Not All Success Is Created Equal: The Innovation Costs of Extreme Success

Abstract

Corporate ideation systems are increasingly used to harness employee creativity for innovation. Within these systems, serial ideators play a central role by consistently supplying new ideas. While prior research has emphasized the benefits of past success in fostering future innovation, it often treats all successes as functionally equivalent. In this study, we adopt a more nuanced perspective by distinguishing between ordinary and extreme success, and theorize that extreme success, but not ordinary success, undermines innovation outcomes. Drawing on a four-year archival dataset encompassing 1,145 ideas submitted by 236 serial ideators within the internal ideation system of a global automotive firm, we find that past extreme success significantly reduces the likelihood of subsequent idea implementation. We further demonstrate that this effect is driven by two mediating mechanisms: (i) reduced team idea development and (ii) inflated self-perceived social status. In two follow-up experiments, we provide causal evidence that extreme success influences the two mediators. Together, our research advances prior work by conceptually and empirically distinguishing between ordinary and extreme success in ideation systems and uncovering the specific mechanisms through which extreme success, unlike ordinary success, can hinder subsequent innovation outcomes. We discuss several implications for managers seeking to foster sustained employee creativity and innovation through digital ideation.

Keywords: idea management, creativity, innovation, collaboration, social status, extreme success

1. Introduction

Companies have long recognized employee creativity as a catalyst for innovation (Hartmann and Hartmann, 2023; Schweisfurth and Dharmawan, 2019). To effectively harness the creative potential of employees, many organizations employ digital platforms, often referred to as web-based ideation systems (Beretta, 2019; Gamber et al., 2022). These platforms have evolved well beyond static idea repositories; they now integrate structured processes that support idea generation, development, evaluation, and implementation, often supplemented by real-time feedback and reward mechanisms for participating employees (Gerlach and Brem, 2017). As such, ideation systems play a strategically important role in transforming employees' creativity into innovations (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017).

Serial ideators who regularly contribute ideas to organizational ideation systems are particularly important for both the sustainability of these systems and the overall organization's competitiveness (Bayus, 2013; Van den Ende et al., 2015). A growing body of research has examined how prior ideation outcomes shape the nature and quality of future contributions. Specifically, several studies show that earlier success can enhance future performance by enabling ideators to learn from positive experiences (e.g., Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014; Hofstetter et al., 2018). At the same time, Bayus (2013) demonstrates that earlier success can lead to fixation, harming subsequent efforts by ideators. Despite these valuable insights, prior work has largely treated all instances of success as equivalent, without distinguishing between modest achievements and extraordinary.

We contend that understanding extreme success's role is important from theoretical and practical standpoints. Experience of extreme success that significantly exceeds an ideator's initial expectations and are typically evidenced by extraordinary rewards may trigger distinct psychological and behavioral responses beyond what can be expected from either ordinary success or failure. Evidence from various fields supports this idea. For

instance, in service research, “customer delight” (i.e., extreme satisfaction) prompts different reactions than mere satisfaction, including heightened loyalty, more vigorous word-of-mouth, and increased future expectations (Chitturi et al., 2008; Finn, 2012; Oliver et al., 1997). In finance, traders who experience extraordinary gains often develop behavioral biases (Peterson, 2005; Pompian, 2012; Zhang and Teo, 2014) that subsequently impair future performance (Barber and Odean, 2000; Peterson, 2005; 2011).

In the context of innovation, extreme success can signal the emergence of an exceptional serial ideator who consistently produces breakthrough, high-value contributions with a strong potential to shape organizational outcomes (Griffin et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2018; Narin and Breitzman, 1995). The influence of these innovators often extends beyond their own outputs, as they can elevate performance standards among their peers (Hohberger, 2016; Liu et al., 2018; Oettl, 2012). Consequently, organizations seek to retain rare contributors, viewing them as uniquely valuable drivers of innovation success (Griffin et al., 2020). Yet, ironically, the very experience of extreme success, which serves as a strong marker of ideator potential, may also introduce challenges that hinder future performance (Packalen et al., 2023). Understanding how extreme success shapes subsequent ideation behavior is, therefore, essential for designing systems that not only recognize creativity but also sustain it over time.

This study directly examines how extreme ideation success affects future innovation outcomes. We theorize that extreme success can undermine subsequent idea implementation. We identify two mechanisms for this effect: a reduced willingness to engage in team-based idea development and an increase in self-perceived social status, both of which negatively affect the likelihood that future ideas are implemented. We test our hypotheses drawing on a four-year dataset from an internal ideation system of a large automotive company, comprising 1,145 ideas submitted by 236 different ideators. The findings show that extreme success is associated with lower rates of idea implementation, a pattern that is statistically

accounted for by reduced team idea development and elevated self-perceived status. Two follow-up experimental studies (one reported in the main text and one in the Web Appendix) provide causal evidence that extreme success influences these two mediators, supporting our theorized mechanisms.

Our study makes three key contributions to research on creativity and innovation, which collectively offer new theoretical and practical insights into the design of ideation systems that foster ongoing employee innovation. First, we contribute to the literature on success and innovation (e.g., Bayus, 2013; Beretta, 2019; Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014) by distinguishing between ordinary and extreme ideation success. While prior research treats success as a uniform construct and often documents its positive influence on future innovation (see Bayus, 2013 for an exception), we demonstrate that extreme success can adversely affect subsequent idea implementation. Second, we advance theoretical understanding of the mechanisms linking past success to future innovation outcomes. Specifically, we identify and empirically validate two novel mediators: reduced team-based idea development and inflated self-perceived social status. These findings help explain why extreme success can undermine performance and offer a more nuanced account of the behavioral consequences of achieving recognition in ideation systems. Third, we extend research on serial innovators (e.g., Griffin et al., 2009; Pescher et al., 2024) by examining how extreme success shapes the long-term creative trajectory of high-performing ideators. While organizations often focus on identifying and rewarding exceptional contributors, our findings suggest sustaining their innovation performance may require more than continued recognition alone. Together, these findings offer new theoretical and practical insights into the design of ideation systems that aim to foster ongoing employee innovation.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. From creativity to innovation

Driven by advancements in information technologies (Acar, 2019), organizations are increasingly using digital ideation systems. Numerous companies from a wide range of industries (e.g., Dell, Osram, or Renault) turn to web-based ideation platforms in their quest for both radical and incremental ideas (Bayus, 2013; Deichmann et al., 2021). These systems are often classified in two ways. On the one hand, closed, corporate platforms exist that are designed for internal ideation, fostering idea generation exclusively among a company's employees (Deichmann et al., 2021; Kruft et al., 2019; Schweisfurth and Dharmawan, 2019). On the other hand, some organizations also use open platforms, also classified as crowdsourcing, that focus on external ideation and solicit contributions from users outside the organizational boundaries (Dahlander et al., 2021; Pollok et al., 2019; Schemmann et al., 2016). In this paper, we focus on the former, internal ideation systems.

Modern digital ideation systems support ideators through various stages of the ideation journey (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017). This includes the generation of creative ideas (Gibbs et al., 2017), the improvement of ideas (Zhu et al., 2019), and the subsequent selection of ideas (Beretta, 2019). Integral to digital ideation is the recognition and appreciation of ideas through the provision of rewards (Gerlach and Brem, 2017). Rewards in this process can be grouped into two categories: non-monetary rewards, such as social recognition (Beretta, 2019) and non-cash prizes (Bayus, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2017), and monetary rewards (Bockstedt et al., 2016; Hartmann and Hartmann, 2023). In this study, we concentrate on monetary rewards, seeing them as a success experience for ideators in a digital ideation system.

2.2. Success experience and subsequent idea implementation

In Table 1, we highlight several papers that have explored the effects of past ideation success on subsequent ideation performance. Most studies document the positive effects of past success (Bockstedt et al., 2015; 2016; Boons and Stam, 2019; Deichmann and Jensen,

2018; Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014; Hofstetter et al., 2018; Lehmann et al., 2025), while a few of the highlighted studies also report about negative (Bayus, 2013) or non-significant effects of success (Beretta, 2019) on subsequent ideation performance.

While prior work varies in defining success, ranging from implementation outcomes and funding awards to contest rankings and reward receipt, these studies consistently treat success as a homogeneous construct without differentiating between ordinary and extreme success. The dominant theoretical lens emphasizes how prior success influences learning based on the successful experience itself (Bayus, 2013; Deichmann and Jensen, 2018; Hofstetter et al., 2018). However, much less attention has been paid to how prior success may shape ideators' self-perceptions of and subsequent engagement with others in future ideation efforts. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which past success influences subsequent innovation have rarely been empirically tested (see Lehmann et al., 2025 for an exception).

In contrast, our study adopts a novel perspective by explicitly differentiating the effects of extreme success and ordinary success in employee ideation. We further extend the literature by theoretically developing and empirically examining two underlying mechanisms, namely team idea development and self-perceived social status, through which extreme success shapes idea implementation. As shown in Table 1, our study is the first to distinguish between types of success and to empirically test how extreme success influences future idea implementation through identifiable psychological and behavioral pathways.

Insert Table 1 about here

2.3. Differentiating ordinary from extreme success

Building on earlier literature regarding performance assessment based on initial expectations (Oliver, 1980; Oliver and Swan, 1989), we define extreme success as success that significantly exceeds the ideator's expectations. This conceptualization requires

considering both the expectation of success before receiving an evaluation outcome and the perception of performance after receiving the evaluation outcome. Generally, performance can fall into three categories: negative disconfirmation, where performance falls below expectations; confirmation, where performance meets expectations; and positive disconfirmation, where performance vastly exceeds expectations. In our context, to achieve an extreme level of success, ideators must perceive their performance as significantly surpassing their initial expectations, often indicated by receiving unusually high praise and/or extraordinary rewards compared to the standard.

It is important to note that the ideator's assessment of performance is subjective and context dependent. For example, in recurring ideation contests where ideas are frequently implemented, failing to have an idea implemented can be self-perceived as a clear failure. Conversely, in one-off contests where ideas are rarely implemented (e.g., one per million ideas), having an idea implemented or even selected for the next round can be considered an extreme success. Similarly, while a $20,000 reward might be seen as standard in open-innovation contests for cutting-edge technology (Analytics India Magazine, 2024; Wazoku, 2024), a $1,000 reward can be viewed as an extraordinary reward in firm-internal employee ideation where rewards are rarely distributed.

Although extreme success is a numerical subset of the past success construct examined in prior ideation research (Table 1), it is neither equivalent to nor a valid proxy for the aggregate construct. Past success measures typically combine ordinary and rare or extreme outcomes. Yet, because ordinary successes vastly outnumber extremes, reported effects overwhelmingly reflect cases of ordinary success. This distinction is intuitive when considering phenomena with varying intensity. For example, normal doses of medicine promote healing, while extreme doses can trigger harmful physiological responses; one would not use the effects of extreme dosing to represent a drug's typical impact. Similarly, in

financial markets, past positive returns often reinforce disciplined investing, whereas extraordinary profits can trigger overtrading behaviors, which tends to reduce subsequent performance (Choi et al., 2009; Peterson, 2005; Phan et al., 2018). In ideation contexts, extreme success likewise operates through distinct mechanisms that cannot be inferred from overall success patterns. Thus, while prior research has documented the effects of overall past success (e.g., Bayus, 2013; Deichmann and Jensen, 2018; Lehmann et al., 2025), those findings do not reveal how extreme success specifically influences behavior. By isolating extreme cases, our work advances ideation theory by demonstrating that success effects are non-linear; extreme achievement activates unique psychological and social dynamics that can derail future innovation.

3. Extreme success, team idea development, and subsequent idea implementation

We theorize first how extreme success can negatively affect the likelihood that ideators develop subsequent ideas with a team. While team idea development offers both benefits and drawbacks, ideators weigh these factors when deciding whether to collaborate (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018). We propose that experiencing extreme success leads ideators to underestimate the benefits of team idea development while overemphasizing its costs. As a result, ideators are likely to avoid team idea development in subsequent ideation efforts.

We argue that extreme success tends to amplify overconfidence, causing individuals to overestimate their idea generation abilities and knowledge. Prior research shows that even moderate positive outcome on earlier ideas can boost ideators' confidence by validating their competencies (Hofstetter et al., 2018), providing encouragement (Chan et al., 2021), and facilitating positive emotions (Camacho et al., 2019). It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that extreme success will have an even greater impact. Rather than confidence, what ideators now might experience is overconfidence. Moreover, we argue that extreme success leads ideators to attribute their achievements predominantly to their own exceptional abilities, rather than to

external factors such as help from others, timing, or luck (Miller and Ross, 1975). This self-serving attribution bias stems from the tendency to focus on successful outcomes while neglecting the underlying development process. Research on trading behavior demonstrates that individuals who achieve unusually high returns often discount the role of chance, believing instead that their outcomes stem solely from personal skills, leading to less effective future decisions (Pompian, 2012). Similarly, extreme success can distort ideators' evaluations of the ideation process, leading them to disregard external factors (e.g., luck) and instead credit the exceptional outcome to their own abilities, reinforcing an inflated belief in their self-sufficiency.

When ideators believe they can succeed based solely on their own superior skills (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018), they see little reason to collaborate. Although having teammates can provide access to complementary skills (Fischer et al., 2023; Gibbs et al., 2017) and reduce individual effort through workload sharing (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018), ideators who have previously achieved extreme success tend to discount these advantages, assuming they alone possess the capabilities required to generate the next breakthrough. These tendencies are further reinforced by the inherent challenges of teamwork. Coordination efforts typically increase in team settings (Staats et al., 2012), while control over the creative process needs to be relinquished (Grimes, 2018; Howell et al., 2022; Rouse, 2020), and the potential rewards of a successful idea must be distributed among team members (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2000). Rational ideators assess the trade-offs between such costs and benefits when deciding whether to engage in team-based innovation (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018). However, overconfident ideators are more likely to perceive the costs as outweighing the benefits. Working independently allows them to maintain full control over the creative process, follow their preferred methods, and retain the full share of potential rewards, reinforcing their belief that they are both capable and sufficient on their own.

One might expect the adverse effects of team-based extreme success on subsequent idea development to be attenuated. After all, since the victory is shared, team members may be more aware of the collective effort involved (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018), potentially weakening individual overconfidence. Nevertheless, we propose that such inflated self-perceptions can persist due to the dominance of self-serving attribution bias in positive outcomes (Bradley, 1978; Miller and Ross, 1975), which can also operate in team contexts (Schlenker and Miller, 1977). By focusing primarily on the extreme success outcome rather than the underlying collaborative process, each team member may disproportionately credit themselves for the group's accomplishment (Ross and Sicoly, 1979). Consequently, overconfidence, though likely less pronounced than in a strictly individual context, can still undermine team development.

In summary, ideators who have received extremely positive outcomes from the organization regarding their past performance are more likely to develop subsequent ideas alone. They exhibit high confidence in their ability to generate successful ideas independently and tend to dismiss the value of others' contributions. Consequently, they undervalue the benefits of team idea development. By generating and implementing ideas independently, they avoid what they perceive as the disadvantages of teamwork. Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a. Experience of extreme success is negatively associated with team idea development.

While we theorize that ideators who experienced extreme success will opt to develop subsequent ideas alone, we hypothesize next that team idea development will more likely be associated with idea implementation. It is well established that teamwork enhances both idea generation and implementation (Kurtzberg and Amabile, 2001; Singh and Fleming, 2010; Tierney and Farmer, 2002). Collaboration can significantly increase the success (e.g.,

Deshmane and Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2023) as well as the impact of creative and innovative work once implemented (e.g., Deichmann et al., 2020; Singh and Fleming, 2010).

Specifically, through team idea development, ideators can leverage team members' diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and skills (Acar et al., 2024; Gibbs et al., 2017). As such, teams not only develop better ideas but also provide constructive feedback and identify weaknesses more effectively than a lone ideator could do. Different team members can rigorously evaluate various ideas and, through collaboration, pool their resources to address any identified weaknesses (Harvey, 2014; Kurtzberg and Amabile, 2001). This collaborative process can also lead to identifying new and potentially better ideas that can be proposed for evaluation (Harvey and Kou, 2013). Improved or new ideas are more likely to be successfully implemented as they have already been vetted and iteratively developed throughout the collaborative team process (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017).

Team idea development also signals to idea evaluators that there is sufficient commitment and support from various team members to successfully implement an idea (Deichmann et al., 2021). It shows that the ideator works with a group of people who trust each other (Lee and Gargiulo, 2022). This is important because implementing an idea involves many uncertainties, and those who can flexibly adjust and cope with new situations will be more successful in realizing their ideas (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010; West, 2002). Indeed, encouragement and support from team members are critical during tough and stressful situations, helping to overcome setbacks (Baer, 2012; Lechner and Floyd, 2012; Madjar et al., 2002). For these reasons, we suggest that team idea development is positively associated with idea implementation.

Hypothesis 1b. Team idea development is positively associated with subsequent idea implementation.

Hypothesis 1c. Team idea development mediates the relationship between the experience of extreme success and idea implementation.

4. Extreme success, self-perceived social status, and subsequent idea implementation

We theorize next that experiencing extreme success increases an ideator's self-perceived social status within an organization. Self-perceived social status refers to individuals' subjective evaluations of their relative standing within a social group (Janssen and Gao, 2015). Prior research suggests that individuals often perceive their ideas as extensions of the self, closely tied to their identity and self-efficacy (Grimes, 2018; Pierce et al., 2001; Rouse, 2020). As such, ideation outcomes are frequently internalized, with success or failure becoming personally meaningful and influencing perceptions of status. Building on this perspective, we argue that extreme success leads individuals to elevate their self-concept through both social comparisons with others and temporal comparisons with their former selves.

First, self-perceived status is fundamentally shaped by social comparison processes (Reh et al., 2022). For example, individuals with similar incomes may perceive their status differently depending on the affluence of their surrounding environment (Roy et al., 2016). Similarly, within ideation contexts, even standard achievements can provide an ideator with a sense of elevated status because it signals to themselves, and even to others, that they are more capable and competent than other ideators (Afuah and Tucci, 2012; Felin and Zenger, 2014). However, extreme success provides a far more favorable basis for social comparison, as it reflects a significant deviation from normative performance. Outperforming peers by a substantial margin allows individuals to infer a higher relative standing on the organizational status ladder. This effect is further amplified when ordinary success is very common (e.g., many participants receive recognition or small rewards) (Lehmann et al., 2025), while experiencing extreme success is perceived as rare and, therefore, more distinct.

Second, extreme success fosters elevated self-perceived status through temporal comparisons, by comparing the current self to the past self (Wilson and Ross, 2000; Zell and Alicke, 2009). As previously discussed, even modest positive outcomes can enhance self-confidence (Camacho et al., 2019; Chan et al., 2021). By extension, an extraordinary outcome can inflate ideators' self-assessments to a much greater extent. Specifically, ideators may selectively process information to credit their success in retrospect primarily to their skills and competencies rather than situational factors (Miller and Ross, 1975; Pompian, 2012). This self-serving bias can lead them to conclude they are more capable now than they were before in achieving extreme success, even if their competencies are objectively unchanged. Such overconfidence often translates into self-perceptions of higher social standing (Anderson et al., 2012a; Kennedy et al., 2013).

To clarify, we argue that extreme success can elevate self-perceived status whether the idea is developed individually or in a team. Although shared credit may temper social comparisons in a team context, individuals often internalize collective achievements as evidence of their own competence. Research shows that group members frequently over-claim credit for joint accomplishments, with each person viewing themselves as the primary driver of success (Ross and Sicoly, 1979). Additionally, the temporal comparison pathway remains intact: ideators may conclude they have become far more capable than before, regardless of whether the success was individual or shared.

In summary, we propose that extreme success heightens self-perceived social status by providing ideators with a meaningful basis for upward social and temporal comparison. As a result, when ideators achieve extreme success, they are more likely to perceive themselves as holding a higher social status within the organization.

Hypothesis 2a. The experience of extreme success is positively associated with self-perceived social status.

We hypothesize next that self-perceived social status will be associated with lower idea implementation. Prior research demonstrates that self-perceived social status substantially shapes individuals' cognitions, motivations, and behaviors (Anderson et al., 2012b; Pettit and Sivanathan, 2012; Yu et al., 2019). While increased status perceptions can enhance idea generation by boosting voice, self-efficacy, and motivation (Janssen and Gao, 2015; Lovaglia et al., 1998; Nease et al., 1999), we propose that excessively elevated self-perceived status may undermine idea implementation. Specifically, inflated status perceptions can reduce motivation to improve future performance, redirect attention and resources toward status signaling rather than idea development, and foster a risk-averse, authoritarian mindset.

First, once individuals believe they have reached their aspiring status through extreme success, they may become less motivated to exert the effort required for subsequent innovation. This occurs because many people treat status as an end in itself (Bothner et al., 2012; Walker and Smith, 2002). While those with moderately high status through past (ordinary) success may remain driven to close the gap to their desired standing (Lehmann et al., 2025), those who sense they have "hit the ceiling" become complacent. Prior research consistently suggests that performance improves with status up to a threshold, after which it tends to wane (Bothner et al., 2012).

Second, elevated self-perceived status can divert attention and cognitive resources away from core tasks, such as idea development, to activities helping to maintain or signal one's status. According to Anderson et al. (2008), individuals aim to align actual status with their self-perceived status, possibly to avoid status loss. Consequently, those with inflated status perceptions may prioritize demonstrating their status publicly (e.g., through visible self-promotion) over the demanding work of developing the next idea. Evidence from award-winning CEOs (as an indicator of elevated status) shows they often underperform relative to both their prior selves and non-winning CEOs, partly because they devote significant time to

status-oriented endeavors (e.g., public talks, writing books) rather than their core tasks (Malmendier and Tate, 2009). For ideators who achieve extreme success, a status source that may be less traditional or broadly recognized than standard promotions, the motivation to reinforce their elevated standing through conspicuous signaling may be even more potent, as their perceived status gains are more precarious and require more active maintenance. Unlike formalized promotions or established credentials, status derived from creative achievements exists in a more subjective and potentially ephemeral social space. Ideators with extreme success may therefore feel particular pressure to validate their newfound status through visible actions that demonstrate their expertise or influence.

Additionally, individuals with high self-perceived status can become increasingly concerned with how others perceive them (Pettit and Sivanathan, 2012). To affirm their standing, they may focus on meeting others' expectations of high-status behavior, such as helping or appearing generous, because it reaffirms their position in others' eyes (Blader et al., 2016; Doyle and Lount, 2023; Flynn, 2003). This attention shifts from concrete, detail-oriented tasks toward maintaining an abstract self-concept has been shown to be detrimental to creativity and idea implementation (Kim and Kim, 2020; Lehmann et al., 2025). Furthermore, as status grows, so can the fear of losing it, promoting greater investment in visible status markers.

Finally, a high self-view of social status often induces a risk-averse mindset. Individuals at this level typically prioritize status maintenance, which is associated with conservatism and authoritarianism (Briker et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2018). These individuals may favor routine activities that ensure stability over novelty (Jost et al., 2003; Jost et al., 2007). Such risk aversion is detrimental to generating creative and innovative ideas, which require cognitive flexibility and a willingness to depart from established norms (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017). Conversely, individuals who perceive themselves as holding a lower

social status within the organization may be more willing to adopt innovative approaches and disrupt the status quo to advance their social standing (Barron, 1969).

In conclusion, we propose that once ideators perceive their social status to be sufficiently high following extreme success, they become more complacent, invest effort and attention in publicly preserving their status through conspicuous yet less effort-intensive means, and avoid risks and truly innovative pursuits. As a result, the likelihood of subsequent idea implementation is expected to decrease.

Hypothesis 2b. Self-perceived social status is negatively associated with subsequent idea implementation.

Hypothesis 2c. Self-perceived social status mediates the relationship between the experience of extreme success and idea implementation.

Insert Figure 1 about here
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5. Study 1: Field study

5.1. Research setting

To address our research questions, we collaborated with an international company in the automotive industry and collected data from its firm-internal digital ideation system. In this system, employees submit as many process ideas as they want, either as a team or individually. Once submitted, these ideas are evaluated by experts from the company (e.g., managers in charge of the process to which the idea pertains) who determine whether or not to implement the ideas. Ideas that are not selected receive concise feedback detailing the reasons for rejection. Ideas that are selected also receive a brief congratulatory note and a monetary reward. The reward is set ex-post, after an idea is implemented, and is based solely on the merits of that idea, specifically its usability and potential cost savings, independent of other submissions. Notably, there are no restrictions regarding how high a reward can be.

The setting provides an ideal context for studying how subsequent idea implementation of ideators is affected by experiences of extreme success for two key reasons. First, the system allows ideators to submit multiple ideas over time which creates a longitudinal record of each individual's ideation history and allows us to track changes in behavior and outcomes following prior success. Second, because the system does not impose a cap on rewards, it naturally produces a wide distribution of reward sizes, making it possible to identify instances of "extreme success", which we operationalize as rewards exceeding one standard deviation above average reward sizes.

5.2. Data

We extracted data covering five years, allowing us to study a long enough time frame to track ideators' submission histories and behavioral patterns over time. We collected this data from the company's production site that had implemented the ideation system for the longest duration, which provided us with a rich record of ideators and their contributions. The full dataset consists of 1,830 ideas submitted by 423 different ideators. Monetary rewards for implemented ideas in this full dataset ranged from €0 to €11,313, with a median of €125.23 Euros, a mean of €290.83 and a standard deviation of €760.28. Our operationalization of extreme success is based on this reward distribution.

5.3. Measures

The dependent variable in our study, *idea implementation*, is dichotomous and captures whether a submitted idea was put into action (Schemmann et al., 2016; Schweisfurth and Dharmawan, 2019).

To operationalize our independent variable, we first categorized each ideator's experience during the twelve months preceding an idea submission into three mutually exclusive groups: (1) prior failure, defined as having experienced at least one failed idea and no prior success; (2) extreme success, defined as having experienced at least one instance of

extreme success; and (3) ordinary success, defined as having experienced at least one ordinary success but no extreme success. We use a 12-month window based on consultation with the partner company, which suggested that the rewards might have an impact as long as one year. Note that we also report robustness checks using an extended 24–48 months window.

We followed prior research on extreme project performance (Szatmari et al., 2021) and studies on extreme surprises in consumer behavior (Finn, 2012) to differentiate between ordinary and extreme success. Particularly, we define extreme success as receiving a reward that exceeds one standard deviation above the mean reward across the full study period (i.e., greater than 1,051 Euros). This threshold captures outcomes that deviate meaningfully from what ideators typically experience. To validate this operationalization, we conducted interviews with ideators and benchmarked against cross-industry norms. These insights confirmed that reward distributions in ideation systems, both within the focal firm and across comparable organizations, tend to be stable over time. This stability supports our use of a full-period threshold as reflective of the long-run expectations ideators form based on organizational norms, rather than short-term fluctuations. We validate this operationalization through alternative dynamic specifications reported in the robustness checks.

Second, for all our analyses, we created two dummy variables using failure as the reference category: one for extreme success (coded as 1 when the ideator experienced extreme success, and 0 when they experienced failure) and one for ordinary success (coded as 1 when the ideator experienced ordinary success, and 0 when they experienced failure). This allows us to isolate the effects of different types of success compared to the baseline of failure. It is worth noting that the way rewards were granted in the organization has remained stable throughout the four-year period covered by our dataset.

Our mediator variables are measured as follows. First, *team idea development* captures ideators' tendency to cooperate with others in idea generation. It represents a dichotomous variable and is measured as 1 in case follow-up ideas are submitted as a team and 0 when they are submitted individually. Second, we measure *self-perceived social status* using the "clout" variable from the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), developed by Pennebaker et al. (2015). This measure is based on research by Kacewicz et al. (2014), which demonstrated that language can reflect relative self-perceived social status; higher clout values indicate higher self-perceived status. Numerous subsequent studies have also used clout to measure self-perceived social status (e.g., Altmeier and Fisch, 2024; Eckardt et al., 2024; Vaughn, 2018).

We use several control variables that are likely to affect our overall model. We control for the ideator's *submission experience,* which we measure by the number of past submissions (Bayus, 2013). Additionally, we control for *system experience* as indicated by the time in days since the ideator has been a program member (Kruft et al., 2019). Such experiences can contribute towards better ideation outcomes (Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014; Kruft et al., 2019) but could, for instance, also impact an ideator's self-perceived status in generating ideas. Another control we added to our models is an ideator's past *team submission experience,* which might impact the willingness to team up for ideation in the future (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018) and likely also affects idea implementation, provided that ideators can leverage from the diverse know-how gained from past team ideas. Therefore, we create a dummy variable measuring whether the ideator has submitted at least one idea with a team before. In addition, we capture the *latest feedback* the ideator received from a past submission using five dummies (i.e., "success feedback;" rejection feedback dummies: "no economic benefit," "technically not feasible," "idea already exists," or "other reason"). Feedback about failed ideas could contribute to the ideator's learning and thus to

better ideation outcomes. Furthermore, recent feedback about a successful idea could boost the ideator's self-perceived social status. Another dummy variable captures whether the ideator belongs to the *production department*. We include this control because we expect that ideas from production workers are more likely to be implemented (compared to ideas from administrative staff) due to a greater savings potential that their ideas possibly realize (Rapp and Eklund, 2002). Because the number of production workers in a production site is usually higher than the number of administrative staff, there are more opportunities to form teams among shopfloor employees, which could affect the willingness to develop an idea collaboratively or not. As an ideator's identity can influence evaluators' judgments, we control for *ideator anonymity*, measured by whether the ideator submits the idea anonymously or with their name revealed since this may affect idea selection (Pinsonneault, 1999). We also control for an ideator's potential resource constraints when an idea was submitted by an ideator on the same day as another idea from the same ideator (same-day submission). Submitting several ideas at the same time may either reflect divided attention and reduced idea quality or an exploratory strategy to increase the chance of idea success (see Bayus, 2013). Because ideas are submitted and evaluated on a rolling basis with no fixed deadlines or batch reviews, same-day clustering reflects ideator behavior rather than deadline effects.

Dummy variables for the *submission year* are used to capture unobservable effects related to time differences (Liu et al., 2020). Table 2 provides an overview of the operationalization of our variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

5.4. Empirical strategy

Our hypotheses are tested with a generalized structural equation model (GSEM) using Stata 18.5. Because our dependent variable is dichotomous, and our two mediator variables are dichotomous (team idea development) and continuous (self-perceived social status), our model combines one probit and one OLS regression. We use robust standard errors that are clustered by the ideator since our sample comprises ideas generated by the same ideators (Kruft et al., 2019).

As noted in prior work (Gamber et al., 2022), including team ideas, and thus duplicated ideas, without adjustment can bias model estimates when analysis is conducted at the ideator level. In our dataset, when a team submits an idea, that idea is attributed to each team member individually. To account for this and avoid overstating the influence of team-based submissions, we apply a weighting scheme: each team-based idea is weighted by the inverse of the number of team members (e.g., .5 for a two-person team; .25 for a four-person team). Following this approach also aligns with our expectation that the psychological effect of past outcomes, particularly extreme success, may be diluted in a team context compared to individual efforts. The weighting thus serves to both prevent over-representation of team ideas and better capture the differential psychological impact of individual versus collective success.

Furthermore, we calculate predicted probabilities to interpret the probit equations (Beretta, 2019). Following prior studies, we apply the bootstrapping procedure to test the effects of the mediation (Martinez, 2015; Miremadi et al., 2023).

5.5. Results

5.5.1. Descriptive Statistics

Figure 2 reports descriptives for the full dataset (N=1,830 ideas). One-time ideators make up 35% of all ideators (148/423) but account for only 8% of idea submissions (148/1,830). In contrast, serial ideators (i.e., those who submitted more than one idea)

represent 65% of the sample (275/423) and generated 92% of all ideas (1,682/1,830). The evaluation outcomes for these ideas do not differ significantly between the two groups (χ^2 (2) = 2.97, p = 0.226), which helps mitigate concerns about potential sample selection bias. One-time ideators submitted 148 ideas, with a 41% implementation rate (88 failures [59%], 57 ordinary successes [39%], and 3 extreme successes [2%]). Serial ideators submitted 1,682 ideas, with an implementation rate of 48% (877 failures [52%], 770 ordinary successes [46%], and 35 extreme successes [2%]). As our research question concerns how experiencing extreme success influences subsequent implementation, we necessarily focus on serial ideators who submitted more than one idea. Their importance in driving innovation outcomes further justifies this focus: (1) serial ideators generate 92% of all ideas, and (2) they account for 93% of implemented ideas (805/865).

Insert Figure 2 about here

For our main analysis, we use the final sample of 1,145 ideas submitted by 236 serial ideators, each influenced by at least one prior evaluation outcome within the past 12 months (see Fig. 3). The analyses automatically exclude the first idea submitted by each serial ideator, as it cannot, by definition, be influenced by any earlier success or failure. In our final sample, 69 ideas from 15 ideators followed an extreme success experience, confirming that such events are rare. An additional 643 ideas from 139 ideators followed an ordinary (but not extreme) success experience. Finally, 433 ideas from 174 ideators followed only failure experience. Table 3 illustrates further descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Insert Table 3 about here

5.5.2. Main analysis

Table 4 reports the findings for the regressions. Our mean VIF is 1.25 and our highest VIF is 1.72 for the variable system experience, which is well below the critical threshold of 10 (Alin, 2010), suggesting that multicollinearity is not an issue.

Our findings demonstrate that prior extreme success (compared to prior failure) is negatively associated with team idea development (Model 1: $b = –.688$, $p = .009$) and positively associated with self-perceived social status (Model 2: $b = 4.995$, $p = .004$). These findings support H1a and H2a. The predicted probabilities for the probit equation reveal that the likelihood of team idea development decreases on average by 16% in the case of extreme success. Findings from Model 3 also reveal that extreme success has a significant negative effect on idea implementation ($b = –.418$, $p = .053$) when mediators are not included. Based on the calculated marginal effects, the likelihood of idea implementation decreases, on average, by approximately 42% in cases of extreme success.

Findings from Model 4 show that team development has a positive association with idea implementation ($b = .216$, $p = .013$), while self-perceived social status demonstrates a negative association ($b = –.006$, $p = .043$). The predicted probabilities reveal that team idea development increases idea implementation likelihood by 9% on average. Further, an increase in self-perceived social status by 10% decreases the likelihood of idea implementation by 2% on average. Additionally, standardized comparisons show that a one standard deviation increase in team idea development corresponds to a 4.5 percentage point increase in implementation likelihood, whereas a one standard deviation increase in self-perceived social status corresponds to a 3 percentage point decrease. Both mechanisms significantly influence implementation outcomes, with team idea development showing a somewhat stronger positive effect. Thus, our results confirm H1b and H2b.

Insert Table 4 about here

We also hypothesized that team idea development and self-perceived social status mediate the relationship between extreme success experience and idea implementation. The 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals from the bootstrapping procedure (with 5,000 bootstrapping intervals) do not include zero for team idea development (b = −.148, CI [−.345, −.028]) and self-perceived social status (b = −.029, CI [−.082, −.002]), providing support for our hypotheses H1c and H2c. Once we control for these mediators, the direct effect of extreme success (b = −.329, CI [−.728, .071) becomes non-significant, suggesting that team development and self-perceived status fully mediate the relationship between extreme success and idea implementation.

In contrast to the confirmed effects for extreme success, ordinary success does not show a significant effect on team idea development (Model 1: b = –.056, p = .684) or self-perceived social status (Model 2: b = .084, p = .936). Furthermore, the direct effects of ordinary success, whether mediators are included (Model 4: b = .170, p = .117) or not (Model 3: b = .096, p = .356), are positive but insignificant.

5.5.3. Robustness tests

First, we conducted an additional analysis by employing a different baseline for our independent variable. Specifically, we utilized ordinary success as the baseline for a comparative analysis between extreme success and failure. The findings from this robustness check suggest that the results remain consistent with our main analysis (see Web Appendix, Tables 1a-c). Compared to ordinary success, extreme success is negatively associated with team idea development (Model 1: b = –.631, p = .003), and positively associated with self-perceived social status (Model 2: b = 4.911, p = .001). Team idea development, on the other hand, has a positive association with idea implementation (Model 3: b = .216, p = .013),

while self-perceived social status shows the opposite (Model 3: $b = -.006$, $p = .043$). Furthermore, the predicted probabilities validate these effects, and the bootstrapping method supports the mediation.

Second, we further assessed the robustness of our results by applying alternative thresholds for extreme success. Specifically, we defined extreme success as (a) the top 5% of rewards, corresponding to earnings of 934 Euros or more, and (b) one standard deviation above the median, corresponding to more than 886 Euros. The top 5% threshold is a commonly used benchmark for exceptional performance in fields such as education and the social sciences (Guiso et al., 2008; Hedges and Nowell, 1995; Keller et al., 2022). In contrast, the one-standard-deviation-above-the-median threshold captures less skewed outlier achievements, helping to minimize the influence of extreme values in the data. The findings of all these models (see Web Appendix, Tables 2a-c, Tables 3a-c) remain consistent with our main analysis.

To address concerns that our main model defines extreme success using information from future rewards, we test two alternative approaches using dynamically adjusted thresholds that reflect only information available at the time of each reward. First, we define extreme success using annual thresholds based on the previous year's mean and standard deviation (e.g., Year 3's threshold uses only Year 2's distribution). This approach captures short-term shifts in reward expectations. Second, we use cumulative thresholds based on all historical data up to but excluding the focal year (e.g., Year 3's threshold uses Years 1-2). This approach smooths temporary fluctuations while still avoiding future information. Results from both dynamic specifications (see Web Appendix, Tables 4a-5b) remain consistent in direction and significance with our main findings. The stability of results across these different operationalizations strengthens confidence that our findings reflect actual behavioral responses to extreme success rather than measurement artifacts.

Third, we conducted a post-hoc analysis to control for LIWC "clout," which is measured by the description of ideas with fewer than 50 words, as smaller text descriptions should be viewed with scepticism (LIWC, 2024). We have identified 131 idea descriptions containing fewer than 51 words from our total sample of 1,145 ideas. To ensure the robustness of our main analysis, we conducted an additional model with these ideas excluded, and our findings were replicated using the remaining 1,014 ideas. The results (see Web Appendix, Tables 6a-c) are consistent with our main findings.

Fourth, to further assess the influence of team-based past outcomes, we conducted additional robustness analyses. Specifically, we ran a model without applying weights for team-based idea outcomes (see Table 5) and models excluding all team-based instances of extreme success (see Web Appendix, Tables 7a–c). The results of both sets of analyses are consistent with our main findings.

Insert Table 5 about here

Fifth, we conducted robustness checks by relaxing the original 1-year restriction and recalibrating ideators' experiences using alternative timeframes: two years, three years, and no restriction (covering the entire four-year observation period). Results (see Web Appendix, Tables 8a–c) indicate that our main effects remain significant for up to two years, with extreme success continuing to influence idea implementation via team idea development. At three years or longer, both mediators diminish in significance, suggesting the effects of extreme success substantially fade after two years. These results reinforce the robustness of the team mechanism and highlight that the persistence of the status effect is more limited.

Six, we examined whether ideator experience impacts continued participation in idea submission (see Web Appendix, Table 9). We also conducted several supplementary analyses, including: (1) a model incorporating idea similarity as an additional control

variable; (2) a model further incorporating evaluator-related and ideator-related controls, and controlling for other past feedback types; and (3) a model with standard errors clustered at both the individual and year levels (see Web Appendix, Table 10-12). These supplementary models further support the robustness of our results and reinforce our theoretical arguments.

Finally, to further contextualize our findings within the broader literature, we examined the effect of overall past success by aggregating extreme and ordinary success into a single measure. We then conducted three independent sample t-tests comparing implementation rates following failure versus (1) extreme success, (2) ordinary success, and (3) overall past success. As shown in Figure 4, the results indicate that both overall past success (M = 0.48, SD = 0.50, p = 0.035) and ordinary success (M = 0.50, SD = 0.50, p = 0.008) significantly increase the likelihood of subsequent idea implementation compared to failure-only experience (M = 0.41, SD = 0.49). In contrast, extreme success (M = 0.30, SD = 0.46, p = 0.086) is associated with a lower implementation rate relative to failure. Second, we estimated an additional model using this combined success variable to predict subsequent idea implementation. The results (see Web Appendix, Table 13) show a significant positive association between overall past success and subsequent idea implementation.

Insert Figure 4 about here
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6. Study 2: Causal evidence

To further examine the proposed mechanisms, we investigated the causal effects of extreme success on team idea development and self-perceived social status using an experimental design. We hypothesize that extreme success (vs. ordinary success vs. failure) reduces the likelihood of joining a team while increasing the self-perceived status of the ideator in the company. To improve the generalizability of our findings, we set up this experiment in a different domain (the confectionery industry). This study was pre-registered

on AsPredicted (https://aspredicted.org/4q6f-jnj9.pdf), including the hypotheses, study design, and analysis plan, prior to data collection for the experimental components. The full experimental materials and procedure are provided in the Web Appendix.

6.1. Participants and procedures

Three hundred U.K. residents recruited via Prolific completed an online study in exchange for monetary compensation (M_{age} = 37.5, *SD* = 10.9; 57.0% female, 42.3% male, .3% nonbinary). In a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of three success conditions: extreme success, ordinary success, or failure. Table 6 reports the demographic characteristics for each condition.

Insert Table 6 about here

Participants were instructed to imagine themselves as employees at a confectionery company that is organizing an innovation contest to develop a new kid-friendly packaging design. They read a detailed brief about the contest requirements, which included submitting a 500-word proposal with details related to visuals and interactive elements of the new packaging design. The brief informed them that proposals were scored from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates no potential, and 100 indicates the highest potential. After reading the brief, participants were required to provide a short overview of their proposal.

Following submission, participants received an evaluation from an expert panel, which constituted the manipulation of success levels: those in the extreme success condition learned their proposal surpassed all expectations and scored 95 out of 100, those in the ordinary success condition were told their proposal met all expectations with a score of 70, and those in the failure condition were told their proposal fell short of the expectations with a score of 40. The evaluation was accompanied by a visual graph illustrating their scores.

6.2. Measures

We measured two dependent variables: team idea development and self-perceived social status. The order of these variables was counterbalanced. Participants completed a binary measure of *team idea development*. After completing the initial task and receiving the evaluation, participants were asked to imagine deciding to enter another contest to develop a new chocolate flavor and were presented with the following question: "As you prepare for the contest, you have a chance to join a team of your colleagues who have invited you to their team. How would you prefer to participate in this contest?" The response options were randomized as 0 = "I would participate as an individual" and 1 = "I would participate as part of a team."

To measure *self-perceived social status*, we adapted the well-established measure using the MacArthur ladder (Kraus et al., 2010; Loignon and Kodydek, 2022). Participants were presented with a ladder with rungs representing where employees stand within the company based on their role in driving innovation. They read that people at the top of the ladder are the most influential in driving innovation—they are the most recognized for their innovative ideas, have the highest respect for their contributions, and are seen as leaders in innovation. In contrast, at the bottom are people who have the least influence on innovation—they are the least recognized for their ideas, have little respect for their contributions in this area, and are not seen as leaders in innovation. Participants were then asked to consider how their colleagues would rate them and to select the number (0–10) that best reflects their position on this ladder, with the response scale anchored as follows: 0 = "The least influential in driving innovation" and 10 = "The most influential in driving innovation."

As a manipulation check, participants answered an item assessing the perceived success of their first contest idea: "Based on the feedback you received, how would you rate the outcome of your 1st contest idea?" (1 = "Extreme failure," 5 = "Neither failure nor success," 9 = "Extreme success"). As an attention check, participants were asked: "In this

study, you were an employee of what type of manufacturing?" with response options: 1 = Drink manufacturing, 2 = Electronics manufacturing, and 3 = Confectionery manufacturing. As specified in our pre-registration, we excluded two participants who did not select "Confectionery manufacturing" from the analysis.

6.3. Results

The manipulation was successful. Results from a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the manipulation condition on the perceived success of the first contest ($F(2, 295) = 479.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .765$). Post-hoc comparisons indicated that participants in the extreme success condition ($M = 8.59$, $SD = .74$) rated their performance significantly higher than those in the ordinary success condition ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.33$; $p < .001$) and those in the failure condition ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.33$; $p < .001$). Participants in the ordinary success condition also rated their performance significantly higher than those in the failure condition ($p < .001$), and significantly above the midpoint of the scale (5) ($p < .001$)—further indicating that those in the ordinary success condition interpreted the outcome as successful.

We conducted a binary logistic regression to examine the effect of prior success experience on participants' likelihood of submitting their second idea as part of a team (0 = individual submission, 1 = team submission). Past success was modeled as a three-level categorical predictor (failure, ordinary success, extreme success). Using the failure condition as the reference group, participants in the extreme success condition were significantly less likely to participate as part of a team (50.5%) compared to those in the failure condition (77.3%, $b = –1.21$, Wald = 14.80, $p < .001$, Exp(b) = .30). There was no significant difference between the ordinary success condition (67.0%) and the failure condition ($b = –.52$, Wald = 2.58, $p = .11$, Exp(b) = .60). To compare the extreme and ordinary success conditions, we reran the analysis using ordinary success as the reference group. Results indicated that participants in the extreme success condition were significantly less likely to submit as part of

a team than those in the ordinary success condition (b = –.69, Wald = 5.59, p = .018, Exp(b) = .50).

Results from a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of past success on self-perceived social status (F(2, 295) = 232.980, p < .001, η^2 = .612). Post-hoc comparisons showed that participants in the extreme success condition (M = 8.18, SD = 1.33) rated their self-perceived status significantly higher than those in the ordinary success condition (M = 5.63, SD = 1.73; p < .001) and the failure condition (M = 3.36, SD = 1.63; p < .001). Participants in the ordinary success condition also rated their self-perceived status significantly higher than those in the failure condition (p < .001).

Study 2 provides causal evidence for the effects of extreme success on team idea development (H1a) and self-perceived social status (H2a). Compared to both failure and ordinary success, extreme success reduces the likelihood of joining a team and elevates self-perceived social status. Additionally, consistent with our field study, while ordinary success (vs. failure) has little effect on team development, it does increase self-perceived status. We will return to this finding in our discussion.

To further assess the robustness and generalizability of our findings, we conducted a second experiment that employed a different ideation task with distinct requirements and varied the levels of success manipulation. The results replicated the effects of extreme success on both team idea development and self-perceived status, reinforcing the consistency of these effects. Please see the Web Appendix (A Supplementary Experiment) for methodological and analytical details of this experiment.

7. Discussion

In this study, we investigated how extreme success, as distinct from ordinary success, influences the likelihood of subsequent idea implementation in corporate ideation systems. Drawing on the creativity and innovation literature, we theorized that different levels of

success may elicit distinct behavioral and cognitive responses. Specifically, we proposed that extreme success may disrupt the ideator's creative process in ways that are not observed following ordinary success. Our findings offer robust support for this proposition. Using a four-year archival dataset from a corporate ideation platform, we show that extreme success is associated with lower levels of team idea development and higher levels of self-perceived social status, both of which significantly reduce the likelihood of subsequent ideas being implemented. These findings are robust across a wide range of additional analyses. Specifically, the effects hold when using an alternative baseline (ordinary success), applying different thresholds for defining extreme success, excluding short idea descriptions, adjusting for team-based effects, and extending the time window for past outcomes. These results are further corroborated by two complementary experimental studies, which provide causal evidence for the proposed effects of extreme success on team idea development and self-perceived social status.

Notably, while the experimental results were entirely consistent with our hypotheses, a divergence in pattern emerged when compared to the field data. In the field study, only extreme success significantly elevated self-perceived status, with ordinary success statistically indistinguishable from failure. By contrast, the experimental setting produced a more differentiated pattern, with extreme success associated with higher self-perceived status than ordinary success and ordinary success associated with higher status than failure. One possible explanation lies in how individuals attribute status through social comparison. In real-world contexts, observers may rely on a more compressed or binary evaluative frame, reserving elevated status for those who clearly surpass normative expectations, i.e., those achieving extreme success. Ordinary success, although objectively positive, may be too prevalent or insufficiently distinctive to alter perceptions of status in naturalistic settings. In contrast, the controlled conditions of the experiment may have encouraged more fine-grained

assessments, enabling participants to distinguish more clearly among varying levels of success. These findings suggest that the status implications of achievement are shaped not only by the nature of the outcome but also by the social context in which it is evaluated.

Importantly, in our field data, we also replicate the well-documented positive association between overall past success and subsequent idea implementation, consistent with prior studies (Bockstedt et al., 2016; Boons and Stam, 2019; Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014). This replication suggests that our empirical context is not idiosyncratic but representative of typical ideation management settings. Furthermore, it is well-suited for isolating extreme from ordinary success. When we disaggregate overall success into ordinary and extreme components, the positive baseline is largely mirrored by ordinary success. In contrast, extreme success is associated with a lower likelihood of subsequent implementation (see Fig. 4). This aligns with our argument that, because ordinary outcomes vastly outnumber extreme ones, estimates based on aggregated success measures are primarily driven by ordinary cases.

It is worth noting that our finding of a positive association between overall past success and subsequent idea implementation contrasts with Bayus (2013), who reports a negative effect. This discrepancy may stem from the unique nature of success in his setting. With only 4% of ideas implemented on Dell's IdeaStorm, success was exceptionally rare, making any achievement potentially feel extreme rather than ordinary. Moreover, as one of the first crowdsourcing platforms, IdeaStorm participants likely had no baseline expectations for success. Unlike today's ideators, who understand that platforms seek and implement user ideas, these early contributors probably submitted suggestions without expecting implementation. In such a context, having one's idea selected by Dell experts would be genuinely surprising, transforming an even modest recognition into what we would classify as extreme success. This interpretation suggests that Bayus's negative findings may actually

support our theory. When most or all successes feel extreme (due to their rarity and unexpectedness), the overall effect of "past success" becomes negative. In contrast, settings with more frequent success and experienced contributors (i.e., people who understand evaluation criteria and have calibrated expectations) allow for meaningful distinction between ordinary and extreme achievement. Our disaggregation reveals that both Bayus's and other studies' findings can be correct; they simply capture different distributions of extreme versus ordinary success.

Our findings also show that ordinary success does not significantly influence subsequent team idea development. This differs from Deichmann and Jensen (2018), who found that past success increased the likelihood of collaboration. We believe this divergence reflects differences in the perceived skill requirements for achieving success. In their setting, success depended not only on generating a strong idea but also on delivering persuasive verbal presentations to evaluators. As the authors hypothesized, because few ideators excel at both, success likely signaled not only the quality of potential collaborators but also made ideators more aware of the value of complementary skills, thereby increasing the appeal of collaboration. In our setting, as in many other ideation contexts (e.g., Bayus, 2013; Bockstedt et al., 2015; Hofstetter et al., 2018), success is determined solely by written proposals. While the objective benefits of teamwork remain high, as our findings in H1b and H1c confirm, ordinary success may lower the perceived need for collaboration. Even if to a lesser extent than extreme success, such experiences can still lead ideators to overestimate their individual capability. Combined with limited exposure to others' complementary contributions, due to the absence of presentation stages, this may dampen motivation to seek out collaboration partners. Together, these factors may help explain why the effect observed in Deichmann and Jensen (2018) did not emerge in our study.

7.1. Theoretical implications

Our study offers several contributions to the literature on creativity and innovation. First, we expand research on the effects of ideators' past success in firm-internal ideation systems (Deichmann and Jensen, 2018; Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014) and broader contexts such as open innovation contests and crowdsourcing (Bayus, 2013; Boudreau et al., 2016; Körpeoğlu and Cho, 2018). Prior studies often document the positive influence of past success on future performance. However, by aggregating ordinary and extreme success into a uniform construct, they were not able to isolate or explain the effects of extreme success, which may trigger qualitatively distinct downstream responses beyond what can be expected from general success (Peterson, 2005; Pompian, 2012). In contrast, in this study, we conceptually and empirically distinguish between ordinary and extreme success, demonstrating that extreme success has negative downstream effects on subsequent idea implementation. In doing so, we introduce extreme success as a conceptually distinct and theoretically consequential form of achievement in ideation contexts and challenge the implicit assumption that success effects are linear and uniform across all levels of achievement.

Second, we move beyond the dominant emphasis on potential learning and motivational benefits of past success and provide empirical evidence for alternative mechanisms that may hinder subsequent idea implementation (e.g., Deichmann and Van den Ende, 2014; Lehmann et al., 2025). Specifically, we show how extreme success hinders subsequent idea implementation via two novel mediators, reducing the likelihood of team idea development and inflating ideators' self-perceived social status. We extend the insights of Bayus (2013), who suggested that past success might diminish the ability to generate creative and diverse ideas over time due to cognitive fixation. Our findings highlight complementary but distinct mechanisms, such that when success reaches an extreme level, it can shift how ideators view themselves and how they interact with others. This finding also

directly extends Deichmann and Jensen (2018), who documented a positive effect of team idea development on future success, by explicitly theorizing and empirically demonstrating why team development matters for implementation, especially under conditions of extreme success. This further underscores the critical role of collaboration in ideation management.

Third, our research contributes to the growing literature on serial ideators by highlighting the potential downsides of extreme success (Bayus, 2013; Griffin et al., 2009; Griffin et al., 2020; Pescher et al., 2024). Prior studies emphasize the critical value of retaining rare, high-performing serial innovators due to their disproportionate impact on breakthrough outcomes (Griffin et al., 2009; Pescher et al., 2024). Our findings extend this literature by showing that the very experiences that make these individuals exceptional, namely, extreme success, can also introduce psychological and behavioral constraints that undermine sustained ideation. We provide a theoretical basis for understanding how extreme success may distort self-perception and reduce collaborative engagement, both of which are essential for sustained creativity and innovation. By identifying these unintended consequences, our work invites a rethinking of organizational policies and innovation management practices aimed at supporting the long-term creative output of serial ideators.

In addition, considering that the possibility of achieving extreme success is the result of a company's policy of offering rewards for ideas that generated the highest savings, our study also adds to the literature on organizational factors that affect creativity and innovation (Heinze et al., 2009; Sarooghi et al., 2015). It questions the benefits of high rewards in digital ideation, which are often seen as a means to attract and motivate idea generators (Acar, 2018; Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Liu et al., 2014). The literature on rewards has primarily focused on how the prospect of winning rewards affects ideation outcomes (Acar, 2018; Ales et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2014; Terwiesch and Xu, 2008), which is found, for example, to be beneficial for the number and quality of ideas generated (Liu et al., 2014; Toubia, 2006). Our

study advances the literature by investigating the longer-term consequences of winning overly high rewards. We show that the experience of winning overly high rewards negatively affects ideation outcomes as the newly proposed ideas will often not be implemented.

7.2. Practical implications

Our findings provide guidance to managers of ideation systems on how to design effective reward policies. Rewards have long been seen as a means to attract and motivate ideators to contribute to digital ideation (Acar, 2018; Fairbank and Williams, 2001). However, our results suggest that excessively high rewards that are tied to extreme success can unintentionally hinder future creative engagement and idea implementation. As such, rather than maximizing rewards to encourage participation, organizations should consider moderate and balanced reward structures that motivate without inflating self-perceived status or discouraging collaboration. This could be implemented, for example, by capping the maximum reward amount in corporate ideation systems, where the amount of rewards is usually calculated concerning the value an idea offers (Fairbank and Williams, 2001; Rapp and Eklund, 2002). Another approach is to minimize the reward range between different successful submissions.

In addition, managers might consider rewarding not only the outcome of idea generation but also the creative process that leads to it. In this way, idea generation as a team could be rewarded and promoted, thereby encouraging individuals to intentionally collaborate and form teams. In case a company favors large monetary rewards for outstanding ideas, we encourage managers to implement safeguards to mitigate potential downsides. In the asset trading context, for example, the negative behavioral consequences of extraordinary gains can be mitigated by feedback on the accuracy of the decision-making process rather than just the outcome (Bregu, 2020). In the context of ideation, responding constructively to ideas from extremely successful ideators might, therefore, help to curb self-serving attributions and

reduce the risk of overconfidence. Additionally, ideators who have experienced extreme success could be actively encouraged, or even assigned, to work in teams. Exposure to diverse perspectives may help rebalance their self-perceptions and improve the quality and implementability of their future contributions.

7.3. Limitations and future research

Our study has limitations that suggest avenues for future research. First, we used data from a corporate ideation platform focused on incremental process innovations, potentially limiting the generalizability of our findings. Although our experimental study suggests these findings might also extend to novel ideation contexts, previous research indicates that radical ideas often have a lower likelihood of implementation, especially when similar ideas have been previously proposed (Hoornaert et al., 2017). We encourage future studies to explore the impact of our proposed effects within the context of radical ideas. Furthermore, our analysis was constrained by restricted access to comprehensive field data from our company due to a strict data protection policy. As such, we were not able to consider various ideator characteristics, such as gender and education level, that could significantly influence the outcomes (Jeppesen and Lakhani, 2010; Poetz and Schreier, 2012).

Second, in Study 1, we operationalize extreme success using multiple thresholds: rewards exceeding one standard deviation above the mean (1,051 Euros), the top 5% of rewards (934 Euros), one standard deviation above the median (886 Euros), as well as dynamically adjusted thresholds based on either the previous year or all prior years. While these thresholds are meaningful in the context of our corporate platform, rewards in open idea competitions can be significantly higher (Acar and Deichmann, 2019; Hofstetter et al., 2018). Therefore, future research should investigate the effects of extreme success in different contexts and consider alternative operationalizations of extreme success.

Third, while our theoretical rationale for the decline in idea implementation following extreme success is grounded in a reduced willingness by ideators to collaborate and in changes related to their self-perception, we acknowledge that other organizational factors may also contribute to this effect. For example, evaluators might deliberately avoid selecting ideas from individuals who have already achieved extreme success, in an effort to distribute recognition more broadly across contributors. While this explanation is less likely in our context, given that the organizational policy explicitly instructs evaluators to base decisions on a cost-benefit analysis and our results remain robust to accounting for ideator anonymity, it may be more pronounced in settings where recognition is more salient and consequential (e.g., linked to promotions, public awards). Future research could explore these alternative explanations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how extreme success influences creativity and innovation across different organizational environments.

Our field study focuses on idea implementation as the final observable outcome, though theory suggests that team idea development and elevated self-perceived status likely also influence earlier phases of the idea journey (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017). Indeed, collaboration may enhance idea generation and elaboration by enabling ideators to build on one another's input and systematically assess an idea's potential. In contrast, elevated self-perceived status may hinder progress by diverting attention from developing and refining the idea. Although we observe downstream differences in implementation, we cannot isolate which intermediate phases drive the effect. We encourage future research to examine how extreme success shapes distinct stages of the idea journey to more precisely locate its impact.

Moreover, while we theorize that extreme success may demotivate ideators from developing ideas collaboratively, it is also plausible that they gravitate toward like-minded collaborators, preferring teams that reflect their own views and status. This homogeneity in team formation could limit exposure to diverse perspectives and reduce critical feedback,

ultimately diminishing idea refinement and implementation potential. Conversely, potential teammates who lack similar levels of success may be hesitant to join these teams, fearing misalignment, reduced influence, and lacking diversity (Fischer et al., 2023; Gibbs et al., 2017). Future research should explore how extreme success reshapes team dynamics, diversity, and openness to dissent in ideation environments.

Our supplementary analyses revealed that the effects of extreme success persist significantly for approximately two years, after which they generally diminish. This finding suggests that extreme success continues to shape collaborative behaviors over a remarkably long period. However, the mediating role of self-perceived social status deteriorates more rapidly compared to team idea development, aligning with our expectation that subjective perceptions of status diminish quickly without continued reinforcement. Future research could further examine the boundary conditions influencing the persistence of extreme success effects, including whether more objective markers of status (e.g., promotions or formal recognition) help sustain them over longer time horizons.

Despite these limitations, our research enriches our understanding of the effects of extreme success experience, particularly how this relates to people's subsequent idea implementation.

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Tables

Table 1
Empirical evidence on the relationship of past success and ideation performance in digital ideation.

Study	Study Context		Underlying mechanism studied	Operationalization of past success	Effects of past success
	Type of ideation system	Differentiating Success types			
Bayus (2013)	Open	No	No	Idea implementation	Past success decreases idea implementation.
Beretta (2019)[1]	Corporate	No	No	Funding selection	Past success does not significantly affect the likelihood of future ideas being selected for funding.
Bockstedt et al. (2015)[1]	Open	No	No	Contest ranking	Past success increases the likelihood of success.
Bockstedt et al. (2016)[1]	Open	No	No	Contest ranking	Past success increases the likelihood of success.
Boons and Stam (2019)[1]	Open	No	No	Contest ranking	Past success increases idea performance.
Deichmann and Jensen (2018)	Corporate	No	No	Funding selection	Past success increases the likelihood of future ideas being selected for funding.
Deichmann and Van den Ende (2014)	Corporate	No	No	Funding selection	Past success increases the likelihood of future ideas being selected for funding.
Hofstetter et al. (2018)	Open	No	No	Reward receipt	Past success increases idea quality.
Lehmann et al. (2025)	Corporate	No	Yes	Idea implementation	Past success increases idea implementation via increased task motivation.
Our study	Corporate	Yes	Yes	Reward percentile	*Extreme success*, but not ordinary success, decreases idea implementation via lower team idea development and higher self-perceived social status.

Note: *[1] = the study considers the effects of past success implicitly as a control variable. Only studies on past success are summarized, in which ideation was rewarded.*

Table 2
Operationalization of the variables.

Variable	Measurement
Idea implementation	The idea was implemented (No = 0, Yes = 1).
Extreme success*	Dummy variable indicating whether the ideator experienced extreme success (No = 0, Yes = 1).
Ordinary success*	Dummy variable indicating whether the ideator experienced ordinary success (No = 0, Yes = 1).
Team idea development	The idea was submitted as a team (No = 0, Yes = 1).
Self-perceived social status	The extent to which the ideator is high in self-perceived social status; calculated by the LIWC variable 'clout' using the idea description.
Submission experience	Number of previously submitted ideas by the ideator.
System experience	Number of days since the ideator first used the idea management system.
Team submission experience	The ideator of the idea has previously submitted at least one idea as part of a team (No = 0, Yes = 1).
Latest feedback experience	Dummies for the latest feedback the ideator received ('success feedback'; rejection feedback: 'no economic benefit', 'technically not feasible', 'idea already exists', 'other reason') (5 dummies).
Production department	The ideator belongs to a production department (No = 0, Yes = 1).
Ideator anonymity	The ideator did not reveal his/her name as part of the submission (No = 0, Yes = 1)
Same-day submission	An idea is submitted by the ideator on the same day as an earlier idea by the same ideator (No = 0, Yes = 1).
Submission year	Dummy for each year in which the idea was submitted since the launch of the ideation platform (4 dummies).

***Note**: * Extreme success and Ordinary success are dummy variables originating from a single, three-category measure of ideator experience (failure, ordinary success, extreme success), with failure as the omitted baseline.*

Table 3
Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
(1) Idea implementation	.45	.50	1.000																				
(1) Failure	.38	.49	-.062	1.000																			
(2) Extreme success	.060	.24	-.076	-.197	1.000																		
(3) Ordinary success	.56	.50	.097	-.883	-.287	1.000																	
(4) Team idea development	.38	.49	.104	-.065	-.100	.111	1.000																
(5) Self-perceived social status	55.00	13.29	-.044	-.013	.061	-.016	.069	1.000															
(6) Submission experience	7.95	7.32	-.014	-.403	.149	.322	.035	-.043	1.000														
(7) System experience	602.73	333.20	.017	-.139	.110	.083	-.005	-.023	.372	1.000													
(8) Team submission experience	.60	.49	.031	-.246	.019	.231	.301	.068	.335	.206	1.000												
Latest feedback experience																							
(9) Success feedback	.35	.48	.102	-.357	.090	.306	-.006	.035	-.111	.012	-.016	1.000											
(10) No economic benefit	.15	.36	-.052	.132	-.016	-.121	-.039	.004	.047	-.037	.002	-.315	1.000										
(11) Technically not feasible	.08	.26	-.086	.270	-.016	-.256	-.107	-.022	-.098	-.073	-.051	-.210	-.121	1.000									
(12) Idea already exists	.19	.40	-.043	-.035	-.036	.051	.047	-.083	.144	.038	.019	-.353	-.204	-.136	1.000								
(13) Other reason	.23	.42	.023	.155	-.044	-.131	.064	.046	.014	.029	.031	-.406	-.234	-.157	-.263	1.000							
(14) Production department	.86	.35	-.083	.065	-.046	-.041	-.048	-.068	.023	-.077	-.031	-.119	.032	.048	.083	.001	1.000						
(15) Ideator anonymity	.10	.30	-.022	.017	.002	-.018	-.110	.037	-.038	-.026	-.086	-.001	.093	-.028	-.069	.004	-.043	1.000					
(16) Same-day submission	.13	.34	-.010	-.031	.076	-.006	.043	.002	.068	-.047	-.032	.027	-.008	-.042	-.006	.007	-.008	.027	1.000				
Submission year																							
(17) Submission year 1	.04	.18	-.020	.116	-.048	-.091	-.002	.010	-.132	-.247	-.146	-.061	-.015	.036	.080	-.015	-.047	.032	.011	1.000			
(18) Submission year 2	.20	.40	.007	.098	-.071	-.062	-.043	.025	-.190	-.442	-.133	.094	-.073	.123	-.036	-.088	-.077	.002	.014	-.095	1.000		
(19) Submission year 3	.30	.46	-.012	-.023	-.019	.032	-.057	-.018	.094	-.022	.091	-.101	.064	-.061	.010	.088	.062	-.030	.032	-.123	-.323	1.000	
(20) Submission year 4	.47	.50	.013	-.100	.092	.054	.087	-.007	.115	.464	.077	.040	.006	-.056	-.010	-.005	.022	.014	-.045	-.179	-.470	-.610	1.000

Notes: *Correlations above .076 are significant at 1%. SD = standard deviation; N= 1,145.*

Table 4
Research findings.

Variables	Team idea development Model 1 (probit)		Perceived social status Model 2 (OLS)		Idea implementation Model 3 (probit)		Idea implementation Model 4 (probit)	
Extreme success	**-.688****	**(.262)**	**4.995****	**(1.730)**	-.418^{+}	(.216)	-.329	(.209)
Ordinary success	-.056	(.139)	.084	(1.039)	.096	(.104)	.170	(.108)
Team idea development							**.216***	**(.087)**
Self-perceived social status							**-.006***	**(.003)**
Submission experience	-.004	(.016)	-.122	(.090)	-.004	(.008)	-.005	(.009)
System experience	-.000	(.000)	-.000	(.002)	.000	(.000)	-.000	(.000)
Team submission experience	.750***	(.130)	2.144*	(.963)	.056	(.102)	.002	(.112)
Latest feedback experience	yes (5)		yes (5)		yes (5)		yes (5)	
Production department	-.200	(.170)	-1.100	(1.694)	-.261+	(.135)	-.235	(.145)
Same-day submission	.149	(.118)	-1.053	(1.159)	.015	(.081)	-.065	(.084)
Ideator anonymity	-.396^{+}	(.208)	1.609	(1.527)	-.100	(.157)	-.147	(.170)
Submission year	yes (4)		yes (4)		yes (4)		yes (4)	
Constant	-.299	(.362)	57.342***	(3.097)	.123	(.286)	.438	(.312)
Wald chi2	55.88**		30.52*		36.53**		48.62***	

Notes: *Models 1,2 and 4 are part of the structural model, while Model 3 was estimated separately using a probit regression. The calculated Wald-χ^2 value for the full structural model (Models 1,2 and 4) implies the general significance of our model ($\chi^2[47]=164.73$; $p < .001$). Robust standard errors clustered by the ideator in parentheses.*
$^{+}$ *$p < .10$,* * *$p < .05$,* ** *$p < .01$,* *** *$p < .001$. N=1,145.*

Table 5
Research findings for unweighted model.

Variables	Team idea development Model 1 (probit)		Self-perceived social status Model 2 (OLS)		Idea implementation Model 3 (probit)	
Extreme success	**-.675***	**(.286)**	**4.177****	**(1.555)**	-.353+	(.213)
Ordinary success	-.004	(.139)	.221	(.976)	.098	(.102)
Team idea development					**.231****	**(.088)**
Self-perceived social status					**-.006***	**(.003)**
Submission experience	-.008	(.016)	-.117+	(.065)	-.004	(.007)
System experience	-.000+	(.000)	-.001	(.001)	.000	(.000)
Team submission experience	.925***	(.130)	2.588**	(.936)	-.003	(.104)
Latest feedback experience	yes (5)		yes (5)		yes (5)	
Production department	-.202	(.179)	-1.958	(1.752)	-.257*	(.129)
Same-day submission	.112	(.121)	-1.135	(1.026)	-.002	(.081)
Ideator anonymity	-.445*	(.205)	1.521	(1.551)	-.058	(.158)
Submission year	yes (4)		yes (4)		yes (4)	
Constant	-.224	(.338)	57.761***	(3.005)	.363	(.314)
Wald chi2	78.63***		36.95**		36.53**	

Note: *Wald chi2 for overall model: 186.41***. Robust standard errors clustered by the ideator in parentheses.* $^{+}p < .10$, $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$. *N=1,145.*

Table 6
Demographic characteristics by experimental condition.

Condition	Numbers of participants	Demographics
Failure	99	M_{age} = 38.0, *SD* = 11.44; 57.6% female, 42.4% male
Ordinary success	100	M_{age} = 37.2, *SD* = 10.90; 59.6% female, 40.4% male
Extreme success	101	M_{age} = 37.3, *SD* = 10.33; 54.5% female, 44.6% male, 1% nonbinary

Figures

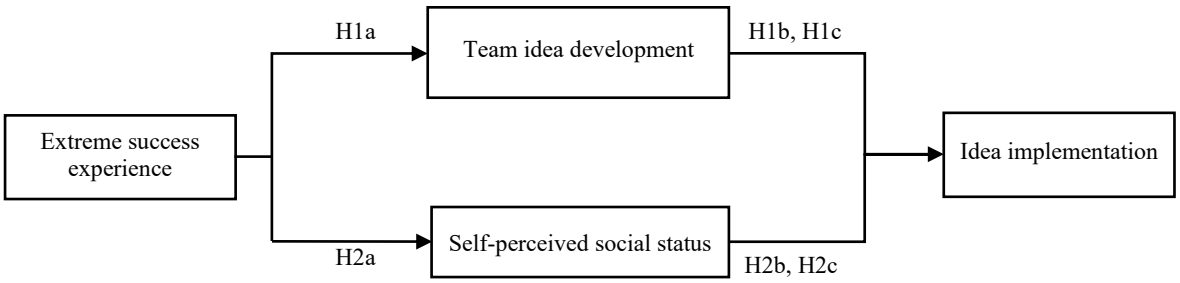

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

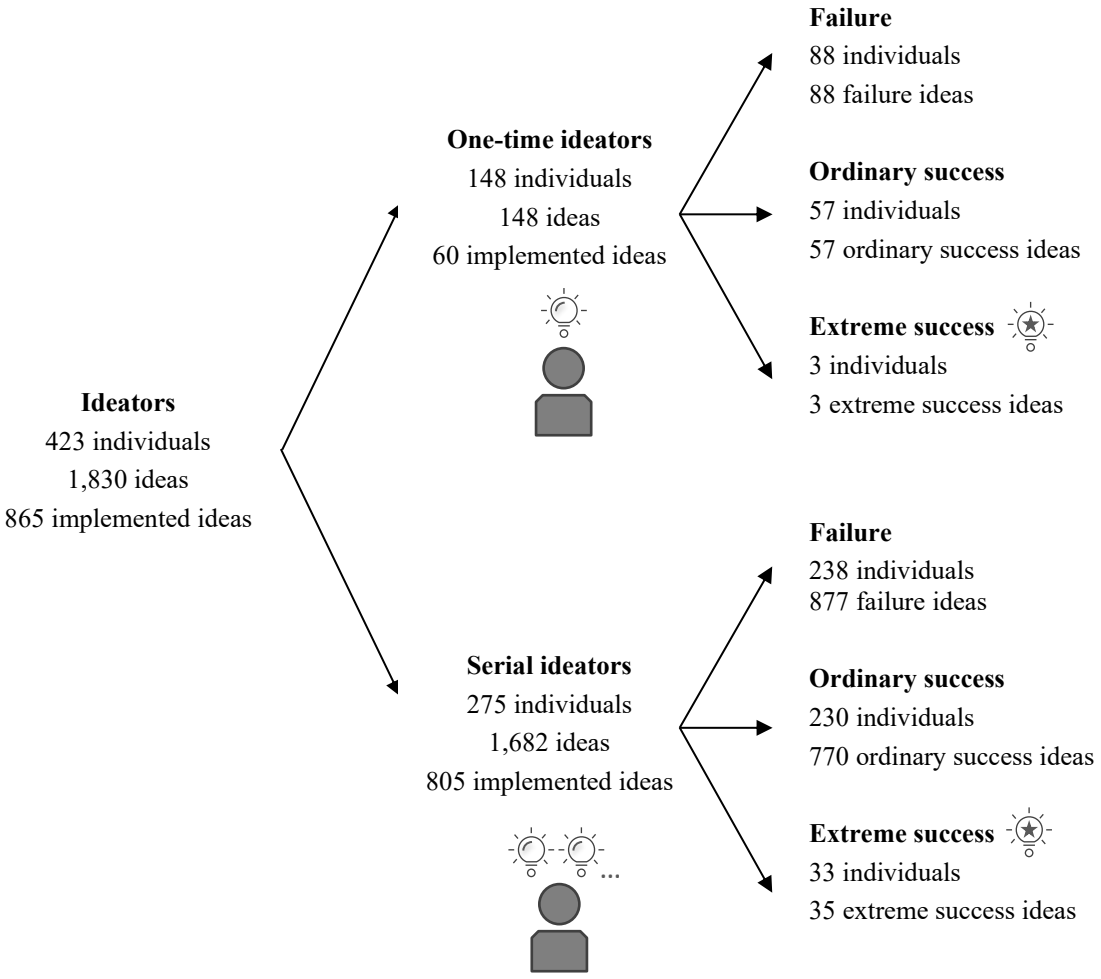

Fig. 2. Descriptive statistics of the full sample.

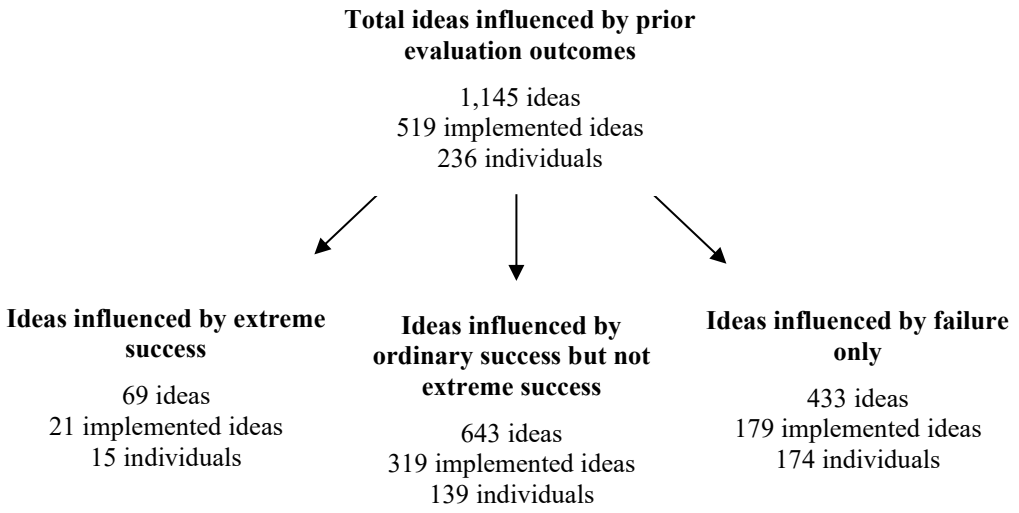

Fig. 3. Ideas influenced by prior evaluation outcomes within 12 months

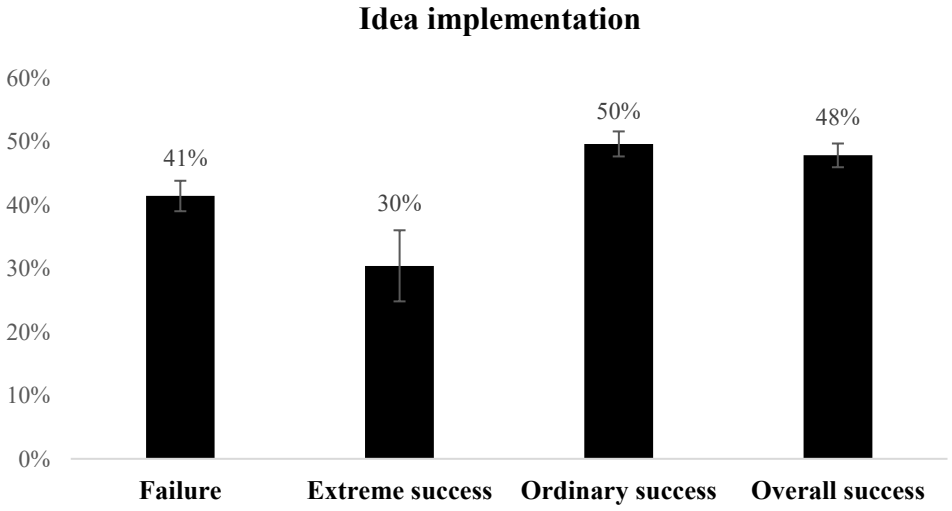

Fig. 4. Likelihood of implementation following failure, extreme success, ordinary success, and overall success

Note: *Error bars represent one standard error of the mean.*