

Leader-member behavior congruence and employee performance: the mediation effects of LMX and PsyCap

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Abstract:

Rooted in person-supervisor fit theory, this study addresses why, how, and when leader-member congruence/incongruence in proactive behavior influences employee outcomes. We contribute to the literature by: (a) examining the effects of four leader-follower congruence scenarios on employee LMX and (b) suggesting a new underlying mechanism that links the congruence effect and employee performance through employee LMX and employee psychological capital. The data from 98 employee-supervisor dyads in Taiwan show support for our hypotheses. The polynomial regression and response surface analyses reveal that the LMX quality is enhanced when the dyad members are matched in their proactive behaviors. Furthermore, although incongruence scenarios are harmful to the dyadic relationship, follower proactive behavior lightens the severity of their effects. Support is found for the indirect effect of the proactive behavior congruence on employee performance via the serial mediation effects of employee LMX and psychological capital. Our results provide several meaningful contributions to the follower-supervisor fit literature. The implications of the results for managerial application and future research are briefly discussed.

Keywords:

Congruence; proactive behavior; psychological capital; LMX; job performance

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INTRODUCTION

Harmony between employees and their surroundings in the workplace has long been considered crucial for employees and the organization alike (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Ostroff & Judge, 2007). The importance of this harmony is demonstrated in person-environment fit theory, which is founded on the core assumption that good environment-employee fit generally leads to positive outcomes (Cole, Carter, & Zhang, 2013; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Current literature categorizes person-environment fit into several aspects (Van Vianen, Shen, & Chuang, 2011). Among these aspects, the person-supervisor fit (P-S fit) considers the match between employees' characteristics and those of their supervisors, such as their values, personalities, and behavioral styles (Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005; Van Vianen et al., 2011; Zhang, Ling, Zhang, & Xie, 2015).

Researchers have accumulated a considerable body of evidence to support the beneficial effects of the congruence (or fit) between employees and their supervisors (Van Vianen et al., 2011; Yang, Yan, Fan, & Luo, 2017). Person-leader congruence in values is believed to positively affect desirable employee outcomes, such as commitment and job satisfaction (Byza, Dörr, Schuh, & Maier, 2019). In addition, leader member exchange (LMX) agreement between leaders and followers can enhance employee work engagement, which in turn increases employees' organizational citizenship behaviors (Matta, Scott, Koopman, and Conlon (2015). Nevertheless, current P-S fit literature is lacking in several important regards. First, the majority of previous studies consider fit as a single continuous construct, which is solely perceived by either the employee or the supervisor (Astakhova, 2016; Boon & Biron, 2016; Fan & Han, 2018; Hamstra,

Van Vianen, & Koen, 2019; Huang & Simha, 2018; Klaic, Burtscher, & Jonas, 2018). As a consequence, these studies focus primarily on the congruence/incongruence effect and overlook the difference in outcomes when the leader-employee dyad is matched or mismatched at various levels. To address this gap, the current study sets out to clarify the effects of four different fit scenarios between the dyad members in order to provide more detailed insights for the fit literature.

Second, most previous P-S fit studies focus mainly on the fit in personality, values, or needs of employees and supervisors rather than their actual behaviors (Ghetta, Hirschi, Wang, Rossier, & Herrmann, 2020). Past research has suggested that personality is an antecedent of actual behavior, and is thus a more distant predictor of employee outcomes than their behavior patterns (Crant, 2000; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Scholars have thus called for further study on the effects of congruence in behavioral patterns rather than the predictors of these patterns (i.e., personalities) (Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012). To answer this call, the current research explores the complex effects of congruence/incongruence between the proactive behavior patterns of leaders and employees on employee psychology and subsequent workplace outcomes.

As the notion of employee-leader congruence evolves, the need for an improved understanding of the underlying mechanisms emerges. Several studies have identified mediating mechanisms through which congruency drives desired outcomes. For instance, congruence has been shown to influence employee outcomes via procedural and distributive justice, work engagement, empowerment, and LMX (Byza et al., 2019; Carter, Mossholder, & Harris, 2018; Cole et al., 2013; Matta et al., 2015; Riggs & Porter, 2017; Zhang et al., 2012). The current study complements this line of research by proposing a new mechanism by which congruency shapes the effects of proactive behavior on employee performance. In particular, the study contends that employee LMX and employee psychological capital (PsyCap) mediate the effects of leader-

follower congruence on employee performance. We hypothesize that congruence between the proactive behaviors of leaders and followers enhances employees' LMX, from which they gather and build up psychological capital by receiving mental support, encouragement, and feedback, which enable them to rebound from difficulties at work and attain a higher job performance.

In addressing these issues, we focus on three main objectives. First, we assess under which alignment scenarios the fit/misfit of leader and follower proactive behavior benefits or harms employee performance. We not only test the congruence/incongruence effect, but also compare the variance when the congruence/incongruence occurs at either a high or low level of proactive behavior. We then set out to uncover the underlying mechanism through which congruence asserts its effects on employee outcomes. We propose that LMX and PsyCap serve as mediators that bridge the effects of leader-follower proactive behavior congruence on employee job performance. In this regard, we make several important contributions to the literature. First, we reconfirm the importance of harmony between employees and their environment by contending that employees' proactive behaviors are most beneficial when aligned with those of their supervisors. Furthermore, drawing on P-S fit theory, we predict that dyads whose members are congruent in proactive behavior are more likely to establish higher quality inter-dyad relationships and enhance their work outcomes accordingly.

Second, we classify four particular scenarios of leader-follower congruence (i.e., both parties exhibit high or low proactive behavior) and incongruence (i.e., the leader exhibits higher or lower proactive behavior than the follower). The proposed classification provides a more systematic understanding of the congruence effects of leader-follower proactive behavior than previous studies. We further compare the effects of these four congruence/incongruence scenarios on employee performance, and thus contribute to the P-S fit literature.

Third, by proposing LMX and employee PsyCap as mediators, we shed light on the underlying mechanism responsible for the manner by which P-S fit enhances employee performance. Thus, we advance the literature on congruence by explaining how the alignment between the proactive behavior tendencies of the leader and member, respectively, influence employee outcomes in the workplace.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Proactive Behavior Congruence between Leader and Follower

Organizations have become increasingly reliant upon the initiatives of their employees. Thus, proactive behaviors such as taking charge or voice behaviors have emerged as highly desirable qualifications for many jobs (Chan, 2006; Erdogan & Bauer, 2005; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). Furthermore, as these behaviors are aimed at changing the internal organizational environment, they are more easily noticed by leaders and subordinates than those which aim to change the broader and external aspect of the organization or improve only oneself (Parker & Collins, 2010). Thus, the current study purposely focuses on the effects of different alignment scenarios between leaders' and members' proactive behaviors rather than their distant antecedents.

Dyadic congruence between followers and leaders has been shown to increase interpersonal outcomes, including goal congruence and a higher quality and frequency of communications between the dyad members (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002; Strauss, Barrick, & Connerley, 2001). Conversely, a mismatch between leaders and followers in either conceptual beliefs or behaviors hinders the development of dyadic interpersonal relationships and negatively affects employee outcomes (Bai, Dong, Liu, & Liu, 2017; Cai, Cai, Sun, Xu, & Feng, 2021; Y. Chen, Wen, Peng, & Liu, 2016). To provide a more thorough examination of the complex effects of congruence between leaders and members, we propose a two-by-two matrix (Figure 1) that

maps the proactive behavior self-ratings (high vs. low) of the leader against those of the follower.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Referring to this matrix, we contend that dyads belonging to the two high congruence quadrants (quadrants 1 and 2) will have better relationships than those belonging to the low congruence quadrants (quadrants 3 and 4) for three reasons. First, dyadic congruence in proactive behavior plays a critical role in the initial stage of LMX, which in turn determines the quality of the relationship between the dyad members. According to LMX theory, the leader and follower role expectations and responses during the initial interaction stage greatly affect the quality of the subsequent dyadic relationship (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Scandura, 1987). Furthermore, during the role-making phase, the two parties transmit their role expectations to one another and evaluate the responses they receive. Dyads whose members have similar levels of proactive behavior are more efficient in setting up reciprocal agreement regarding roles and goal expectations (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005). In addition, when followers display a similar set of behaviors as their leaders, their values and goals also tend to be aligned with those of the leader, and thus they are more likely to fulfill the leader's expectations of them.

Dyads with high congruence of proactive behavior are inclined to actively seek methods that improve the current situation (Parker & Collins, 2010). High proactive behavior leaders tend to expect employees to be self-initiated and are more willing to develop relationships with followers who exhibit similar proactive behaviors as themselves. On the other hand, when both members of the dyad possess a low level of proactive behavior, they tend to prefer stability and maintenance of the status quo rather than attempting to improve their work environment. In particular, the followers focus on maintaining stability in their daily jobs rather than putting effort into changing them knowing that their supervisors would encourage them to do so. The successful

cycle of role expectation – fulfillment subsequently enhances the LMX quality between the dyad members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Second, according to P-S fit theory, employees who perceive similarities with their supervisors tend to experience higher LMX (Van Vianen et al., 2011). This is because when individuals and their supervisors possess similar or matching behaviors, supplementary fit occurs (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Employees with perceived supplementary fit benefit from enhanced trust and ease of communication in the workplace (Spanjol, Tam, & Tam, 2015). This improves the quality and frequency of the exchange within the dyad, and thus strengthens the relationship between the dyad members (Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2008; Sears & Hackett, 2011). When both the leader and the follower exhibit high proactive behaviors, they are more comfortable discussing the development of new methods to improve the workplace or task procedures. By contrast, low proactive behavior dyads maintain a good relationship with effective communications, but largely focus on maintaining the current work situation rather than improving it. Thus, in this study, we expect that when both sides of the dyad demonstrate similar levels of proactive behavior, followers are more likely to develop a supplementary fit perception toward their leaders and foster a rewarding interpersonal relationship accordingly.

Conversely, asymmetry in the proactive behaviors of the leader and follower may impair the LMX quality. For instance, the party that possesses low proactive behavior may prefer stability as their work goal, while their counterpart may consistently seek to improve or create change in the environment. This goal asymmetry then becomes a barrier to improving their relationship, creating ineffective communications between them. Having insufficient information and confused role expectations, a subordinate may reduce the frequency of interactions with their leader, or even choose to avoid them all altogether. Thus, we hypothesize that followers will experience higher

levels of LMX if their level of proactive behavior is aligned with that of the leader. In other words, we suggest:

Hypothesis 1a: The more aligned the proactive behaviors of the follower and his or her leader are (i.e., the higher the congruence between them), the higher the follower's LMX will be.

As discussed above, leaders and followers can be congruent at either high or low levels of proactive behavior. Within scenarios of high congruence in proactive behavior, the frequency of proactive behaviors should intuitively be associated in some way with the quality of the LMX. In this study, we contend that high proactive behavior leaders tend to appreciate employees who can initiate, control, and carry out their tasks independently without excessive supervision (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013). Research has shown that followers' proactive behaviors (e.g. voice behavior) strengthen the LMX quality only when the leader interprets these behaviors as pursuing performance rather than other purposes (Lam, Huang, & Snape, 2007). High proactive behavior leaders are more likely to evaluate their followers' proactive actions as positive contributions rather than aggressive behaviors. Thus, they are more willing to recognize contributions and provide greater autonomy and support to subordinates who exhibit proactive behaviors. The resources and perceived appreciation of the leader then further enhance the employee's perceived relationship quality.

Furthermore, dyads that possess high proactive behaviors not only experience supplementary fit, but also enjoy the benefits of proactive behavior. For instance, their implicit mutual agreement on proactive work goals may encourage them to expend greater effort in further improving their work relationship. This enables them to generate and execute improvements more efficiently together. Employees who possess proactive behavior tend to actively seek their leader's guidance and suggest improvements. Moreover, highly proactive behavior leaders also benefit

their followers by taking the initiative in suggesting improvements in the workplace or providing constructive feedback crucial to their employees' development.

While dyads whose members are congruent at a low level of proactive behavior may also establish good dyadic relationships, their goals are largely centered on passive adaptation to the environment. For example, low proactive behavior leaders tend to concentrate on daily job tasks and preservation of the current environmental state, while low proactive behavior employees are less likely to raise questions, suggest innovative ideas, or look for feedback from their supervisors (Crant, 2000). Due to this lack of effort, the relationship between the leader and follower is essentially established based on the assistance and support needed in difficult situations rather than on high quality and frequent communications or appreciation of one another. As a result, employees who align with their leaders at a low level of proactive behavior are less likely to develop high quality relationships than those who align with their leaders at a high level of proactive behavior. As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b: Employees' LMX is higher when they are aligned with the leader at a high level of proactive behavior than when they are aligned with the leader at a low level of proactive behavior.

As described earlier, a mismatch in proactive behavior between the leader and the follower may damage their LMX quality. Both parties may react to this asymmetry by withdrawing from building a relationship between them. Nevertheless, it is important to differentiate between the two scenarios of leader-follower incongruence in proactive behavior, namely the leader exhibits more proactive behavior than the follower, and vice versa.

Asymmetry in proactive behavior signals that the two sides of the dyad do not share the same objective at work. For instance, highly proactive leaders may expect his/her followers to

actively seek out solutions to work problems and to be self-initiated without the need for instruction. However, low proactive behavior employees focus simply on completing their daily tasks rather than improving them. Thus, asymmetry exists between the role expectations of the high proactive behavior leader and the actual role performance of the low proactive behavior employee. This incongruence in role expectations may eventually worsen the relationship between them.

Conversely, when the follower possesses a higher level of proactive behavior than the leader, the follower's proactive behavior may lighten or offset the negative effect of the incongruence. Wilson, Sin, and Conlon (2010) argued that by being self-initiating and frequently presenting proactive behavior, subordinates can deliver valuable and beneficial resources to the leader. For instance, highly proactive employees actively look for resources and gain alliances with others in the workplace to achieve their goals. Furthermore, they tend to initiate interactions with their leader to facilitate problem discussion or feedback, regardless of the leader's passivity. In doing so, they can lessen the withdrawal tendency of the low proactive behavior leader, thereby maintaining an average leader-follower relationship. Thus, in our study, we contend that high proactive behavior followers, through their thoughtful efforts to improve the relationship with their leaders, can lighten or alleviate the negative effects of proactive behavior incongruence. Furthermore, we expect the incongruence effect to be more harmful to employees' perspective on LMX when the leader has a higher level of proactive behavior than the follower. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1c: Employees' LMX is lower when the leader's proactive behavior is higher than that of the follower rather than when the follower's proactive behavior is higher than that of the leader.

Employee Psychological Capital, LMX and Job Performance

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a positive psychological state of individual development and is characterized by having confidence, optimism, hope, and resiliency (Luthans, 2002; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). PsyCap is differentiated from other human and social capitals in that it develops oneself toward becoming the best possible self with the aim of improving one's performance in an organization (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs, 2006). According to Avey (2014), leadership actions and communications can influence employees' PsyCap as leaders hold crucial roles in forming their followers' psychological state. Thus, in this study, we expect that employees' PsyCap will be influenced by the quality of their relationships with the leader.

High LMX employees are more likely to experience high quality communications with their leaders. They thus have a greater chance of receiving feedback and valuable guidance on their current course of action. This process helps them accumulate knowledge and know-how, which in turn enhances their self-efficacy while conducting tasks. However, the resources received from high-quality relationships not only help employees complete their tasks, but also enable them to construct a stable positive attitude toward their assignments. Furthermore, as suggested by Cooper, Kong, and Crossley (2018), psychological support from the leader is a valuable interpersonal resource that helps employees bounce back from stress and deal with high expectations while working. In addition, high-quality LMX members are more likely to receive psychological resources such as appreciation, motivation, trust, and mental support from the leader, which helps build and strengthen their resilience and enables them to handle difficult tasks positively even during critical situations. We thus propose that:

Hypothesis 2: Employee LMX is positively related to employee PsyCap.

PsyCap is a crucial social and human psychological resource which emphasizes self-

development (Luthans et al., 2006). High PsyCap can help employees rebound from current stress and build enduring resources for future job requirements. Employees who possess high PsyCap are self-assured. They tend to be confident when undertaking challenging tasks, and are less likely to exhibit motivational deficits when facing challenging situations in the workplace (Bandura, 1997). High PsyCap employees are also better able to bounce back from failure and unexpected situations. Moreover, they hold an optimistic viewpoint when looking at difficult tasks and consistently have positive outcome expectancies. This optimistic outlook helps high PsyCap employees focus their efforts on the main goal continuously and effectively even when facing initial failure, and this enhances the possibility of successful task outcome. Researchers have also shown empirically that PsyCap can synergistically promote the achievement of goals and performance improvement in employees (Hobfoll, 2002; Luthans et al., 2007; Stajkovic, 2006). We thus propose that:

Hypothesis 3: Employee PsyCap is positively related to employee job performance.

Given that we have hypothesized the effects of leader-follower congruence in proactive behavior on LMX (Hypothesis 1) and established a relationship between LMX, employee PsyCap, and employee outcomes (Hypotheses 2 and 3), we further propose a serial mediation effect to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the indirect effect of proactive behavior congruence between the leader and member on the member's work outcome. In particular, we suggest that congruence in the proactive behaviors of the leader and member indirectly affects the follower's job performance via the serial mediation effects of employee LMX and employee PsyCap, respectively. In other words, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Congruence in the proactive behaviors of leaders and members is related to employees' job performance via employee LMX and PsyCap.

The research framework adopted in the present study is shown in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

METHOD

Samples and procedures

We conducted our study in a two-wave survey. All of the participants were employed students enrolled in a business school in Taiwan. At the beginning of the semester, we explained the objectives and procedures of our research to the students and assured them of complete confidentiality. The students who agreed to participate in the study were assigned a code, which was used to match their questionnaires in the first and second waves of the survey. The students initially rated their own proactive behaviors and provided the work emails of their immediate supervisors. We contacted the supervisors by email and provided them with a link leading to an online survey with a code number which we later used to link their responses with those of their employees. The supervisors then completed the online questionnaire about their proactive behaviors. Four weeks later we asked the students who participated in the first wave of data collection to rate their PsyCap and perception of LMX toward their immediate supervisors. We additionally invited the leaders to rate the job performance of their followers.

A total of 120 dyads were recruited during the first wave of data collection. After the second wave, excluding incomplete answers, we received data from 98 dyads, corresponding to a response rate of 81.2%. Among the 98 employees, 48 were male. Employees in their 40s to 50s accounted for 32% of the total received responses, followed by those in their 30s to 40s (25%). More than half of the employees reported job tenures from 3 to 10 years. A further 25% had job tenures of less than 2 years, while 12% had tenures of more than 10 years. 61% of the leaders were male. In addition, 79% of the leaders were aged from 50 to 65 years old. The firm tenure of the leaders was

18 years on average and ranged from 1 to 32 years.

Measures

The original scales were all in English. However, the study was conducted in Taiwan, and hence a back-translation process was employed (Brislin, 1980). All of the scales had the form of 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 “Never” or “Strongly disagree” to 7 “Always” or “Strongly agree”.

According to Parker and Collins (2010), proactive behaviors at work include taking charge, voice, individual innovation, and problem prevention. Following Parker et al. (2006), we adopted the four highest factor loading items from Morrison and Phelps (1999) to measure the taking charge behavior. A typical item included, “How frequently do you try to bring about improved procedures in your workplace?”. We adopted four items from LePine and Van Dyne (1998) which were the most consistent with our construct definition to measure voice. For example, we asked, “How frequently do you speak up and encourage others in the workplace to get involved with issues that affect you?”. We measured individual innovation using three items from Scott and Bruce (1994), such as “How frequently do you search out new techniques, technologies and/or product ideas?”. Finally, we adopted three items measuring problem prevention from Parker et al. (2006). For example, “How frequently do you try to find the root cause of things that go wrong?”

We performed second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for both the leaders’ proactive behavior and the followers’ proactive behavior. The results showed that our data adequately fit the leader model ($\chi^2/df=2.60$, TLI=.88, CFI=.93, RMSEA=.12) with a Cronbach’s α of .93. The second-order CFA for the proactive behavior of the followers similarly showed good results ($\chi^2/df=1.26$, TLI=.98, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.05) with a Cronbach’s α of .96

The employees’ LMX was measured using the LMX-7 scale (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995;

Scandura & Graen, 1984). A typical item included, “My manager understands my problems and needs”. The Cronbach’s α of the scale was .93.

We measured the employees’ PsyCap using 24 items developed by Luthans and Youssef (2007). Example items included, “Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work” and “I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job”. PsyCap consists of four dimensions, namely self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Previous research has suggested that PsyCap, as a higher-order factor, has a synergistic effect and greatly influences employee outcomes in the workplace (Hobfoll, 2002). The second-order CFA results showed that our data had a good fit with the model ($\chi^2/df=1.45$, TLI=.99, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.03) with a Cronbach’s α of .93.

The leaders rated the job performance of their followers using the five-item general performance scale developed by Janssen and Van Yperen (2004). A sample item included, “This employee fulfills all responsibilities required by his/her job”. The Cronbach’s α for the scale was .89.

Previous studies have reported that employee job performance may be affected by individual demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and education (Bauer & Green, 1996). We therefore controlled for these variables in our analyses. Specifically, the gender was coded as 0 (male) or 1 (female), while the age was recorded in years, and the education was measured by the highest level obtained (i.e., 1 for high school or below, 2 for bachelor’s degree, and 3 for master’s degree or higher).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the mean values, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability coefficients of all the variables used in the present study. The results show that all of the values meet the suggested requirements. We tested the validity and reliability of our model (see Fig. 1)

by conducting CFA tests on the leader and followers' proactive behaviors, employees' LMX, employees' PsyCap, and employees' job performance. All of the questionnaire items were loaded significantly on their intended constructs ($p < .01$). Moreover, the data provided a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1278.4/773 = 1.65$, $TLI = .87$, $CFI = .89$, $RMSEA = .08$). Thus, the satisfactory composite reliability of the data was confirmed. We further tested several alternative models and found that the hypothesized model provided a significantly better fit than any of the other models. For example, when we combined the LMX and PsyCap constructs, we obtained results of ($\chi^2/df = 2180.2/811 = 2.7$, $TLI = .66$, $CFI = .69$, $RMSEA = .13$). The average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) for all of the constructs exceeded .5 and .7, respectively. Thus, the results showed adequate convergent validity (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988).

We further conducted a discriminant validity test, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). We compared the square root of AVE of all the constructs with the correlations of all possible pairs of constructs. The square roots of the AVEs were found to be higher than all of the correlation values, thereby confirming the discriminant validity of the constructs used in the study (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2012).

Insert Table 1 about here

Findings

Polynomial regression analysis (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2005) and response surface modeling (Edwards & Parry, 1993) were used to test Hypotheses 1(a), (b), and (c). We regressed the employees' LMX on the control variable and entered the follower proactive behavior (F), leader proactive behavior (L), follower proactive behavior squared (F^2), follower proactive behavior multiplied by leader proactive behavior ($F \times L$), and leader proactive behaviors square (L^2), respectively, as the independent variables. In other words, the regression equation was

formulated as follows (note that the control variables are omitted for the sake of simplicity):

$$\text{Employee's LMX} = b_0 + b_1F + b_2L + b_3F^2 + b_4F \times L + b_5L^2 + e$$

The congruence effect of the follower and leader proactive behaviors on the follower LMX was tested. Table 2 shows the estimated coefficients, slopes, and curvatures along the congruence and incongruence lines for the polynomial regression equations used to predict the follower LMX. The curvature of the incongruence line is -0.51 ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that the surface along the incongruence line curves downward. The F value of the three quadratic terms is significant ($F = 9.38, p < 0.000$).

We then plotted the three-dimensional response surfaces using the regression coefficients with F and L plotted on the perpendicular horizontal axes, and the employee LMX plotted on the vertical axis. Figure 3 shows the response surface for the congruence of the leader-follower proactive behaviors and its effect on the employee LMX. The congruence line ($F = L$) runs from the left corner ($F = L = 3.5$) to the right corner ($F = L = -3.5$), whereas the incongruence line runs from the front corner to the rear corner. The concave curvature of the response surface indicates that the employees' LMX is higher when the followers' proactive behavior is aligned with that of the supervisor. This finding is intuitive since the employee LMX value is highest along the $F = L$ line and any deviation from this line inevitably results in a lower LMX. Hence, Hypothesis 1(a) is confirmed.

Hypothesis 1(b) suggests that the employee LMX is higher when the followers are aligned with the leaders at a high level of proactive behavior rather than a low level of proactive behavior. Table 2 shows that the slope along the congruence line is positive yet not significant ($.60, p > 0.05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1(b) is not supported.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

Hypothesis 1(c) suggests an asymmetrical incongruence effect (This phrase is rather vague. Can you rephrase the hypothesis more explicitly here?). Referring to Table 2 the quantity representing the lateral shift is positive (.45), which indicates a shift toward the region where F is greater than L. Thus, when a follower's proactive behavior is higher than that of their leader, their LMX decreases less sharply than when their proactive behavior is lower than that of the leader. Consequently, Hypothesis 1(c) is confirmed. This asymmetrical effect is also shown in Figure 3, in which the LMX is higher at the front corner ($F = 3.5$ and $L = -3.5$) than at the rear corner ($F = -3.5$ and $L = 3.5$).

We next conducted hierarchical regression analyses in SPSS to test Hypotheses 2 and 3. To test Hypothesis 2, we set the employee PsyCap as the dependent variable and entered the control variables and employee LMX as the independent variables. As shown in Model 1 in Table 3, the employee LMX was positively and significantly related to the PsyCap ($\beta = .66, p < .001$). In other words, Hypothesis 2, which suggests that LMX results in higher levels of employee PsyCap, is confirmed. To test Hypothesis 3, which posits that employee PsyCap is positively related to job performance, we set PsyCap as the main effect. Model 2 in Table 3 shows that employee PsyCap is indeed significantly and positively related to job performance ($\beta = .62, p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is also supported.

Insert Table 3 about here

Finally, to test Hypothesis 4, which predicts a serial mediation effect, we followed the “block variable” approach and computed the weighted variable (Edwards & Cable, 2009). We then conducted a bootstrapping serial mediation test involving 10000 samples using the PROCESS macro created by Hayes (2013). The confidence intervals of the indirect effects of LMX and PsyCap ranged from .02 to .28, as shown in Table 4. The CIs excluded 0. Hence, it is inferred that the serial indirect effect is significant, thereby supporting Hypothesis 4. The path model results are shown in Figure 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Insert Figure 4 about here

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to enhance understanding of the complex effects of congruence/incongruence between leaders and members from the perspective of their behavior patterns rather than their personalities. The study formulated a 2 x 2 matrix to describe four scenarios for the proactive behavior congruence/incongruence of the leaders and followers and evaluated the employee LMX quality for each scenario. Moreover, the study went beyond previous research by proposing employee LMX and PsyCap as serial mediators of the relationship between leader-follower congruence and employee job performance.

Based on the data received from 98 dyads, we found support for most of our proposed hypotheses. However, Hypothesis 1(b), which proposed that the LMX quality is stronger when the dyad is aligned at a higher level of proactive behavior than a lower level of proactive behavior, was not supported. In the following, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the

present findings and identify the study limitations and possible directions for future research.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings have several important theoretical implications. First, we contribute to the P-S fit literature by empirically testing the positive effects of follower–leader congruence in proactive behavior. Previous studies have shown that congruence results in supplementary fit, which enhances interaction and communication within the dyad and improves work outcomes (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002; Strauss et al., 2001). Our results have verified these findings by showing that congruence in the proactive behaviors of leaders and members results in a higher LMX quality. Our findings also contribute to the LMX literature by showing that employees who possess low levels of proactive behavior can still exhibit adequate job outcomes provided that a good fit within the dyad is maintained. Furthermore, our results extend proactivity literature by identifying the effects of actual proactive behavior rather than its distant antecedents. As behavior patterns are argued to be a more direct antecedent of employee outcome than personality, our findings contribute more robust evidence regarding the effects of proactivity in the workplace.

In our study, we introduced a 2x2 matrix to identify four specific scenarios for the congruence between the proactive behaviors of the employees and supervisors, respectively. We then examined the employee LMX under each of the four scenarios. Our results showed that when the level of the follower's proactive behavior is higher than that of their leader, their LMX decreases less sharply than when their level of proactive personality is lower than that of the leader. Our finding is thus consistent with the conclusions of previous research, which showed that employee proactive behaviors tend to decrease the withdrawal tendency of both parties when facing differences in proactive behavior (Zhang et al., 2012). Our results therefore emphasize the crucial role of employee proactivity in transforming unfavorable workplaces and mitigating

potential negative impacts as employees pursue their goals.

However, we failed to find support for our hypothesis that the employee LMX quality increases when the leader and member are aligned at a high level of proactive behavior rather than at a low level. This may be due to the fact that any consistency of behaviors between the two parties tends to create a harmonious and pleasant relationship irrespective of the intensity of the displayed behaviors. In other words, when both sides of the dyad possess similar proactive behaviors at either a high level or a low level, they develop shared objectives, which then serve as common ground for communications between them. This enables both parties to understand one another and to communicate with ease, which advances the development of their relationship. Thus, a high quality LMX can be attained regardless of whether the two parties are aligned at a high or a low level of proactive behavior.

Finally, we have shown that employee LMX and PsyCap play mediating roles in determining the effects of leader-follower congruence in proactive behavior on employee job performance. Although PsyCap is considered a crucial psychological state, current understanding of its antecedents in the workplace is somewhat limited (S.-L. Chen, 2015; Liu, 2013; Walumbwa, Peterson, Avolio, & Hartnell, 2010). By empirically testing the mediation effect of PsyCap, we advance understanding of both the antecedents and outcomes of this construct. In particular, we show that congruence within the dyad enhances the LMX quality, and the follower thus derives psychological resources which increase his/her PsyCap and thus result in an improved work performance. In general, our integrated model contributes to the current literature by enhancing understanding of the underlying mechanisms of follower-supervisor fit and its desired outcomes.

Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions described above, the current study also has

several important implications for managerial practice. For instance, the findings suggest that harmony between the leaders and members in workplace dyads is crucial for the development of constructive relationships between them and in determining favorable employee outcomes. Thus, leaders should be aware of their personal level of proactive behavior in order to avoid bias when evaluating the proactive behaviors of their followers. Furthermore, high proactive leaders may consider aligning their expectations of their followers' job performance with the level of proactive behavior demonstrated by the employees. They can also give more detailed and structured task requirements rather than expecting low proactive behavior employees to be self-directed. Conversely, low proactive leaders should be supportive and encourage highly proactive behavior employees to take initiative in order to maximize their potential in the workplace.

The results have also shown that workers with highly proactive behavior can lighten the possible negative effects of incongruence between themselves and their leaders and are thus able to initiate and maintain high-quality relationships with them. To encourage such behavior, and to amplify its effect, leaders should thus be aware of their potential bias toward employees' proactive behavior. Although proactive behaviors are generally encouraged within the workplace, when employees take initiative at work, the potential behavior discrepancy within the dyad may cause bias in how their leaders appraise their behavior. Thus, organizations should equip leaders with the necessary skills and resources to recognize and reward the proactive efforts of their employees.

Limitations and Future Research

This research suffers several limitations. First, data collected from Asian countries are expected to show stronger congruence effects than those collected from low power distance countries (Tang et al., 2015). Although many studies have not shown significant differences between Asian and Western countries in terms of the power distance effect on job performance,

future research should compare results from different samples in order to validate the present findings. Furthermore, although we attempted to minimize the risk of common method bias by collecting data from two different sources in two waves four weeks apart, we were not able to completely eliminate the potential for such bias. Furthermore, we collected the employee LMX and PsyCap in the second wave of data collection. This may limit the causality inference of our serial mediation hypothesis. Thus, we encourage future scholars to conduct a longitudinal study to test the validity of the present results.

Second, we are aware of the causality issue between LMX and employee proactive behavior. In particular, we share the viewpoint of Xu, Loi, Cai, and Liden (2019) that followers may influence leaders by displaying positive active behaviors. Through this process, employees can strengthen their relationship with the leader. Nevertheless, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that causality could be reversible. Previous researchers have suggested that LMX quality increases employee taking charge and voice behaviors via empowered psychology (Kim, Liu, & Diefendorff, 2015; Wang, Gan, & Wu, 2016). Thus, future studies may usefully employ longitudinal methods to clarify this causality effect. Additionally, although we emphasized the employees' viewpoint in the dyadic exchange relationship, future research should also explore the benefits of supervisor-follower fit from the leader's perspective. In particular, as leaders allocate job tasks and resources, their LMX resulting from leader-member fit may influence their employees' psychological state and attitude at work.

Finally, the present study does not take into account the boundary factors that may influence the effects of leader-follower congruence in proactive behavior. For instance, a low proactive, high congruence dyad may benefit from tasks that require preciseness, harmony, and regular execution. On the other hand, a highly proactive, high congruence dyad may benefit from

tasks that require constant change or improvement, such as R&D or customer service. Thus, future research should consider other boundary factors such as the job nature and industry type and explore the effects of these factors in different in/congruence scenarios.

Conclusion

Drawing on person-supervisor fit theory, the current study has explored why, how, and when employees' proactive behavior can result in better LMX relationships. We have gone beyond previous research by introducing and comparing the effects of four different scenarios of leader-follower fit. We are among the first to demonstrate that LMX and employee PsyCap act as serial mediators governing the effects of the leader-follower proactive behavior congruence on the workplace performance of employees. Our results thus make a significant contribution to current underlying theoretical logic linking congruence in the workplace and desired employee outcomes.

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Table 1 Validity, mean, standard deviation, and correlation matrix.

	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Gender	.48	.50	-	-	-	-							
2.Age	42.98	11.83	-	-	-	-.13	-						
3.Education	2.89	.76	-	-	-	-.03**	-.21*	-					
4.Leader PB	6.15	.58	.91	.49	.93	-.30**	-.06	.29**	.70				
5.Member PB	5.41	.95	.92	.53	.96	-.27**	.21*	.35**	.29**	.79			
6.LMX	5.54	.89	.85	.57	.93	-.06	-.04	.16	.16	.48**	.75		
7. PsyCap	5.26	.99	.94	.64	.93	-.19	.11	.17	.22*	.62**	.67**	.92	
8.Job performance	5.77	.72	.84	.64	.89	-.02	.06	.07	.10	.61**	.55**	.60**	.92

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $N = 98$

PB: proactive behavior; LMX: Leader-member exchange

The square root of AVEs are shown on the diagonal line in bold face

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 Polynomial regressions of congruence in proactive behaviors effect on follower LMX.

	Follower LMX	
	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	2.65*	5.41***
Age	-.03	.06
Gender	-.04	-.14
Education	.15	-.23
Follower LMX (F)	.53***	.56***
Leader LMX (L)	.02	.05
F squared		-.02
F x L		.35**
L squared		.02
R squared	.26	.34
ΔR square	.21	.30
Congruence (F = L) line		
Slope		.60
Curvature		.54**
Incongruence (F = -L) line		
Slope		.45*
Curvature		-.51*
F for the three quadratic terms		9.38***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $N = 98$

Table 3 Hierarchical regressions results.

	Employee PsyCap	Job Performance
	Model 1	Model 2
Control variables		
Age	-.13	.11
Gender	.12	.01
Education	.04	-.01
Employee LMX	.66***	
Employee PsyCap		.62***
R square	.49	.38
ΔR square	.47	.35
F change	78.65	54.51
P value	.000	.000
D-W	1.58	1.78

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $N = 98$

Table 4 Serial mediation effect result.

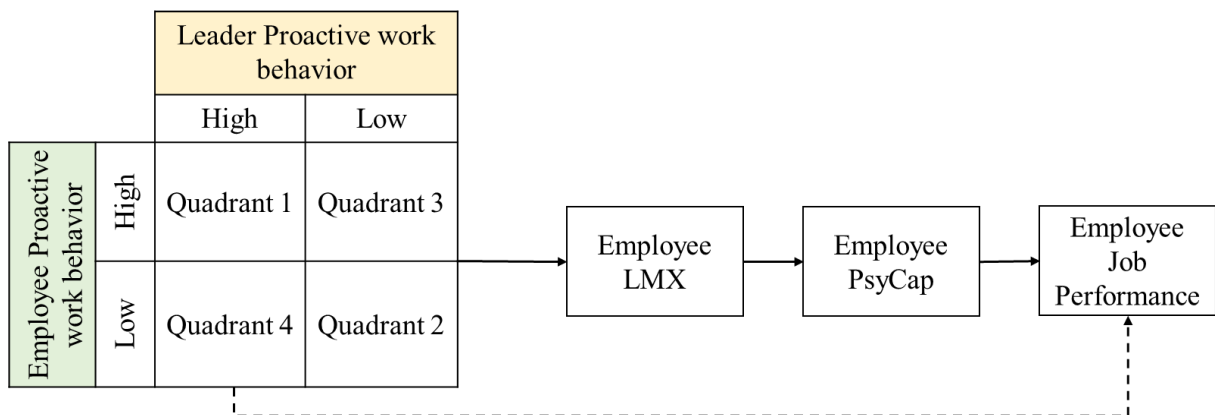
	Job Performance		
	Coeff	LLCI	ULCI
Control variables			
Age	.00	-.01	.01
Gender	.06	-.18	.30
Education	-.12	-.29	.05
Indirect effect			
Congruence in proactive behavior → LMX → Job performance	.12	-.06	.36
Congruence in proactive behavior → PsyCap → Job performance	.13	.01	.34
Congruence in proactive behavior → LMX → PsyCap → Job performance	.14	.02	.28

$N = 98$

Figure 1
Leader - Follower congruence in Proactive Behavior

		Leader Proactive work behavior	
		High	Low
Employee Proactive work behavior	High	Quadrant 1 High Congruence: Both leader and follower rating are high	Quadrant 3 Low Congruence: Leader rating is low, follower rating is high
	Low	Quadrant 4 Low Congruence: Leader rating is high, follower rating is low	Quadrant 2 High Congruence: Both leader and follower rating are low

Figure 2
Research Framework



Note: Dashed arrow indicates serial mediation effects.

Figure 3

Employee's LMX as predicted by Leader-employee's Proactive behaviors congruence

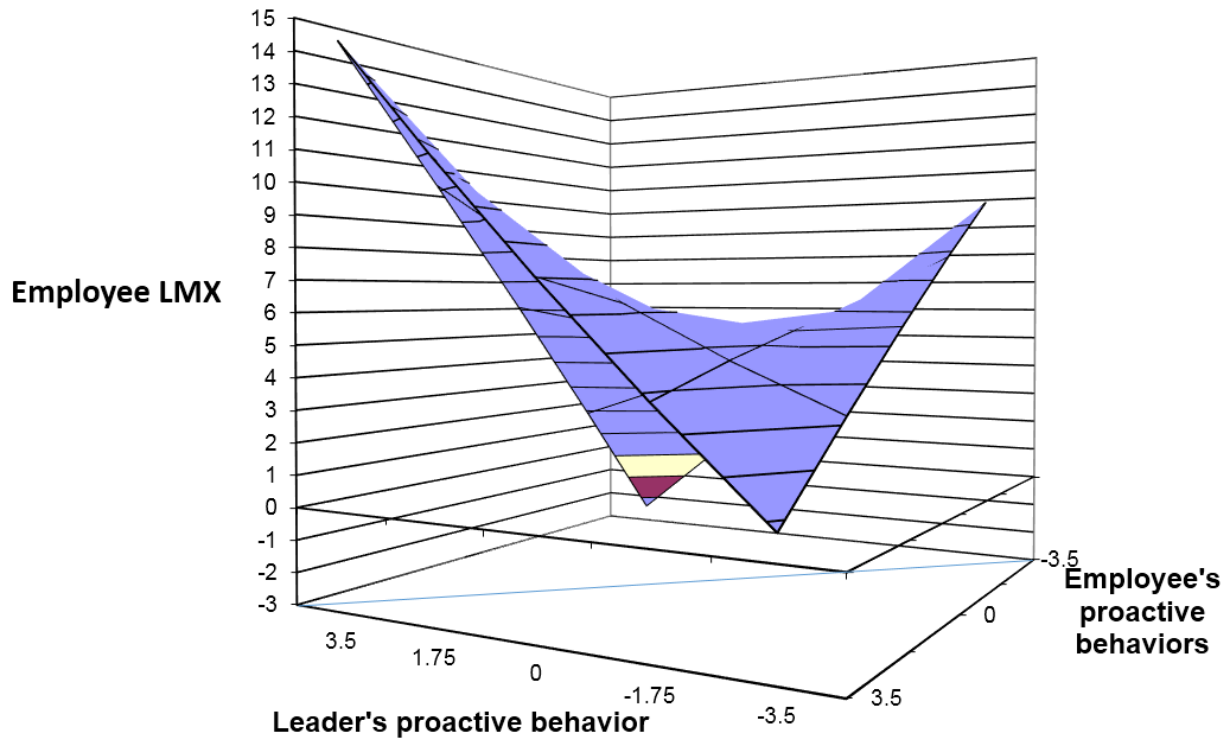
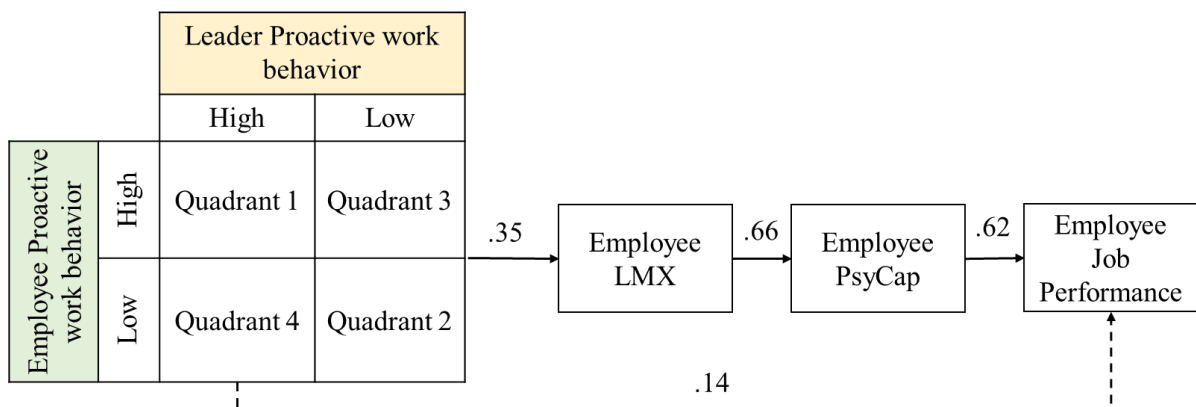


Figure 4

Path model of the research framework



Note: Dashed arrow indicates serial mediation effects. All lines are significant