed that creative thinking has no boundaries, creative people also need a clear vision and expectations set by leaders. Ambiguity in communication between leaders and their followers can lead to situations in which they feel unsafe, which hinders creativeness. While intrinsic motivation plays a key role in creativity, extrinsic motivation, such as a fair rewarding system in an organization, facilitates creativity as well (Sung & Choi, 2009). Creative people can avoid finding new solutions or approaches to existing problems if they perceive their efforts are not supported or praised (Gerhart & Fang, 2015). Research made by Ma and Jiang (2018) showed that a synergy between transformational leadership and financial rewards has a significant effect on employee creativity. Based on the above discussion, we suggest that;

Proposition 2: Closing leader behaviors are positively related to creative tendency.

Opening and closing leader behaviors have unique approaches that can promote creativity independently. However, the interaction between opening and closing leader behavior can further influence creative tendency. That is to say, creative tendency may be highest when both opening and closing leader behaviors are high (Zacher & Rosing, 2015). Despite the general idea that creativity is mostly related to exploration (March, 1991), creativity necessitates exploitation as well since creative ideas should be practical and need the use of existing knowledge at the first stage (Rosing et al., 2011). Without a clear vision and structure, it is impossible to find effective solutions to problems. Thus, instead of selecting one alternative, trying to pursue both at the same time, i.e. ambidexterity – the successful combination of seemingly conflicting alternatives (e.g. Alpkın & Aren, 2009; Alpkın & Gemici, 2016), may support creativity by balancing opening and closing behaviors. Therefore, we argue that;

Proposition 3: Ambidextrous leadership (i.e. the interaction of opening and closing leader behaviors) is positively related to creative tendency.

4. The Mediating Role of Trust in Leader

Creative people face organizational and perceptual barriers such as fear of success and its consequences, lack of confidence, fear of rejection and fear of criticism (Groth & Peters, 1999). Particularly, leaders' approaches to new ideas and innovative solutions influence employees' inclination towards creativity (Chen et al., 2009). In this regard, if leaders prefer to maintain existing routines, practices and norms in organizations and see organizational changes as useless efforts, employees feel discouraged to be creative. Moreover, those leaders can also think that creative people tend to break rules, act against authority and cause conflicts with their colleagues (Mehta & Dahl, 2019). Therefore, due to all these risks, employees may not want to take action for the benefit of the organization as they can be misjudged and even punished by their leaders. At this point, trust in leader might be a crucial mechanism that bridges the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and creative tendency. In cases where employees perceive that leaders are open to new ideas without any judgment, they can express them more freely and seek better ways to achieve continuous improvement. Thus, we propose that;

Proposition 4: Trust in leader mediates the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and creative tendency.

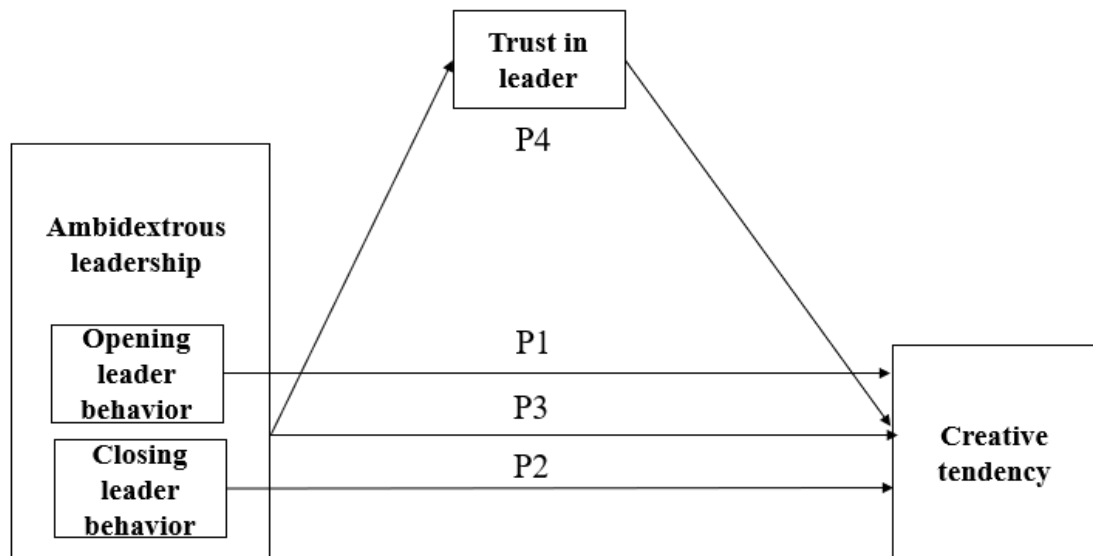


Figure 1. Proposed Model

5. Conclusion

The current study offered a new theoretical perspective to enhance our understanding of employees' creative tendency. Based on the literature review and related discussions, we suggested potential relationships and outcomes. In order to promote creativity in organizations, we highlighted the role of leaders by proposing that ambidextrous leadership, with its opening and closing leader behaviors, might strengthen employees' creative tendency. However, considering the risky nature of creativity, we also argued that there might be a missing link between ambidextrous leadership and creative tendency

which can be addressed by a critical mechanism, namely trust in leader. Despite the earlier research on the relationship between certain kinds of leadership types and creativity, much uncertainty still exists about the effect of ambidextrous leadership on creative tendency.

This paper used the lenses of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to explain the relations in the conceptual model. According to this theory, we argued that the perception of ambidextrous leadership could lead to creative tendency through trust in leader. With this proposed model, we aimed to contribute to the investigation of creative tendency and close the gap by questioning its relationship with ambidextrous leadership. This contribution is not limited to theoretical areas, it can also provide valuable insights for practitioners. Organizations can better examine what kind of leadership behaviors are more favorable for supporting creativity in both public and private sectors, and they may encourage leaders to develop those certain behaviors to build trust in the workplace.

References

- Afsar, B., Badir, Y. F., & Saeed, B. B. (2014). Transformational leadership and innovative work behavior. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 114(8), 1270-1300. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-05-2014-0152>
- Alpkan, L., & Aren, S. (2009). Ambidexterity: The combination of seemingly conflicting priorities. *5th International Strategic Management Conference*, 4, 191-196. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263932718>
- Alpkan, L., & Gemici, E. (2016). Disruption and Ambidexterity: How innovation strategies evolve? *12th International Strategic Management Conference, Procedia Social and Behavioral Science* 235, 782-787. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.11.080>
- Alpkan, L., Karabay, M., Şener, İ., Elçi, M., & Yıldız, B. (2020). The mediating role of trust in leader in the relations of ethical leadership and distributive justice on internal whistleblowing: A study on Turkish banking sector. *Kybernetes*, 50(7), 2073-2092. <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-05-2020-0268>
- Amabile, T. M. (1983). *The social psychology of creativity*. Springer-Verlag.
- Amabile, T. M., & Pillemer, J. (2012). Perspectives on the social psychology of creativity. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 46(1), 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.001>
- Andriopoulos, C. (2001). Determinants of organisational creativity: a literature review. *Management Decision*, 39(10), 834-841. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740110402328>
- Arda, Ö. A., Aslan, T., & Alpkan, L. (2016). Review of Practical Implications in Authentic Leadership Studies. *5th International Conference on Leadership, Technology, Innovation and Business Management. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 229, 246-252. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.07.135>
- Bidault, F., & Castello, A. (2009). Trust and creativity: understanding the role of trust in creativity-oriented joint developments. *R&D Management*, 39(3), 259-270. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9310.2009.00557.x>
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. Transaction Publishers.
- Bulut, Ç., & Alpkan, L. (2006). Behavioral Consequences of an Entrepreneurial Climate within Large Organizations: An Integrative Proposed Model. *South East European Journal of Economics & Business*, 64-70. <https://www.academia.edu/189934>
- Caniëls, M. C., De Stobbeleir, K., & De Clippeler, I. (2014). The antecedents of creativity revisited: A process perspective. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 23(2), 96-110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12051>
- Chen, C. H. V., Li, H. H., & Tang, Y. Y. (2009). Transformational leadership and creativity: exploring the mediating effects of creative thinking and intrinsic motivation. *International Journal of Management and Enterprise Development*, 6(2), 198-211. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMED.2009.022627>

- Chen, M. H., & Kaufmann, G. (2008). Employee creativity and R&D: A critical review. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 17(1), 71-76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8691.2008.00471.x>
- Cummings, A., & Oldham, G. R. (1997). Enhancing creativity: Managing work contexts for the high potential employee. *California management review*, 40(1), 22-38. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41165920>
- De Jong, J. P., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2007). How leaders influence employees' innovative behaviour. *European Journal of innovation management*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1108/14601060710720546>
- Duan, S., Liu, Z., & Che, H. (2018). Mediating influences of ethical leadership on employee creativity. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 46(2), 323-337. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.6160>
- Elçi, M., Şener, İ., & Alpkın, L. (2012). The Impact of Ethical Leadership and Leadership Effectiveness on Employees' Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Work Related Stress. *8th International Strategic Management Conference Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 58, 289-297. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.1003>
- Elçi, M., Şener, İ., & Alpkın, L. (2013). The Impacts of Ethical Leadership on the Antisocial Behavior of Employees: The Mediating Role of Ethical Climate. *Journal of Global Strategic Management*, 14, 57-66. <https://doi.org/10.20460/JGSM.2013715667>
- Franken, R. E. (1998). *Human motivation*. Pacific Grove, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Gemici, E., & Alpkın, L. (2015). An application of disruptive innovation theory to create a competitive strategy in Turkish air transportation industry. *11th International Strategic Management Conference. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 207, 797-806. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.10.169>
- Gerhart, B., & Fang, M. (2015). Pay, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, performance, and creativity in the workplace: Revisiting long-held beliefs. *Annual review of organizational psychology and organizational behavior*, 2(1), 489-521. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032414-111418>
- Gong, Y., Huang, J. C., & Farh, J. L. (2009). Employee learning orientation, transformational leadership, and employee creativity: The mediating role of employee creative self-efficacy. *Academy of management Journal*, 52(4), 765-778. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2009.43670890>
- Groth, J., & Peters, J. (1999). What blocks creativity? A managerial perspective. *Creativity and Innovation management*, 8(3), 179-187. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8691.00135>
- Gu, Q., Tang, T. L. P., & Jiang, W. (2015). Does moral leadership enhance employee creativity? Employee identification with leader and leader-member exchange (LMX) in the Chinese context. *Journal of business ethics*, 126(3), 513-529. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1967-9>
- Gunday, G., Ulusoy, G., Kilic, K., & Alpkın, L. (2008). Modeling Innovation: Determinants of Innovativeness and the Impact of Innovation on Firm Performance. *IEEE International Conference on Management of Innovation and Technology*, 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICMIT.2008.4654462>
- Hughes, D. J., Lee, A., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., & Legood, A. (2018). Leadership, creativity, and innovation: A critical review and practical recommendations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 29(5), 549-569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.03.001>
- Javed, B., Naqvi, S. M. M. R., Khan, A. K., Arjoon, S., & Tayyeb, H. H. (2019). Impact of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior: The role of psychological safety. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 25(1), 117-136. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2017.3>
- Joo, B. K., McLean, G. N., & Yang, B. (2013). Creativity and human resource development: An integrative literature review and a conceptual framework for future research. *Human Resource Development Review*, 12(4), 390-421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484313481462>
- Koh, D., Lee, K., & Joshi, K. (2019). Transformational leadership and creativity: A meta-analytic review and identification of an integrated model. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 40(6), 625-650. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2355>
- Lee, A., Legood, A., Hughes, D., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., & Knight, C. (2020). Leadership, creativity and innovation: A meta-analytic review. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 29(1), 1-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2019.1661837>

- Ma, X., & Jiang, W. (2018). Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and employee creativity in entrepreneurial firms. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 54(3), 302-324. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886318764346>
- March, J. G. (1991). Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization science*, 2(1), 71-87. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.71>
- Martinaityte, I., & Sacramento, C. A. (2013). When creativity enhances sales effectiveness: The moderating role of leader–member exchange. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 34(7), 974-994. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1835>
- Mehta, R., & Dahl, D. W. (2019). Creativity: Past, present, and future. *Consumer Psychology Review*, 2(1), 30-49. <https://doi.org/10.1002/arcp.1044>
- Rosing, K., Frese, M., & Bausch, A. (2011). Explaining the heterogeneity of the leadership-innovation relationship: Ambidextrous leadership. *The leadership quarterly*, 22(5), 956-974. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.07.014>
- Shah, M. S., Wu, C., & Ullah, Z. (2021). The inter-relationship between CSR, inclusive leadership and employee creativity: a case of the banking sector. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 9158. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169158>
- Shalley, C. E., & Gilson, L. L. (2004). What leaders need to know: A review of social and contextual factors that can foster or hinder creativity. *The leadership quarterly*, 15(1), 33-53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.12.004>
- Sung, S. Y., & Choi, J. N. (2009). Do big five personality factors affect individual creativity? The moderating role of extrinsic motivation. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 37(7), 941-956. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2009.37.7.941>
- Uçar, A. C., Alpkan, L., & Elçi, M. (2021a). The Effects of Person–Organization Fit and Turnover Intention on Employees' Creative Behavior: The Mediating Role of Psychological Ownership. *SAGE Open*, 11(4), 21582440211066924. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211066924>
- Uçar, A. C., Alpkan, L., & Elçi, M. (2021b). The Effect of Servant and Transformational Leadership Styles on Employee Creative Behavior: The Moderating Role of Authentic Leadership. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 10, 99-119. <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2021.60538>
- Zacher, H., & Rosing, K. (2015). Ambidextrous leadership and team innovation. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 36(1), 54-68. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-11-2012-0141>
- Zhang, S., Ke, X., Frank Wang, X. H., & Liu, J. (2018). Empowering leadership and employee creativity: A dual-mechanism perspective. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 91(4), 896-917. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12219>