

# Action–Effect Anticipation and Temporal Adaptation in Social Interactions

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Interacting agents may anticipate their partner's upcoming response and include it in their action plan. In turn, observing an overt response can trigger agents to adapt. But although anticipation and adaptation are known to shape action control, their interplay in social interactions remains largely unexplored. In 4 experiments, we asked how both of these mechanisms could contribute to one striking phenomenon: Agents initiate actions faster when they know their partner will produce a compatible rather than an incompatible response. In Experiment 1, we manipulated the compatibility between agents' actions and partners' responses and investigated the interplay between adaptation and anticipation within the same dyadic interaction. In Experiments 2–4, we isolated the contribution of each mechanism by having agents interact with virtual partners whose responses could be experimentally controlled. We found that adaptation and anticipation exert parallel but independent effects on action execution: Participants initiated their actions more quickly when the upcoming partner response was compatible and, independently, when their partner had responded more quickly on the preceding trial. These findings elucidate models of action control in social interactions.

## Public Significance Statement

This study suggests that our behavior in social interactions is affected by a tendency to anticipate how our interaction partner will respond and, independently, by a tendency to adapt to the speed of their previous responses. These findings help shed light on the mechanisms that allow people to coordinate with each other in social interactions.

**Keywords:** anticipation, adaptation, entrainment, action–effect, imitation

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Actions executed in social interactions can be shaped by several different mechanisms (Knoblich, Butterfill, & Sebanz, 2011). When interacting, agents may engage anticipatory mechanisms, that is, they may represent the upcoming actions of their interac-

tion partners. Such anticipation is known to influence action planning and execution across various contexts, from musical performances to sports, dancing, and conversations (Aglioti, Cesari, Romani, & Urgesi, 2008; Bläsing et al., 2012; Corps, Crossley, Gambi, & Pickering, 2018; Wolf, Sebanz, & Knoblich, 2018). In addition, actions in social interactions may be shaped by mechanisms of adaptation, such as the spontaneous tendency to adapt to the temporal characteristics of other people's behavior (Loehr, Large, & Palmer, 2011; Marsh, Richardson, & Schmidt, 2009; Schmidt & Richardson, 2008; Schmidt, Fitzpatrick, Caron, & Mergeche, 2011; Shockley, Richardson, & Dale, 2009; Varlet, Marin, Lagarde, & Bardy, 2011; Wilson & Wilson, 2005).

But although it is clear that both anticipation and adaptation play a role in social interactions, it is difficult to tease apart the contribution of each mechanism to specific interpersonal phenomena. Here, we focus on one striking finding, namely that agents perform actions faster if they know they are going to be imitated by their interaction partner, compared to when they know their interaction partner will respond with an action different from their own (Lelonkiewicz & Gambi, 2017; Pfister, Dignath, Hommel, & Kunde, 2013; Pfister, Weller, Dignath, & Kunde, 2017; Weller, Pfister, & Kunde, 2019). In four experiments, we investigated how

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adaptation and anticipation may contribute to this phenomenon. To this end, our participants interacted with a partner and performed a task that allowed for simultaneous anticipation and adaptation, or for anticipation only, and we tested how these mechanisms affected action planning and execution.

A growing body of research shows that social interactions often involve anticipation. In a landmark study by Knoblich and Jordan (2003), participants controlled an object moving laterally across the screen by operating an acceleration and a deceleration key. Importantly, prior to reaching the edge of the screen (at which point the object should bounce back and change the direction of motion), they had to gradually stop accelerating and start decelerating. The study revealed that participants who performed the task in pairs (where each key was operated by a different person, and they had to coordinate) were similarly successful as solo participants (where one person operated both keys), suggesting that they were able to predict each other's keypresses. Indeed, many other studies showed that agents anticipate the actions of their interaction partners, both with respect to *what* actions will be performed and *when* they will be performed (Sebanz & Knoblich, 2009; for reviews, see also Keller, 2008; Keller, Novembre, & Hove, 2014; Meyer, Bekkering, Haartsen, Stapel, & Hunnius, 2015; Pickering & Gambi, 2018; Sebanz, Bekkering, & Knoblich, 2006).

But what allows for anticipation in social interactions? In a recent extension of ideomotor theory, that is, the sociomotor framework, Kunde, Weller, and Pfister (2018) proposed that anticipation stems from a general mechanism of action planning: When an agent performs an action, bidirectional associations are automatically established between this action and its typical effect (i.e., the auditory, visual or proprioceptive event that appears to be contingent on this action). Critically, once these associations are formed, the action becomes represented in terms of the effect. Thus, according to ideomotor accounts of human action control, planning and executing an action involves the anticipation of its typical effect (Hommel, Müssele, Aschersleben, & Prinz, 2001; Hommel, 2013; Pfister, 2019; Shin, Proctor, & Capaldi, 2010).

Evidence consistent with this proposition comes from research using the action–effect compatibility paradigm (Kunde, 2001, 2003; see also Badets, Pesenti, & Olivier, 2010; Földes, Philipp, Badets, & Koch, 2017). Studies in this paradigm involve action-contingent effects that are either compatible or incompatible with participants' actions on a dimension such as spatial position (e.g., left vs. right), duration (e.g., long vs. short), or intensity (e.g., high vs. low; see Kornblum, Hasbroucq, & Osman, 1990, for details on the concepts of compatibility and dimensional overlap). If actions are indeed represented in terms of their effects, action execution should be facilitated when participants can expect their action to be followed by a compatible rather than incompatible effect. This prediction has been confirmed by several studies involving non-social action effects. For instance, participants are known to initiate a button-press more quickly when it is followed by a spatially compatible light effect (e.g., a right button-press followed by a light on the right side), as compared to an incompatible light effect (e.g., a right button-press followed by a light on the left side; Kunde, 2001; see also Horváth, Bíró, & Neszmeilyi, 2018; Kunde, Koch, & Hoffmann, 2004; Pfister, Janczyk, Wirth, Dignath, & Kunde, 2014).

Importantly, the sociomotor framework (Kunde et al., 2018) holds that such mechanism of action planning can be extended to

social interactions, that is, an action can become associated with the behavior that it typically evokes in others. Under this premise, agents may represent their action in terms of the expected response of their interaction partner, and therefore, in social contexts, action execution should come with an anticipation of the partner's upcoming response. In an early attempt to demonstrate this process, Pfister and colleagues (2013) asked participants to perform a button-pressing task, acting either as a leader or follower. The leader performed either a short or long button-press reacting to a color cue, and the follower responded with a button press of the same (in the compatible block) or different length (in the incompatible block). The study found that leaders initiated their actions more quickly when they were followed by a compatible rather than an incompatible response, even though the task did not require them to consider how the follower would respond. This was consistent with the possibility that leaders represented in their action plan the type of response that the follower was about to produce (for similar findings, see Müller, 2016).

However, actions executed during social interactions are also known to be affected by adaptation to previously observed behavior (Knoblich et al., 2011). One striking illustration of this phenomenon is the tendency to adapt to the temporal patterns present in the behavior of others, such as when audience members fall into a single clapping rhythm (Néda, Ravasz, Brechet, Vicsek, & Barabási, 2000; see also Keller et al., 2014; Levitin, Grahn, & London, 2018; Oullier, de Guzman, Jantzen, Lagarde, & Kelso, 2008; Schmidt & O'Brien, 1997). Importantly, temporal adaptation appears to influence actions beyond intentional control. For instance, in a study by Okano, Shinya, and Kudo (2017), participants were asked to tap on an electronic drum set either in synchrony with a metronome (solo condition) or both with the metronome and with one another (joint condition). The results revealed that participants who performed the task with a partner departed from the metronome rhythm to a greater extent than solo participants, and that, crucially, this was caused by adaptation to the other person's tapping speed. This adaptation was captured by a positive correlation between agent's response speed and the response speed of the partner on the preceding trial (see also Konvalinka, Vuust, Roepstorff, & Frith, 2010).

Based on these findings, Lelonkiewicz and Gambi (2017) asked if the behavioral pattern obtained by Pfister and colleagues (2013) could be explained by adaptation to the follower's response speed, rather than anticipation of the upcoming response. Critically, in Pfister et al.'s study, as in many previous studies on motor imitation, the follower responded faster in the compatible than in the incompatible block (e.g., Bertenthal, Longo, & Kosobud, 2006; Brass, Bekkering, Wohlschläger, & Prinz, 2000; Catmur & Heyes, 2011). Thus, the difference in leaders' action initiation speed between the compatible and incompatible blocks could be produced by leaders adapting to the speed with which the follower produced the response on the preceding trial, rather than by leaders anticipating the type of response the follower would produce next. To test this alternative explanation, Lelonkiewicz and Gambi (2017) manipulated the follower's response speed, so that the follower was now faster producing incompatible than compatible responses: Under these conditions, they found that leaders were also faster in the incompatible than in the compatible block. Crucially, this behavioral pattern was contrary to what should occur if leaders were influenced only by anticipation of the fol-

lower's response type. Moreover, leaders' action initiation speed on the current trial was positively correlated with follower's speed on the preceding trial, which was consistent with the possibility that leaders adapted to the follower's observed timing (Experiment 2). Further, when leaders could not see or hear the follower (and thus could not adapt), their speed was uncorrelated with the follower's speed, and there was no effect of the follower's upcoming response type (Experiment 1).

Although [Lelonkiewicz and Gambi's \(2017\)](#) findings confirmed that actions executed in a social context can be affected by spontaneous temporal adaptation, they did not demonstrate that adaptation was the sole factor driving the behavioral pattern observed by [Pfister and colleagues \(2013\)](#). Indeed, there is some indication that actions may be influenced by anticipation of the upcoming response even when the speed of this response is held constant. In a recent study by [Pfister and colleagues \(2017\)](#), participants acting as leaders performed the button-pressing task together with a virtual follower who, again depending on the experimental block, responded with a compatible or an incompatible press. Crucially, the virtual follower was programmed to initiate responses with constant speed across the compatible and incompatible blocks. The results revealed that leaders initiated their actions sooner in the compatible than incompatible block, suggesting they anticipated the type of the follower's upcoming response.

Taken together, these independent investigations suggest that action execution in social interactions is likely to be affected by both mechanisms—anticipation of the partner's response associated with one's own action and adaptation to the partner's observed response speed. However, no study has yet investigated the interplay between these mechanisms. We set out to fill this gap using the same leader/follower button-pressing paradigm as in past research ([Lelonkiewicz & Gambi, 2017](#); [Pfister et al., 2013, 2017](#)). In a set-up allowing for anticipation and adaptation alike (Experiments 1 and 4), or for anticipation only (Experiments 2 and 3), we tested how these mechanisms affected action planning and execution. In addition, while previous studies manipulated the follower's response between blocks, we used a design where the response varied trial-by-trial. This allowed us to address an important, and so far unanswered, question: How flexible is the anticipatory mechanism proposed by the sociomotor framework ([Kunde et al., 2018](#))? Past research has demonstrated that agents anticipate a partner's behavior when the partner consistently produces this behavior, for example a compatible response, over many trials, but it is less certain whether anticipation would be engaged when the partner dynamically alternates between producing compatible and incompatible responses (a situation that is not uncommon in social interactions).

In Experiment 1, we investigated whether adaptation and anticipation affect leader's action execution in such interactions. We hypothesized that, if action–effect anticipation is engaged, leaders should be quicker to initiate their actions on trials where the upcoming follower's response would be compatible (as compared to trials where it would be incompatible). Further, if action execution is shaped by spontaneous temporal adaptation, leaders' speed on the current trial should be positively correlated with follower's speed on the preceding trial.

Experiments 2 and 3 used the same task as Experiment 1 but with preprogrammed virtual followers replacing human followers. The main purpose of adopting this design was to allow full control

over the timing of responses, while retaining the manipulation of response compatibility (as in [Pfister et al., 2017](#)). Specifically, we held the speed with which the followers initiated their responses constant, so we could investigate whether anticipation of the follower's response type affected leaders' actions independently from any phenomena related to response speed.

Finally, in Experiment 4, we used a variant of the virtual follower paradigm to address another important question related to the sociomotor account of action planning ([Kunde et al., 2018](#)): What features of the upcoming response are captured by action–effect anticipation? Whereas previous research showed that this mechanism contributes to the ability to anticipate what type of response will be produced, it is unclear whether it may also underlie the ability to anticipate when the response will occur. Although there is some evidence that agents represent the delay between their actions and upcoming nonsocial effects ([Dignath & Janczyk, 2017](#); see also [Dignath, Pfister, Eder, Kiesel, & Kunde, 2014](#); [Thomaschke & Dreisbach, 2015](#)), a test of whether agents use this mechanism to anticipate the timing of their partner's responses is currently lacking. Thus, in Experiment 4, we varied the speed of the virtual followers' responses while keeping the relationship between the leaders' actions and followers' responses constant (i.e., responses were always compatible), and we tested if leaders anticipated the speed with which the follower would initiate the response.

## Experiment 1

Experiment 1 tested whether anticipation and adaptation shaped leaders' action execution in an interaction where the compatibility between leader and follower actions varied from trial to trial. Crucially, the engagement of action–effect anticipation in such contexts is not trivial. Recall that the mechanism proposed by the sociomotor framework ([Kunde et al., 2018](#)) requires a stable associative binding between the action and the partner's response. It is plausible that agents exploit such associations when their partner consistently produces the same type of response (e.g., tossing a ball to one another). However, in many interactions the partner produces different responses to one and the same agent's action (e.g., in tandem canoeing, the person in the back paddles on the right side while the person in the front corrects the course by varying between the left or right side), making it potentially difficult for the agent to acquire and update the action–response associations. Although there is some suggestion that agents can anticipate nonsocial effects when the action–effect mapping changes between trials ([Gaschler & Nattkemper, 2012](#); [Pfister, Kiesel, & Melcher, 2010](#); [Zwosta, Ruge, & Wolfensteller, 2013](#)), current evidence for anticipation of social effects is confined to paradigms where the mapping changes between experimental blocks ([Müller, 2016](#); [Pfister et al., 2013, 2017](#); [Weller et al., 2019](#)).

Thus, in Experiment 1 we tested if leaders anticipated the follower's response in an interaction where the type of the upcoming response was randomly determined at the beginning of each trial. We hypothesized that if anticipation is automatically engaged in such circumstances, leaders should initiate their actions more quickly on trials where the follower would produce a compatible (vs. an incompatible) response. Moreover, we tested if leaders' engaged in temporal adaptation. Consistently with the evidence

that such adaptation occurs on trial-by-trial basis (e.g., Konvalinka et al., 2010; Lelonkiewicz & Gambi, 2017; Okano et al., 2017), we expected to observe a positive correlation between leaders' speed on the current trial and follower's speed on the preceding trial.

## Method

Raw data, analysis scripts, experiment scripts, stimulus materials, preregistered protocols, and additional details about the project are available at Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/532qr/>).

**Participants.** We recruited 40 participants (i.e., 20 pairs;  $M_{\text{age}} = 27.6$  years, range = 20–65 years; 27 women, six left-handed; tested at University of Würzburg). A power analysis based on the effect size for response anticipation suggested a sample size of at least 12 participants (effect size:  $d_z = \frac{t}{\sqrt{n}} = \frac{3.52}{\sqrt{24}} = 0.89$ ; desired power:  $1 - \beta = 0.80$ ; data taken from Pfister et al., 2013). We opted to recruit a somewhat larger sample, however, to account for possible reductions of the effect size due to the trial-wise design. All participants gave informed consent prior to the experiment and received course credit for participation. The study followed the guidelines of the ethics committee of the Institute of Psychology at the University of Würzburg and the ethical regulations of the German Society for Psychology (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie).

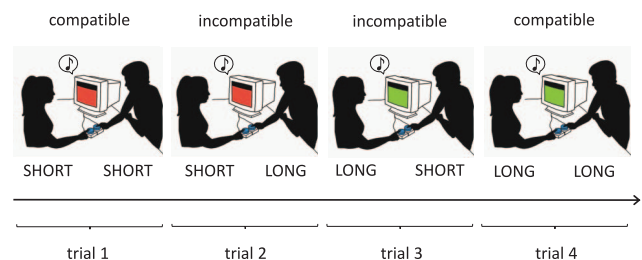
**Stimuli, apparatus, and procedure.** The methods were a close replication of previous work (Experiment 1 in Pfister et al., 2013), with the exception that the compatibility between the leader's action and the follower's response was manipulated on a trial-by-trial basis (rather than between blocks). Leader and follower sat across the table from each other, controlling one external response key each, and the leader observed a 17" monitor which was placed at the edge of the table (for a photograph of the set-up, see Pfister et al., 2013, Supplement).

In the beginning of each trial, participants heard an auditory cue indicating whether on the current trial the follower would produce a compatible or an incompatible response (either a synthesizer chord or a whistle sound played back via speakers, each 900 ms long; the mapping of sound to response type was counterbalanced across participant pairs). Next, 1,000 ms after the end of the auditory cue, the screen changed from black to either red or green, prompting the leader to produce a short (1–150 ms) or a long (200–600 ms) keypress (color to keypress mapping was counterbalanced across participant pairs). To measure keypress durations, the external keys fed back onset (i.e., keypress) and offset (i.e., key release) events to the computer's parallel port. Leaders were instructed to lift the finger visibly from the key when finishing their keypress action so that the end of the leader action would be clearly detectable for the follower. Depending on the upcoming response condition, the follower would then respond with either the same or the other type of keypress. The follower was instructed to initiate their keypress immediately after the leader had finished his or her action (i.e., lifted the finger from the key). In case of errors (wrong leader or follower response, indeterminate responses with  $150 \text{ ms} < \text{duration} < 200 \text{ ms}$  or durations  $> 600 \text{ ms}$ , premature response of the follower, or no action), the computer played a buzzer sound and displayed an error message for 1,000 ms. The screen went black at the end of each trial and the program waited for another 500 ms until the next trial started.

Participants were acquainted with the auditory and color cues at the beginning of the session: The experimenter repeatedly played the sounds until both participants indicated to have memorized the mapping; they then had the opportunity to practice short and long keypresses before commencing the experiment proper. Participants completed 20 blocks consisting of 32 trials. Each block comprised eight repetitions of each possible mapping of the leader's action (short, long) and the follower's response (compatible, incompatible; Figure 1), which were presented in random order. After 10 blocks, the participants swapped roles so that the leader of the first half of the experiment became the follower in the second half and vice versa.

**Statistical analyses.** As per our experimental design, we tested whether leader's action initiation time (i.e., the time between the color cue and when the leader starts pressing on their key; henceforth, *leader reaction time* [RT]) would differ between trials where the follower was expected to produce a compatible versus an incompatible response (*upcoming response: compatible vs. incompatible*). For completeness, we also checked whether such an effect was modulated by the type of response produced by the follower on the preceding trial (*preceding response: compatible vs. incompatible*), as there may be sequential effects when the follower's response varies on each trial (e.g., participants might be biased to anticipate the same effect type as in the previous trial; cf. Liepelt, Wenke, Fischer, & Prinz, 2011). Thus, we conducted a  $2 \times 2$  within-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed up by two-tailed paired-sample  $t$  tests. An analogous analysis was conducted for follower's action initiation time.

Moreover, to determine whether leader RT was affected by the speed with which the follower initiated their response on the preceding trial (i.e., the time between when the leader lifts the finger from their key and when the follower starts pressing on their key, calculated for the preceding trial; *preceding follower RT*), we carried out a linear mixed effect (LME) model involving preceding follower RT, upcoming response, and preceding response (and all interactions) as fixed effects, and by-subjects random intercepts and slopes for all fixed effects and interactions (we scaled and centered preceding follower RT and applied contrast effect-coding to upcoming response and preceding response). Full model structure and results, as well as error rate analysis can be found in the [online supplemental material](#).



**Figure 1.** Experiment 1: Exemplary trial sequence. On each trial, the leader (female silhouette) reacted to a color cue and produced either a short or a long keypress. Once the leader lifted the finger from her key, the follower (male silhouette) responded with a compatible or an incompatible keypress. An auditory cue at the beginning of each trial announced the type of the upcoming response. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

## Results

Prior to the leader RT analysis, we excluded four participants whose error rate exceeded 33% in at least one design cell (leaving  $n = 36$ ). We also discarded the first block from each half of the experiment as training, error trials (9%), and outlier trials (i.e.,  $RT > 2.5 SD$  from the participant's condition mean; further 2%).

To investigate if leaders engaged in anticipation, we tested if leaders' actions were affected by the type of the upcoming response of the follower, and whether this effect would be modulated by the type of response produced by the follower in the preceding trial. The results are illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. The ANOVA revealed two main effects qualified by an interaction—upcoming response:  $F(1, 35) = 13.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 < .01$ ; preceding response:  $F(1, 35) = 7.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 < .01$ ; interaction:  $F(1, 35) = 58.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . Follow-up  $t$  tests showed that leaders initiated their actions more quickly before compatible than incompatible responses, but only if on the preceding trial the follower had produced a compatible response,  $t(35) = 6.58, p < .001, d_z = 1.10$ ; if, however, on the preceding trial the follower had produced an incompatible response, leaders' actions were not reliably affected by the upcoming response,  $t(35) = -1.74, p = .090, d_z = -0.29$ .

We conducted a corresponding analysis on follower RT, after treating it the same way as we did for leader RT (leaving  $n = 28$ ). The results are illustrated in Figure 2. There was a main effect of upcoming response,  $F(1, 27) = 32.73, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$ , but no effect of preceding response,  $F(1, 27) = .51, p = .483, \eta_p^2 < .01$ . Importantly, just as in the leader RT data, the analysis revealed an interaction,  $F(1, 27) = 30.53, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , and the follow-up comparisons detected a large and robust effect of the upcoming response for trials occurring after a compatible response trial,  $t(27) = 7.21, p < .001, d_z = 1.36$ , and a small, nonreliable effect for trials occurring after an incompatible response trial,  $t(27) = 1.65, p = .110, d_z = 0.31$ .

To determine if leaders engaged in temporal adaptation, we tested whether leaders' action initiation speed on a given trial was affected by the speed with which the follower initiated their response on the preceding trial (see Figure 4). The LME model confirmed the findings from the ANOVA, that is, the main effects of upcoming response,  $B = -12.45, SE = 3.43$ ,

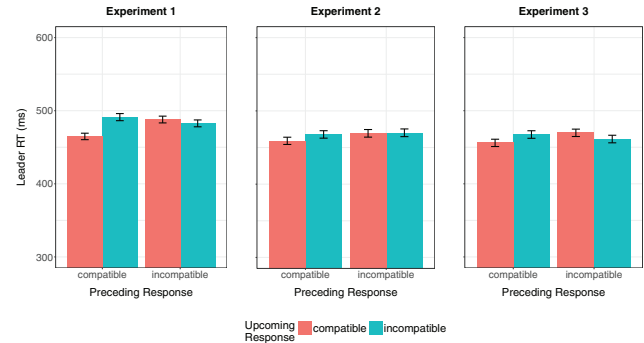


Figure 3. Experiments 1–3: Reaction time (RT) of the leader presented by preceding response and upcoming response of the follower. Error bars represent 95% confidence interval of the mean. Note that the panel for Experiment 1 is the same as Panel A in Figure 2. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

$t = -3.63, p < .001$ , and preceding response,  $B = -5.17, SE = 2.43, t = -2.13, p = .041$ , and their interaction,  $B = -36.14, SE = 5.10, t = -7.08, p < .001$ . Critically, it also revealed a main effect of preceding follower RT, such that the longer the follower RT on the preceding trial, the longer the leader RT on the current trial,  $B = 7.83, SE = 1.60, t = 4.88, p < .001$ . Interestingly, there were no reliable interactions involving this effect ( $ps > .098$ ), suggesting that it was independent from the effects related to the follower's response type (either preceding or upcoming).

## Discussion

In Experiment 1, leaders interacted with a follower who produced either a compatible or an incompatible response, varying compatibility on a trial-by-trial basis. Consistently with previous studies, the speed with which leaders initiated their action on the current trial was positively correlated with the follower's speed on the preceding trial, indicating that leaders engaged in temporal adaptation (Konvalinka et al., 2010, 2014; Loehr & Palmer, 2011; Okano et al., 2017; Wu, Chapman, Walker, Bischof, & Kingstone, 2013). Moreover, our analysis suggested that adaptation impacted leaders' actions independently from any effects of response type (as in Experiment 2 of Lelonekiewicz & Gambi, 2017).

We also found evidence that leaders anticipated the follower's response type: Leaders initiated their actions sooner prior to a compatible than incompatible response, suggesting they represented the upcoming response in their motor plan. Importantly, this implies that agents are able to anticipate another person's response, and incorporate it in their motor plan "on the fly," and not just on the basis of observing repeated and consistent associations over many trials, as in previous blocked designs (Pfister et al., 2013, 2017). But whereas this effect was large and statistically robust for trials occurring after a compatible response from the follower, it was considerably smaller and failed to reach statistical significance for trials occurring after an incompatible response. There are a number of possible explanations for this striking interaction.

One interpretation of this result is that leaders did in fact anticipate the partner's behavior following both compatible and incompatible responses, but after observing an incompatible re-

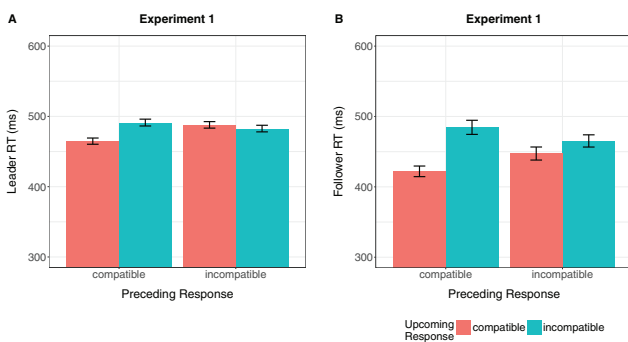
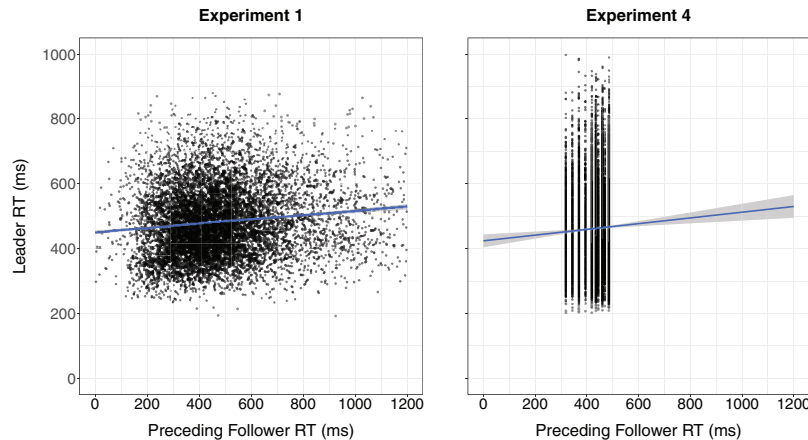


Figure 2. Experiment 1: Reaction time (RT) of the leader (A) and the follower (B) as a function of preceding response and upcoming response of the follower. Error bars represent 95% confidence interval of the mean. See the online article for the color version of this figure.



**Figure 4.** Experiments 1 and 4: The relation between leader reaction time (RT) and preceding follower RT. The difference in range of preceding follower RT stems from the fact that response speed of human followers in Experiment 1 was considerably more variable than of virtual followers in Experiment 4. The shaded area around the regression line represents 95% confidence interval on the fitted values. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

response anticipation was attenuated by conflict adaptation, a processing mode that has been shown to hamper effects related to stimulus representation after experiencing conflict (e.g., the Simon effect; Wühr & Ansorge, 2005; see Gratton, Coles, & Donchin, 1992; we return to this in General Discussion). Alternatively, this result could be due to leaders anticipating the speed rather than the type of the upcoming response. Although it is currently unclear whether agents use action–effect anticipation to predict the timing of their partner’s responses, there is evidence that they do so with regards to nonsocial action effects (i.e., they represent the delay between the action and its nonsocial effect; Dignath & Janczyk, 2017; Dignath et al., 2014; Thomaschke & Dreisbach, 2015). Importantly, although in Experiment 1 followers initiated their response sooner if it was compatible rather than incompatible (the well-known automatic imitation effect; Heyes, 2011), this effect was considerably larger for trials occurring after a compatible than an incompatible response. Thus, it is possible that leaders anticipated the different speed of compatible and incompatible responses particularly after a compatible trial, when the difference between these response types was salient. In contrast, leaders’ action execution was not affected by response compatibility after an incompatible trial, when the follower’s speed did not reliably differ depending on compatibility. Experiment 2 was conducted to tease apart these alternative explanations (i.e., response type anticipation modulated by conflict adaptation vs. response speed anticipation).

## Experiment 2

To study response type anticipation without possible confounding influences of response speed, in Experiment 2 the role of the human follower was taken by two virtual followers who produced their responses with constant speed. One follower always produced compatible responses, whereas the other follower always produced incompatible responses; because the identity of the follower was announced at the beginning of each trial, participants (who now only acted as leaders) could anticipate the upcoming response based on the virtual

follower’s identity. We hypothesized that if the critical anticipation finding from Experiment 1 (i.e., leaders’ actions were affected by the upcoming response after compatible, but not after incompatible trials) can be attributed to anticipation of response type (modulated by conflict adaptation), we should observe it also in Experiment 2. Alternatively, if it was solely due to anticipation of response speed, leaders’ actions should now be unaffected by the manipulation of response compatibility.

## Method

**Participants.** Thirty-two participants took part in the experiment ( $M_{\text{age}} = 22.6$  years, range = 18–37 years; 26 women, four left-handed; tested at University of Würzburg), again allowing sufficient power for testing the effect of response anticipation. Ethical approval, informed consent and participant compensation were arranged as per Experiment 1.

**Stimuli and apparatus.** Participants sat in front of a 17" CRT monitor and operated a standard German QWERTZ keyboard. They used the “M” key for long and short keypresses and “K” to react to the catch trials (see Design and Procedure for details). The virtual followers were presented in the middle of the screen against a black background. Either follower appeared seated at a table in front of a laptop, with their upper body visible to the participant. Stimuli prompting participants’ reactions were displayed at the bottom of the screen.

The videos showing the follower were implemented in E-Prime, by presenting still frames of successive phases of the movements at 30 Hz. The videos showing the follower producing a long or a short keypress had the same structure for both followers: The movement started 33 ms (i.e., one video frame) after the video onset and the follower’s hand reached the laptop to press a key after a further 264 ms (eight frames); the hand then remained on the key for 66 ms (two frames) in the short keypress video and 825 ms (25 frames) in the long keypress video, after which it returned to the starting position. The short keypress video had a total

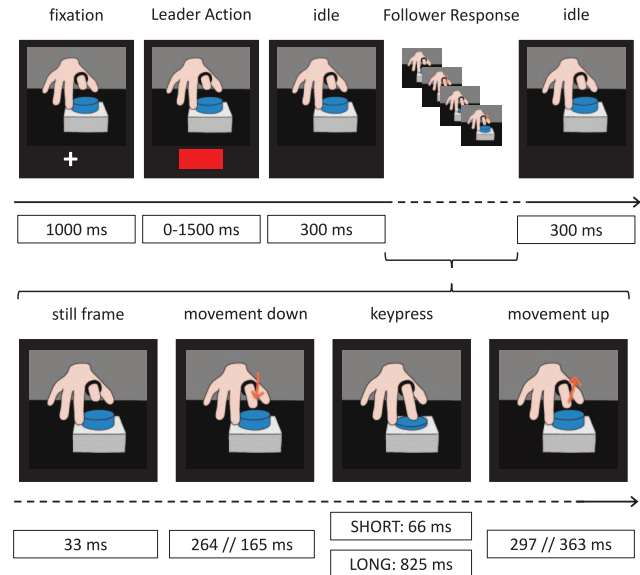
duration of 627 ms (19 frames) and the long keypress video of 1386 ms (42 frames). The video frames were created with Poser 10 (Smith Micro Software Inc., Aliso Viejo, CA) and are available online (<https://osf.io/532qr/>).

**Design and procedure.** At the beginning of the experiment, the virtual followers were introduced as characters with distinct names and identities (one male, Tim, and one female, Sophie). Participants were told that one follower would always produce a compatible response to their action (e.g., after a short keypress of the participant the follower would also perform a short keypress), whereas the other follower would always produce an incompatible response (e.g., after a short keypress of the participant the follower would perform a long keypress). Thus, the follower's identity determined whether the upcoming response would be compatible or incompatible (the mapping of follower to response type was counterbalanced across participants). Participants then practiced long (200–600 ms) and short keypresses (1–150 ms) and completed six practice trials in which they were familiarized with the structure of standard trials and catch trials (see below).

In each trial, a picture of one of the two followers and a white fixation cross appeared for 1,000 ms (see Figure 5). Then, a color cue was presented for 200 ms prompting participants to produce either a short or long keypress (blue or red rectangle; color to keypress mapping was counterbalanced across participants). Participants were expected to produce a keypress within 1,500 ms from the cue onset. If they produced a correct action, the video of the follower's long or short keypress started after further 300 ms. Next, the picture of the follower stayed on the screen for another 300 ms, after which the screen went black and the next trial started after 1,500 ms. If participants produced an incorrect action, no action at all, or initiated the action before the presentation of the cue, an error message was displayed for 1,000 ms, the follower remained still and a new trial was started after 1,800 ms. Participants completed 10 experimental blocks with 40 trials each. The identity of the follower was randomized within blocks, but both followers appeared equally often in each block.

To ensure that participants paid attention to the followers' movements, we implemented catch trials (see Pfister et al., 2017); we deemed these necessary in this experiment because participants were now performing only the role of leaders and interacting with a virtual follower and were thus potentially more likely to ignore the follower's responses entirely. In catch trials, the time between the participant's keypress and the follower's movement was prolonged from 300 ms to 1,000 ms. Participants were asked to press the "K" key whenever they noticed such a catch trial. Each trial had a one in 20 chance to be a catch trial (determined randomly at the beginning of each trial), but the first five trials of each block were never catch trials to allow participants to get used to standard trials first. If participants detected a catch trial correctly, a reassuring message was displayed (*Well done!*), and if they missed a catch trial, a warning message was displayed (*Pay attention to your partner's reactions!*).

**Statistical analyses.** Leader RT was analyzed with a  $2 \times 2$  within-subjects ANOVA followed by paired-sample *t* tests, as per Experiment 1. However, because now leaders interacted with a follower who initiated responses with constant speed, in Experiment 2 we did not test for the effects of temporally adapting to the follower.



**Figure 5.** Experiments 2–3: The trial structure (upper panel) was identical in both experiments, but the exact timing of the virtual follower's response (lower panel) differed as specified below (these differences were implemented to make Experiment 3 directly comparable with Experiment 1; see Experiment 3, Methods). For illustration purposes, the figure depicts only the hand of the virtual follower. The exact stimuli used in the experiments can be found online (<https://osf.io/532qr/>). Trial structure: For 1,000 ms, leader observed a fixation cross, whereas the virtual follower remained still in the neutral position. Next, the leader reacted to a color cue and produced an action. After 1,500 ms or after the leader's key release (whichever occurred first), the idle period started where the follower remained still for another 300 ms. Subsequently, the follower produced a response comprising of a still frame (33 ms), movement down (264 ms in Experiment 2 or 165 ms in Experiment 3), keypress (66 ms for short and 825 ms for long presses, both in Experiment 2 and 3), and movement up (297 ms in Experiment 2 or 363 ms in Experiment 3). The trial finished after another 300 ms of idle period. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

## Results

Prior to the analysis, we discarded data as per Experiment 1 (Block 1, error trials 9%, outliers further 2%; no participant had an error rate qualifying for exclusion). We also discarded observations following catch trials (4%) and excluded one participant who did not respond on any of the catch trials (leaving  $n = 31$ ). The results are illustrated in Figure 3. A  $2 \times 2$  within-subjects ANOVA on leader RT found a reliable main effect of upcoming response, a marginal, but not reliable effect of preceding response, and a marginal interaction—upcoming response:  $F(1, 30) = 11.62$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2_c < .01$ ; preceding response:  $F(1, 30) = 4.06$ ,  $p = .053$ ,  $\eta^2_c < .01$ ; interaction:  $F(1, 30) = 3.04$ ,  $p = .092$ ,  $\eta^2_c < .01$ . Critically, just as in Experiment 1, follow-up comparisons showed that leaders initiated their actions more quickly prior to compatible than incompatible responses, but this effect was robust after compatible trials,  $t(30) = 3.23$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $d_z = 0.58$ , and not after incompatible trials,  $t(30) = -0.24$ ,  $p = .812$ ,  $d_z = -0.04$  (means in Supplemental Table S1 in the online supplemental material).

## Discussion

Experiment 2 replicated the critical finding of action–effect anticipation from Experiment 1: Leaders' actions were affected by the upcoming response, but this effect was statistically reliable only for trials occurring after the follower had performed a compatible response (and not for trials after an incompatible response). Importantly, this pattern now occurred in a setting where the followers initiated their responses with constant speed, suggesting that it can be attributed to anticipation of response type rather than response speed (see also Pfister et al., 2017). Note, however, that the relevant statistical effect (i.e., the effect of upcoming response type for trials after compatible responses) was considerably smaller than in Experiment 1 ( $d_z = 0.58$  vs.  $d_z = 1.10$ ). Thus, to assess its robustness, we conducted Experiment 3.

## Experiment 3

Experiment 3 was a conceptual replication of Experiment 2. Again, participants acted as leaders and two virtual followers performed compatible or incompatible responses with constant speed. However, we made two important changes: First, to minimize any effect of task-unrelated information about the follower, we displayed only the follower's hand; second, we changed the timing of the responses so that it more closely resembled the typical follower's performance from Experiment 1. We tested if the interaction of upcoming response and preceding response would replicate in this carefully controlled context and, crucially, whether following a compatible trial, leaders would be quicker when they could anticipate the upcoming response to be compatible. Positive evidence would further corroborate the hypothesis that leaders' actions can be affected by response type anticipation. Experiment 3 was preregistered (<https://osf.io/532qqr/>).

## Method

**Participants.** As per our preregistration, we halted data collection after reaching the desired sample size of 32 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 21.6$  years, range = 18–33 years; 20 women, none left-handed; tested at University of Edinburgh). We estimated the sample size based on the effect size for the Upcoming Response  $\times$  Preceding Response interaction from Experiment 1 (we used package *simr* in R with 10 simulations, and the *compare* “lr” method). This showed that a sample size of 32 achieves close to 100% power. Thirteen additional participants were tested but their data were discarded prior to response speed analyses because of a technical problem ( $n = 4$ ) or because they failed to meet one of the criteria set in our preregistration: They were either left-handed ( $n = 5$ ), or made errors on more than 33% of trials in at least one design cell ( $n = 4$ ). Participants gave informed consent and received £7. All experimental procedures were approved by the Ethics Committee at the Department of Psychology, University of Edinburgh.

**Stimuli and apparatus.** Participants sat in front of an LCD monitor and operated a custom-made button box (similar to the one depicted in front of the virtual follower; see Figure 5) with their right-hand. Their left hand rested on a standard English QWERTY keyboard, which they used to respond to catch trials by pressing the “K” key. The follower's response began with a still frame (33 ms) of the neutral position, then the index finger began

moving from the neutral position to reach the button (movement duration = 165 ms, or five frames); note that this stage (i.e., 165 ms) was shorter than in Experiment 2 (i.e., 264 ms)—this was to ensure that followers responded with speed resembling the one typically produced by human followers; next, the finger remained on the button for either 66 ms (two frames, short press) or 825 ms (25 frames, long press; as in Experiment 2), after which it returned to the neutral position during 363 ms (11 frames).<sup>1</sup> A “click-on” sound played when the hand pressed the button, and a “click-off” sound played on release (both sounds 60 ms long). The virtual hands were created in Blender (v2.78; open source, The Blender Foundation, Amsterdam, the Netherlands); video frames used for presentation to participants are available online (<https://osf.io/532qqr/>).

**Design and procedure.** As in Experiment 2, participants (acting as leaders) interacted with two virtual followers, who were introduced using a male (Tim) and a female name (Sophie). Importantly, in the present design participants only saw the followers' hands, that is, one follower was represented by a right hand wearing a white ring on the index finger, whereas the other was represented by an identical hand wearing a black ring; the hands were shown resting on a white/black surface to make it easier for participants to identify the follower. Further, we set the intertrial interval to 500 ms (to replicate the interval used in Experiment 1). Apart from that, the trial structure was equivalent to the one of Experiment 2.

**Statistical analyses.** Leader RT was analyzed as in Experiment 2.

## Results

Prior to the analysis, data was treated as in Experiment 2 (excluded error trials 11%, trials after catch trials 5%, outliers 2%). The results are shown in Figure 3. The analysis replicated the critical Upcoming Response  $\times$  Preceding Response interaction from Experiment 1,  $F(1, 31) = 7.32$ ,  $p = .011$ ,  $\eta^2_G < .01$ , and follow-up  $t$  tests confirmed that leaders initiated their action more quickly prior to compatible than incompatible responses, but only after trials where the follower had produced a compatible response,  $t(31) = 2.91$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $d_z = 0.52$ ; response compatibility did not reliably affect leaders action execution after incompatible trials,  $t(31) = -1.70$ ,  $p = .098$ ,  $d_z = -0.30$ ). The two main effects were not reliable—upcoming response:  $F(1, 31) = 1.50$ ,  $p = .230$ ,  $\eta^2_G < .01$ ; preceding response:  $F(1, 31) = 1.29$ ,  $p = .265$ ,  $\eta^2_G < .01$ .

## Discussion

In Experiment 3, we found further evidence for the hypothesis that action execution can be affected by response type anticipation, and that such mechanism can act independently of any processes involving follower's speed. These results, and results from Experiment 2, imply that the behavioral pattern observed in Experiment

<sup>1</sup> In Experiment 3, both followers responded with a speed that was as close as possible to the average follower RT observed in Experiment 1 (i.e., Experiment 3: 498 ms = 300 ms idle period + 33 ms still frame + 165 ms finger down; Experiment 1: 484 ms). The finger up period was prolonged relative to Experiment 2 so as to maintain the total duration of the follower's response in Experiments 2–3, that is, short response 627 ms, long response 1386 ms.

1 was caused at least in part by response type anticipation. Notwithstanding, the critical effect in Experiments 2 and 3 was considerably smaller than in Experiment 1 ( $d_z = 0.58/0.52$  vs.  $d_z = 1.10$ ). The smaller effect size in Experiments 2–3 could be due to a number of differences between these experiments and Experiment 1. Most notably, in Experiment 1 leaders (participants) interacted with a human follower (another participant), while in Experiment 2 they interacted with a virtual follower, and just a virtual hand in Experiment 3. There is evidence that others' actions are less strongly represented when the other is a nonhuman agent (Müller et al., 2011; Press, Bird, Flach, & Heyes, 2005; Stenzel et al., 2012; Tsai, Kuo, Hung, & Tzeng, 2008; Weller et al., 2019).

However, another possibility is that anticipation of followers' response speed did play some role in leaders' action execution in Experiment 1 (see Experiment 1, Discussion). Because agents readily anticipate the delay between actions and their nonsocial effects during action planning (e.g., Dignath & Janczyk, 2017), it is plausible that the timing of partner's responses may be anticipated in a similar manner. Recall that followers in Experiment 1 initiated compatible responses more quickly than incompatible responses, and that this difference was particularly pronounced on trials occurring after a compatible trial (for an illustration of this finding, see Figure 2). Thus, in Experiment 1, leaders could have anticipated the speed of the upcoming response based on this pattern, which in turn resulted in a greater effect size in this experiment as compared to Experiments 2–3 (where response speed was constant and such anticipation could not have an effect). We ran Experiment 4 to investigate this possibility.

### Experiment 4

Experiment 4 tested if agents represent in their action plan the timing of the partner's upcoming response. There is some evidence that this might be the case: In a recent study by Dignath and Janczyk (2017), keypresses were initiated sooner when they would be followed by a tone occurring after a short, rather than long delay, suggesting that the anticipated delay length affected action execution (see also Dignath et al., 2014; Thomaschke & Dreisbach, 2015). However, it is unclear whether these findings can be extended to social action effects. Whereas several studies demonstrated that some form of temporal anticipation is present in social interactions, most of these demonstrations involved tasks that required agents to anticipate, or at least to coordinate with each other (e.g., Wolf et al., 2018; for reviews, see Harry & Keller, 2019; Keller et al., 2014; van der Steen & Keller, 2013). Thus, it is currently unclear whether agents would anticipate the timing of their partner's responses when the task does not require them to do so.

To investigate this, in Experiment 4 we once again used the button-pressing paradigm which does not require leaders to anticipate or to coordinate. Specifically, we used a design similar to Experiment 3 where leaders (participants) interacted with two virtual followers (animated hands). Now, however, the followers produced only compatible responses and instead we manipulated their response speed: One follower initiated responses with constant speed, whereas the other increased their speed across the experimental session. Consequently, particularly toward the end of the session, one follower was quicker to respond than the other. Thus, follower's identity could help anticipate whether the upcoming

response would be fast or slow. We hypothesized that, if leaders anticipate the timing of the follower's responses based on action–effect associations, they should initiate actions more quickly where they interact with the quicker follower (i.e., where they could anticipate a faster response), as compared to trials where they interact with the slower follower (i.e., where they could anticipate a slower response). Experiment 4 was preregistered (<https://osf.io/532qr/>).

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 32 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.9$  years, range = 18–27 years; 24 women, none left-handed; tested at Cardiff University). A further eight participants were tested but their data was discarded (seven because their error rate was greater than 33% in at least one design cell, and one due to technical failure). Participants gave informed consent and received £8 compensation. All experimental procedures were approved by the Ethics Committee at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University.

**Stimuli and apparatus.** Like in Experiment 3, participants were seated in front of an LCD monitor, they operated the custom-made button box with their right hand, whereas their left hand rested on an English QWERTY keyboard to respond to catch trials (using the “K” key). The stimuli representing the virtual followers were the same as in Experiment 3.

**Design and procedure.** Experiment 4 followed the design and procedure of Experiment 3, but with a few modifications. Specifically, the virtual followers now produced only compatible responses and we manipulated their response speed: The experimental session was divided into four parts, across which for one follower we incrementally increased their response initiation speed while keeping it constant for the other follower (see Table 1). Recall that follower's response speed was the time between the moment when the leader lifts the finger from their key and the moment when the follower starts pressing on their key. For the virtual followers in Experiments 2–4, response speed comprised the prepresentation interval, with the addition of the time to display one still frame of the video and the time to complete the finger down movement. Thus, to manipulate response speed in Experiment 4, we modulated the length of the idle period before the presentation of the response (see Figure 5).

To help relate Experiment 4 to the findings of Experiment 1, we modeled the responses based on those of human followers in Experiment 1: In Part 1, response speed of both virtual followers was identical to the mean follower RT in Experiment 1. In Part 2, one follower responded more quickly than the other, and the difference between their speeds corresponded to the difference in follower RT between compatible and incompatible responses on trials after an incompatible trial. In Part 3, this difference further increased and now corresponded to the follower RT difference

Table 1  
*Experiment 4: Average Response Speed of the Followers Across Parts of the Experimental Session*

Follower	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	Part 4
Constant follower	460 ms	460 ms	460 ms	460 ms
Quick follower	460 ms	444 ms	394 ms	344 ms

between compatible and incompatible responses after a compatible trial. Finally, in Part 4, the difference between followers increased once again (this time it was estimated with a linear function fitting the difference values from preceding parts). All response speeds were presented with the addition of random jitter across trials ( $\pm 25$  ms). There were five blocks of 32 trials in each part of the experiment. The instructions never mentioned the followers' speed. Catch trials were also modified: They were now trials in which the follower responded incompatibly. Every other aspect of the procedure was the same as in Experiment 3.

**Statistical analyses.** We investigated if leader RT would vary depending on whether the leader expected a fast or slow response (*upcoming speed: fast vs. slow*). Importantly, because the speed difference between the fast and slow responses increased across the experimental session, we expected this effect to be modulated by the factor coding for the progression of the session (*Part 1 vs. 2 vs. 3 vs. 4*). Thus, we conducted a  $2 \times 4$  within-subject ANOVA. Further, we tested if leader RT was affected by the Preceding follower RT (i.e., speed with which the follower initiated their response on the preceding trial). To this end, we analyzed the subset of trials following those trials where the follower speed varied (i.e., quick follower in parts 2–4): We ran an LME model regressing leader RT against preceding follower RT (scaled and centered), with by-subjects random intercepts and slopes.

## Results

As per our preregistration, we discarded the first block from each part of the experiment (as leaders may take time to learn to anticipate the fast followers' speed after a speed change), error trials (10%), observations following catch trials (4%), and outliers (2%). The ANOVA revealed a main effect of part, but no effect of upcoming speed and no interaction, suggesting a practice effect—leaders became faster as the experiment progressed, regardless of whether the upcoming follower's response would be fast or slow—part:  $F(3, 93) = 4.42, p = .017, \eta^2_p = .01$ ; upcoming speed:  $F(1, 31) = 2.32, p = .138, \eta^2_p < .01$ ; interaction:  $F(3, 93) = 0.87, p = .462, \eta^2_p < .01$ . Consistently, follow-up comparisons conducted on data from each part found little evidence for the upcoming speed effect (uncorrected  $ps > .033$ ; full results in the [online supplemental material](#)).

In addition, we investigated if leaders temporally adapted (see [Figure 4](#)). The analysis revealed a main effect of preceding follower RT indicating that leaders adapted to the follower's response speed on the preceding trial,  $B = 3.76, SE = 1.70, t = 2.21, p = .035$  (see the [online supplemental material](#) for the details about the LME model and for additional analyses confirming this finding).

## Discussion

Experiment 4 tested if participants spontaneously anticipated the follower's response speed. Although they adapted to the speed of follower's response on the preceding trial, they did not show evidence of anticipating the speed of the upcoming response. This suggests that such anticipation did not contribute to the critical behavioral pattern in Experiment 1 nor to the difference in effect sizes observed between Experiment 1 and Experiments 2–3.

## General Discussion

Both anticipation and adaptation are important for action planning and execution, but the exact contribution of each mechanism to social interactions remains poorly understood. We addressed this gap in four experiments involving a leader/follower paradigm. Our results suggest that agents anticipate the type of their partner's upcoming response, even in interactions where the mapping between their action and the response changes on a trial-by-trial basis (Experiments 1, 2, and 3). In contrast, we found no evidence that anticipation involves a representation of partner's speed in such interactions (Experiment 4). In addition, we observed that agents adapt to the speed of their partner's past responses, and our data suggested that such adaptation is engaged independently from anticipation (Experiments 1 and 4). These findings have several implications, both for accounts of social interactions and for our understanding of the mechanisms through which anticipation and adaptation are realized.

## Anticipation

The sociomotor framework (Kunde et al., 2018) postulates that much of the anticipation observed in social interactions can be attributed to a general mechanism that governs actions in individual and social contexts alike. In this view, actions are represented in terms of their effects, so executing an action in a social context involves anticipating the response that this action typically evokes in others. The critical prediction of this account is that action execution should be facilitated when the upcoming response is similar to one's own action. Consistently, we found that leaders initiated their actions sooner prior to compatible than incompatible follower's responses (at least on trials occurring after a compatible response; Experiments 1–3). Importantly, we demonstrated this in a social context where the follower produced both compatible and incompatible responses, switching randomly between these response types on a trial-by-trial basis. Thus, together with previous research that used blocked designs (e.g., Pfister et al., 2017), our study suggests that the mechanism proposed by the sociomotor framework is a plausible candidate for explaining anticipation across various kinds of social interactions.

Further, our findings inform the discussion of what features of the partner's responses are represented through this mechanism. Although the sociomotor framework does not make specific predictions in this regard, the underlying process of associative learning (on which this account relies) would suggest that associations should be formed on all the dimensions shared between the action and response (Shin et al., 2010; cf. Weller et al., 2019). Thus, in our experiments, agents should represent both the type and the speed of the upcoming response. However, whereas we observed response type anticipation (Experiments 1–3), we found little evidence that agents represent the speed of the upcoming response: Leaders' initiated their actions just as quickly when they were about to interact with a follower who was consistently slow or a follower who was fast (Experiment 4). This is difficult to reconcile with the vast evidence for anticipation of other people's timing in social interactions (e.g., Knoblich & Jordan, 2003; Pecenka & Keller, 2011; Wolf et al., 2018).

One possible explanation for the lack of speed anticipation in our experiments is that, unlike anticipating the timing of nonsocial effects (Dignath & Janczyk, 2017; Dignath et al., 2014; Thom-

aschke & Dreisbach, 2015), anticipation of partner's timing is realized through a different mechanism, perhaps one driven by task goals. This would be consistent both with earlier studies showing such anticipation in tasks that explicitly require participants to coordinate in time, and with theoretical accounts viewing anticipation as a voluntary process (Harry & Keller, 2019; Keller et al., 2014; van der Steen & Keller, 2013). Another possibility is that the incorporation of effect delays into action planning is less likely for social than for nonsocial effects, since effect delays might be more variable in social interactions (Kunde et al., 2018). However, neither of these explanations conforms to a strong formulation of the ideomotor theory, which would expect anticipation to be engaged automatically and irrespectively of the nature of the action effect. That said, null results should be interpreted with caution.

Although generally underscoring the role played by action-effect anticipation in social interactions, our findings are also informative about the conditions under which the involvement of such mechanism is reduced. Consistently across our experiments, a difference between compatible and incompatible responses for leaders' action initiation occurred on trials following a compatible follower response but was much reduced on trials following an incompatible response. This pattern of results is likely related to conflict adaptation (Gratton et al., 1992; Grosjean & Mordkoff, 2001; Wühr & Ansorge, 2005), a processing mode engaged after experiencing a cognitive conflict, and involving active inhibition of stimulus or response features that might induce further conflict (Fanini, Nobre, & Chelazzi, 2006; Melcher et al., 2015; Nobre, Rao, & Chelazzi, 2006; for a review, see Egner, 2007). For our experiments, such an account would suggest that leaders formed a representation of the upcoming follower's response (e.g., "the follower will move the finger downwards to press the button"), but after incompatible trials they inhibited the features of this representation that conflicted with their action plan (e.g., "the follower will perform a different type of press than me"), thus reducing the effect related to anticipating compatible versus incompatible responses.

However, an alternative view would hold that, after experiencing conflict on incompatible trials, agents transiently switched to a mode of action representation where anticipated social effects were no longer included in the action plan at all. Such alternative action representation could for example include only body-related effects, such as visual and proprioceptive effects of the planned finger movement, but not a representation of the follower's action as being compatible or incompatible with the leader's own action (Pfister, Janczyk, Gressmann, Fournier, & Kunde, 2014; Thébault, Michalland, Derozier, Chabrier, & Brouillet, 2018; Wirth, Pfister, Brandes, & Kunde, 2016; see Pfister, 2019, for a review). If correct, this view would suggest that anticipation of the follower's response type only occurred after compatible trials but not after incompatible trials. Even though both accounts might explain the reduced compatibility effect following incompatible trials, one aspect of our findings favors the interpretation that anticipation of social effects did not occur after incompatible trials—we did not find evidence for a residual compatibility effect following such trials.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we propose that experiencing conflict due to incompatibility between their action and the partner's response cause agents to transiently switch to a different mode of action repre-

sentation, one that does not incorporate anticipated social action effects into the action plan.

Finally, a third possible interpretation of our results pattern is that agents might have been slowed by the need to represent a distinct action for the partner (e.g., short keypress) in addition to representing one's own (e.g., long keypress).<sup>3</sup> This could be caused either by observing an incompatible past response or anticipating an incompatible upcoming response. In either case, the processing burden would be greater than when agents' actions were both preceded and followed by a compatible response (and so the representation of partner's action was identical to one's own). Note that this interpretation is compatible with the hypothesis that agents automatically represent the type of their partner's upcoming response (Kunde et al., 2018).

## Adaptation

Our study clearly demonstrates that agents spontaneously engage in temporal adaptation: When interacting with a follower whose response speed varied between trials, leaders adapted their action initiation speed to the follower's speed on the preceding trial. They did so even though they were not explicitly tasked with coordinating their actions in time, and even though they performed discrete actions. This is consistent with evidence suggesting that adaptation is ubiquitous in social interactions, occurring when agents perform continuous (e.g., Konvalinka et al., 2010) or discrete actions (e.g., van der Wel & Fu, 2015), and when they do (e.g., Okano et al., 2017) or do not have a goal to coordinate (e.g., Schmidt & O'Brien, 1997).

Importantly, we showed that spontaneous temporal adaptation can occur independently from anticipation: Our analyses suggested that, in an interaction where both mechanisms were at play, adaptation and anticipation exerted independent effects on the speed with which leaders initiated their actions (Experiment 1). Moreover, we found evidence for temporal adaptation also in an interaction where anticipation was not engaged (Experiment 4). Consistently with recent studies, this implies adaptation is a distinct mechanism (Konvalinka et al., 2010, 2014; Koban, Ramamoorthy, & Konvalinka, 2019; Lelonkiewicz & Gambi, 2017; Okano et al., 2017).

Because our study did not aim to test any particular account of temporal adaptation, we can only speculate on what is the exact nature of this mechanism. According to nonlinear dynamic models of synchronization, motor activity of one agent becomes synchronized with the activity of another through perceptual coupling, similarly to two metronomes synchronizing via a mechanical connection. In this view, adaptation stems from the general tendency of coupled systems to self-organize (Dumas, de Guzman, Tognoli, & Kelso, 2014; Fairhurst, Janata, & Keller, 2013, 2014; Kelso, de Guzman, Reveley, & Tognoli, 2009; Schmidt & O'Brien, 1997). Alternatively, temporal adaptation can be viewed through the lens of linear event-based

<sup>2</sup> Although one could also assume a residual compatibility effect to be overshadowed by post-conflict slowing, post-conflict slowing is typically only observed in simple, univalent tasks (Verguts, Notebaert, Kunde, & Wühr, 2011), which are unlike those used in the current study.

<sup>3</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this additional interpretation.

models, which propose that motor activity is organized by an internal time-keeping system (Harry & Keller, 2019; Keller et al., 2014; van der Steen & Keller, 2013). In this perspective, adaptation results from automatic correction mechanisms that adjust the timing of the time-keeper in response to the temporal patterns observed in the environment (Repp, 2005; Repp & Su, 2013). Although these models have been developed to explain behavior in continuous synchronization tasks and have not been applied to discrete reaction tasks akin to the one used here, participants in our study may have fallen into a semirhythmic pattern of performance due to the regular temporal structure of the task, which used constant and relatively short intertrial intervals. In sum, although at this time we cannot ascertain which group of models better captures the adaptation observed in our study, our findings are generally compatible with accounts postulating that interacting agents engage in spontaneous temporal adaptation.

### The Role of Anticipation and Adaptation in Social Interactions

Consistently with the proposition that social interactions rely both on anticipatory and adaptive mechanisms (Keller et al., 2014; Knoblich et al., 2011; Loehr & Palmer, 2011; Pickering & Garrod, 2007; Schmidt et al., 2011), we found that agents engaged action–effect anticipation and temporal adaptation in an interaction where their partner alternated between producing compatible and incompatible responses. Together with the studies that attested these mechanisms for tasks where response compatibility varied between blocks (Lelonkiewicz & Gambi, 2017; Pfister et al., 2013, 2017), our findings suggest that anticipation and adaptation might be involved in social interactions more generally. Interestingly, despite both mechanisms being primarily related to action planning and execution in the individual, it is plausible that their involvement in interactions can also have the function of increasing coordination between agents. Specifically, anticipating the upcoming response can be seen as a form of task corepresentation, a process allowing agents to infer the goals of their interaction partner (Knoblich et al., 2011; Sebanz et al., 2006; Sebanz, Knoblich, & Prinz, 2003, 2005). Further, temporal adaptation often leads the agents to converge on a common temporal structure, which in turn makes their actions more predictable and easier to coordinate with (Vesper, Butterfill, Knoblich, & Sebanz, 2010; Vesper, van der Wel, Knoblich, & Sebanz, 2013). In this sense, our findings point to an interesting possibility that the same cognitive mechanisms that govern actions in the individual context, in the social context may help transform an interaction with no explicit coordination goal into a joint action.

This is compatible with recent theoretical accounts. For example, according to the associative sequence learning model of action planning (ASL), the associative learning mechanism underlying anticipation is also responsible for the phenomenon of social imitation (Brass & Heyes, 2005; Heyes, 2001, 2011). In this view, much like in the ideomotor view of action planning, excitatory connections are established between an action plan and the perceptual consequences of this action, and it is because of these connections that observing an action induces a tendency to imitate it. Thus, imitation, which has been dubbed “social glue” due to its ability to increase cooperation (for reviews, Chartrand & Lakin, 2013;

Hamilton, 2015; Heyes, 2013), may serve as an example of how a basic learning mechanism, operating both inside and outside the social domain, helps to bring interacting agents together.

Another illustration of this process comes from research on sensorimotor synchronization. According to the Adaptation and Anticipation Model of sensorimotor synchronization (ADAM), much of the ability to temporally coordinate with others is achieved through an automatic adaptation mechanism that adjusts the timing of an internal time-keeping system to external temporal patterns (Harry & Keller, 2019; Keller et al., 2014; van der Steen & Keller, 2013). This mechanism has been shown to operate irrespective of whether or not the patterns are produced by human agents (for reviews, see Repp, 2005; Repp & Su, 2013). However, when occurring in social contexts, such temporal adaptation contributes to coordination and to feelings of connectedness between agents (Marsh et al., 2009).

In sum, these data converge with the possibility that social interactions benefit from the engagement of adaptation and anticipation. But how widely can this be applied? On one hand, it is plausible that the effects of anticipation and adaptation are limited in certain contexts. Specifically, the use of anticipation may be constrained when interacting with a partner who often changes their response (e.g., in a competitive game of tennis), because these situations may pose a challenge for establishing reliable action–response associations. Temporal adaptation, in contrast, is likely to prevail in interactions with variable partners because agents are known to adapt to perturbed rhythms (Repp & Su, 2013), but it might be hampered in interactions that do not have a discernable temporal structure (e.g., carrying a couch up the stairs). Arguably, however, many social contexts involve temporally regularized and highly predictive behavior (e.g., dancing, turn-taking in conversations, rowing), and in such contexts both the anticipatory and adaptive mechanisms would be expected to support efficient interactions.

### Conclusions

To conclude, across four experiments we investigated the contribution of response anticipation and temporal adaptation to social interactions. We demonstrated that agents can spontaneously anticipate partner’s responses in interactions where action–response mapping changes dynamically. However, we observed anticipation only of response type but not of response speed, and we found no evidence for anticipation occurring after trials where agents might have experienced a cognitive conflict. Further, we showed that agents’ actions can be affected by spontaneous adaptation to the observed timing of the partner’s responses, and that this mechanism can be engaged independently of response anticipation. Our results are in agreement with models proposing that social interactions are shaped by multiple cognitive and perceptual mechanisms, including anticipation and temporal adaptation, and that these mechanisms might help agents to achieve coordination.

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