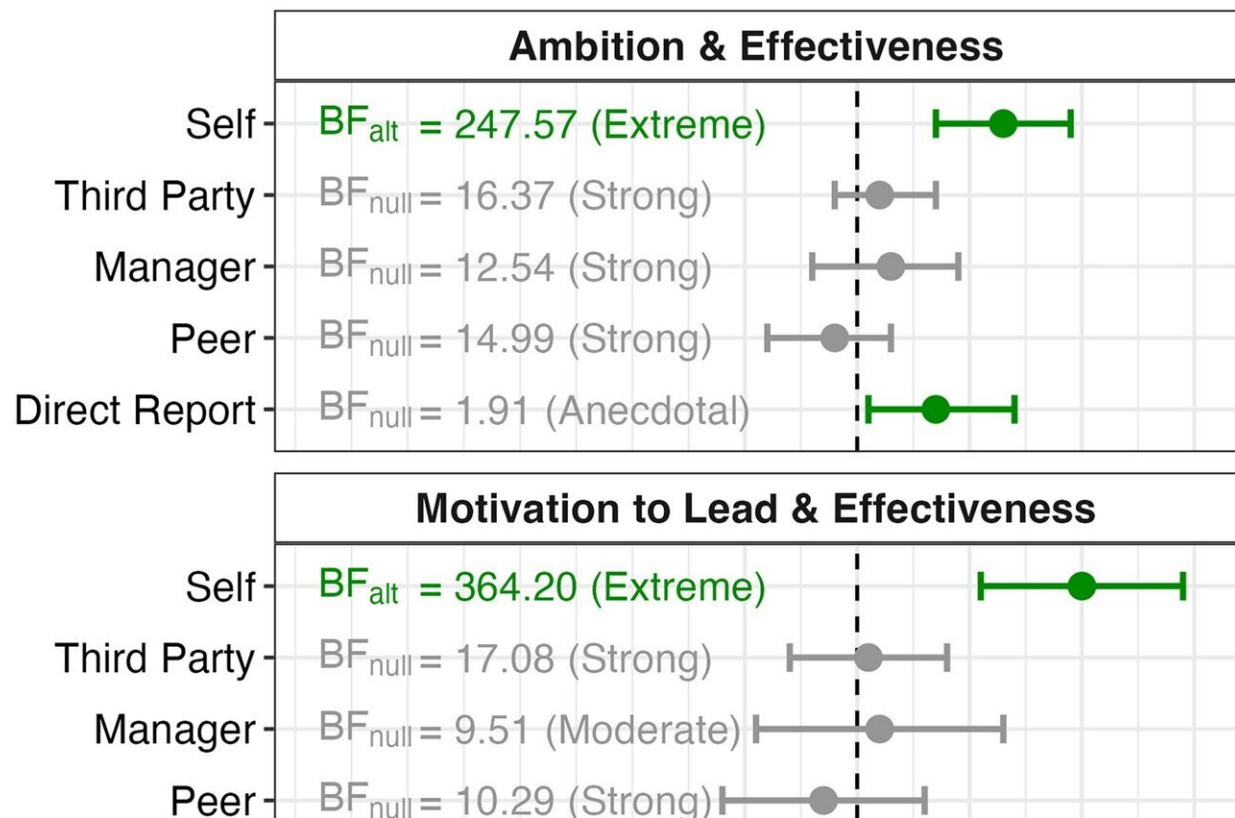


# Ambitious people aren't born leaders, research suggests

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The relationship between ambition and leadership ratings for three measures of ambition and five rater roles. We ran mixed-effects models predicting effectiveness ratings from ambition as well as random intercepts for leaders and effectiveness items and obtained the coefficient estimates for ambition ( $\beta^1$ ). Credit: *PNAS Nexus* (2024). DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae295

Do ambitious people make good leaders? Ambition can lead people to strive for leadership roles. But could there be a mismatch between qualities that motivate people to strive for leadership and qualities that make people good leaders?

Shilaan Alzahawi and colleagues asked 472 executives enrolled in a leadership development program offered by a West Coast business school in the United States to rate their ambition. The authors then compared these ambition scores with 360-degree leadership assessments obtained from the executives themselves, as well as their current managers, peers, and subordinates.

The [paper](#) is [published](#) in the journal *PNAS Nexus*.

The authors found, as expected, that leadership ambition increases self-ratings of effectiveness in a leadership role. That is, leaders with high self-reported ambition also rated themselves as highly-effective leaders. However, the authors found no relationship between leadership ambition and third-party ratings of leadership effectiveness; highly ambitious executives, compared to less ambitious executives, were rated as no more effective in their leadership roles by their managers, peers, or direct reports.

These results suggest that the pool of people striving for [leadership roles](#) may be filled with ambitious people who seek extrinsic rewards, such as high salaries and [social status](#), and regard themselves more positively than others do. According to the authors, society may want to develop alternative approaches to choosing and training leaders.

**More information:** Shilaan Alzahawi et al, A legend in one's own mind: The link between ambition and leadership evaluations, *PNAS Nexus* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae295](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae295)

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