
Leader reactions to follower proactive behavior: Giving credit when credit is due

human relations

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DOI: 10.1177/0018726714548235

hum.sagepub.com



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Abstract

In the present study, we rely upon an integration of proactive motivation and performance theories to investigate a neglected research question – when is proactive behavior likely to be rewarded or punished? Based upon a self-determination theory perspective of proactive motivation, we hypothesize that leader feelings of responsibility for constructive change moderate the relationship between follower proactive behavior and performance evaluation. The results of a time-lagged study support this hypothesis, indicating that follower taking charge behavior is rewarded with higher performance evaluations only when leaders feel responsible for constructive change. Following the discussion of findings, we discuss practical implications, potential limitations of the present study and directions for future research.

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Keywords

leadership, performance, proactive behavior, responsibility for constructive change, taking charge

Introduction

In today's dynamic and uncertain competitive environment, employee proactive behavior is an increasingly important determinant of organizational success (Frese et al., 2007; Grant and Ashford, 2008; Parker and Collins, 2010; Seiling, 2001). There are many distinct types of proactive behavior. Examples include expressing ideas for constructive change (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001), making positive changes in work methods or procedures (Morrison and Phelps, 1999) and preventing problems from occurring (Frese and Fay, 2001). Behaviors such as these are considered 'proactive' because they are self-initiated, anticipatory or future-oriented and are intended to constructively change current circumstances (Bindl and Parker, 2011; Crant, 2000; Grant and Ashford, 2008). Organizations now depend upon employees' proactive behavior as a way to drive meaningful change through the workplace and as a means of dealing with challenges arising from increasingly scarce resources, widening spans of control and the need for continuous improvement (Campbell, 2000; Grant et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2007). Employees also benefit from their own proactive behavior in many ways, including higher performance evaluations (Grant et al., 2009; Thompson, 2005; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998), higher salaries and more promotions (Seibert et al., 2001), better workplace socialization (Parker and Collins, 2010), more positive attitudes (Morrison and Milliken, 2000), increased feelings of control (Parker, 1998) and greater career success (Seibert et al., 1999). As a result, both scholars and practitioners have a keen interest in gaining a better understanding of how to promote and support employee proactivity.

Despite the benefits that organizations and employees may reap from proactive behavior, scholars caution that this type of activity may also lead to negative outcomes (e.g. Bateman and Crant, 1993; Chan, 2006; Grant and Ashford, 2008; Janssen et al., 2004; Morrison, 2011; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). For example, leaders do not always react positively to proactive behavior by followers. Because follower proactive behavior challenges the status quo, it may be viewed as a criticism of the way the leader manages his or her responsibilities (Burris, 2012). If leaders feel threatened, incompetent or embarrassed by a follower's proactive behavior, they may give that follower lower performance evaluations or withhold other rewards such as training opportunities and promotions (Bateman and Crant, 1993; Chan, 2006; Frese and Fay, 2001; Grant and Ashford, 2008; Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). That is, even though proactive employees make valuable contributions to the organization, leaders may not give those employees credit for engaging in behaviors that benefit the organization (Grant et al., 2009: 33). Unfortunately, there is scant research examining how leaders view proactive behavior by their followers (Bolino et al., 2010; Burris, 2012; Grant et al., 2009; Parker et al., 2010). In particular, scholars acknowledge that current research has overlooked the possibility that characteristics of the leader may interact with follower proactivity to influence leader evaluations of follower performance (Fuller et al.,

2012; Grant et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2012). Because rewarding proactive behavior may lead to continued proactive behavior and not rewarding proactive behavior may lead to its extinction (Grant and Ashford, 2008; Grant et al., 2010), leader reactions to follower proactive behavior have important implications for constructive change and innovation within organizations (Bolino et al., 2010). Therefore, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of leaders that influence their reactions to proactive behavior if organizations are to design their workplaces to support proactivity (Fuller et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2009).

In the present study, we focus upon the linkage between proactive behavior and performance evaluations. In general, it is thought that proactive behavior will be positively related to performance evaluations because it contributes directly or indirectly to organizational effectiveness (Fuller et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2009). Early conceptualizations of proactive behavior tended to cast proactivity as extra-role behavior – behavior that goes beyond expectations (e.g. Frese et al., 1996; Morrison and Phelps, 1999; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). However, not all models of work performance cast proactive behavior as extra-role or in-role in nature (e.g. Griffin et al., 2007) and research indicates that employees frequently believe their work role includes proactive behavior (McAllister et al., 2007). Further, organizations have increasingly come to value and even require employee proactivity owing to the need for continuous improvement in today's competitive environment (Fuller et al., 2012; Seiling, 2001). That is, in many of today's organizations, proactive behavior may not be considered 'beyond expectations'.

The perspective we take on performance evaluation is, in part, determined by our broader research question: when is proactive behavior likely to be rewarded or punished? In general, when leaders evaluate the performance of their followers, they focus upon the extent to which the follower meets expectations or standards (i.e. in-role performance; Tepper et al., 2011). Indeed, traditional performance management systems rely upon in-role performance evaluations as the basis for making administrative decisions such as promotions or pay raises (Griffin et al., 2007; Williams and Anderson, 1991). Accordingly, researchers in the proactivity literature (e.g. Fuller et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2009) often cast higher performance evaluations as a 'reward' and focus upon in-role performance evaluations (e.g. Fuller et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012). However, prior empirical research has not clearly linked performance evaluations with rewards. In the present study, we are able to clearly link performance evaluations with rewards because our sample is drawn from an organization that employs a merit pay system. Further, this organization considers proactive behavior to be the responsibility of every employee and includes proactive behavior as an aspect of its formal performance evaluation system. Therefore, in the present study, it is reasonable to expect that proactive behavior will be positively related to performance evaluations and to frame performance evaluation as a reward. Even so, the rewards employees receive from their proactivity depend heavily on how supervisors evaluate proactive behavior (Grant and Ashford, 2008: 18) and supervisor disposition can affect their evaluation of proactive behavior (Fuller et al., 2012), which is why we believe the topic merits research. Consequently, in the present study, we use performance theory and proactive motivation theory to hypothesize that the relationship between follower proactive behavior and leader evaluation of follower performance is moderated by leaders' feelings of responsibility for constructive change. Felt responsibility for constructive

change (FRCC) reflects the extent to which an individual has chosen to make meaningful workplace change a part of his or her job (Morrison and Phelps, 1999).

Despite the fact little is known about the factors that moderate the relationship between proactive behavior and employee performance evaluation, there continues to be a lack of empirical research exploring this topic. Accordingly, our study seeks to contribute to the proactivity literature in a number of ways. First, our study answers the often repeated call for research examining when proactive behavior will be favorably evaluated by leaders and when it will not be favorably evaluated (e.g. Bolino et al., 2010; Morrison, 2011; Parker et al., 2010). There have also been more specific calls for research examining contextual moderators of the relationship between proactive behavior and performance evaluations such as the traits and characteristics of leaders (e.g. Bindl and Parker, 2011; Fuller et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2012). If organizations are to promote effectively the expression of proactive behavior in the workplace, it is critically important that we better understand the role leaders play in encouraging or discouraging that behavior (Grant et al., 2009). Second, by introducing leader feelings of responsibility for constructive change as an important contingency variable for the relationship between proactive behavior and evaluations of performance, we illustrate the potential benefit of integrating existing streams of research within the realm of proactivity (Fuller et al., 2012; Grant and Ashford, 2008). Prior to this study, felt responsibility for constructive change had only been explored as an antecedent of proactive behavior. However, taking responsibility for change is also thought to be a fundamental aspect of leadership (Burns, 1978; Johnson, 2002; Nayar, 2010; Pereira, 2005). By conceptualizing felt responsibility for constructive change as a leader characteristic, we examine the extent to which FRCC also plays a role in determining the effects of proactive behavior. This conceptualization increases the value of the felt responsibility for constructive change construct and research exploring antecedents of FRCC as it may hold clues to influencing proactivity in more than one part of the proactivity process model. Further, our research should provide insight on how leaders may, or may not, act in ways that transfer responsibility for constructive change to subordinates (Nayar, 2010; Seiling, 2001). Finally, scholars emphasize that we must not only be concerned about the extent to which proactive behavior is related to performance, but also the extent to which that behavior has an impact upon the performance of others within the organization (Grant and Ashford, 2008; Griffin et al., 2007; Morrison, 2011). Accordingly, we answer the call for research that links the proactive behavior of one employee to the success of other employees (Grant and Ashford, 2008). Our study contributes to the literature by exploring the possibility that proactive behavior is positively related to follower success (i.e. higher performance evaluations) only when that behavior helps the leader to be successful (i.e. helps the leader to fulfill his or her responsibility for constructive change).

Theory and hypothesis development

Based upon the authors' review of the extant literature, there are only four studies that have explored leader reactions to follower proactivity. Two of these studies use proactive personality to assess follower proactivity. Chan (2006) found that follower situational judgment moderated the relationship between proactive personality and performance

ratings such that the relationship was stronger for those followers with better situational judgment than for those with poor situational judgment. Zhang et al. (2012) found that leader proactive personality moderated the relationship between follower proactive personality and leader ratings of follower performance. These studies are important because they suggest that follower proactivity does not always lead to higher leader evaluations of follower performance. However, 'personality is a relatively distal predictor of work outcomes in comparison with actual behaviors' (Zhang et al., 2012: 126) and research indicates proactive personality is not equally predictive of all types of proactive behavior (Fuller and Marler, 2009; Parker and Collins, 2010). Accordingly, Zhang et al. (2012) advocate that future research in this area might fruitfully focus upon specific forms of proactive behavior.

The other two studies examine leader reactions to follower proactive behavior, rather than proactive personality, as a predictor of leader evaluations of follower performance. The following studies represent an advance over the previous two studies because the leader is more clearly aware of the subordinate behavior. Although Grant et al. (2009) did not directly measure leader characteristics, they reasoned that leaders are aware of their followers' values and affect, and make attributions about the benevolent intentions of follower proactive behavior, which influences the leader's reaction to that behavior. Grant and colleagues (2009) found that the relationship between follower proactive behavior and performance evaluations was moderated by follower pro-social values and negative affect, such that the relationship was stronger when followers reported high levels of pro-social values and low levels of negative affect. In discussing how to build upon their findings, Grant et al. (2009) suggested that future research attempt to evaluate the extent to which supervisors value proactive behavior as a moderator of the proactive behavior–performance relationship. Following this suggestion, Fuller and colleagues (2012) hypothesized that supervisors with proactive personalities would value subordinate proactivity more than supervisors with passive personalities. The results of this study indicate that the linkage between proactive behavior and performance evaluations is stronger when leaders have proactive personalities than when leaders have passive personalities. Thus, leader characteristics appear to play an important role in determining the relationship between proactivity and performance evaluation. However, because personality is stable and difficult to change, this limits the practical implications of Fuller et al.'s (2012) use of selection and placement as a means of fostering subordinate proactivity. Therefore, in the present study, we focus upon leader feelings of responsibility for constructive change rather than leader personality as a moderating factor because proactive work motivation is malleable, thus making it more easily influenced by organizational practices (e.g. leadership, training and rewards).

The form of proactive behavior we focus upon in the present study is taking charge. Taking charge 'entails voluntary and constructive efforts . . . to effect organizationally functional change with respect to how work is executed within the contexts of their jobs, work units, or organizations' (Morrison and Phelps, 1999: 403). First and foremost, we focus upon taking charge because employees that take charge make 'valuable contributions to organizations' (Grant et al., 2009: 33). Further, taking charge reflects the essence of proactivity (i.e. personal initiative and constructive anticipatory action; seizing control) perhaps better than any other established proactive behavior construct. We also

elected to examine taking charge as opposed to more specific forms of proactivity (Crant, 2000) because it is a general form of proactive behavior, making it (and our research) generalizable to a much broader array of work situations.

Performance theory offers an explanation as to why proactive behavior may, or may not, be positively related to job performance ratings. According to performance theory, the relationship between behavior and performance (i.e. the effectiveness of that behavior) can be problematic because it necessarily involves an evaluation. Campbell and associates (1990, 1993) discuss this evaluation issue in terms of 'utility'. Utility is defined as the value of a particular behavior (Campbell, 1990). The utility of a behavior is a value judgment made by those the organization recognizes as appropriate judges (Campbell, 1990). Consistent with this view, Campbell (2000) notes that whether or not proactive behavior is effective behavior is a judgment problem for leaders. Thus, performance theory predicts that when leaders view follower behavior as valuable, they are likely to reward that behavior by giving followers higher performance evaluations. Conversely, when leaders do not view follower proactive behavior as valuable, they are unlikely to give the proactive follower higher performance evaluations. Therefore, performance theory would suggest that the relationship between follower proactive behavior and the leader's evaluation of the subordinate's performance should be moderated by the extent to which that leader considers follower proactive behavior to be valuable. Although they did not allude to performance theory, Grant et al. (2009) propose essentially the same notion, stating that 'it is possible that supervisors' beliefs about the value of proactive behaviors will moderate the proactivity-performance evaluation relationships' (p. 52).

Within the broader framework of performance theory, recent theoretical and empirical work on proactive motivation argue that leader felt responsibility for constructive change (Morrison and Phelps, 1999) will influence the extent to which a leader views follower proactive behavior as having utility (i.e. value). Felt responsibility for constructive change (FRCC) 'reflects the extent to which an individual feels personally responsible for continually redefining performance (i.e. doing things better), rather than solely performing his or her own task well according to current performance standards (i.e. doing the job right)' (Fuller et al., 2006: 1092). Different from felt responsibility for task accomplishment (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), felt responsibility for constructive change represents a desire to not only put in more effort, but also expand one's role to include solving problems and developing improved methods of work (Fuller et al., 2006). From a self-determination theory perspective, FRCC is a form of 'identified regulation' (Fuller et al., 2012; Parker et al., 2010). Identified regulation involves the internalization of an activity as 'personally important and useful' (Koestner and Losier, 2002: 104) – a conscious valuing of a behavior or goal (Ryan and Deci, 2002: 17). That is, FRCC reflects the extent to which an employee has internalized the value of constructive change (Parker et al., 2010: 838). Accordingly, FRCC involves a consideration of the extent to which proactive behavior is useful in attaining long-term objectives.

We argue that leaders with strong feelings of responsibility for constructive change are likely to value the proactive behavior of their subordinates because it helps these leaders fulfill their personally assumed responsibilities and achieve associated long-term objectives. This assertion is consistent with Bolino et al.'s (2010) suggestion that

leaders who benefit from followers' proactive behavior are likely to welcome that behavior and is also consistent with Grant and Ashford's (2008) proposition that leaders are likely to reward follower behavior if it is perceived to be interpersonally or organizationally beneficial. As observed by Grant and colleagues (2011), because 'leaders cannot always predict, envision and control key internal and external events, they rely on employees to take initiative and create constructive change' (p. 530). That is, constructive change cannot simply be a top-down phenomenon where leaders are the ones who 'make it happen'; it must also be driven from the bottom-up (Grant et al., 2011). Accordingly, follower proactive behavior should have utility for high FRCC leaders because that behavior helps the leader to fulfill his or her assumed responsibility for enacting constructive change. In this case, the leader is likely to view proactive behavior by the follower as a supportive form of behavior. However, not all leaders believe that constructive change is part of their job. When a leader does not feel responsible for constructive change, follower proactive behavior is unlikely to help the leader fulfill his or her assumed responsibilities or long-term objectives and, as such, have little value. In such a case, the leader is more likely to view follower proactive behavior as challenging and critical of the way responsibilities are being discharged. Therefore, performance theory would predict that high FRCC leaders are likely to reward follower proactive behavior with higher performance evaluations because of their perception that proactive behavior has utility, while low FRCC leaders would not reward follower proactive behavior because of their perception that behavior has little utility. Accordingly, we forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The positive relationship between proactive behavior and performance evaluation will be moderated by a leader's feeling of responsibility for constructive change such that the relationship will be stronger when feelings of constructive change are high than when feelings of constructive change are low.

Method

Employees of a small municipal utility company in the southeastern part of the USA participated in this research project. The company employed 122 people, 29 of which fulfilled supervisory roles. Average span of control for supervisors was approximately four employees. Examples of jobs within the organization include lineman, electrician, laboratory technician, cable technician, supervisory control and data acquisition operator, engineer and water/sewer maintenance. All employees, with the exception of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), had a formal performance evaluation once a year and shared a common performance evaluation form (i.e. all employees were formally evaluated on the same performance criteria). Since his installation some years prior to this study, the CEO of the company emphasized the importance of continually increasing efficiencies and innovation to provide better service to the company's residential and commercial customers. Accordingly, proactive behavior, broadly framed, was one common aspect of the employees' formal performance evaluation. Formal yearly performance evaluations were the basis for compensation adjustment in the form of merit pay increases.

Employees were given the opportunity to complete a survey during regular work hours. It was clearly communicated that participation in the study was voluntary and that all responses would be kept confidential. Three separate surveys were used to collect the data for this study (one for all employees and two to be completed by supervisors only). At a centralized location (the customer service center), a survey (survey 1) was given to all employees; it included questions about demographics, proactive personality and felt responsibility for constructive change (only leader responses were used). During that same week, leaders were provided with a different survey to complete in private, requiring them to assess the taking charge behavior of every direct report (survey 2). Two months after the completion of the first two surveys, a third survey was provided to leaders requiring them to assess the job performance of each of their followers (survey 3). While all supervisors participated in evaluating subordinates (100% response rate), the number of subordinates evaluated was reduced to 95 owing to lack of participation (being the CEO, not completing the survey) and lack of tenure (probationary employees were not included), making the overall response rate 79 percent. The respondents were 80 percent male and 20 percent female. Additional demographic data were collected using ranges to promote higher response rates in this small organization. Most respondents had at least six years with the company (27% with 6–10 years, 11% with 11–15 years, 26% with greater than 15 years), while 30 percent had been with the company 1–5 years and 6 percent less than one year. The majority of respondents had some college experience (40% some college, 21% college degree, 2% graduate degree) with the remainder having graduated from high school (36%) or not finishing high school (1%).

Measurement

A five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (scored as 1) to strongly agree (scored as 5) was used as the response format for all questions with the exception of proactive personality that was assessed using a seven-point scale. We used reduced item scales for the leader evaluations of follower proactive behavior and evaluations of follower performance to reduce fatigue associated with filling out multiple forms and to foster increased participation by leaders.

Proactive behavior. During the same week in which the survey was provided to all employees (i.e. survey 1), we distributed a survey (survey 2) to leaders only and asked leaders to assess each follower's taking charge behavior using the four highest loading items in Morrison and Phelps's (1999) scale ($\alpha = .85$). An example item is 'this person often tries to institute new work methods that are more effective for the company'.

Leader felt responsibility for constructive change (FRCC). We used the three positively framed items from Morrison and Phelps' (1999) measure to assess each leader's feelings of responsibility for making positive changes in the workplace ($\alpha = .75$). The reduced item set of positively framed items was used in the hopes of having better internal consistency than reported in prior research using the full five-item scale (two items are negatively framed). These items were included on the survey given to all employees, but only the

leader responses were used in our analysis. A sample item is ‘I feel a personal sense of responsibility to bring about change at work’.

Performance evaluation. Approximately two months after assessing follower proactive behavior, using survey 3, we asked leaders to assess each follower’s in-role performance using the four highest loading items from Williams and Anderson’s (1991) scale ($\alpha = .82$). Example items include ‘this person performs tasks that are expected of him/her’ and ‘this person meets formal requirements of the job’.

Control variables. All of the control variables were follower responses. Because meta-analytic evidence indicates proactive personality is positively related to job performance evaluations (Fuller and Marler, 2009), we included follower proactive personality as a control variable. We used Seibert et al.’s (1999) 10-item scale to assess the proactive personality of followers (e.g. ‘Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for change’). The response scale used for proactive personality was a Likert-type scale of ‘1’ to ‘7’ where ‘1’ represented ‘Strongly Disagree’ and ‘7’ represented ‘Strongly Agree’. Consistent with Grant et al. (2009), we also included tenure, education, gender (men coded as ‘1’ and women coded as ‘2’) and age as demographic control variables.

Analysis

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.51 to assess the discriminant validity of the study variables (i.e. taking charge, felt responsibility for constructive change and performance evaluations). Consistent with reviews of fit indices for structural equations modeling (e.g. Iacobucci, 2010), we report $\chi^2/\text{degrees of freedom}$, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and the comparative fit index (CFI). To test the study hypothesis, we used hierarchical linear modeling.

Results

Table 1 displays the summary statistics for the study variables, the correlation matrix and reliabilities. The results indicate that taking charge is positively correlated to the time-lagged evaluation of performance. Results of the CFA indicate that a three-factor model (taking charge, leader felt responsibility for constructive change and performance evaluation) not only provided an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2(51) = 101.14$; $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 2.12$; SRMR = .08; CFI = .90), but also a fit superior to other alternative models with fewer factors.

A multilevel model was constructed based on the research model. Following recommendations in Enders and Tofighi (2007), level-1 variables were grand-mean centered because the focus of the study is the cross-level effects of a level-2 variable (i.e. Leader FRCC). The first model in the HLM analysis (i.e. Model 1, Table 2) is fully unconditional (i.e. it contains no level-1 or level-2 variables). Fully unconditional models provide a baseline to assess improvement in subsequent nested multilevel models (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002).

Table 1. Correlations and descriptive statistics.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Performance evaluation	4.1	0.43	(.86)							
2. Taking charge	3.51	0.60	.30**	(.88)						
3. Leader FRCC	4.29	0.68	.11	.15	(.83)					
4. Proactive personality	5.13	0.80	.10	.14	.05	(.90)				
5. Tenure	–	–	.07	.08	.10	.11	–			
6. Education	–	–	.03	.14	.04	.02	.24	–		
7. Gender	–	–	.26**	.05	.01	–.28**	–.08	.07	–	
8. Age	–	–	.22*	.01	.08	–.01	.54**	.17	.02	–

Note: Cronbach's Alpha in (). FRCC = felt responsibility for constructive change.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The second model included the level-1 predictor (i.e. taking charge) and the five level-1 control variables – proactive personality, tenure, education, gender and age. The five control variables were treated as fixed in order to build a more parsimonious model (Singer and Willett, 2003). The results in Model 2 indicate taking charge, gender (women > men) and age have significant positive associations with performance evaluation, although the control variables proactive personality, tenure and education were unrelated to performance evaluation. These results support the further testing of cross-level effects of leader FRCC effects. Before our hypothesis could be tested, however, leader FRCC's main effects on performance evaluation were assessed to allow a more valid assessment of leader FRCC's moderation effects. Results from Model 3 indicate that the direct cross-level effects of leader FRCC on performance evaluation are not significant. The moderating effects of leader FRCC on the relationship between taking charge and performance evaluation were examined next. Results from that test (Model 4) show not only that leader FRCC has a significant moderation effect on the taking charge – performance evaluation relationship ($p = 0.042$), but also that the addition of this moderating effect improves model quality as assessed by a χ^2 test of change in deviance from Model 3 to Model 4 ($p = 0.064$). These results support our study hypothesis.

A final model (i.e. Model 5) was also run to examine if the elimination of non-significant variables produced substantially different results than those found in Model 4 (Singer and Willett, 2003). The results from Models 4 and 5 are roughly the same, which suggests the results in Model 4 are reasonably stable. These results provide additional support for our study hypothesis.

We plotted the interaction between each follower taking charge and leader FRCC to gain a better understanding of the form of the interaction. The interaction was plotted at both high (i.e. +1 SD) and low (i.e. -1 SD) values of leader FRCC as plotting the form of the interaction in this fashion more clearly illustrates the effect leader FRCC has upon the relationship between taking charge and job performance evaluation (Cohen et al., 2003). The slope of the regression line for leaders with high feelings of responsibility for constructive change is significantly positive ($B = .47, p < .01$), while the slope of the regression line for leaders with low feelings of responsibility for constructive change is not statistically significant ($B = .014, p > .05$).

Table 2. Hierarchical linear modeling results for leader evaluation of follower performance.^a

Variables (coefficients)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Level-I Independent and control variables					
<i>Proactive personality</i> (β_{10}) ^b		0.063 (.042)	0.062 (.042)	0.057 (.043)	
<i>Tenure</i> (β_{20}) ^b		-0.031 (.021)	-0.031 (.021)	-0.029 (.022)	
<i>Education</i> (β_{30}) ^b		-0.035 (.044)	-0.035 (.046)	-0.040 (.047)	
<i>Gender</i> (β_{40}) ^b		0.244** (.088)	0.244** (.087)	0.241** (.084)	0.235** (.086)
<i>Age</i> (β_{50}) ^b		0.090** (.028)	0.091** (.027)	0.094** (.028)	0.079** (.028)
<i>Taking charge</i> (β_{60})		0.177* (.067)	0.179* (.069)	0.144 ^c (.071)	0.163* (.067)
Direct effects on level-I intercept (β_0)					
Intercept (γ_{00})	4.160*** (.062)	4.129*** (.043)	4.131*** (.046)	4.111*** (.049)	4.117*** (.040)
<i>Leader FRCC</i> (γ_{01})			-0.015 (.080)	0.055 (.090)	
Moderating effects on level-I coefficient of <i>Taking charge</i> (β_6)					
<i>Leader FRCC</i> (γ_{61})				0.233* (.109)	0.208* (.083)
Goodness-of-fit					
Deviance	95.93	74.67	74.63	71.19	74.46
Number of parameters	3	11	12	13	9
Δ Deviance from previous model ^d		-21.26**	-0.04	-3.44† ^e	NA

^a $N = 95$ at individual-level (level-1); $N = 29$ at supervisor level (level-2). Unstandardized coefficient estimates and robust standard errors (in parentheses) reported. Level-1 and level-2 predictors are grand-mean centered. Estimation is Full Maximum Likelihood.

^bLevel-1 variable is treated as fixed.

^cEstimated p -value is 0.053.

^dChi-square values calculated via Soper (2013).

^eEstimated p -value is 0.064.

† $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The main purpose of the present study was to answer the many calls for research to better understand when proactive behavior will, and will not, be welcomed in the workplace (Bolino et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2010). Our study contributes to the proactive behavior literature by providing new insight into a largely overlooked area of research – how characteristics of leaders impact their reaction to follower proactive behavior. Using a time-lagged design, our results support the argument that the positive relationship between proactive behavior and job performance evaluation is moderated by leader feelings of

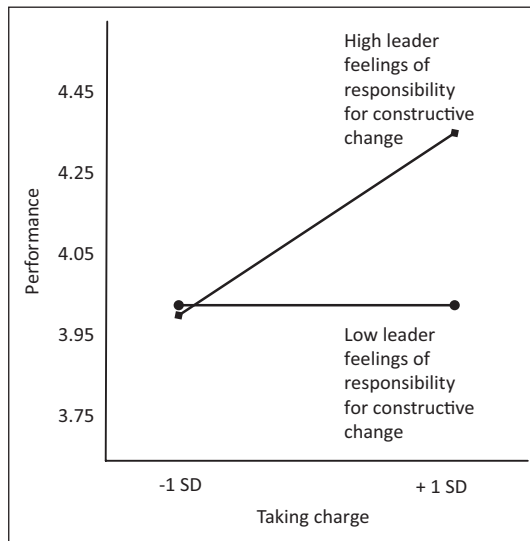


Figure 1. Felt responsibility for constructive change as a moderator of the taking charge-performance relationship.

responsibility for constructive change. As predicted, the interaction plot (see Figure 1) shows that when leaders feel responsible for constructive change, they tend to reward proactive followers with higher performance evaluations. Alternatively, when leaders do not feel responsible for constructive change, the results indicate that proactive followers tend to receive the same performance evaluation as passive followers. That is, even though they do not value proactive behavior, low FRCC leaders do not punish proactive followers with lower performance evaluations – they appear to simply tolerate the behavior. These results support the view that follower proactive behavior has utility for high FRCC leaders and little utility for low FRCC leaders. Stated in more general terms, our theory and findings are consistent with the view that the relationship between proactive behavior and performance ratings depends upon the extent to which the leader values proactivity.

In contrast with recent research indicating that leaders react differently to challenging forms of voice behavior by followers than they do to supportive forms of voice (i.e. Burris, 2012), our research suggests that the same follower proactive behavior may be viewed as challenging by one leader and supportive by another. For a leader who feels personally responsible for constructive change, taking charge is likely to be viewed as a supportive form of behavior because it helps the leader fulfill his or her responsibilities. For a leader who does not view change as an important aspect of his or her job, taking charge behavior may be seen as challenging or confrontational if the leader feels that it is critical of the way he or she manages responsibilities (i.e. things can be done better than they are being done now). Because leader perceptions are likely to influence their behavior, we encourage researchers to develop theoretical frameworks that take into account leader perceptions rather than solely categorizing behaviors as either supportive or challenging.

Our results also provide some insight into other proactivity-related issues. Bolino et al. (2010) recently suggested it would be useful to know how leaders would react to follower proactive behavior if it were to come at the expense of the follower's in-role task duties. Indeed, some researchers have suggested that leaders may not welcome proactive behavior because it is incongruent with their role expectations for subordinates (Unsworth and Parker, 2003). Because our results indicate that low FRCC leaders give proactive followers and passive followers the same performance evaluations, it seems logical to conclude that proactive behavior does not fall within the role expectations these leaders have for their followers. This finding is particularly interesting because taking charge takes time, effort and resources – time, effort and resources that a low FRCC leader might view as being better allocated to leader-expected task duties. While low FRCC leaders may not welcome followers that take charge, they do not appear to view the behavior as counterproductive. On the other hand, we found a positive relationship between taking charge and performance evaluation for high FRCC leaders. This suggests that taking charge does fall within the role expectations that high FRCC leaders have for their followers. Bolino et al. (2010) suggest that some leaders may value follower proactive behavior while others prefer for followers to focus upon their job duties. Our results suggest that these may not be incompatible situations – some leaders may value follower proactivity *and* view it as a responsibility of the follower. In short, our results suggest that leaders give credit for follower proactive behavior when they feel credit is due (i.e. when proactivity is an expected part of the job).

In the current study, we introduce leader FRCC as an important contingency variable for the linkage between proactive behavior and job performance evaluations. In doing so, we provide insights called for by a number of proactivity scholars. Our study answers the call for existing streams of proactivity to be used in new ways within the proactivity research domain (Fuller et al., 2012; Grant and Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010). Prior to this study, felt responsibility for constructive change had been solely conceptualized as a proximal antecedent of proactive behavior (e.g. Fuller et al., 2006; Morrison and Phelps, 1999; Parker and Collins, 2010). By introducing FRCC as a contextual variable, we leverage prior research on this construct by using it in a different part of the proactive process model. Parker and colleagues (2006) state that flexible role orientations, like felt responsibility for constructive change, influence how individuals approach their own proactivity because they see proactive behavior as a critical part of fulfilling their work responsibilities. Our findings add to the literature by showing that feelings of responsibility for constructive change also influence how one approaches proactive behavior by *others*. Researchers have also called for a better understanding of how the proactive behavior of one employee might be linked to the success of others within the organization (Grant and Ashford, 2008). Our study shows that the relationship between follower proactive behavior and performance evaluations may depend upon the extent to which the leader views that behavior as helping to fulfill his or her own work responsibilities. Thus, follower proactivity may lead to follower success (i.e. positive performance evaluations) when it contributes to leader success.

Our study may also provide additional insight into what underlies leader FRCC. One of the thoughts expressed in our reviews from the journal encouraged us to examine the extent to which leader 'experience' (i.e. tenure and education) might underlie FRCC.

The logic behind this exploration is that more experienced leaders might have a better understanding of the importance of constructive change in today's competitive environment and greater confidence to accept responsibility for constructive change than leaders with less experience. Indeed, research suggests more experienced leaders are better able than less experienced leaders to identify ways of overcoming constraints that impede better performance (Griffith and Neely, 2009). We found that leader FRCC was positively related to leader education ($r = .54, p < .01$) but unrelated to leader tenure ($r = .13$, NS). This finding is consistent with the view that education is positively related to cognitive ability as well as the ability to develop and implement creative solutions to workplace problems (Bantel and Jackson, 1989), thereby making it more likely that educated leaders will accept responsibility for making improvements in the workplace. Broadly, with knowledge comes responsibility for change. To assess the extent to which leader education might account for the results reported here, we performed the same analyses used to assess the moderating effect of FRCC and found that leader education did not moderate the relationship between taking charge and performance evaluations. Consequently, while our results indicate education underlies FRCC, we can be more confident that FRCC appears to be capturing something beyond education in the present study.

Interestingly, gender demonstrated a significant relationship with in-role performance evaluations such that women in the sample were more likely than men to have high performance evaluations. This unexpected finding is counter to a great deal of the extant literature that reveals that women receive lower performance evaluations than men in some cases (Arvey and Murphy, 1998; Lyness and Heilman, 2006). Upon further consideration, we believe the gender effect may be owing to the type of jobs women in the sample performed (staff versus line positions). Empirical evidence indicates that job type may be part of the reason that women in line positions suffer from lower performance evaluations than women in staff positions as line positions may be more strongly male gender-typed than staff jobs (Lyness and Heilman, 2006). Also, because 'complex interactions in the rating environment' are likely to influence performance ratings (Arvey and Murphy, 1998: 153), this unexpected finding serves as a reminder that researchers have only scratched the surface of the issue of gender bias in performance appraisal with additional research being warranted.

There are a number of practical implications from this study. First, our findings indicate that if organizations wish to be supportive of proactive behavior, they need to ensure that employees in leadership positions feel responsible for constructive change. These leaders will naturally value proactive behavior and be motivated to support proactive behavior in their followers. Because felt responsibility for constructive change is malleable rather than stable, current and future passive leaders' proactive motivation levels could be shaped in such a way that they come to value and reward follower proactivity *by choice* (i.e. identified self-determined regulation). Research suggests that various human resource (HR) practices are likely to contribute to the development of feelings of responsibility, including designing jobs with certain characteristics (e.g. access to resources, Fuller et al., 2006; autonomy, Parker and Collins, 2010), and active career management including incentivizing more education, compensation, and/or promotion practices. Further, given that felt responsibility for constructive change is thought to be a

characteristic of transformational leaders (Burns, 1978), transformational leadership training (see Spreitzer and Quinn, 1996) may also increase the extent to which leaders feel responsible for constructive change. Therefore, our results suggest that organizations have a much wider variety of intervention tools that can be used to increase leader receptivity to proactive behavior than suggested in recent leader personality-based research (i.e. Fuller et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012). For example, organizations may be able to develop and retain passive leaders who might otherwise be deemed unpromotable or even terminated. Further, our research suggests there would be little value in devoting HR resources to promote proactivity among subordinates if their leader does not value proactive behavior, as the leader would be unlikely to reward proactivity (which might lead to its extinction – Grant and Ashford, 2008; Grant et al., 2010). Accordingly, it seems that fostering leader feelings of responsibility for constructive change should be a priority for organizations wishing to support the expression of proactive behavior.

There are also some potential negative implications of our findings. The results suggest that some proactive employees may receive higher performance evaluations than other proactive employees. Consequently, there is the potential for different leader reactions to follower proactive behavior to create dissatisfaction and feelings of injustice among proactive employees if substantial compensation inequities arise from different performance evaluations. Bolino et al. (2010) proposed organizations that expect proactive behavior may cause tension between proactive and passive employees. Similarly, our results suggest that differing expectations by leaders may also cause tension and feelings of injustice among proactive employees, as low FRCC leaders appear to give lower performance evaluations to proactive followers than high FRCC leaders. The consequence of differential leader reactions to follower proactive behavior has yet to be explored, but seems worthy of attention in future research.

As with all research, there are strengths and limitations in our study. Organizations are increasingly making proactive behavior a responsibility (Aktouf, 1992; Boswell et al., 2001). However, some organizational performance management systems may not capture or formally reward such behavior, which may limit the generalizability of our findings. Because previous proactivity research has cast performance evaluations as rewards, we felt that it was appropriate to conceptualize performance evaluation as a reward in this study owing to the link between performance evaluations and compensation in this particular company. Further, some degree of proactivity was expected of all employees. This allows our study to offer a unique insight – even when proactivity is expected by the organization, not all leaders will feel responsible for constructive change. Perhaps more importantly, these leaders do not tend to reward subordinates who engage in behavior that is sanctioned and valued by the organization because proactivity is of little value to them personally. Another strength of our study is the use of a time-lagged research design, which is more rigorous than most previous research in this area. However, while temporal separation of predictor and criterion measurement should allay some concerns about common methods variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003), we still cannot claim to have determined causality. Consequently, our interpretation of the results suggesting causality should be viewed with appropriate caution. It is also important to note that we took additional steps recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to reduce the possibility that common method variance could substantially

impact our results. Three different surveys were used to collect the data as well as two locations (i.e. customer service center and each supervisor's office). Also, research indicates common methods variance (CMV) is extremely unlikely to cause significant interaction effects found using hierarchical linear modeling (Lai et al., 2013). Indeed, Lai et al.'s (2013) research indicates that the presence of CMV should actually lower the likelihood of identifying cross-level interaction effects. Further, the use of multi-level modeling (HLM) provides increased confidence in our results as this analysis controls for potential non-independence concerns. Taken together, the design of the study and the type of analysis we employed should reduce concerns about common methods bias and the credibility of our results.

We encourage other scholars to continue research in this area as it appears leaders play a critical role in reinforcing the desirability of follower proactive behavior. Even though our results provide new insight into factors that influence leader reactions to follower proactive behavior, we are only beginning to understand the complexities of this issue. The present study is the first to examine FRCC as a leader characteristic, despite the fact that a number of leadership theories emphasize accepting responsibility for constructive change as a fundamental characteristic of effective leaders (e.g. Burns, 1978; Collins, 2001; Wohl and Wolter, 2011). Consequently, we further encourage others to delve deeper into FRCC as a characteristic of both leaders and followers because today's competitive environment not only makes FRCC a critical leader characteristic, but also because it is imperative for leaders to transfer responsibility for constructive change to their followers (Nayar, 2010).

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers and Paul Edwards, Editor-in-Chief, for the helpful comments and suggestions.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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