

**Are Proactive Employees Proactive Performers? The Moderating Role of
Supervisor-Subordinate Marital Status Similarity**

Xiaoyu Wang
School of Economics and Management
Tongji University

Xiaotong (Janey) Zheng
Durham University Business School
Durham University

Jin Luo
School of International and Public Affairs
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Shuming Zhao
School of Business
Nanjing University

Correspondence Author: Jin Luo, School of International and Public Affairs,
Shanghai Jiao Tong University, No. 1954, Huashan Road, Shanghai, P.R. China.
E-mail: hatechris@sjtu.edu.cn.

The data that support the findings of this study are available in Open Science
Framework at <https://osf.io/cwfvk/>. DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/CWFK

Abstract

In accordance with the similarity attraction paradigm, this paper investigates when and how proactive employees can be rated as proactive performers by proposing supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity as a relational moderator and leader-member exchange as the mediator. It therefore advances understanding of performance evaluation of proactive employees. Data from a sample of 471 Chinese employees and their 161 supervisors are used to examine the models hypothesized. The results show that LMX mediates the interaction effect between a proactive personality and supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity on supervisors' evaluations of proactive performance. When proactive employees and their supervisors have similar (dissimilar) marital status, the indirect relationship between proactive personality and supervisor-rated proactive performance via LMX is stronger (weaker). Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Key words: proactive personality, proactive performance, marital status similarity, leader-member exchange, relational demography

Introduction

Organizational survival and success in today's competitive environment largely depend on employee proactivity (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010). Therefore, organizations expect their employees to perform proactively (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007) and reward proactive employees with higher salaries and promotion opportunities (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). There are two research streams in the proactivity literature, one studying positive outcomes of employee proactive personalities (e.g. Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010; Sun & Van Emmerik, 2015) and one investigating the antecedents of employee proactive performance (e.g. Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2010; Schilpzand & Huang, 2018). Although knowledge has accumulated in each stream, they do not communicate with each other. That is, relatively less is known about whether proactive employees are always seen as proactive performers in the eyes of supervisors. This omission could be partly because prior research has assumed that an employee having a proactive personality, defined as a disposition to make personal efforts to create a favorable environment (Bateman & Crant, 1999), must lead to him or her performing proactively. In other words, scholars have assumed that proactive employees must be recognized as proactive performers by others in the workplace (e.g., their direct supervisors). However, because proactive employees tend to challenge the status quo (Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008), they may not be favored by their supervisors or be evaluated as higher performers (Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009). Instead, supervisors may regard them as troublemakers who might cause ill-timed distractions (Chan, 2006) or even as threats to their authority (Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). It is therefore necessary to investigate when and how supervisors regard proactive employees as proactive performers to advance our understanding of employee proactivity.

In conformity with the similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971; Jamieson, Lydon, & Zanna, 1987), numerous studies have shown that when employees and their supervisors share similar characteristics they are more likely to build and maintain high-level leader-member exchange (LMX) (Epitropaki & Martin, 1999; Vecchio & Brazil, 2007), which is positively related with supervisor (proactive) performance evaluations (Duarte, Goodson, & Klich, 1994). We therefore propose a relational moderator – supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity – to explain the conditions under which a proactive personality is more likely to increase LMX, which in turn will lead to higher supervisor evaluations of proactive performance. We particularly focus on marital status similarity because although the relational demography literature has shown that demographic similarity can positively influence LMX (Gerstner & Day, 1995; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), previous studies have tended to concentrate on gender and race (e.g., Turban, Dougherty, & Lee, 2002), and sometimes age, education and length of tenure (e.g., Triana, Richard, & Yücel, 2017). Unlike these demographic categories, marital status provides unique insights into the effects of social category similarity on LMX. This is because, unlike other aspects of relational demographic similarity, marital status is a self-selected social category which carries important value-laden information (Byrne & Carr, 2005; Depaulo & Morris, 2006). Moreover, supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity has received little attention in organizational settings.

Being married and being single each have both positive and negative work-related stereotypical associations. On the one hand, married people have been theoretically stereotyped as having more stable lives (DePaulo & Morris, 2005b) and are also often seen as mature and responsible in the workplace (Frone, 2003), whereas single people have been assumed to be irresponsible and socially poorly-adjusted, particularly those who are not married beyond the

normal age for marriage (Depaulo & Morris, 2005a; Etaugh & Birdoes, 1991; Morris et al., 2008). On the other hand, managers have begun to be concerned that the families of married workers may interfere with their work (Ling & Poweli, 2001). They realize that marriage and children decrease the time and effort that can be devoted to work (Guttek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991) and that stress and negative emotion caused by families (e.g., quarrels) may result in impatient, irresponsible and even abusive supervision (Burton, Hoobler, & Scheuer, 2012; Kiewitz et al., 2012). Because of the value-laden nature of marital status, it is reasonable to argue that ingroup attribution bias will work more effectively for supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity than other inherent demographic similarities. Numbers of cases of marital status discrimination have increased and it is still an issue nowadays (EllisWhittman, n.d.). This is particularly true in Chinese culture, where marriage has long been associated with social norms so that traditional stereotypes of marital status are significant in Chinese organizations (Xu et al., 2007; Zhang, 2010). On the biggest Chinese question-and-answer website, Zhihu (<http://zhihu.com>), there are many ongoing debates about how to deal with marital status discrimination in the workplace and how to deal with conflicts with supervisors and employers due to marital status dissimilarity. We therefore collect data from working adults in China to test our theoretical model (Figure 1), which investigates the indirect relationship between proactive personality and proactive performance via LMX moderated by supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Our research makes unique contributions to both the proactivity and the relational demography literatures. First, prior research investigating the outcomes of employee proactive

personalities has mainly focused on in-role (e.g., Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012) and extra-role performance (organizational citizenship behavior, Li et al., 2010) but has overlooked their impact on proactive performance, the most direct performance evaluation of proactive employees. We therefore contribute to the employee proactivity literature by empirically examining the proactive personality-performance association from a relational perspective. Second, our paper highlights the unique role of marital status similarity as a relational moderator according to the similarity-attraction paradigm. By integrating the effect of attributional bias regarding marital status on supervisor-subordinate relationships, this research advances our understanding of factors that affect supervisor performance evaluations of proactive employees. Furthermore, our study is among the first in the relational demography literature to shed light on the crucial role of marital status similarity by viewing marital status as a value-laden category rather than a stable demographic variable, and therefore it opens up a new avenue for examining the effects of relational demography in organizations.

Hypothesis Development

A relational perspective on proactive employees and their supervisors

We maintain that proactive employees and their supervisors are both motivated to develop high-quality LMX relationships. From the perspective of proactive employees, because immediate supervisors are critical sources of work-related information and are authorized to decide in-unit resource allocation (Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997), building high-quality exchange relationships with supervisors can enable them to identify work-related opportunities (Li et al., 2010) and so gain greater autonomy to effectively improve their work situations (Grant & Ashford, 2008). As has been shown in prior research, proactive employees have better political

knowledge (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Seibert et al., 2001) and they constantly seek ways to create a relational environment which is beneficial for them to take initiatives to perform their tasks effectively (Thompson, 2005). From the perspective of supervisors, a good relationship with proactive employees is also beneficial. Proactive employees set working goals and seek ways to improve their work (Zhang et al., 2012) so supervising them requires less time and effort. At the same time, their proactive efforts contribute to achieving group goals (Campbell, 2000; Li et al., 2010). However, due to supervisors potentially having unfavorable opinions regarding proactive employees, as was discussed in the introduction, there may be a relational boundary condition. We articulate this argument in the next sections, where we introduce the moderating role of supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity and the mediating effect of LMX.

Marital Status Similarity as a Relational Moderator

According to the similarity-attraction paradigm, people see other parties who are similar to themselves in important respects more favorably (Turban & Jones, 1988), which can lead to liking and LMX (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994). Previous studies have shown that demographic similarities are important references for both employees and supervisors for them to initially evaluate each other and they influence the quality of relationships between them (Epitropaki & Martin, 1999; Vecchio & Brazil, 2007). Going beyond the traditional relational demographic similarities such as of gender, age and race (e.g., Turban et al., 2002; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), we propose that marital status similarity provides the important conditions under which good exchange relationships are more likely to develop between proactive employees and their supervisors. In addition, focusing on marital status similarity in Chinese culture is particularly interesting. Chinese people's feelings about

marriage have dramatically shifted in recent decades. Research has shown that most of the Chinese younger generation choose to get married much later than society expects them to (Yeung & Hu, 2013; 2016; Yu & Xie, 2013). Many more Chinese people choose to get divorced to be single again so the numbers of divorced couples in China have markedly increased (Wang & Zhou, 2010). These facts indicate that there might be a broad variety of marital statuses in Chinese organizations, making investigating marital status similarity interesting and important to understand how it interacts with proactive personality to affect LMX.

First, we argue that compared with other demographic categories (e.g., gender, age, race) which are inherent, people can choose whether and when to get married, which makes marital status a value-laden choice (Byrne & Carr, 2005; Depaulo & Morris, 2006). Employees and supervisors with similar marital status share similar cognitive information processing to interpret events and process information of particular importance to increase mutual understanding and form good relationships. For example, married supervisors and their married employees will share understanding of difficulties that married couples may encounter in life and at work, and therefore appreciation of flexible work schedules. In this case, the similarity creates an inclusive climate and so encourages them to deal with work problems in a creative and friendly way. As a consequence, a married proactive employee is more likely to build a good relationship with a married supervisor and to suggest a more flexible way to better finish a job because he/she believes the suggestion will be appreciated and understood. Similar considerations may apply to single supervisors and their single employees. In contrast, misunderstanding or even hostility may arise between an employee and a supervisor when they have different marital statuses. As mentioned, married supervisors may think single employees are less responsible and mature than married employees (Etaugh & Birdoes, 1991; Morris et al., 2008) and single supervisors may

have concerns about married employees' commitment to work (King et al., 2012; Reina, Peterson, & Zhang, 2017), which can harm their relationship.

Hypothesis 1: Supervisor-subordinate marital status similarity will positively interact with proactive personality in LMX so that the positive relationship between proactive personality and LMX is stronger (weaker) when the supervisor and the employee have similar (dissimilar) marital status.

LMX as a Relational Mediator

The quality of supervisor-subordinate exchange relationships has been shown to predict supervisor performance evaluations (Duarte, Goodson, & Klich, 1994). First, high LMX reflects mutual trust and support on the part of the supervisor (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Once formed, it is likely to affect an employee's courage to proactively perform work tasks and belief that such efforts will be taken seriously and rewarded fairly (Hsiung, 2012; Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008). From the perspective of supervisors, it is beneficial to reward proactive employees who they have good relationships with. Proactive employees set working goals and use initiative to seek ways to improve their work (Zhang et al., 2012) These self-starting efforts contribute to effectively accomplishing the group's work goals (Campbell, 2000; Li et al., 2010), for which supervisors will obtain rewards and recognition of their leadership. In contrast, low LMX results in high relational concerns, e.g. negative feelings and behavioral expectations, which might not only inhibit proactive employees' willingness to take initiatives but also decrease supervisor positive evaluations of proactive employees' performance. After all, proactive employees with a poor dyadic relationship with the supervisor may tend to avoid performing proactively even if they know their performance could benefit the organization (Parker et al., 2006; Ramus & Steger, 2000). At the same time, even if they still perform their

work tasks proactively, supervisors with whom they have low LMX may fail to identify, recognize and reward them for their proactivity due to negative attribution bias or concerns about threats to their status, as was mentioned above. Therefore, we propose that when proactive employees form high-level LMX with their supervisors they are more likely to be evaluated as proactive performers, whereas when proactive employees can only maintain low-level LMX with their supervisors they are more likely to be under-evaluated. Therefore, we expect LMX can predict supervisors' evaluations of proactive performance.

Given the interactive effect of proactive personality and supervisor-employee marital status similarity on LMX predicted in Hypothesis 1, we propose a mediated moderation model (Edwards & Lambert 2007) in which LMX mediates the interactive effect of proactive personality and supervisor-employee marital status similarity on supervisor evaluations of proactive performance. Therefore,

Hypothesis 2: LMX mediates the interactive effects of proactive personality and supervisor-employee marital status similarity on supervisor evaluations of proactive performance, so that the indirect relationship between proactive personality and supervisor evaluations of proactive performance via LMX will be stronger (weaker) when the supervisor and the employee have similar (dissimilar) marital status.

Method

Sample and Procedures

The sample in our study consists of employees and their direct supervisors in various industries and sectors. We contacted the human resource (HR) departments of 180 Chinese companies in various provinces. To ensure the quality of our sample, we had previously discussed with the HR

managers whether their companies were appropriate to study proactivity. That is, whether employee proactivity was appreciated in their organizations and whether employees had opportunities to express their proactivity. The result was that 139 agreed to participate in our data collection and met our criteria. We sent them hard-copy questionnaires. The managers were asked to randomly pick two workgroups to complete our questionnaires, including both supervisors and their employees. The first two initial characters of their names were used to match the supervisor-employee pairs, and were deleted once the data were matched. Each employee was given an envelope to assure them that their responses were confidential. The completed questionnaires were directly mailed back to the researchers.

Six hundred and sixteen employees and their supervisors completed and returned their questionnaires. We were able to match 417 pairs nested in 161 supervisors, with a response rate of 67.7%. In addition to demographic information, the employees answered questions about the proactiveness of their personalities and LMX with their supervisors. The supervisors were asked to rate each employee's proactive work behavior.

Of the employees, 55.6% were male and 44.4% were female. Age was measured as a continuous variable divided into eight categories: 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55 and 56-60. The majority of the employees were aged between 31 and 40: 35.3% in the 31-35 category and 25.5% in the 36-40 category. 15.5% of them were aged between 21 and 25 and the rest were aged between 41 and 60. 13.1% of them had graduated from high school or equivalent (GED), 30.7% had a two-year qualification, 52.8% had a four-year qualification and 3.4% had a graduate degree. 68.6% were married and 31.4% were single. We measured their tenure in years. They had worked in their current companies for an average of 5.53 years ($SD = 5.76$).

As for the supervisors, 65.6% were male and 34.4% were female. Most of them (58.1%) were aged between 31 and 40, 11.9% between 26 and 30, 18.8% between 41 and 45, only one between 21 and 25 and the rest between 46 and 60. Their average tenure was 8.23 years ($SD = 6.64$). 3.8% of the supervisors had graduated from high school or equivalent (GED), 33.3% had a two-year qualification, 61.6% had a four-year qualification and 1.3% had a master degree. 95.6% were married and 4.4% were single.

Measures

The questionnaires were administered in Chinese. As they were originally developed in English, we employed the back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1970). The response scales for the following perceptual measures in our questionnaires all ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Proactive personality. We used 10 items developed by Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer (1999). An example item is “I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life.” The Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

LMX. We used a seven-item scale from Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). An example item is “My leader understands my problems and needs.” The Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

Supervisor-evaluated proactive performance. We adopted the instrument in Fritz et al. (2010) with 7 items to measure employee proactive behavior. The supervisors were asked to assess each employee’s proactive work behavior. An example item is “During the past few weeks, he/she attacked problems actively.” The Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

Dyadic marital status similarity. We created a variable to capture the difference between employee marital status and supervisor marital status by subtracting the latter from the former. Marital status was coded as 1 = *single* (i.e. unmarried, divorced, widowed) or 2 = *married*. We

then coded this new variable into a dummy variable which took value 0 for *dissimilarity* (either a single supervisor and a married employee or a married supervisor and a single employee) or 1= *similarity* (either both were single or both were married).

Control variables. It has been found that perceptions of LMX quality might be influenced by respondent demographic variables, such as age, gender and education (Bauer & Green, 1996). Following suggestions in Zhang et al. (2012), we therefore controlled for similarity of these variables.

Gender similarity was calculated as a dichotomous variable, with 0 = dissimilarity and 1 = similarity. In line with previous studies (e.g., Lau, Lam, & Salamon, 2008; Tsui, Poter, & Egan, 2002), we used the absolute difference between the employees' and their supervisors' ages and length of education. That is, a higher value indicated higher dissimilarity. In addition, we also controlled for both leader and follower tenure to partial out their effects.

Analytical Approach

We tested our hypotheses with structural equation modelling using Mplus 7.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). As our employee respondents were clustered in the data, to correct for bias in the standard error estimates we used cluster-robust standard errors (CR-SEs) (also referred to as empirical standard errors and sandwich estimators, McNeish, Stapleton, & Silverman, 2017). Our aim was to correct for bias based on the residuals to yield more accurate regression coefficient estimates.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of our variables, including reliability estimates and correlations with the main and control variables. Proactive personality was positively correlated with LMX ($r = .54, p < .01$) and proactive performance ($r = .15, p < .01$). The correlation between marital status similarity and LMX was positive ($r = .13, p < .01$). The relationship between LMX and proactive performance was positive and significant ($r = .22, p < .01$). These results provided preliminary support for our hypotheses.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Hypothesis Testing

To test our hypotheses, a moderated mediation model was specified using Mplus 7.2. The results are shown in Table 2. To test Hypothesis 1, which predicted a moderating effect of proactive personality and marital status similarity on LMX, we mean-centered proactive personality (Dawson, 2014) before creating the moderating product. As Table 2 shows, marital status similarity was positively and significantly related to LMX ($B = .26, p = .04$). The moderating effect of marital status similarity and proactive personality was positively and significantly related to LMX ($B = .35, p = .02$). Simple slope analyses suggested that a proactive personality had a stronger positive effect on LMX when supervisor-employee marital status was similar (i.e. marital status similarity = 1) (simple slope = $.70, p < .001$) than when it was dissimilar (i.e. marital status similarity = 0) (simple slope = $.35, p = .02$). The difference between these two slopes was significant (diff = $.35, p = .02$). To better understand the moderating effect of marital status similarity and proactive personality, in Figure 2 we plot simple slopes using the procedure suggested in Aiken, West, & Reno (1991). As the figure shows, the positive relationship between

proactive personality and LMX was stronger when supervisor-employee marital status was similar. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Insert Table 2 and Figure 2 about here

To test Hypothesis 2, we examined the conditional mediation effect to compare the indirect effect between proactive personality and proactive performance via LMX under different marital status similarity conditions. The results are reported in Table 3. The conditional indirect effect of proactive personality on proactive performance via LMX was stronger and significant when supervisor-employee marital status was similar (.12, $p < .01$ 95% CI [.03, .21], excluding zero). The conditional indirect effect was non-significant when supervisor-employee marital status was different (.06, *ns*) since 0 was included in the 95% confidence interval [-.01, .13]. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

In accordance with the similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), we have proposed and examined a moderated mediation model that explains when and how a dispositional proactive trait is translated into supervisor-rated proactive performance. As hypothesized, we found that marital status similarity moderated the indirect relationship between employee proactive personality and proactive performance through LMX. Proactive employees who share the same

(different) marital status as their supervisors are more (less) likely to be rated as higher (lower) proactive performers because they are more likely to build high (low) exchange relationships with their supervisors. These findings indicate that married (single) proactive employees may not be regarded as proactive performers by their single (married) supervisors because they may have low levels of LMX. Our research has theoretical and practical implications which we outline in the following sections.

Theoretical implications

First, we have contributed to the employee proactivity literature by empirically examining the proactive personality-performance association from a relational perspective. By studying the moderating effect of marital status similarity and the mediating effect of LMX, we link dispositional proactive personality and supervisor-rated proactive performance. Our results highlight the importance of considering how supervisors regard proactive employees from a relational perspective. Specifically, the finding of marital status similarity as a boundary condition indicates that we should not take for granted the relationship between proactive personality and other-rated proactive performance. That is, an employee's proactive personality may not necessarily mean a higher proactive performance evaluation in the eyes of his/her supervisor, which has been largely overlooked in prior research. Therefore, we suggest an important new avenue for future research to extend our findings and explore other mechanisms and conditions that are essential for proactive employees to be regarded as proactive performers.

Second, we have contributed to the relational demographic similarity literature by proposing and investigating a new form of relational demographic similarity – marital status similarity – which enriches the scope of relational demography that can be investigated in future research. By including previously identified aspects of relational demographic similarity – i.e.

gender, age and education similarity – as control variables, our findings demonstrate a stronger and unique effect of marital status in relational demography and thus contribute with our newly proposed marital status similarity. Our study fills important research gaps by demonstrating the positive effects of marital status similarity and provides an avenue for future research to consider other value-laden and self-selected categories, such as the functional area or professional affiliations. Similarity in these categories is more organizationally relevant and might have more implications explaining the effect of similarity on supervisor-employee relationships.

Third, the role of marital status similarity in the modern workplace that we have found support for has been a relatively less explored area in both Chinese and western societies. We found our results in a collectivism-salience culture, and they might not be only explained by the similarity-attraction theory presented by western scholars (Byrne, 1971). As argued earlier, they can be attributed to the fact that much misunderstanding, miscommunication and even hostility may occur between married and single employees with increasing numbers of single people. For example, in the U.S. single (i.e. divorced, widowed and always single) employees make up over 40% of the nation's full-time workforce (Casper, Weltman, & Kwesiga, 2007). As being single is increasingly more prevalent, our results have provided implications for future research by preliminarily exploring marital status in the Chinese context. More research is needed to examine this issue in western societies.

Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that employees showing proactivity can be more (less) effective in a marital status congruent (or incongruent) context. On the basis of our findings we recommend that supervisors should pay close attention to the role of marital status similarity in supervision and teamwork, which has long been ignored, to promote mutual understandings and trust with

employees. In particular, if a supervisor works with an employee who is proactive but has a different marital status, the supervisor should be aware that the marital status incongruent setting could be an obstacle to developing high-quality exchange relationships with the employee, which can negatively influence the employee's proactive performance. In addition, employee-supervisor relationships operate in two ways. Our findings also have implications for employees, who sometimes find it challenging to be proactive when they work with certain supervisors and wonder what the reason is. Our findings suggest that different marital status could be one factor that causes misunderstanding and conflict.

We therefore provide suggestions about how supervisors and employees can be more effective in a marital status incongruence setting. First, we suggest that both supervisors and employees who are in such a situation should develop perspective-taking skills to help them understand the other party's viewpoint and therefore their issues and concerns (Parker & Axtell, 2001), which can greatly reduce relational conflicts (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2016). Leaders can provide employees with more opportunities in decision-making to understand their perspectives, which has been shown to be positively associated with working relations (Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2006). Employees, on the other hand, need to tailor their proactivity to consider their supervisor's perspective. Second, we suggest that both parties can still make attempts to build deep-level similarities despite being different in marital status. By organizing and participating in informal events and activities, supervisors and employees can socialize at a deep level (Zheng, et al., 2021), which can develop similar work values and promote mutual understanding (Klein & Wang, 2010). All these measures can enhance the possibility of high-quality relationships between supervisors and subordinates with dissimilar marital status so that proactive employees will feel comfortable to express their proactivity. Given that proactive

employees are organizations' most important human capital, creating a positive relational atmosphere for them to behave proactively through the endeavors of supervisors would be efficient resource utilization and should be included as a leadership responsibility.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

First, although our data were all collected via a survey (a common method), multiple sources of construct measurement (supervisor and subordinate) and the use of an objective independent variable – e.g. marital status – greatly decrease bias from common method variance (CMV). Our focus on a moderated mediation hypothesis further mitigates concerns associated with CMV. Monte Carlo studies strongly suggest that significant interaction effects, which are central to our hypotheses and for which we found support, cannot be attributed to common method variance (Evans, 1985; Harrison, McLaughlin, & Coalter, 1996). However, longitudinal designs will be important in future research to confirm our results and further support the causality of the hypothesized relationships.

Second, our research has categorized all unmarried, widowed and divorced individuals as single people¹ but these statuses might be seen differently in the Chinese context. Divorce is sometimes seen as a failure in China, which might lead to negative social judgments or discrimination. This discrimination can to some extent be extended to supervisor evaluations of divorced employees' performance and work competence. Because different ways of being single differ in terms of social judgment, the influence of marital status similarity on supervisor-employee relationships may differ too. Unmarried supervisors might have a negative bias against divorced employees, which is less likely to promote high quality LMX. Therefore, future

¹ Only five of our employees reported they were divorced and none of employees or supervisors reported they were widows. Therefore, we were unable to differentiate them in our analysis.

research might benefit from investigating whether divorce has an effect on supervisor evaluations and how diverse marital statuses influence leader-member exchange relationships and employee proactive behavior.

Third, our research regards marital similarity as a dichotomous variable, which, although this is in line with previous research in the relational demographic similarity literature (e.g., Lau et al., 2008; Tsui et al., 2002), is limited in showing the difference between different similarity and dissimilarity conditions. Future research can extend our findings by investigating marital status similarity between employees and supervisors with more specific situations. For example, it could involve four situations: 1) the employee is single and the supervisor is married; 2) the employee is single and the supervisor is single; 3) the employee is married and the supervisor is single; 4) the employee is married and the supervisor is married.² Doing this could produce richer knowledge to advance the field.

² Unfortunately, we were unable to explore these situations due to very unequal subsamples for each condition.

References

- Aiken, L. S., West, S. G. & Reno, R. R. (1991). *Multiple Regression: Testing and Interpreting Interactions*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Bateman, T. S. & Crant, J. M. (1999). Proactive behavior: Meaning, impact, recommendations. *Business Horizons*, 42(3), 63-70.
- Bauer, T. N. & Green, S. G. (1996). Development of leader-member exchange: A longitudinal test. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(6), 1538-1567.
- Brislin, R. W. (1970). Back-translation for cross-cultural research. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1(3), 185-216.
- Burton, J. P., Hoobler, J. M. & Scheuer, M. L. (2012). Supervisor workplace stress and abusive supervision: The buffering effect of exercise. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 27(3), 271-279.
- Byrne, D. E. (1971). *The Attraction Paradigm (Vol. 11)*. Academic Press, New York.
- Byrne, A., & Carr, D. (2005). Caught in the cultural lag: The stigma of singlehood. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16(2/3), 84-91.
- Campbell, D. J. (2000). The proactive employee: Managing workplace initiative. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 14(3), 52-66.
- Casper, W. J., Weltman, D. & Kwesiga, E. (2007). Beyond family-friendly: The construct and measurement of singles-friendly work culture. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 70(3), 478-501.
- Chan, D. (2006). Interactive effects of situational judgment effectiveness and proactive personality on work perceptions and work outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(2), 475-481.

- Crant, J. M. (2000). Proactive behavior in organizations. *Journal of Management*, 26(3), 435-462.
- Dawson, J. F. (2014). Moderation in management research: What, why, when and how. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 29(3), 1-19.
- DePaulo, B. M. & Morris, W. L. (2005a). Singles in society and in science. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16(2/3), 57-83.
- DePaulo, B. M. & Morris, W. L. (2005b). Should singles and the scholars who study them make their mark or stay in their place? *Psychological Inquiry*, 16(2/3), 142-149.
- DePaulo, B. M., & Morris, W. L. (2006). The unrecognized stereotyping and discrimination against singles. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15(5), 251-254.
- Duarte, N. T., Goodson, J. R., & Klich, N. R. (1994). Effects of dyadic quality and duration on performance appraisal. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(3), 499-521.
- Edwards, J. R., & Lambert, L. S. (2007). Methods for integrating moderation and mediation: a general analytical framework using moderated path analysis. *Psychological Methods*, 12(1), 1-22.
- EllisWhittam. (n.d.). Discrimination based on marital status. Retrieved May, 2021, from <https://elliswhittam.com/blog/discrimination-based-marital-status/>
- Epitropaki, O. & Martin, R. (1999). The impact of relational demography on the quality of leader-member exchanges and employees' work attitudes and well-being. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 72(2), 237-240.
- Etaugh, C. & Birdoes, L.N. (1991). Effects of age, sex, and marital status on person perception. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 72(2), 491-497.

- Evans, M. G. (1985). A Monte Carlo study of the effects of correlated method variance in moderated multiple regression analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 36(3), 305-323.
- Frese, M. & Fay, D. (2001). Personal initiative: An active performance concept for work in the 21st century. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 23, 133-187.
- Fritz, Charlotte, Maya Yankelevich, and Anna Zarubin (2010). Happy, healthy, and productive: The role of detachment from work during nonwork time. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95, 977-983.
- Frone, M. R. (2003). Predictors of overall and on-the-job substance use among young workers. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 8(1), 39-54.
- Galinsky, A. D., Rucker, D. D. & Magee, J. C. (2016). Power and perspective-taking: A critical examination. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 67, 91-92.
- Gerstner, C. R. & Day, D. V. (1995). Putting leadership back into leader-member exchange: A meta-analytic review and extension. Paper presented at the *10th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology*, 1 April-4 April, Orlando, FL.
- Graen, G., & Cashman, J. F. (1975). A role-making model of leadership in formal organizations: A developmental approach. In J. G. Hunt & L. L. Larson (Eds.), *Leadership Frontiers* (pp. 143-165). Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.
- Graen, G. B. & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 219-247.
- Grant, A. M. & Ashford, S. J. (2008). The dynamics of proactivity at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 28, 3-34.

- Grant, A. M., Parker, S. & Collins, C. (2009). Getting credit for proactive behavior: Supervisor reactions depend on what you value and how you feel. *Personnel Psychology*, 62(1), 31-55.
- Griffin, M. A., Neal, A. & Parker, S. K. (2007). A new model of work role performance: Positive behavior in uncertain and interdependent contexts. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(2), 327-347.
- Griffin, M. A., Parker, S. K., & Mason, C. M. (2010). Leader vision and the development of adaptive and proactive performance: a longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(1), 174-182.
- Gutek, B. A., Searle, S. & Klepa, L. (1991). Rational versus gender role explanations for work-family conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(4), 560-568.
- Harrison, D. A., McLaughlin, M. E. & Coalter, T. M. (1996). Context, cognition, and common method variance: Psychometric and verbal protocol evidence. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 68(3), 246-261.
- Hsiung, H. H. (2012). Authentic leadership and employee voice behavior: A multi-level psychological process. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 107(3), 349-361.
- Jamieson, D. W., Lydon, J. E. & Zanna, M. P. (1987). Attitude and activity preference similarity: Differential bases of interpersonal attraction for low and high self-monitors. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(6), 1052-1060.
- Kiewitz, C., Restubog, S. L. D., Zagenczyk, T. J., Scott, K. D., Garcia, P. R. J. M. & Tang, R. L. (2012). Sins of the parents: Self-control as a buffer between supervisors' previous experience of family undermining and subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 23(5), 869-882.

- King, E. B., Botsford, W., Hebl, M. R., Kazama, S., Dawson, J. F. & Perkins, A. (2012). Benevolent sexism at work: Gender differences in the distribution of challenging developmental experiences. *Journal of Management*, 38(6), 1835-1866.
- Klein, K. M., & Wang, M. (2010). Deep-level diversity and leadership. *American Psychologist*, 65(9), 932–934.
- Kossek EE, Lobel SA, Brown J. (2006). Human resource strategies to manage workforce diversity. In Konrad AM, Prasad P, Pringle JK (Eds.), *Handbook of Workplace Diversity* (pp. 53–74). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lau, D. C., Lam, L. W., & Salamon, S. D. (2008). The impact of relational demographics on perceived managerial trustworthiness: Similarity or norms?. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 148(2), 187-209.
- Li, N., Liang, J. & Crant, J. M. (2010). The role of proactive personality in job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior: a relational perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95, 395-404.
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., & Stilwell, D. (1993). A longitudinal study on the early development of leader-member exchanges. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78(4), 662-674.
- Ling, Y. & Poweli, G. N. (2001). Work-family conflict in contemporary China: Beyond an American-based model. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 1(3), 357-373.
- McNeish, D., Stapleton, L. M. & Silverman, R. D. (2017). On the unnecessary ubiquity of hierarchical linear modelling. *Psychological Methods*, 22(1), 114-140.
- Morris, W.L., DePaulo, B.M., Hertel, J. & Taylor, L.C. (2008). Singlism – Another problem that has no name: Prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination against singles. In M.A. Morrison

- and T. G. Morrison (Eds.), *The Psychology of Modern Prejudice* (pp. 165-194). Nova Science Publishers, Hauppauge, NY.
- Muthén, L. K. & Muthén, B. O. (2012). *Mplus Statistical Modeling Software: Release 7.0*, Los Angeles, CA.
- Parker, S. K., & Axtell, C. M. (2001). Seeing another viewpoint: Antecedents and outcomes of employee perspective taking. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(6), 1085-1100.
- Parker, S. K. & Collins, C. G. (2010). Taking stock: Integrating and differentiating multiple proactive behaviors. *Journal of Management*, 36(3), 633-662.
- Parker, S. K., Williams, H. M. & Turner, N. (2006). Modeling the antecedents of proactive behavior at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(3), 636-652.
- Phillips, A. S., & Bedeian, A. G. (1994). Leader-follower exchange quality: The role of personal and interpersonal attributes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(4), 990-1001.
- Ramus, C. A. & Steger, U. (2000). The roles of supervisory support behaviors and environmental policy in employee “ecoinitiatives” at leading-edge European companies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(4), 605-626.
- Reina, C. S., Peterson, S. J. & Zhang, Z. (2017). Adverse effects of CEO family-to-work conflict on firm performance. *Organization Science*, 28(2), 228-243.
- Schilpzand, P., & Huang, L. (2018). When and how experienced incivility dissuades proactive performance: An integration of sociometer and self-identity orientation perspectives. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(8), 828-841.
- Seibert, S. E., Crant, J. M. & Kraimer, M. L. (1999). Proactive personality and career success. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 84(3), 416-427.

- Seibert, S. E., Kraimer, M. L. & Crant, J. M. (2001). What do proactive people do? A longitudinal model linking proactive personality and career success. *Personnel Psychology, 54*(4), 845-874.
- Sun, S. & Van Emmerik, H. I. (2015). Are proactive personalities always beneficial? Political skill as a moderator. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 100*(3), 966-975.
- Thompson, J. A. (2005). Proactive personality and job performance: a social capital perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(5), 1011-1117.
- Triana, M. D. C., Richard, O. C. & Yücel, İ. (2017). Status incongruence and supervisor gender as moderators of the transformational leadership to subordinate affective organizational commitment relationship. *Personnel Psychology, 70*(2), 429-467.
- Tsui, A. S. & O'Reilly, C. A. (1989). Beyond simple demographic effects: The importance of relational demography in superior-subordinate dyads. *Academy of Management Journal, 32*(2), 402-423.
- Tsui, A. S., Porter, L. W., & Egan, T. D. (2002). When both similarities and dissimilarities matter: Extending the concept of relational demography. *Human Relations, 55*(8), 899-929.
- Turban, D. B., Dougherty, T. W. & Lee, F. K. (2002). Gender, race and perceived similarity effects in developmental relationships: The moderating role of relationship duration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 61*(2), 240-262.
- Turban, D. B., & Jones, A. P. (1988). Supervisor-subordinate similarity: types, effects, and mechanisms. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 73*(2), 228-234.

- Van Dyne, L., Kamdar, D. & Joireman, J. (2008). In-role perceptions buffer the negative impact of low LMX on helping and enhance the positive impact of high LMX on voice. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*(6), 1195-1207.
- Vecchio, R. P. & Brazil, D. M. (2007). Leadership and sex-similarity: A comparison in a military setting. *Personnel Psychology, 60*(2), 303-335.
- Wang, Q., & Zhou, Q. (2010). China's divorce and remarriage rates: Trends and regional disparities. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 51*(4), 257-267.
- Wesolowski, M. A. & Mossholder, K. W. (1997). Relational demography in supervisor-subordinate dyads: Impact on subordinate job satisfaction, burnout, and perceived procedural justice. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 18*(4), 351-362.
- Xu, A., Xie, X., Liu, W., Xia, Y., & Liu, D. (2007). Chinese family strengths and resiliency. *Marriage & Family Review, 41*(1/2), 143-164.
- Yeung, W. J. & Hu, S. (2013). Coming of age in times of change: The transition to adulthood in China. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*(1), 149-171.
- Yeung, W. J. J., & Hu, S. (2016). Paradox in marriage values and behavior in contemporary China. *Chinese Journal of Sociology, 2*(3), 447-476.
- Yu, J. & Xie, Y. (2013). Changes in the determinants of marriage entry in post-reform urban China. Paper presented at the Population Association of America Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA.
- Zhang, J. (2010). Marriage and suicide among Chinese rural young women. *Social Forces, 89*(1), 311-326.

Zhang, Z., Wang, M.O. & Shi, J. (2012). Leader-follower congruence in proactive personality and work outcomes: The mediating role of leader-member exchange. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(1), 111-130.

Zheng, Y., Zheng, X., Wu, C. H., Yao, X., & Wang, Y. (2021). Newcomers' relationship-building behavior, mentor information sharing and newcomer adjustment: The moderating effects of perceived mentor and newcomer deep similarity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 125, 103519.