Claiming more than equality: Should leaders ask for forgiveness? ☆

Jeroen Stouten [a,*], Thomas M. Tripp [b]

[a] Department of Psychology, University of Leuven, Tiensestraat 102, 3000 Leuven, Belgium
[b] Washington State University Vancouver, 14204, NE Salmon Creek Avenue, Vancouver, WA 98686-9600, USA

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A B S T R A C T

In organizations, leaders are often paid more than lower-level employees. Social dilemma research also shows that leaders feel entitled to earn more, and because of this, are more inclined to contribute less than an equal share to a public good, which may damage the collective. In two experiments, the social dilemma context is used to examine how group members react when either a leader or a follower violates the equality norm. Moreover, we demonstrate how asking for forgiveness sometimes mitigates people's reactions to equality norm violations. Results show that asking for forgiveness attenuates negative emotions, retribution, and non-cooperation—but more so if followers, relative to leaders, violated equality. In fact, leaders are less likely to be seen as even violating norms, suggesting that group members perceive leaders to be entitled.

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A fact of organizational life is that leaders receive more pay and benefits than do lower echelon employees. Typically, CEO's earn more pay than most, if not all, other employees in their organizations; upper management earns more than lower management; and lower management earns more than entry-level employees (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Rees, 1993). Not only do leaders earn more, but they feel entitled to take more. High-paid leaders may develop a taste for perquisites, perhaps especially those leaders who ascend quickly in organizations, who, as Kramer (2003) argues, may develop a "winner wants all" mentality. Such leaders often feel that rules do not apply to them and that they deserve the trappings of power (Kramer, 2003). For example, consider the famous rise and fall of Lew Glucksman at Lehman Brothers in 1983 (Auletta, 1986). Once Glucksman assumed the sole CEO position, he immediately grabbed resources for himself and his cronies, even though the resource-grab harmed the firm.

Moreover, it doesn't take much leading for a "leader" to feel entitled. Keltner et al. (2003) propose that power is associated with increased rewards and freedoms because powerful people become disinhibited. To illustrate, they describe an experiment in which groups of three people were asked to complete a boring task of filling out surveys for a half-hour. In each group, one person was selected randomly to be "in charge." Next, a plate of five cookies was put out. Typically, the "leader" was the one who grabbed the extra cookies. The present research addresses whether followers will accept leaders' selfish behaviors.

In general, leaders' entitlement may motivate them to claim more resources—even if this would endanger their organizations' long-term goals. Such conflicts resemble the conflicts inherent in social dilemmas. That is, leaders and followers often are highly interdependent such that individual interests compete with collective interests (Frey & Osterloh, 2005)—i.e., in any one "round," every member is better off making a selfish choice than a cooperative choice, regardless of what other members choose; yet, if most members act selfishly, the common good (e.g., a company project) is harmed, to all members' detriment. By analogy, if leaders and followers are rewarded to look out only for themselves instead of for the company, and if most organizational employees pursue these individual rewards, then the collective organization can suffer. For instance, in a firm facing bankruptcy, if management and the unions insist on pay increases for themselves despite their dire fiscal straits, then the firm can more quickly go into bankruptcy. As such, we believe the research on social dilemmas (Komorita & Parks, 1994) models aspects of this problem of leader entitlement. Therefore, in this paper we will concentrate on the social dilemma research to understand and test resolutions to the leader-entitlement problem.

So, what does the social dilemma research say about leader entitlement? First, it shows that the installment of a leader to supervise the group can enhance cooperation among members (Messick et al., 1983; Rutte & Wilke, 1984). Leaders are expected to act fairly, serving the group's interests (Samuelson & Messick, 1995). Yet, sometimes leaders may also act so self-interestedly as to take a greater share of the rewards or contribute less than other members (De Cremer, 2003; De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005; Samuelson & Allison, 1994), which seems to be unfair to group members, especially when there already is variance in group member's earnings (Stouten, De Cremer, & Van Dijk, 2005b). In fact, leaders may even feel entitled to take more benefits: De Cremer & Van Dijk (2005) showed that leaders who feel they earned their role take a greater share of the resources than leaders who do not believe they earned their leadership role. This suggests that as the leader's role becomes more important, leaders take advantage of the situation, and are more inclined to increase their own payoff (see Stouten et al., 2005b).

That leaders feel entitled to earn more or contribute less is especially relevant in situations in which a common project or public good has to be provided by the group, referred to as a special type of social dilemma, the public good dilemma (Komorita & Parks, 1994). In such situations, people generally use the fairness rule of equality (Van Dijk & Wilke, 1995, 2000), which suggests that each group member contributes an equal share to the public good (Deutsch, 1975). For example, research shows that if a group member contributes less than an equal share in a public good dilemma (which would lead the group to fail in providing the public good), then group members perceive this as unfair (Stouten, De Cremer, & Van Dijk, 2005a).

In such groups, after members contribute less than an equal share to the "common good" and the group fails because of this, what happens next? While group members hold other, equal-status group members to the equality rule, will they also hold a leader to the equality rule? Equity theory (Adams, 1965) suggests that members may feel that a greater share (or reduced burden) for the leader is "equitable" because of the greater "inputs" that leadership entails (e.g., status, skills, risk, effort). Indeed, leaders often have more duties and responsibilities (Bass, 1990), which would, according to equity theory, make them more entitled to earn more (or contribute less to unskilled, tedious work) as well. At least, the leaders think so. What if the followers disagree? And what if followers take more or contribute less than is equal—does everyone agree that followers (or leaders) are not entitled to do so?

In general, what kind of conflict erupts from such a disagreement? For one thing, followers may become angered and uncooperative, and thus more inclined to retaliate (Stouten et al., 2005a; 2006; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002). Hence, violating equality in the group may likely lead to negative and retributive reactions, because violating equality is perceived as unjust. Thus, we wonder how such unequal benefits and burdens affect revenge and forgiveness in such groups.

1. Injustice, revenge and forgiveness

In general, injustice is the prime trigger of workplace revenge (Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2007). When organizations (including their leadership) are not perceived as fair, then employees are much more likely to retaliate (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999), such as by stealing office supplies (Greenberg, 1990), badmouthing executives (Morrill, 1992), and engaging in variety of other behaviors that undermine organizational leadership, including loafing, following orders to the letter instead of to the spirit, quitting without notice (Bies & Tripp, 1996) and sabotage (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002).

Tyler (2006) argues that leaders must be perceived as fair by their followers for leaders to maintain legitimacy. If leaders decide to contribute less to the group's common good, which would endanger the group's further existence, what can leaders do? One thing they can do is apologize and ask for forgiveness. Giving an explanation about one's actions indeed can re-establish cooperation (Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002) and improve people's perceptions of the violator's integrity (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004).

Kellerman (2006) argues that apologies, especially from organizational leaders, are on the rise in the United States. Sometimes leaders apologize to external stakeholders on behalf of the company; other times leaders apologize to the company for their own errors. Kellerman further argues that such apologies matter to employees when she says, "A leader's apology is a performance in which every expression matters and every word becomes part of the public record" (p. 74). There is no reason why a leader cannot apologize for hoarding company perquisites such as, say, using the corporate jet for personal use. We wonder, however, would it make a difference? It might, if it results in forgiveness and cooperation.

Research shows that sometimes victims of perceived injustice forgive instead of avenge (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006). Forgiveness reduces the anger (Lawler, Younger, Piferi, & Jobe, 2005; Worthington & Scherer, 2004) that motivates revenge (Allred, 1999; Bies & Tripp, 1996; Goldman, 2003). After all, by definition, forgiveness is the letting go of anger: Enright & the Human Development Study Group, (1991, p. 108) define forgiveness as "a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, condemnation, and subtle revenge towards the offender who acts unjustly while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion generosity or even love toward him/her." Such forgiveness also implies that cooperation will follow (e.g., Karremans, Van Lange, & Holland, 2005).

But will a leader's apologizing and seeking forgiveness, after this person violated an important coordination rule such as equality, result in the followers granting forgiveness? Bobocel & Zdaniuk (2005) noted that only a few studies have investigated the psychological processes underlying the effectiveness of such social accounts. Also, Sandage, Worthington, Hight & Berry (2000) argue that, while much research has examined granting forgiveness, very little research has examined seeking forgiveness. They theorize that seeking forgiveness should encourage the granting of forgiveness. One reason is that, as Weiner, Graham, Peter & Zmuidinas (1991) showed in a series of four experiments, those who confess their wrongdoings are viewed more positively than people who merely offer excuses. We suspect that requesting forgiveness also communicates remorse and concern for followers,

which according to the relational model of procedural justice (Tyler & Lind, 1992), should result in increased perceptions of procedural fairness, which in turn should neutralize the anger caused by distributive unfairness (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). Indeed, forgiveness is associated with trusting and caring relationships and greater social capital in organizations (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoreson, 2000). However, if leaders are perceived as entitled to earn more, requesting forgiveness may not influence group members' reactions (After all, in this case there would be no norm violation to forgive). In contrast, a follower seeking forgiveness may indeed rule out group members' worst-case attributions about his or her intentions: rather than believing the follower selfishly exploited the collective, they may deem his or her actions as unintentional. In turn, a decreased perception of intention should reduce the followers' emotional and retributive reactions (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Crossley, 2006; Stouten, De Cremer, & Van Dijk, 2006; Tripp et al., 2007).

In sum, the present research addresses how group members will react when, first, a member violates the equality principle in a social dilemma context, and second, that member seeks forgiveness. We argue that group member reactions–such as anger, forgiveness, and subsequent cooperation–depend upon the violator's status as a leader or follower (Miller, 2001). A leader asking for forgiveness is not likely to influence follower's reactions so much, because there is nothing to forgive (the leader may be entitled to more). However, when a fellow-follower violates equality by contributing less than an equal share, it is seen as a violation and, thus, there is something to forgive. Therefore, the follower asking for forgiveness is expected to influence group members' emotional and retributive reactions. In Experiment 1, we test this proposition.

In summary, following a group member's contributing less than an equal share in a social dilemma, we hypothesize these interaction effects:

H1. Granting forgiveness—Asking for forgiveness will increase granting of forgiveness, but mostly of followers. That is, followers asking for forgiveness will increase group member granting of forgiveness compared to followers who do not ask for forgiveness; but for leaders, asking for forgiveness is not expected to influence group member granting forgiveness.

H2. Anger—Asking for forgiveness after a violation of equality will decrease anger, but mostly when it is followers who ask. That is, followers asking for forgiveness will reduce group member anger compared to followers who do not ask for forgiveness; but for leaders, asking for forgiveness is not expected to influence group member anger.

H3. Cooperation—Asking for forgiveness will increase cooperation, but mostly when it is followers who ask. That is, followers asking for forgiveness will increase group member cooperation compared to followers who do not ask for forgiveness, but for leaders the effect of forgiveness is not expected to influence group member cooperation.

2. Experiment 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and design

Participants were 60 undergraduate students who were paid 7 Euro for their participation. They were randomly assigned to a 2 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) factorial design.

2.1.2. Procedure

Upon entering the laboratory, participants were seated in separate cubicles containing a chair, a table, and a computer. All instructions were presented on the computer screen. Participants were informed that they were part of a four-person group, which would play several games, and that they (supposedly) would be able to interact with one another via their computer. In reality, the computers were not connected with each other. Group members were referred to as group member 1 to 4 (in reality, all participants learned that they were group member 3).

2.1.2.1. Introduction of the public good dilemma. Then, the public good dilemma was introduced. Participants learned that they possessed a personal endowment of 100 chips (each chip = 0.05 Euro), which they, if they wished to, could contribute. If the group managed to reach a given threshold of 200 chips, then the group would receive a bonus, which would be divided equally among the four group members. Hence, when the threshold of 200 chips would be reached, the group would earn a bonus of 400 chips—that is, 100 chips each.

After explaining the situation, some comprehension questions were asked in order to check whether participants understood the situation. All participants answered these questions correctly. Then, participants could decide which amount they wished to contribute to the public good. After their decision, participants learned about the other members' contributions. First, it was said that the group did not contribute a sufficient amount of chips in order to reach the threshold. Then, the exact amount of chips each group member contributed was shown. Participants learned that two group members contributed an equal share (= 50 chips) and another group member (group member number two) violated the equal share by contributing only 10 chips (this procedure was taken from Stouten et al., 2005a, 2006).[1]

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[1] Because followers took an average of 52.03 (SD = 6.77) chips for themselves, it was clear that the threshold of 200 chips could not be reached.
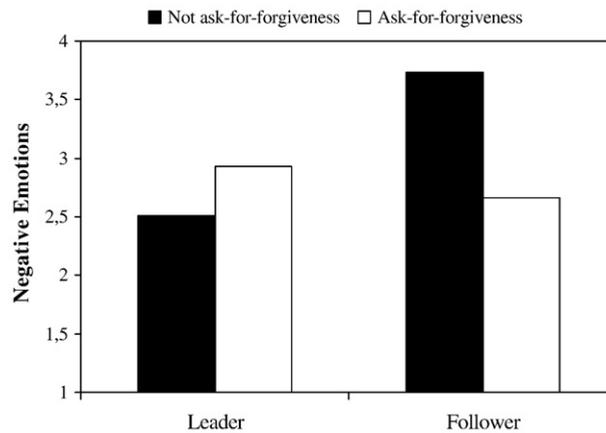
Fig. 1. The relationship between a leader or a follower violating equality and the request for forgiveness on negative emotions (Experiment 1).

2.1.2.2. Leadership manipulation. Before participants could decide about their contribution to the public good, the leadership manipulation was introduced. Participants were told that there is often a leader in groups where decisions are made. Hence, in this situation a leader would also be appointed. To appoint a leader in a legitimate manner, the person who would score highest on a questionnaire assessing leadership qualities would be appointed as the leader of the group. Participants filled out the self-developed 26-item Management Assessment Inventory (MAI) consisting of such items as "leadership is a matter of influencing others" and "a leader should be able to command respect." After a short interval, participants received bogus feedback about the results of the inventory. Participants in the *leadership* condition learned that, in the remainder of the experiment, group member number two (hence, the violator of equality) would perform the leader role in the group and that they would be a follower. Participants in the *follower* condition learned that group member number four, who gave an equal number of 50 chips, would be the leader. Then, participants were asked a few questions concerning their role in the group (see De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005; Stouten et al., 2005b, for a similar procedure). As a manipulation check, all participants were asked who the follower in the group was. All participants remembered correctly that they were a follower.

2.1.2.3. Asking forgiveness. After the participants were informed about the group members' contributions, the experimenter entered the room and told the participant that group member two (the violator) wanted to give a message. The experimenter then handed over a handwritten note to the participant. In the *forgiveness* condition the note said "I'm very sorry for what I've done. Can you forgive me?" In the *no forgiveness* condition, no message was given. This manipulation was adapted from previous research (Stouten et al., 2006) and included a request of asking for forgiveness (see also Purtilo, 2005).

2.1.2.4. Dependent measures. Then, the dependent measures were assessed. All questions were answered on a scale of 1 (= "not at all") to 7 (= "very much so"). Participants were asked to what extent they were willing to forgive the group member who was responsible for not getting the bonus. Then, participants were asked how they felt in this situation, using the emotions angry, frustrated, disappointed, hostile, and aggrieved. These items were combined to form one negative-emotion scale (Cronbach's α = .87).

A few moments later, the experimenter entered the room and gave each participant an envelope (which held 10 lottery tickets). Participants were told that the envelopes contained lottery tickets and that these lottery tickets were an extra reward for the participants. The more lottery tickets participants kept for themselves, the more their chances on an extra reward of 7 Euro would increase. They were allowed to take from the envelope any number of lottery tickets they wished. However, the envelope would be shared with another group member. Participants were always told that the lottery tickets would be shared with group member two (that is, the violator). The experimenter would then leave the room and only enter the room again to pick up the envelope to ostensibly hand it over to group member two.

Further, seven items of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivation Scale (TRIM-12; McCullough et al., 1998) were assessed. Only the items that were relevant in the presented group situation were used: For example, "I'll make him/her pay," "I wish that something bad would happen to him/her," and "I'm going to get even" (for the seven items: Cronbach's α = .86). Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and paid.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Forgiving

A 2 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the extent that participants wanted to forgive the violator showed a main effect for leadership, $F(1, 56)$ = 6.01, p < .05, and a significant interaction, $F(1, 56)$ = 5.59, p < .05. This interaction showed that if a follower violated equality, they were more likely to be forgiven if they asked for forgiveness (M = 5.10, SD = 1.55) than if they did not ask for forgiveness (M = 4.17, SD = 1.19), $F(1, 56)$ = 3.12, p < .10. If a leader violated equality, differences in asking for forgiveness did not influence granting forgiveness (ask-for-forgiveness: 5.13, SD = 1.77; not-ask-for-forgiveness: M = 6.00, SD = 1.00), $F(1, 56)$ = 2.50,
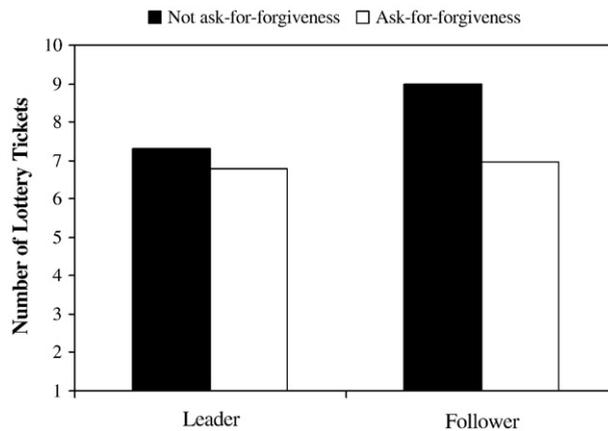
Fig. 2. The relationship between a leader or a follower violating equality and the request for forgiveness on the amount of lottery tickets that are taken (Experiment 1).

$p = .12$. This suggests that leaders were more likely to be forgiven even if they did not ask for forgiveness, and that only followers benefited from asking for forgiveness.

2.2.2. Negative emotional reactions

A 2 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the negative emotion scale revealed an interaction effect, $F(1, 56) = 4.42$, $p < .05$ (Fig. 1). This effect showed that if a follower violated equality, asking for forgiveness ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.17$) lowered negative emotional reactions relative to not asking for forgiveness ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.06$), $F(1, 56) = 4.71$, $p < .05$. Whereas in the leader condition, differences for seeking forgiveness were less pronounced and not significant (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.67$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.45$), $F(1, 56) = 0.69$, $p < .42$.

2.2.3. Lottery tickets

A 2 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the amount of lottery tickets that participants kept for themselves (what was left would be given to the other group member, who was the violator) showed a main effect for leadership, $F(1, 56) = 10.38$, $p < .005$, for seeking forgiveness, $F(1, 56) = 20.00$, $p < .001$, and an interaction effect, $F(1, 56) = 7.28$, $p < .01$ (Fig. 2). The interaction revealed that if a follower violated equality, participants kept fewer lottery tickets when this person asked for forgiveness ($M = 6.95$, $SD = 1.05$) than when this person did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 9.00$, $SD = 1.04$), $F(1, 56) = 26.69$, $p < .001$. In contrast, in the leader condition there were no significant differences for forgiveness (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 6.80$, $SD = 0.94$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 7.31$, $SD = 1.32$), $F(1, 56) = 1.52$, $p < .23$.

2.2.4. TRIM

A 2 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the TRIM items showed a significant interaction, $F(1, 56) = 4.12$, $p < .05$. This interaction showed that if a follower was the violator and asked for forgiveness this led to lower retributive reactions (that is, less getting even), and hence more forgiveness ($M = 1.71$, $SD = 0.55$) than if no forgiveness was asked ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.84$), $F(1, 56) = 3.87$, $p = .05$. However, when a leader was the violator no significant differences between asking for forgiveness ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 0.79$) or not asking for forgiveness ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.72$) occurred, $F(1, 56) = 0.85$, $p < .37$.

2.3. Discussion

Experiment 1 showed that when the equality rule was violated by a follower, group members reacted with more negative emotions and wanted to get even more (hence, less forgiveness) when no forgiveness was asked for than when forgiveness was asked for. Also, when no forgiveness was asked, group members kept more lottery tickets for themselves (which meant fewer tickets for the violator) than when the violator did ask for forgiveness. In contrast, when the leader of the group violated equality, seeking forgiveness did not significantly affect members' reactions. Moreover, within the leader condition, the harvest of lottery tickets was more modest.

3. Experiment 2

Two alternative explanations for the results of Experiment 1 may exist. First, both followers and leaders agree that leaders are entitled to earn more, crediting leaders with the greater inputs of leadership. In this case, followers perceive no unfairness by the leaders, because followers agree that leaders are entitled to take more, and therefore there is nothing to forgive or avenge. Alternatively, followers may consider that leaders are not entitled to earn more, or at least not credited with the greater inputs of leadership, and thus instead followers did judge the leaders' actions as unfair, but simply did not expect (nor require, nor even appreciate) leaders to ask for forgiveness. Therefore, followers would have no added positive emotional reaction when leaders did

ask for forgiveness. Research indeed shows that leaders are more allowed to deviate from social norms than followers. Leaders are, for example, likely to violate norms or break promises more often than followers (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Mondillon et al., 2005; Tedeschi, Lindskold, Horal, & Gahagan, 1969). In short, we have two explanations for the same results. One, leaders are not transgressors, and thus there is nothing to ask forgiveness for, because they are allowed to earn more. That is, leaders deserve certain privileges in society such as greater prosperity and better health (Bass, 1990; Marmot, 2004). Alternatively, two, leaders did transgress, but unlike followers, do not need to ask for forgiveness.

Also, we conduct Experiment 2 to overcome a limitation of the design in Experiment 1. The limitation is that the leadership manipulation was incomplete: that is, "leaders" received their leadership position merely by scoring highly on a leadership aptitude test, but not by actually performing leadership activities (e.g., coordinating group activities, evaluation). Thus, all the possible contributions (merits, inputs) a leader makes to a group were not represented. In Experiment 2, we include a condition where we add leadership activities to leadership aptitude.

Thus, our first three hypotheses are to replicate the findings in Experiment 1 with regard to granting forgiveness (H1), anger (H2), and cooperation (H3). In addition, we hypothesize that following a group member's taking of a disproportionate share of the benefits by violating equality in a public goods dilemma, we predict about rule violations:

H4a. Leaders will be less expected to ask for forgiveness than will followers.

H4b. Leaders who take a disproportionate share will be judged as violating rules less than will followers.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and design

Participants were 140 undergraduate students who were paid 7 Euro for their participation. They were randomly assigned to a 3 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) factorial design.

3.1.2. Procedure

Similar to Experiment 1, participants entered the laboratory and learned that they were part of a four-person group, and that they (supposedly) would be able to interact with one another via their computers. Group members were referred to as group member 1 to 4 (in reality all participants learned that they were number three).

3.1.2.1. Introduction of the public good dilemma. The public good dilemma that then was introduced was of the same structure as in Experiment 1. After explaining the situation, some comprehension questions were asked in order to check whether participants understood the situation. All participants answered these questions correctly. After participants could decide which amount they wished to contribute to the public good, they learned about the other members' contributions. As in Experiment 1, it was said that the group did not contribute a sufficient amount of chips in order to reach the threshold. Participants learned that two group members contributed an equal share (= 50 chips) and another group member (group member number two) violated the equal share by contributing only 10 chips.[2]

3.1.2.2. Leadership manipulation. Before participants could decide about their contribution to the public good, the leadership manipulation was introduced. This manipulation was the same as in Experiment 1, except that one other condition was added to the follower and leader conditions. In the *merit-leader* condition, participants were told that "As a leader, group member two has to perform and maintain some extra tasks for the group," whereas this information was not presented in the leader condition. All participants remembered correctly that they were assigned the role as follower in the group.

3.1.2.3. Asking for forgiveness. The forgiveness manipulation was the same as in Experiment 1.

3.1.2.4. Dependent measures. The dependent measures were similar to those of Experiment 1. All questions were answered on a scale of 1 (= "not at all") to 7 (= "very much so"). Participants were asked to what extent they could forgive the group member who was responsible for the failure of the group to provide the bonus. Also, participants were asked how they felt in this situation, using the emotions angry, frustrated, irritated, disappointed, hostile, and aggrieved. These items were combined to form one negative-emotion scale (Cronbach's α = .89). After a few moments, the experimenter entered the room with an envelope containing 10 lottery tickets. As in Experiment 1, participants were asked to decide on the number of tickets to keep for themselves. The remaining lottery tickets would be handed over by the experimenter to group member two (that is, the violator). Participants learned that the more tickets they kept the more their chances would increase for an extra, 7 Euro reward.

Further, the same TRIM measure as in Experiment 1 was used (Cronbach's α = .84). Then, participants were asked to what extent they thought a leader should apologize and ask for forgiveness when he/she makes an error, and to what extent they thought certain rules were violated. Single-item measures were used because by using single items this was less obtrusive for participants. Also, the use of single item measures has been shown to be a valid way to assess certain measures (see e.g., Sackett & Larson, 1990; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and paid.

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[2] Because followers took an average of 52.29 (SD = 6.86) chips for themselves, it was clear that the threshold of 200 chips could not be reached.

Fig. 3. The relationship between a leader or a follower violating equality and the request for forgiveness on negative emotions (Experiment 2).

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Forgiving

A 3 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the extent that group members wanted to forgive the violator revealed a main effect for seeking forgiveness, $F(2, 134) = 8.42$, $p < .01$, and an interaction effect, $F(2, 134) = 7.32$, $p < .01$. This interaction showed that when a follower violated equality, group members were more likely to forgive when the follower asked for forgiveness ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 0.96$) than when the follower did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1, 45) = 22.78$, $p < .001$. In the leader condition, group members also were more likely to forgive when the leader asked for forgiveness ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.38$) than when the leader did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.69$), $F(1, 42) = 5.02$, $p < .05$. However, group members did not significantly differ in forgiving in the merit-leader condition as a function of seeking forgiveness (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.45$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.60$), $F(1, 47) = 1.53$, $p < .23$).

3.2.2. Negative emotional reactions

A 3 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on negative emotional reactions showed a main effect for seeking forgiveness, $F(2, 134) = 13.45$, $p < .01$, and an interaction effect, $F(2, 134) = 4.25$, $p < .05$ (Fig. 3). This interaction showed that only when a follower violated equality, group members reacted emotionally less negative when the follower asked for forgiveness ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.10$) than when the follower did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1, 45) = 18.73$, $p < .001$. No significant effects for seeking forgiveness were found in the leader (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.39$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.93$), $F(1, 42) = 1.23$, $p < .28$, and merit-leader conditions (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.58$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.35$), $F(1, 47) = 0.03$, $p < .96$.

3.2.3. Lottery tickets

A 3 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the amount of lottery tickets that participants kept for themselves revealed a main effect for leadership, $F(2, 134) = 8.93$, $p < .001$, and an interaction effect, $F(2, 134) = 3.19$, $p < .05$ (Fig. 4). The interaction effect showed that when a follower violated equality, group members kept fewer lottery tickets when the follower asked for forgiveness ($M = 6.22$, $SD = 0.55$) than when the follower did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 7.34$, $SD = 1.34$), $F(1, 45) = 11.32$, $p < .005$. No

Fig. 4. The relationship between a leader or a follower violating equality and the request for forgiveness on the amount of lottery tickets that are taken (Experiment 2).

significant effects for seeking forgiveness were found in the leader (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 7.13$, $SD = 1.42$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 6.90$, $SD = 1.48$), $F(1, 42) = 0.26$, $p < .62$, and merit-leader conditions (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 8.12$, $SD = 1.75$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 7.87$, $SD = 1.79$), $F(1, 47) = 0.24$, $p < .64$.

3.2.4. TRIM

A 3 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the TRIM scale showed an interaction effect, $F(2, 134) = 2.80$, $p = .06$. This interaction revealed that when a follower violated equality, group members showed less retributive reactions when the follower asked for forgiveness ($M = 1.41$, $SD = 0.59$) than when the follower did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.76$), $F(1, 45) = 8.53$, $p < .01$. No significant effects for seeking forgiveness were found in the leader condition (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.81$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 1.99$, $SD = 0.62$), $F(1, 42) = 0.04$, $p < .84$, nor in the merit-leader condition (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 2.04$, $SD = 0.69$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.71$), $F(1, 47) = 0.03$, $p < .88$.

3.2.5. Acceptability of leaders asking for forgiveness

A 3 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the item whether leaders who made an error, should apologize and ask for forgiveness yielded a main effect for leadership, $F(2, 134) = 3.02$, $p > .05$. Post-hoc tests showed that leaders ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.18$) should apologize and ask for forgiveness more than merit-leaders ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.58$; $p < .05$). Leaders and merit-leaders were not significantly different from the condition in which followers violated equality ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.53$), $ps > .40$. Hence, they were equally expected to ask for forgiveness.

3.2.6. Are leaders violating an allocation rule?

A 3 (leadership) × 2 (seeking forgiveness) ANOVA on the item whether rules were violated revealed an interaction effect, $F(2, 134) = 5.71$, $p < .01$. This showed that when a follower violated equality, group members thought that rules were less violated when the follower asked for forgiveness ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.53$) than when the follower did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.78$), $F(1, 45) = 5.10$, $p < .05$. In contrast, in the leader condition, group members thought that rules were more violated when the leader asked for forgiveness ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.35$) than when the leader did not ask for forgiveness ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.61$), $F(1, 42) = 4.55$, $p < .05$. No significant effects for seeking forgiveness were found in the merit-leader condition (ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.45$; not-ask-for-forgiveness: $M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.27$), $F(1, 47) = 1.07$, $p < .31$.

To check whether leaders were judged as violating rules less than followers, post-hoc tests in the no forgiveness condition showed that there was a significant difference between leaders and followers, $p < .05$, suggesting that leaders were less seen as violating rules, although merit leaders were not different from followers, $p < .64$.

Considering these findings, it may well be that, because group members did not consider leaders to have violated rules, seeking forgiveness may not influence group member's cooperation with regard to the lottery tickets. To test this, we used bootstrapping techniques using 1000 replications to examine whether the interactive effect of leadership and forgiveness on cooperation would be mediated by whether rules were violated. Bootstrapping treats the sample as a population and then re-samples with replacement a number of times and computes relevant statistics for each replacement sample. An average of the standardized regression weights is calculated and compared with the estimators obtained as a result of model testing (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Shrout & Bolger, 2002; Yung & Bentler, 1996). Results of bootstrapping showed, first of all, that the mediator, violation of rules, was significant, $t = 3.89$, $p < .001$, on cooperation. In addition, the interactive effect of leadership and forgiveness turned non-significant, $t = -.70$, $p > .48$. This shows that the interactive effect of leadership and forgiveness on cooperation was mediated by the perception of whether rules were violated. Further, the perception that rules were violated was shown to be related to group members granting forgiveness ($r = -.24$, $p < .005$) and to negative emotions ($r = .22$, $p < .01$).

3.3. Discussion

The results of Experiment 2 largely replicate the results of Experiment 1. After a transgression, followers benefit from asking for forgiveness and leaders do not benefit so much. That is, asking for forgiveness leads to less negative emotion, more forgiveness, and less getting even, but only when the transgressor is a follower. Yet, in contrast to Experiment 1, results also showed that leaders in contrast to merit-leaders benefit from asking forgiveness for granting forgiveness. Hence, there seems some evidence that leaders may also be forgiven more if they asked for forgiveness.

Experiment 2 also tried to improve the leadership manipulation. Generally, results showed that differences between the leader and merit-leader conditions were not so pronounced, which may indicate that subjects did not see added value of leadership activities over having leadership status. It also means that the leadership manipulation in Experiment 1 is appropriate, at least compared to Experiment 2. In sum, Hypotheses 1–3 receive support.

Experiment 2 also tried to explain why seeking forgiveness did not influence group members' reactions to leaders but did influence their reactions to followers. We pitted two hypotheses against each other. First, Hypothesis 4a predicts that leaders asking for forgiveness are counter-normative, but followers asking for forgiveness may be appropriate. That is, leaders should not, and are not expected to, ask for forgiveness. Alternatively, Hypothesis 4b predicts that followers would be judged as violating rules more so than leaders would for contributing less than an equal share. That is, leaders are permitted to take a disproportionate share of resources. Our study supports the latter hypothesis over the former. That is, Hypothesis 4a received no support, as leaders asking for forgiveness was seen as just as acceptable as followers asking for forgiveness. Yet, Hypothesis 4b received support. By taking a

disproportionate share, leaders are not violating a rule and followers are violating a rule. In short, leaders and followers are held to different allocation rules.

4. General discussion

The present research addressed whether leaders are seen as violating fairness rules in the group by contributing less than an equal share and whether they benefit from asking forgiveness. Should a group leader ask for forgiveness for contributing less than an equal share? The results generally show that seeking forgiveness for transgressions does not result in more forgiveness of leaders. On the other hand, group followers definitely should ask for forgiveness for appropriating a disproportionate share. Asking for forgiveness results in less anger from other group members, more granting of forgiveness, and less getting even reactions. Below, these findings will be discussed in more detail.

Recent research has investigated when leaders will take a disproportionate share of collective benefits (e.g., De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005; Stouten et al., 2005b). Our study here adds to this literature by showing what the consequences are of leaders taking more on subsequent group member behavior: Apparently, group members do not perceive leaders violating the equality rule as unfair, but rather believe leaders are entitled to earn more because of their perceived extra "input" (see also Van Dijk & Wilke, 1993). Thus, followers agree with leaders, who feel entitled to earn more, and this could drive group members' cooperative behavior (De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005; Stouten et al., 2005b). We also found no consistent evidence that leadership activity (i.e., the extra work of coordinating the group), was an input above and beyond the mere status of receiving a "leader" label because of better performance on a leadership aptitude test.

The present findings also are important for current leadership theories. For example, the concept of ethical leadership has recently received more attention (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Ethical leadership holds that leaders should adhere to norms and principles in their decision and actions. Ethical leaders often can be described as fair and principled. In fact, transformational leaders look beyond self-interest and promote collective interests (e.g., Bass, 1990; Turner, Barling, Epitropaki, Butcher, & Milner, 2002). Ethical and transformational leadership have been shown to relate to increased extra-role behavior, organizational commitment, satisfaction, and motivation (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Cullen, Parboteeah, & Victor, 2003). The present research, however, demonstrated that a leader's violating equality norms seemed to be accepted by followers and did not affect followers' motivation. In correspondence with the findings from the ethical leadership literature, it is yet unclear whether followers in such a situation will be less likely to engage in extra-role behavior, even whether they are still committed to the leader or the organization.

Indeed, the literature on executive pay has, for example, investigated what happens to organizations when low-level employees perceive the difference between their pay and top-level executives' pay as inequitable (Wilhelm, 1993). First, perceived internal pay inequity is associated with turnover (Wade, O'Reilly, & Pollock, 2006). Second, Lazear (1989) argues that pay variance leads to less cooperation, and is thus less efficient, at least when lower-level employees don't believe that they may some day "win" a top management job (Lazear & Sherwin, 1981). Cowherd & Levine (1992) also theorize that pay inequity leads to a lack of cooperation, which results in inferior work. In their study, they compared hourly workers to managers in the top three levels of 102 business units, computing a ratio of the two groups' pay. This ratio correlated negatively with product quality.

One could argue that followers should not compare their outcomes to their leaders' outcomes because leaders often also hold more duties and responsibilities. But the fact is employees do make upward social comparisons (Kulik & Ambrose, 1992), perhaps because information about executives is easily available. Whatever the reason, such comparisons often result in a sense of injustice known as relative deprivation (Crosby, 1984; Martin, 1981).

Our findings here suggest that pay variance need not lead to less cooperation in an additional exchange in which the violator is involved. In fact, in our study, it was acceptable for leaders to take more benefits than followers. So, to explain these apparently discrepant findings, what might be some of the differences between the organizational contexts examined in the executive compensation literature and the work-group context we examined? For one thing, the former compares leaders to followers across many organizational levels, whereas the latter compares leaders to followers across one level, and also compares followers to followers at the same level. Perhaps organizational proximity of the leader matters, such that proximal leaders are forgiven more easily than distal leaders.

A more likely explanation has to do with the magnitude: we examined rewards that were unequal by the leader getting up to 36% to 400% more chips than the followers–and more chips equals better chances at a mere 7 Euro bonus–whereas the executive compensation literature examines executives earning up to 1000% more than first-line employees (i.e., a range of five-digit incomes to seven- to eight-digit incomes; see e.g., Rees, 1993). In short, we studied minor differences in reward, whereas the executive compensation literature examined very large–some would say "obscene"–differences. There may be some threshold level of pay variance, only after which employees become uncooperative.

We add to the social dilemma literature by showing that a simple request for forgiveness can attenuate the effect of a follower's violation of equality on other group members' anger and subsequent lack of cooperation. This adds to previous research because it mainly focused on how granting forgiveness affects the perpetrator's reactions (Karremans et al., 2005; Sandage et al., 2000). The present research addressed how requests for forgiveness influence other members' reactions. Results show that, at least, the request for forgiveness helps when there is a violation to forgive, as there is when non-leaders violate equality, but does not help so much when there is no violation to forgive, as there is not when leaders violate equality. Followers, however, do benefit from asking forgiveness for transgressions. Hence, although at first such fairness violations may lead to negative emotions, retribution, and less cooperation, a request for forgiveness attenuates such reactions. Thus, by asking forgiveness, followers' vulnerability is able to quickly turn around the heated situation.

The present research is also central for understanding the role of emotions and revenge in high interdependence situations. To date, social dilemma research has paid little attention to this type of reactions, despite the fact that recent literature specifically outlines the importance of emotions and revenge in decision-making (Hertel, 1999; Knapp & Clark, 1991; Loewenstein & Lerner, 2002).

Consistent with the revenge and injustice literature, we find perceptions of inequity can lead to negative emotional reactions (such as anger) and "getting even" behavior (Stouten et al., 2005a, 2006). Inequity can often be described as the perception that one's inputs relative to one's outcomes are not proportional to another person's inputs and his or her outcomes (Adams, 1965). However, because in many cases it is hard to observe the inputs and outcomes of oneself and the other, the perception of inequity can be considered in the eye of the beholder.

Also, more forgiving reduces the "getting even" behavior of ticket-taking for followers. We add to the study of forgiveness in two ways. First, we demonstrate that seeking forgiveness increases the granting of forgiveness, but–second–mostly for a follower who asks for forgiveness, and less so for a leader. We provide some evidence that it may be counter-normative for some organizational members to seek forgiveness. In fact, the present research demonstrated that granting forgiveness is dependent on one's status in the group. For example, leaders are more easily forgiven, whereas for followers a request for forgiveness is necessary for attenuating negative reactions.

4.1. Practical implications

Leaders feel entitled to more, are inclined to benefit more than others, and, as the present research demonstrates, this behavior is tolerated by followers. Hence, organizations should be careful that leaders do not over benefit themselves at the expense of the group.

Similarly, in the social dilemma situation that was used in the present studies, the violation of equality of the leader is a clear signal of acting greedy and is likely to be disastrous for the group as a whole because the public good could not be accomplished. For example, research shows that leaders are more likely to violate norms or break promises more often than followers (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Mondillon et al., 2005; Tedeschi et al., 1969). In addition, research showed that leaders' feelings of entitlement may lead to violating the organization's rules and regulations. For example, Kramer (2003) noted: "The sacrifices an individual makes on the way to the top not only make it harder to cope with the rewards when they do come, they also make the person greedier for more of the same (p. 63)."

Hence, organizations should take care that leaders remain fair in their decision behavior, especially because followers may be likely to easily forgive leader violations. However, over time, if multiple violations occur, leaders may damage their reputation and followers may not tolerate leaders' behavior anymore. In this case, followers may indeed perceive injustice and retaliate. Clearly, such retaliation can damage the organization apart from the fact that leaders' self-interested behavior itself may hurt the organizations' reputation.

4.2. Limitations and future research

First of all, our manipulation of forgiveness involved both an apology and a request for forgiveness. Therefore, group members' reactions may have been influenced by apologizing and/or by the request for forgiveness. In the present research, it was proposed that it would be rather strange to ask for forgiveness without apologizing as well. Also, in daily life, people generally are first inclined to say sorry and ask for forgiveness (e.g., Purtilo, 2005). However, in order to disentangle the effects of apologizing and asking for forgiveness in future research should benefit from separating its effects. Also, with respect to the forgiveness manipulation check, future research may include questions that ask if participants recognized that they were being asked to forgive in order to put the forgiveness manipulation to a stricter test.

While the strength of the laboratory methodology is control that allows causal inference, the tradeoff is external validity. In this study, the context was simplified in that groups were temporary, did not truly work together, and group members did not really interact. In addition, participants knew that they only were going to interact temporarily with the other group members. Yet, just like in other social dilemma experiments, participants still acted as if they cared whether their group norms were violated. Recently it also has been argued that findings from lab research are comparable in both nature and effect size to those of field research (Anderson, Lindsay, & Bushman, 1999). As such, we provide a conservative test of our hypotheses. Nevertheless, future field research is needed to generalize our findings to organizational settings in which followers are on a daily basis confronted with the leader's decisions.

A further concern is that subjects' responses may be influenced by considerations of social desirability. That is, participants may have felt that if they decided to retaliate against the leader, this may have severe consequences as the leader would be able to retaliate. However, group members would not likely believe that their emotional responses would be communicated to the leader of the group and these findings are similar to the behavioral results. Because group members' emotional and behavioral responses converge, there is little reason to assume that group members answered in a socially desirable way with respect to the behavioral responses. Otherwise, emotional and behavioral reactions would have been different. In addition, behavior in real-world settings is also influenced by certain norms of behavior, and it is unclear whether norms exert a greater impact in real or experimental settings.

Note that Experiment 2 was conducted to make the leadership manipulation richer, by adding leadership activity to aptitude. However, this made little difference in the results. Unfortunately, it also leaves us with fewer clues to what precisely it is about

being a "leader" that makes group members more tolerant of fairness violations. Future research should investigate different dimensions of leadership to answer this question.

Future research may also focus on how asking for forgiveness affects followers' reactions when more than one violation of equality occurs. That is, in the present research equality was violated only once. However, it may well be that followers will be less forgiving when multiple violations by the same group member occur. Similarly, how will the asking for forgiveness affect followers' reactions when this request is perceived as insincere? That is, in order to attenuate affective and behavioral reactions the request for forgiveness should be perceived as sincere (e.g., Stouten et al., 2006).

Along similar lines, how will followers perceive leaders who asked for forgiveness after a violation of equality? Will they be able to still trust the leader as the representative and decision-maker in the group? Might leaders who ask for forgiveness will be seen as more questionable and considered as less trustworthy because such a request can be seen as an acknowledgment of guilt (Schlenker, 1980; Stouten et al., 2006)? However, Kim et al. (2004) recently showed that if it is expressed that such a violation will not occur in the future, which is expressed in a request for forgiveness, trust can be repaired. In addition, the fact that trust can be repaired is also dependent on whether the violation was a matter of competence or integrity. Future research is needed to examine the exact role of trust in these processes and to study which determinants are predictive of repairing or maintaining trust in the leader in future group accomplishment.

4.3. Conclusion

Leaders may on specific occasions be tempted to take from collective investments. Seeking forgiveness may be an appropriate manner to signal to the group that one is sorry. Requesting forgiveness leads to the receiving of forgiveness, but not always. There are boundary conditions. The present research showed that one such boundary condition is whether the violator seeking forgiveness is a leader or a follower. Followers asking for forgiveness of others receive more forgiveness; but leaders asking for forgiveness do not receive more forgiveness. At least not in small-group social-dilemmas. Why not? Because leaders and followers are held to different rules: unjust behavior, such as fairness violations can be perceived to be, is tolerated from leaders but not from followers. Thus, followers need to, and thus benefit from, asking for forgiveness, while leaders do not.

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