

Leaders' Psychological and Behavioral Responses to Employee Proactive Behavior and Their Mechanisms

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Abstract

Employee proactive behavior has received widespread attention from academia and industry due to its benefits for the long-term development of individuals and organizations. Previous research has primarily focused on the intrapersonal effects of proactive behavior on employees themselves, while paying less attention to its interpersonal effects on leaders; meanwhile, considering the important role employees play in the leadership process, a theoretical synthesis of how employee proactive behavior influences leaders' psychological and behavioral reactions would greatly enrich our understanding of employee proactive behavior. Based on attribution theory, implicit followership theory, self-other agreement theory, and others, academia has conducted preliminary explorations of the aforementioned bottom-up influence process, finding that leaders' attitudinal evaluations and behavioral reactions toward employee proactive behavior are influenced by multiple boundary conditions. Future research could specify the psychological and behavioral reactions of leaders elicited by employee proactive behavior, explore the cyclical relationship between employee proactive behavior and leadership styles, and delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms between proactive behavior and performance evaluation.

Full Text

Psychological and Behavioral Responses of Leaders toward Employee Proactive Behaviors

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Abstract

Employee proactive behaviors have garnered extensive attention from scholars and practitioners due to their benefits for individual and organizational development. Previous research has primarily focused on the intrapersonal effects of proactive behaviors on employees themselves, while largely neglecting their interpersonal impact on leaders. Given the essential role that employees play in the leadership process, a theoretical synthesis of how employee proactive behaviors influence leaders' psychological and behavioral reactions would significantly enrich our understanding of proactive behaviors. Drawing on attribution theory, implicit followership theory, and self-other rating agreement theory, scholars have begun exploring these bottom-up influence processes, revealing that leaders' attitudinal evaluations and behavioral responses to employee proactive behaviors are shaped by multiple boundary conditions. Future research should specify the psychological and behavioral reactions elicited by employee proactive behaviors, examine the cyclical relationship between proactive behaviors and leadership styles, and investigate the underlying mechanisms linking proactive behaviors to performance evaluations.

Keywords: employee proactive behavior; leader reactions; boundary conditions; leadership style; followership research

Proactive behavior refers to actions through which individuals actively improve their environment or themselves to achieve more favorable outcomes, characterized by future orientation, change orientation, and self-initiation (Parker et al., 2010). Based on their objectives, proactive behaviors can be categorized into three types: proactive work behaviors (e.g., voice behavior, innovative behavior), proactive strategic behaviors (e.g., issue selling), and proactive person-environment fit behaviors (e.g., feedback seeking, job crafting) (Parker & Collins, 2010). Employee proactive behaviors help individuals and organizations better adapt to dynamic environments and gain competitive advantages, thus attracting widespread attention from both academia and industry (Parker & Bindl, 2017).

Research on antecedents of proactive behavior has found that at the team level, team members' trait composition, internal structure, and HR policies influence team proactive states and behaviors (Harris & Kirkman, 2017). At the individual level, antecedents fall into two categories: individual factors (personality, values, knowledge/skills, and emotions) and situational factors (leadership style, interpersonal climate, social processes, job characteristics, and work stress), which stimulate proactive behavior by influencing individuals' intrinsic motivational states (Parker et al., 2010). Outcome variables of proactive behavior are typically classified by hierarchical level (individual, team, organizational) or nature of impact (positive or negative) (Bolino et al., 2017; Harris & Kirkman, 2017; Li & Huang, 2021). Overall, research has focused mainly on the effects of proactive behavior on employees themselves, with limited understanding of how leaders perceive and respond to such behaviors.

Traditional leadership theories view employees as passive recipients of leader influence, where leadership effectiveness depends entirely on the leader. In contrast, followership research emphasizes employees' (followers') active role in the leadership process, arguing that employees can influence leaders' psychology and behavior (Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; Luo et al., 2021). Inspired by this perspective, we argue that understanding how leaders respond to employee proactive behaviors holds significant theoretical and practical importance. Given the lack of systematic review on leaders' reactions to employee proactive behaviors and limited empirical evidence in followership research (Luo et al., 2021), we believe it is necessary to review and synthesize the psychological and behavioral reactions triggered by employee proactive behaviors. This will enrich our understanding of proactive behaviors, provide empirical support for followership research development (Luo et al., 2021), and offer theoretical guidance for practitioners on how to engage in effective proactive behaviors (Parker et al., 2019).

2. Leaders' Reactions to Employee Proactive Behaviors

Individuals hold internal cognitive frameworks regarding role expectations and behavioral norms, which influence their judgments and reactions toward role occupants (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Since leaders and employees share both commonalities and differences in their perceptions of proactive behaviors (Campbell, 2000), leaders may exhibit varied reactions when confronted with employee proactivity.

2.1 Leaders' Attitudinal Reactions to Proactive Behaviors

Leaders tend to display positive or negative attitudes depending on whether employee proactive behaviors benefit them. Leaders' work objectives and responsibilities often require employee support and assistance for effective completion. Proactive employees help leaders identify problems, provide solutions, reduce obstacles, and facilitate goal achievement (Cao et al., 2019; Carsten et al., 2018). Consequently, leaders generally hold positive attitudes toward proactive behaviors such as promotive voice (Whiting et al., 2008) and active feedback seeking (Ashford & Tsui, 1991) (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Thompson, 2005; Wu et al., 2018). Research shows that employee proactive behaviors demonstrate care and support for leaders and organizations (Cao et al., 2019; Carsten et al., 2018), which can elicit leaders' positive emotional experiences (Schneider et al., 2014), increase their liking for such behaviors and their actors (Allen & Rush, 1998; Whiting et al., 2012), and forge emotional bonds that strengthen leader-member exchange relationships (Yukl & Michel, 2006) and promote mutual understanding and relationship development (Han et al., 2019). Additionally, proactive behaviors that benefit the organization and demonstrate employee competence reflect employees' developmental potential and personal charisma (Crant & Bateman, 2000; Gross et al., 2020), thereby increasing leaders' identification and approach tendencies and categorizing the actor as an in-group member (Sun &

Zhang, 2019). For instance, supportive voice can deepen superior-subordinate relationships (Yukl & Michel, 2006), demonstrate employee loyalty, gain leader affirmation, and help employees receive higher performance evaluations (Burris, 2012).

Conversely, proactive behaviors that pose threats or have self-serving orientations typically encounter leader disapproval (Burris, 2012; Duan et al., 2021). For example, when employees suggest changes to organizational policies, processes, or strategic directions, the implicit opposition to or criticism of leaders' current decisions and actions can trigger leaders' sense of status threat (Burris, 2012). Proactive behaviors with obvious self-serving orientations may disrupt the balance of internal exchange relationships, easily incurring leader aversion and opposition (Duan et al., 2021). Moreover, meta-analyses indicate that prohibitive voice is more likely to elicit negative leader attitudes (Chamberlin et al., 2017).

In summary, proactive behaviors can help leaders prevent and solve work problems while strengthening positive interpersonal interactions, thus gaining leader approval. However, their inherent change orientation may also challenge leaders' personal authority and status (Bolino et al., 2017), provoking opposition (Campbell, 2000; Parker et al., 2010).

2.2 Leaders' Behavioral Reactions to Proactive Behaviors

Based on their positive or negative attitudes, leaders take actions to reinforce or punish employee proactive behaviors. Leaders tend to grant more job autonomy to employees who demonstrate competence, share their goals, and maintain good interpersonal relationships (Yukl & Fu, 1999). Employee proactive behaviors can reflect individual capability, increase positive superior-subordinate interactions (Cao et al., 2019; Han et al., 2019), optimize collaboration (Zhang et al., 2012), and ultimately facilitate leaders' goal progress (Carsten & Kirkman, 2015; Li et al., 2018). However, the challenging nature of proactive behaviors can also trigger leaders' threat perception (Burris, 2012; Chen et al., 2017), activating self-focused orientations and defensive motivations that lead to self-serving behaviors (Williams, 2014). For example, when power is threatened, leaders may emphasize personal authority by hiding critical work information or excluding high-ability employees to diminish their influence (Maner & Mead, 2010). Furthermore, such situations can create interpersonal conflict, leading to abusive supervision toward the employee (Tepper et al., 2011).

Thus, leaders' reactions to employee proactive behaviors primarily depend on the nature of the consequences for themselves. When proactive behaviors help leaders solve problems and advance tasks, leaders develop positive attitudes and take actions to further motivate employee behavior development (Cao et al., 2019; Han et al., 2019). When proactive behaviors threaten leaders' managerial responsibilities or future development, leaders strongly oppose and suppress them (Burris, 2012; Duan et al., 2021).

3. Theoretical Explanations of How Employee Proactive Behaviors Influence Leaders

The previous section summarized leaders' reactions. This section integrates theoretical foundations (primarily attribution theory, implicit followership theory, and self-other rating agreement theory) to elaborate on and analyze the mechanisms through which employee proactive behaviors influence leaders, aiming to help readers systematically understand these influence processes.

3.1 Attribution Theory

To better adapt to their environment, people tend to infer causal relationships between events, analyze and deduce the causes of their own or others' behaviors, predict future events, and determine their psychological and behavioral reactions accordingly (Heider, 1958). Whether an individual's behavioral motivation is driven by internal or external factors can be judged through the behavior's social desirability, freedom of choice, and other criteria (Jones & Davis, 1965). Internal factors include personality traits, ability levels, and emotional responses, while external factors encompass physical environment and current situations. Generally, people tend to attribute others' behaviors to dispositional causes and their own behaviors to situational causes, with this tendency becoming more pronounced after failure (Heider, 1958). When events deviate from normal behavioral norms or personal expectations, people's motivation to make attributions intensifies (Wong & Weiner, 1981).

Proactive behaviors are characterized by self-initiation and change orientation (Parker et al., 2010). Such behaviors, which involve freedom of choice and violate traditional leader expectations (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), easily trigger different attribution motivations in leaders (Wong & Weiner, 1981). The change-oriented nature of proactive behaviors creates both positive and negative attribution possibilities for leaders (Lam et al., 2007; Yan & He, 2016). When employee proactive behaviors target organizational processes and norms, leaders tend to perceive them as challenging behaviors that activate defensive psychology, making them less likely to attribute such behaviors to employees' prosocial motivations and more likely to hold negative attitudes (Su et al., 2017). When leaders believe employees' proactive behaviors are impression management tactics for personal gain, they reduce their liking for such deceptive behaviors and respond with negative attitudes or direct punishment. Conversely, when leaders attribute proactive behaviors to employees' achievement-oriented efforts to improve performance, their responses become more positive (Lam et al., 2007). Moreover, employee characteristics influence leaders' attribution processes. Employees with prosocial values consistently engage in behaviors benefiting others or the organization. Faced with such consistently caring employees, leaders are more willing to attribute their proactive behaviors to prosocial motivations and provide higher evaluations and support (Grant et al., 2009).

3.2 Implicit Followership Theory

Implicit followership theory, developed in the context of rising followership research, is a role cognition theory positing that leaders' behavioral expectations of employees are key to whether and how employees can influence leaders' psychology and behavior. Specifically, this theory suggests that through socialization, leaders gradually develop relatively stable cognitive patterns about how employees should think and behave—namely, leaders' standards for ideal employees (Sy, 2010; Cao & Zhu, 2015). This internal cognitive framework includes both positive and negative dimensions that influence how leaders view subordinates' various behaviors and what interaction patterns they adopt, ultimately affecting relationship quality and leadership style (Sy, 2010). When employees' traits or behaviors align with leaders' positive cognitive frameworks and meet their expectations, employees gain leaders' trust and positive evaluations. Conversely, when employee behaviors deviate from leaders' internal ideal standards and approach their negative employee prototypes, leaders make negative evaluations (Sy, 2010).

Empirical research shows that when employee behavioral tendencies align with leaders' internal positive employee standards and meet their expectations, leaders develop higher levels of interpersonal trust and relationship quality (Sy, 2010) and exhibit more empowering behaviors (Han et al., 2019; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). If employee proactive behaviors deviate from leader expectations, they create threat and uncertainty, activating leaders' defensive cognition and generating superior-subordinate conflict (Chen et al., 2017), damaging leader trust, reducing empowering behaviors toward subordinates (Peng et al., 2016), and even triggering abusive supervision (Zhu et al., 2017).

3.3 Self-Other Rating Agreement Theory

Actors and observers may perceive the same behavior differently. Scholars argue that when actors' self-evaluations exceed observers' evaluations, actors may become arrogant, look down on others, ignore their own shortcomings, and ultimately experience negative consequences. When actors' evaluations are lower than observers', they may misjudge their strengths and weaknesses but become more proactive in completing tasks (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Particularly when observers can benefit actors, actors strive to achieve rating consistency to meet positive social expectations (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Rating consistency indicates consensus and mutual understanding on an issue, reducing conflict (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997) and facilitating subsequent interactions.

Leaders play important roles in evaluating employee performance and promotion, and divergent evaluations between leaders and subordinates may produce different consequences. When leaders and subordinates hold consistent cognitive evaluations of employee proactive behaviors, high employee proactivity means leaders acknowledge employees' important contributions to the organization and hold positive attitudes and emotions toward them (Burriss et al.,

2013). Although proactive behaviors imply change and can positively impact individuals and organizations (Parker et al., 2010), when leaders' evaluations of employee proactive behaviors are lower than employees' self-evaluations, leaders may view some proactive behaviors as ineffective or even destructive, interpreting repeated such behaviors as complaints about organizational status that emphasize self-interest over organizational interests, leading to more negative attitudes toward the employee (Burris et al., 2013). Conversely, when employees perceive their own proactivity as insufficient, they strive to increase proactive behaviors. Faced with such behavior exceeding their expectations, leaders increase their liking and positive evaluations of the employee (Burris et al., 2013).

4. Boundary Conditions of Leaders' Reactions to Employee Proactive Behaviors

Beyond the effects of proactive behaviors themselves, leaders' reactions are also moderated by employee, leader, and situational factors (Bolino et al., 2017; Li & Huang, 2021), which can strengthen or weaken the impact of employee proactive behaviors.

4.1 Employee Factors

Employees' demographic characteristics, abilities, and traits influence leaders' reactions to their proactive behaviors. Regarding demographics, employees' race, status, and employment type affect leaders' judgments of their proactive behaviors (Howell et al., 2015; Whiting et al., 2012). Research shows that demographic characteristics influence leaders' depth of information processing, with leaders showing more positive attribution tendencies and cognitive processing toward proactive behaviors from majority-group members, high-status employees, or full-time employees (Howell et al., 2015). Additionally, employee ability affects leader judgments. Effective behavioral strategies—such as proactive behavior frequency (Huang et al., 2018), suggestion timeliness, professionalism, and positivity (Whiting et al., 2012), and personal credibility (Lam et al., 2019)—can trigger leaders' positive attributions and cognitive trust, increasing positive attitudes and liking for the employee and resulting in higher performance evaluations. Employees with high political skill, situational sensitivity, or emotional regulation ability can engage in proactive behaviors at appropriate times, optimize interpersonal interactions with superiors, and elicit leaders' positive emotions and favorable evaluations (Chan, 2006; Grant, 2013; Sun & van Emmerik, 2015). For example, when employees use constructive communication rather than blanket refusal, their proactive behaviors more easily gain leader understanding and support (Brett et al., 2016). If employees have previously performed excellently, leaders not only tolerate their work mistakes more generously (Cuddy et al., 2011) but also make positive attributions about their proactive behavioral intentions and give higher performance evaluations (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Conversely, when employees lack corresponding abilities but

engage in proactive behaviors due to circumstances, such involuntary and “pretend” behaviors are easily attributed to self-serving motivations (Bolino et al., 2010), leading to negative attitudes, reduced liking (Duan et al., 2021), and punishment for self-serving orientation (Sun & van Emmerik, 2015). Some studies have also explored the roles of employees’ personal values and trait negative affectivity. Leaders tend to believe that proactive behaviors from employees with high prosocial values or low trait negative affectivity stem from organizational concern and thus give more positive evaluations (Grant et al., 2009).

4.2 Leader Factors

Leaders’ personality traits, cognitive evaluations, and resource availability influence how they perceive and respond to employee proactive behaviors. Different personality traits affect leaders’ evaluations of employee proactivity. For example, leaders high in proactivity or learning goal orientation prefer change- and novelty-oriented ideas and behaviors, viewing problems and difficulties as learning and self-improvement opportunities. They actively and frequently communicate with subordinates, accept employee proactive behaviors, and thus require less time and effort for goal setting and coordination, more easily establishing aligned work goals and ultimately developing higher liking and trust for such employees (Zhang et al., 2012) and holding positive attitudes toward their proactive behaviors (Fuller et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012). In contrast, leaders with high power distance emphasize personal authority and status differences, expecting subordinate compliance and showing poorer acceptance of employee proactive behaviors (Grant et al., 2011; Wang & Kim, 2013). If employees engage in proactive behaviors despite leader opposition, this strongly threatens leaders’ sense of control and increases their perceived uncertainty (Chen et al., 2017). To restore personal control, leaders may engage in covert retaliation such as abuse or image sabotage toward the target employee. Conversely, low power distance leaders focus more on work responsibility differences than power acquisition and subordinate control, emphasize employee work ability and goal contributions, view proactive behaviors as demonstrations of personal responsibility, willingly accept such achievement-oriented behaviors, and show liking for the employee (Wang et al., 2019).

Second, different leaders hold different subjective standards for employee behavioral norms (i.e., implicit followership prototypes) and typically use these standards to evaluate subordinate behavior (Sy, 2010). When employee proactive behaviors align with leaders’ behavioral expectations, leaders give full affirmation (Burriss et al., 2013), reduce abusive behaviors (Zhu et al., 2017), increase intimacy, and maintain good interaction (Sy, 2010). Particularly for leaders with high power but low status, who have stronger tendencies to objectify others and adopt different interpersonal behaviors based on how useful others are to them, such proactive employees are viewed as valuable resources (Williams, 2014) and receive more positive, benevolent management behaviors (Wang & Peng, 2016; Peng et al., 2016). However, when leaders’ evaluations of employee

proactivity are lower than employees' self-evaluations, some proactive behaviors are denied or even viewed as complaints. Especially when proactive behavior targets lack value, leaders' attitudes become more negative (Burris et al., 2013). As cognitive differences deepen, serious disagreements about work emerge, activating leaders' competitive mindset and discriminatory cognition, inducing relationship conflict, and ultimately leading to abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2011).

Finally, employee proactive behaviors often require leaders to expend substantial resources on cognitive processing or change implementation. When resource-poor, leaders activate defense mechanisms to avoid change and uncertainty, maintain the status quo, and reduce resource depletion, thus resisting employee proactive behaviors (Fast et al., 2014; McClean et al., 2013; Sessions et al., 2020). Particularly when leaders have low influence or strong dominance motivation (Fast et al., 2014; Maner & Mead, 2010), proactive behaviors trigger status insecurity and self-doubt, leading leaders to make self-serving behaviors based on psychological defense (Fast et al., 2014; Williams, 2014). Power, as an important psychological resource, plays a significant moderating role in leaders' reactions (Chamberlin, 2017; Sessions et al., 2020). High-power leaders hold positive self-concepts and abundant psychological resources, tending to view employee proactive behaviors as positive challenges (Sessions et al., 2020) that generate positive attitudes and emotional reactions (Schneider et al., 2014) and, in the long term, promote information exchange and deep processing among team members, triggering management innovation (Guzman & Espejo, 2019). Additionally, when facing low job demands, leaders have abundant resources for cognitive processing of work problems and show more liking for employee proactive behaviors that meet their expectations (Zhu et al., 2017).

4.3 Situational Factors

Situational factors also cause leaders to react differently to employee proactive behaviors. Organizations assign different work goals to leaders. When employee proactive behaviors are valuable for achieving these goals or obtaining resources, leaders increase their dependence on such employees, strive to ease interpersonal relationships, and reduce abusive management (Wee et al., 2017). When organizations need to change the status quo, employee proactive behaviors facilitate change implementation and hold higher value and meaning for leaders (Fuller et al., 2015), leading leaders to increase their liking for such employees and reduce selfishness in resource allocation (Oc et al., 2015; Whiting et al., 2012). Research on organizational citizenship behavior finds that when OCB climate is low, employees' OCB is more identifiable and attention-grabbing. Moreover, such proactive behaviors, lacking formal organizational rewards, demonstrate stronger altruistic tendencies and more easily gain positive leader evaluations (Bommer et al., 2007). Additionally, specific problem situations and different cultural backgrounds influence leaders' reactions (Brockner et al., 2001; Burris et al., 2017; Urbach et al., 2021). In cultures differing in power distance, future

orientation, and individualism, leaders develop different implicit followership prototypes—standards for employee conduct—that further influence how they treat employee proactive behaviors (Urbach et al., 2021). For example, in low power distance cultures, leaders emphasize relational equality, less likely view employee proactive behaviors as threats or challenges, and thus provide support and affirmation (Brockner et al., 2001).

5. Discussion and Future Research Directions

As demonstrated, leaders show varied attitudinal and behavioral reactions to employee proactive behaviors, with these reactions becoming more positive or negative depending on boundary conditions. Based on existing research limitations, we propose several directions for future research.

First, research should refine the relationship between employee proactive behaviors and leader attitudes and clarify underlying mechanisms. Most researchers infer leaders' attitudinal reactions from their subjective performance evaluations (Morrison, 2014). However, subjective performance evaluations incorporate multiple factors (task performance, counterproductive behavior, extra-role behavior, etc.) (He et al., 2021; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Moreover, employee proactive behaviors can predict objective individual performance (Liu et al., 2007), making it unclear whether leaders base evaluations on objective performance or their attitudes toward proactive behaviors. Performance ratings cannot accurately reflect leaders' psychological reaction processes. Additionally, employees' prior performance levels influence leaders' intention inferences about proactive behaviors (De Stobbeleir et al., 2010) and increase leader tolerance (Cuddy et al., 2011). Future research should therefore specify the relationship between employee proactive behaviors and leader performance evaluations, clarify the mechanisms through which proactive behaviors influence the performance evaluation process, and explore the cognitive processes underlying leader performance ratings to enrich our understanding of proactive behaviors.

Second, research should deepen investigation of leaders' psychological and behavioral reactions to employee proactive behaviors. While existing research has yielded some findings on how leaders perceive and respond to proactive behaviors, it has mainly focused on attitudinal and behavioral reactions. Future research should expand to other reactions, such as leaders' momentary emotional responses using experience sampling methodology and changes in leaders' personal abilities based on self-expansion theory. Followership research posits that although employees and leaders have different roles, both are essential components of the leadership process. Employees are not passive recipients of leader influence but can actively shape leaders' attitudes, emotions, and behaviors (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Compared to rich research on how leaders influence employee proactive behaviors (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2017), the impact of employee proactive behaviors on leaders remains underexplored. Our review reveals scarce research on leaders' specific emotional reactions to proactive behaviors, representing an important future direction. For example, emotional

arousal affects cognitive processing. What momentary emotions and behavioral reactions do leaders experience when facing the challenges or threats of employee proactive behaviors? Can employees' consistent proactive behaviors expand leaders' self-concept and personal abilities during mutual adaptation?

Third, research should explore the bidirectional causal relationship and developmental trends between employee proactive behaviors and leadership behaviors. As shown above, employee proactive behaviors can trigger varied leader psychological and behavioral reactions under different conditions. As a bridge between employees and organizations, leaders' reactions significantly influence the occurrence and development of employee proactive behaviors (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2017; Duan et al., 2016). However, research on the bidirectional causal relationship between proactive behaviors and leader reactions lags behind. For example, employee proactive behaviors can trigger leader empowering behaviors (Han et al., 2019; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015), while empowering leadership promotes employee proactive behavior development (Schilpzand et al., 2018). Yet the bidirectional causal relationship and whether they mutually reinforce and spiral upward or gradually reach equilibrium remain untested. Additionally, recent research shows employees use ostracism and hostility to counter harmful leaders (Tepper et al., 2015; Walsh et al., 2019). Therefore, research on virtuous cycles between proactive behaviors and positive leadership, and vicious cycles with negative leadership, can help us understand the broad consequences of proactive behaviors, examine their dynamic development, and provide theoretical and practical insights for breaking existing vicious interaction patterns, practicing effective proactive behaviors, and promoting effective leadership process interactions and optimal outcomes (Parker et al., 2019; Wee et al., 2017).

Finally, research should expand to multilevel studies of leaders' reactions to employee proactive behaviors. Followership research emphasizes the dual role of superiors and subordinates in effective leadership processes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). To achieve team goals, leaders must interact and collaborate with team members. However, existing research mainly focuses on dyadic leader reactions to individual employee proactive behaviors, with less attention to how leaders respond to team-level proactive behaviors (Sessions et al., 2020). Compared to individual-level research, team-level research has unique properties in composition and emergence, such as member intimacy (Wee et al., 2017) and frequency differences in the same behavior (Sessions et al., 2020), as well as unique team behavior impacts on leaders. These unique properties await future exploration to advance followership research and our understanding of proactive behaviors.

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