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## “Arrogance from Favor” or “Living Up to Expectations”: The Double-Edged Sword Effect of Leader Favoritism on Subordinates’ Extra-Role Behavior

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### Abstract

Liking refers to a subject’s holistic emotional preference for other entities. Existing research has demonstrated that leaders’ liking for subordinates positively influences subordinates’ affective commitment and job satisfaction; however, these studies have failed to uncover the negative effects concealed beneath the well-intentioned nature of liking. In light of this, drawing on the cognitive appraisal theory of emotion, this study investigates the “double-edged sword” effect of leaders’ liking for subordinates on subordinates’ extra-role behaviors. Through a two-stage, multi-source questionnaire survey, the findings reveal that leaders’ liking for subordinates may both foster organizational citizenship behavior by eliciting subordinates’ gratitude and increase organizational deviant behavior by eliciting subordinates’ pride; these effects are contingent upon subordinates’ perceived ability scarcity and individual traditionality. This study extends the theoretical perspectives and mechanisms of workplace liking research and validates the important role of cultural values in the influence of workplace liking.

### Full Text

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your study offers only minor, incremental contributions without attempting to open new areas of inquiry or propose unique and innovative perspectives—especially if it merely examines algorithms or techniques without addressing clear psychological questions—the likelihood of acceptance is low. We recommend submitting such work to other journals.

**Response:** First, this study reveals that leaders' liking for subordinates can trigger subordinates' feelings of hubristic pride and gratitude, thereby exerting a dual effect on their extra-role behaviors. This expands the research perspective on workplace liking and advances the field of emotion research.

Second, our findings enrich the literature on the outcomes of workplace liking, helping researchers more comprehensively understand the complex relationship between leader liking and subordinate behavioral performance. Finally, by introducing individual traditionality, this study validates the important role of cultural values in the influence of liking and reveals the unique impact of leader liking in the Chinese cultural context.

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**Response:** First, this study adopted a two-wave, leader-subordinate paired survey design to reduce common method bias. Second, we used Harman's single-factor test to assess common method bias. The results showed that factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 explained 65.02% of total variance, exceeding the 60% baseline. However, the first principal component explained only 19.31% of variance, below the 40% threshold and not exceeding half of the total variance explained. Therefore, common method bias is not a serious problem in this study. Finally, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis on seven study variables using Mplus 8.3. Results indicated that our hypothesized seven-factor model showed significantly better fit indices than six alternative models ( $\chi^2 = 442.32$ ,  $df = 254$ ,  $CFI = 0.94$ ,  $TLI = 0.93$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ,  $SRMR = 0.05$ ), demonstrating good discriminant validity among the seven variables and absence of serious common method bias.

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**Response:** Yes. The paper fully reports effect sizes for statistical tests and 95% CIs for mediation and moderated mediation effects.

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**Response:** The planned sample size was 360 full-time employees and their 80 direct leaders. We ultimately collected 304 valid paired questionnaires (79 leader questionnaires and 304 employee questionnaires). The deviation from the planned sample size occurred because our two-wave, leader-subordinate paired design resulted in some participants failing to complete the entire survey, leading to sample attrition due to unmatched leader-subordinate data.

**6. For p-values, report exact values (e.g.,  $p = .034$ ) rather than ranges (e.g.,  $p < .05$ ), except for  $p < .001$ . Does your paper meet this requirement? For Bayes factors, did you report sensitivity to prior distribution assumptions?**

**Response:** Yes.

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**Response:** This study did not exclude any data, had no missing data, did not delete any scale items, and reported all measured items and variables.

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**Response:** All scales used in this study are established measures from published literature and are available upon request.

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**Response:** No. Our institution does not have an ethics committee. Relevant ethical compliance documentation can be supplemented later upon editorial request.

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## “Being Arrogant” or “Living Up to Expectations”: The Double-Edged Sword Effect of Leaders’ Liking on Followers’ Extra-Role Behaviors

### Abstract

Liking refers to an overall affective preference that a subject holds toward other entities. Previous research has shown that leaders’ liking for subordinates positively influences subordinates’ affective commitment and job satisfaction. However, these studies have failed to uncover the negative effects hidden beneath the benevolent intention of liking. Addressing this gap, the present study draws upon appraisal theories of emotion to examine the double-edged sword effect of leaders’ liking on followers’ extra-role behaviors. Using a two-wave, multi-source survey design, results indicate that leaders’ liking can either promote followers’ organizational citizenship behavior by eliciting gratitude or increase their organizational deviance by triggering hubristic pride. These divergent effects depend on followers’ perceived rarity of competence and individual traditionality. This study expands the theoretical perspective and mechanisms of workplace liking research and validates the important role of cultural values in the influence of liking.

**Keywords:** liking; organizational deviance; organizational citizenship behavior; emotional reactions; appraisal theories of emotion

Liking and mutual appreciation between leaders and subordinates in the workplace represent a common management phenomenon (Chory & Hoke, 2019). Liking reflects a positive interpersonal affect and represents a synthesis of feelings of attraction (Tsui & Barry, 1986). Research indicates that the presence of liking in the workplace not only affects employees’ daily work experiences but may also exert profound influences on leadership effectiveness and subordinate behavioral performance (Dulebohn et al., 2017). Specifically, leaders’ liking for subordinates may facilitate more effective communication and stronger support (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002), or promote the transformation of positive affect into positive work motivation, thereby enhancing work engagement and performance (Kong et al., 2017). These studies highlight the positive role of

liking in promoting workplace interactions and enhancing employee motivation. Thus, the positive effects of leaders' liking for subordinates benefit organizations considerably and represent an important force driving organizational development.

However, existing research has largely overlooked the potential negative effects of leaders' liking for subordinates. Related studies suggest that close leader-subordinate relationships increase subordinates' psychological entitlement, thereby increasing their likelihood of engaging in organizational deviance (X. Liu et al., 2024). Real-world cases also illustrate this phenomenon. For instance, Li Yinan—a favored protégé and “genius youth” of Ren Zhengfei—was promoted to Huawei's vice president at age 27 and was once designated as Huawei's next leader, enjoying “all the favor one could have.” Yet, the leader's liking failed to secure his loyalty. The high-profile Li Yinan caused prolonged internal friction at Huawei and later left to establish a rival company, becoming a major threat to Huawei. This demonstrates that leaders' liking does not always yield positive effects. If mismanaged, liking may cause subordinates to “become arrogant from favor,” thereby undermining organizational efficiency and threatening organizational performance and development. Therefore, deeply understanding how leaders' liking influences subordinate behavioral performance and exploring how to maximize its positive effects while avoiding its negative consequences hold important theoretical and practical significance.

Based on this background, this study examines the double-edged sword effect of leaders' liking on followers' extra-role behaviors. Compared to in-role performance, extra-role behaviors are more influenced by psychological and emotional resources (Wang et al., 2021) and are thus more likely to be affected by leader liking. Organizational citizenship behavior and organizational deviance are two common and closely related extra-role behaviors in management practice. The former refers to voluntary behaviors that benefit organizational functioning or member interests, while the latter refers to autonomous behaviors that may threaten or harm organizational/member interests. These behaviors are typically examined simultaneously as positive and negative aspects of employee extra-role behaviors (Bowling, 2010; Sulea et al., 2012; Ren & Chen, 2014; Wei et al., 2019). According to appraisal theories of emotion (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987), positive workplace events can trigger different emotional responses through employees' cognitive appraisal processes. Based on this theory, we propose that leaders' liking for subordinates, as a positive workplace event, can generate hubristic pride or gratitude, which differentially influence organizational deviance and organizational citizenship behavior. Furthermore, followers' perceived rarity of competence and individual traditionalism may affect their cognitive appraisal of leader liking, thereby influencing their emotional responses. Therefore, this study also examines the important boundary conditions of perceived rarity of competence and individual traditionalism.

This study makes important contributions to workplace liking and emotion research. First, by introducing an “emotional reactions” perspective based on ap-

praisal theories of emotion, we reveal the double-edged sword effect of leaders' liking on followers' behavioral performance, expanding research perspectives on workplace liking and advancing emotion research. Second, we enrich outcome research on workplace liking by revealing how leader liking influences extra-role behaviors through followers' emotional reactions. Finally, by introducing individual traditionalism as a contextual factor, we validate the important role of cultural values in the influence of liking and reveal the unique impact of leader liking in Chinese cultural contexts.

### Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

**Leader Liking and Followers' Extra-Role Behaviors** We propose that leader liking negatively predicts organizational deviance and positively influences organizational citizenship behavior. When leaders like a subordinate more, they are more likely to invest more affect in that subordinate and provide greater support, guidance, and resources (Sy, 2010; Whiteley et al., 2012; Kong et al., 2017). Based on the reciprocity principle of social exchange, subordinates develop a sense of responsibility and obligation to reciprocate the leader and organization, thereby engaging more in organizational citizenship behaviors that benefit organizational development and less in organizational deviance that may harm organizational interests (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Ren & Chen, 2014). Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H1:** Leader liking positively influences employee organizational citizenship behavior (H1a) and negatively influences organizational deviance (H1b).

**Interactive Effect of Leader Liking and Perceived Rarity of Competence** According to appraisal theories of emotion (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987), positive workplace events can trigger emotional responses through employees' cognitive appraisal processes, and employees' attributions for these events influence their appraisal and subsequent specific emotions. Specifically, employees who attribute positive events to external factors are more likely to experience gratitude, whereas those who attribute them to internal factors are more likely to experience pride (Scherer et al., 2001). Therefore, we contend that leaders' liking for subordinates, as a positive workplace event, can trigger relatively positive or negative emotional responses (Tang et al., 2020), and followers' attributions for this positive event influence their specific emotional reactions.

On one hand, when employees' perceived rarity of competence is higher—meaning they view themselves as more special within the team or organization—leader liking is more likely to trigger evaluations of their own rarity and uniqueness, potentially eliciting the relatively inflated self-conscious emotion of hubristic pride. Conversely, when employees' perceived rarity of competence is lower, the sense of superiority derived from leader liking weakens, and hubristic pride diminishes accordingly. Research shows that when employees attribute positive events to internal, stable, but uncontrollable factors such as talent or

ability, they are more likely to develop hubristic pride (Tracy & Robins, 2004, 2007). Therefore, we propose that if subordinates attribute leader liking more to their unique role in the team—such as an internal, stable cause resulting from competence rarity—they are more likely to evaluate leader liking as deserved and stable, thus generating hubristic pride.

On the other hand, if subordinates believe their abilities are relatively ordinary within the team (i.e., low perceived rarity of competence) but the leader still likes and supports them, enabling them to benefit from leader liking, they are more likely to attribute leader liking to the leader’s encouragement and benevolence—an external, unstable factor—and thus respond with the moral emotion of gratitude (McCullough et al., 2001; Scherer et al., 2001). Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H2:** The interaction between leader liking and followers’ perceived rarity of competence predicts followers’ hubristic pride (H2a) and gratitude (H2b).

**Interactive Effect of Leader Liking and Individual Traditionality** Individuals with different cultural characteristics differ in their judgments of self and environment, as well as in their behavioral manifestations and external reactions (Ma et al., 2023). Traditionality is considered one of the most important concepts describing Chinese value orientations, reflecting a set of internalized ideologies, values, and behavioral tendencies influenced by traditional Chinese culture, with authority compliance as its core element (Farh et al., 1997; Yang & Huang, 1991). First, employees high in traditionality tend to adhere to their role norms and obligations as “subordinates,” respecting and maintaining leaders in “superior” positions, and are less likely to generate ideas or actions that threaten leader interests (Wu et al., 2009; Yang & Huang, 1991). Thus, when facing leader liking, subordinates high in traditionality will less likely develop inflated hubristic pride. Meanwhile, because subordinates high in traditionality have high respect, trust, and obedience toward leaders (Farh et al., 2007), leader liking is more likely to make these subordinates feel flattered and develop a “loyal subordinate” role orientation, eliciting gratitude (Feng et al., 2018). Second, traditional Chinese culture, deeply influenced by Confucianism, emphasizes humility, gratitude, interpersonal harmony, and collective interests (Wang & Zhang, 2012; Su et al., 2022). Therefore, when leaders express liking for subordinates, subordinates high in traditionality are more likely to display humble and grateful attitudes consistent with traditional values, and are more inclined to express gratitude to maintain long-term good relationships with leaders (Gao et al., 2023), while less likely to display hubristic pride that may disrupt interpersonal harmony and collective interests. Conversely, employees low in traditionality focus more on personal achievement and self-expression than on leader or organizational interests (Hui et al., 2004), and are thus more likely to attribute leader liking to internal factors, viewing it as proof of personal achievement and generating hubristic pride. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H3:** The interaction between leader liking and followers’ individual traditional-

ity predicts followers' hubristic pride (H3a) and gratitude (H3b).

**Three-Way Interaction** Leaders' liking for subordinates, as a positive workplace event, triggers emotional responses through employees' cognitive appraisal processes, while individual factors—perceived rarity of competence and traditionality—jointly influence employees' cognitive judgments and attributions for this positive event. First, for employees low in traditionality but high in perceived rarity of competence, they focus more on personal achievement and self-expression than on others' interests (Hui et al., 2004). Therefore, they are more likely to attribute leader liking to their unique role in the team—an internal, stable cause resulting from competence rarity—and view leader liking as proof of personal achievement, thus eliciting hubristic pride (Tracy & Robins, 2004, 2007). For employees high in both traditionality and perceived rarity of competence, despite the tendency toward hubristic pride, traditional Chinese cultural values and social norms will suppress the intensity of subordinates' hubristic pride (Wang & Zhang, 2012). For employees high in traditionality but low in perceived rarity of competence, they have high respect, trust, and obedience toward leaders, while believing their abilities are relatively ordinary. However, because leaders still like them, they feel flattered and attribute leader liking to the leader's benevolence—an external, unstable factor—thus eliciting gratitude. For employees low in both traditionality and perceived rarity of competence, lacking internal attribution motivation (i.e., low perceived rarity of competence), they are more likely to follow the “inducement-contribution balance” principle under low traditionality (Su et al., 2022), reciprocating leader liking with relatively lower gratitude compared to high traditionality. In summary, we hypothesize:

**H4:** A three-way interaction exists among leader liking, followers' perceived rarity of competence, and individual traditionality in predicting followers' hubristic pride.

**H5:** A three-way interaction exists among leader liking, followers' perceived rarity of competence, and individual traditionality in predicting followers' gratitude.

**Effects of Hubristic Pride on Followers' Extra-Role Behaviors** Hubristic pride reflects a self-centered value system that can be severely distorted by inflated desires for superiority (He & Chen, 2020). First, employees experiencing hubristic pride are more likely to focus on their own achievements and dominance (Tracy et al., 2023) rather than organizational or other members' needs and goals, which may reduce their empathy toward others and commitment to the organization (Mitchell et al., 2018). Consequently, they engage less in organizational citizenship behavior and are more likely to engage in behaviors that harm organizational interests for personal gain, such as tardiness, early departure, and deception (Z. Liu et al., 2022; Mercadante & Tracy, 2022). Similarly, research shows that individuals with hubristic pride tend to distort situations to

enhance themselves at others' expense (Michie, 2009). Second, hubristic pride is typically accompanied by self-centeredness and overestimation of one's own authority (Shi et al., 2015; Yeung & Shen, 2019), which may lead employees to believe they are superior and need not follow organizational rules or procedures. Hubristic pride is also associated with lower moral judgment and prosocial motivation (Sanders et al., 2018). Therefore, we hypothesize that employees with hubristic pride will engage less in prosocial organizational citizenship behavior and more in organizational deviance that violates organizational norms. Empirical research demonstrates that when individuals experience high hubristic pride, they are more likely to prioritize their own needs over others', thus engaging less in organizational citizenship behavior (Brosi et al., 2016) and more likely to engage in organizational deviance (Z. Liu et al., 2022; Rubenstein et al., 2023). In summary, we propose:

**H6:** Hubristic pride negatively influences organizational citizenship behavior (H6a) and positively influences organizational deviance (H6b).

**Effects of Gratitude on Followers' Extra-Role Behaviors** First, gratitude as a moral emotion can enhance individuals' awareness of the benefits of moral behavior and strengthen their motivation to engage in more moral behaviors, which in organizations typically manifests as extra-role behaviors (McCullough et al., 2001; Xu & Li, 2016). Employees generally view leaders as organizational representatives. When employees feel grateful toward leaders, they are more likely to develop deeper connections with the organization and its members and take action to reciprocate the leader (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Therefore, grateful employees tend to view themselves as beneficiaries of leader liking, thus engaging more in behaviors expected by leaders (e.g., organizational citizenship behavior) to reciprocate (Sun et al., 2019), and are less likely to engage in behaviors detrimental to the organization (Song et al., 2024). Second, when employees experience high gratitude, they tend to place the leader's (benefactor's) and organization's interests above their own, prompting them to engage more in behaviors that benefit the organization and less in behaviors that may harm it (DeWall et al., 2012). Additionally, gratitude promotes prosocial behavior motivation through "repayment" and "broaden-and-build" (i.e., "paying it forward") mechanisms (Carnevale et al., 2021), and organizational citizenship behavior reflects both employees' repayment for leader liking and broaden-and-build effects on the organization. Empirical research shows that gratitude is positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior (Ford et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2019) and negatively correlated with organizational deviance (Song et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2022). In summary, we propose:

**H7:** Gratitude positively influences organizational citizenship behavior (H7a) and negatively influences organizational deviance (H7b).

The theoretical model of this study is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

## Method

**Participants and Procedure** Participants were full-time employees from enterprises in Southern China. To reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012), this study used a multi-source, two-wave design with leader-subordinate dyads. Questionnaire distribution and collection were conducted through the enterprise version of Wenjuanxing. We recruited participants through the following procedures: (1) We contacted team leaders through the alumni network of a university in Southern China, explained the study's objectives and procedures, invited their teams to participate, and assured strict confidentiality of collected data. (2) After obtaining informed consent from team leaders and members, we acquired team contact information. Through this approach, we obtained contact information for 80 team leaders and their 360 subordinates, including company name, department, leader name, contact information, and subordinates' contact information.

The survey was conducted in two waves separated by two weeks: (1) Wave 1 (T1): Leaders rated their liking for each subordinate and provided demographic information, while subordinates rated their liking for the leader, perceived rarity of competence, individual traditionality, and provided demographic information. (2) Wave 2 (T2): Subordinates self-reported hubristic pride, gratitude, and organizational deviance, while leaders rated each subordinate's organizational citizenship behavior. After excluding questionnaires with obvious response patterns and teams with fewer than 3 members, we obtained valid matched responses from 79 team leaders and 304 subordinates across 44 companies in Southern China, with an average of 4 members per team.

Regarding sample demographics, among the 79 team leaders, 51 (64.6%) were male and 28 (35.4%) were female; ages ranged from 27 to 56 years ( $M = 36.6$ ). In terms of education, 5.1% held junior college degrees, 60.8% held bachelor's degrees, and 34.2% held master's degrees or higher, indicating relatively high education levels. Among the 304 subordinates, 166 (54.6%) were male and 138 (45.4%) were female; ages ranged from 20 to 57 years ( $M = 31.1$ ). Education levels were: 8.2% high school/technical school or below, 30.6% junior college, 53.6% bachelor's, and 7.6% master's or higher. Tenure with current direct leaders ranged from 0.5 to 20 years ( $M = 2.9$ ).

**Measures** This study adopted scales published in high-level international journals whose validity has been repeatedly confirmed in existing research. We followed standard translation-back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1970) to develop the final questionnaire. All scales used a 5-point Likert format (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree").

**Leader liking for subordinates.** We used the 4-item scale developed by Wayne and Ferris (1990). A sample item is "I like this subordinate very much." Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.83$ .

**Hubristic pride.** We measured hubristic pride using the 7-item alpha pride

dimension from the pride scale developed by Tracy and Robins (2007). A sample item is “I sometimes feel arrogant.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.90$ .

**Gratitude.** We adapted the 3-item scale from Badrinarayanan et al. (2019). A sample item is “I am grateful to my supervisor.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.84$ .

**Perceived rarity of competence.** Following Chen et al. (2020), we adapted Vincent and Kouchaki’s (2016) perceived rarity of creativity scale. This 3-item scale includes items such as “Compared with other team members, my skills are unique.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.80$ .

**Individual traditionality.** We used the 5-item scale developed by Farh et al. (1997). A sample item is “A leader is like a parent, and all matters should be decided by him/her.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.80$ .

**Organizational deviance.** We adapted Bennett and Robinson’s (2000) scale to the Chinese context, resulting in 6 items. Considering that employees’ deviant behaviors are typically conducted privately without leaders’ knowledge, we followed common practice in existing research (e.g., Qin et al., 2020; Yam et al., 2018) and used self-report to measure organizational deviance. A sample item is “I sometimes intentionally slow down my work pace.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.88$ .

**Organizational citizenship behavior.** Following previous research (e.g., Lyubikh et al., 2022; Schabram & Heng, 2022), we used the 4 items with highest factor loadings from Smith’s (1983) OCB-altruism dimension. A sample item is “This subordinate often participates in work outside his/her job responsibilities.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.77$ .

**Control variables.** Following relevant studies (e.g., Wu et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2022), we controlled for subordinate gender, age, education, and tenure with leader. Coding was: gender (1 = male, 0 = female); education (1 = “high school/technical school or below,” 2 = “junior college,” 3 = “bachelor’s,” 4 = “master’s or above”); age and tenure with leader were based on actual responses.

**Analytical Strategy** Given the nested structure of our data (multiple subordinates nested within teams rated by the same direct leader), we used Mplus 8.3 with the “TYPE = COMPLEX; ESTIMATOR = MLR” command to address data non-independence (see Wu & Kwok, 2012). This approach is appropriate for non-independent data focusing on single-level variable relationships. Since our study examined individual-level variable relationships, this analytical strategy was suitable and has been used in previous studies with similar data structures (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Schabram & Heng, 2022; Lu et al., 2021). Additionally, we used Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to construct 95% confidence intervals for mediation effects to test hypotheses.

## Results

**Common Method Bias Test** We used Harman's single-factor test to assess common method bias. Results showed that factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 explained 65.02% of total variance, exceeding the 60% baseline. However, the first principal component explained only 19.31% of variance, below the 40% threshold and not exceeding half of the total variance explained. Therefore, common method bias is not a serious problem in this study.

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis** We conducted confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus 8.3 to test discriminant validity among the seven factors: leader liking, hubristic pride, gratitude, organizational deviance, organizational citizenship behavior, perceived rarity of competence, and individual traditionality. To balance sample size and number of estimated parameters, we first parcelled the hubristic pride and organizational deviance scales (which had many items) into three parcels each (Little et al., 2002). The seven-factor model treated all factors as independent. Alternative models included: six-factor (combining gratitude and traditionality), five-factor (combining leader liking, gratitude, and traditionality), four-factor (combining leader liking, gratitude, traditionality, and hubristic pride with perceived rarity of competence), three-factor (combining leader liking, gratitude, traditionality, and hubristic pride with perceived rarity of competence and organizational deviance), two-factor (combining leader liking, gratitude, traditionality, and organizational citizenship behavior vs. hubristic pride, perceived rarity of competence, and organizational deviance), and one-factor (combining all seven factors). As shown in Table 1, the seven-factor model demonstrated the best fit ( $\chi^2 = 442.32$ ,  $df = 254$ ,  $CFI = 0.94$ ,  $TLI = 0.93$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ,  $SRMR = 0.05$ ), indicating ideal discriminant validity among the seven variables.

**Descriptive Statistics** We analyzed means, standard deviations, and correlations using SPSS 26.0. As shown in Table 2, leader liking was significantly negatively correlated with organizational deviance ( $\gamma = -0.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and significantly positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior ( $\gamma = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hubristic pride was significantly positively correlated with organizational deviance ( $\gamma = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and significantly negatively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior ( $\gamma = -0.16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Gratitude was significantly negatively correlated with organizational deviance ( $\gamma = -0.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and significantly positively correlated with organizational citizenship behavior ( $\gamma = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results provide necessary preconditions for hypothesis testing.

**Hypothesis Testing** We constructed three structural equation models (M1, M2, and M3). M1 included the independent variable (leader liking), mediators (hubristic pride and gratitude), dependent variables (organizational deviance and organizational citizenship behavior), and control variables. M2 added moderators (perceived rarity of competence and individual traditionality) and two-

way interaction terms (between independent variable and moderators) to test the interactive effects of leader liking with perceived rarity of competence and traditionality on emotional reactions. M3 added a new two-way interaction term (between the two moderators) and a three-way interaction term (among leader liking, perceived rarity of competence, and traditionality) to test three-way interaction effects. To enhance model interpretability, we mean-centered independent and moderator variables before creating interaction terms. All models controlled for subordinate gender, age, education, and tenure with leader. Results are shown in Table 3 .

**Direct Effects Test** As shown in M1 in Table 3, leader liking had a significant direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior ( $b = 0.44, p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1a. Leader liking also had a significant direct effect on organizational deviance ( $b = -0.33, p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1b. Additionally, hubristic pride significantly positively influenced organizational deviance ( $b = 0.27, p < 0.01$ ) and significantly negatively influenced organizational citizenship behavior ( $b = -0.34, p < 0.001$ ), supporting H6a and H6b. Gratitude significantly negatively influenced organizational deviance ( $b = -0.15, p < 0.01$ ) and significantly positively influenced organizational citizenship behavior ( $b = 0.24, p < 0.001$ ), supporting H7a and H7b.

**Interaction Effects Test** To test H2, M2 in Table 3 shows that the interaction between leader liking and perceived rarity of competence significantly influenced hubristic pride ( $b = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ), indicating significant moderation. Simple slope tests revealed that when perceived rarity of competence was high, leader liking significantly positively influenced hubristic pride ( $b = 0.27, p < 0.001$ ); when perceived rarity of competence was low, the effect was non-significant ( $b = -0.10, p > 0.05$ ), with a significant difference between slopes ( $b = 0.37, p < 0.01$ ). Thus, H2a was supported. As shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper], when perceived rarity of competence was high, leader liking positively related to hubristic pride; when low, the relationship was non-significant.

Additionally, the interaction between leader liking and perceived rarity of competence significantly influenced gratitude ( $b = -0.21, p < 0.01$ ). Simple slope tests showed that when perceived rarity of competence was low, leader liking significantly positively influenced gratitude ( $b = 0.25, p < 0.001$ ); when perceived rarity of competence was high, the effect was non-significant ( $b = -0.09, p > 0.05$ ), with a significant difference ( $b = 0.34, p < 0.01$ ). Thus, H2b was supported. As shown in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper], when perceived rarity of competence was low, leader liking positively related to gratitude; when high, the relationship was non-significant.

To test H3, M2 in Table 3 shows that the interaction between leader liking and individual traditionality significantly influenced hubristic pride ( $b = -0.21, p < 0.05$ ). Simple slope tests revealed that when traditionality was high, leader

liking did not significantly influence hubristic pride ( $b = -0.05, p > 0.05$ ); when traditionality was low, leader liking significantly positively influenced hubristic pride ( $b = 0.22, p < 0.01$ ), with a significant difference ( $b = 0.27, p < 0.05$ ). Thus, H3a was supported. As shown in Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper], when traditionality was high, leader liking did not significantly relate to hubristic pride; when low, the relationship was positive.

Additionally, the interaction between leader liking and traditionality significantly influenced gratitude ( $b = 0.26, p < 0.01$ ). Simple slope tests showed that when traditionality was high, leader liking significantly positively influenced gratitude ( $b = 0.25, p < 0.01$ ); when traditionality was low, the effect was non-significant ( $b = -0.08, p > 0.05$ ), with a significant difference ( $b = 0.33, p < 0.01$ ). Thus, H3b was supported. As shown in Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper], when traditionality was high, leader liking positively related to gratitude; when low, the relationship was non-significant.

To test the three-way interaction in H4, M3 in Table 3 and Figure 6 [Figure 6: see original paper] show that the three-way interaction among leader liking, perceived rarity of competence, and traditionality significantly influenced hubristic pride ( $b = 0.18, p < 0.05$ ), indicating that traditionality significantly moderates the moderating effect of perceived rarity of competence on the leader liking-hubristic pride relationship. Specifically, as shown in Figure 7 [Figure 7: see original paper], under low traditionality, when perceived rarity of competence was high, leader liking significantly positively influenced hubristic pride ( $b = 0.31, p < 0.05$ ); when perceived rarity of competence was low, the effect was non-significant ( $b = 0.12, p > 0.05$ ), with no significant difference ( $b = 0.19, p > 0.05$ ). As shown in Figure 8 [Figure 8: see original paper], under high traditionality, when perceived rarity of competence was high, leader liking significantly positively influenced hubristic pride ( $b = 0.19, p < 0.05$ ); when perceived rarity of competence was low, leader liking significantly negatively influenced hubristic pride ( $b = -0.38, p < 0.001$ ), with a significant difference ( $b = -0.57, p < 0.001$ ). Thus, H4 was supported.

To test the three-way interaction in H5, M3 in Table 3 and Figure 9 [Figure 9: see original paper] show that the three-way interaction among leader liking, perceived rarity of competence, and traditionality significantly influenced gratitude ( $b = 0.20, p < 0.05$ ), indicating that traditionality significantly moderates the moderating effect of perceived rarity of competence on the leader liking-gratitude relationship. Specifically, as shown in Figure 10 [Figure 10: see original paper], under low traditionality, when perceived rarity of competence was high, leader liking significantly negatively influenced gratitude ( $b = -0.38, p < 0.01$ ); when perceived rarity of competence was low, leader liking significantly positively influenced gratitude ( $b = 0.21, p < 0.05$ ), with a significant difference ( $b = 0.59, p < 0.001$ ). As shown in Figure 11 [Figure 11: see original paper], under high traditionality, when perceived rarity of competence was high, leader liking did not significantly influence gratitude ( $b = 0.11, p < 0.05$ ); when perceived rarity of competence was low, leader liking significantly positively in-

fluenced gratitude ( $b = 0.30, p < 0.01$ ), with no significant difference ( $b = 0.19, p > 0.05$ ). Thus, H5 was supported.

## Discussion

**Main Findings** Based on appraisal theories of emotion, this study examined the emotional reaction mechanisms through which leaders' liking influences followers' extra-role behaviors. Using two-wave, multi-source leader-member matched data, we tested the mediating roles of hubristic pride and gratitude when moderated by followers' perceived rarity of competence and individual traditionalness. Results show that: (1) leaders' liking for subordinates can generate hubristic pride or gratitude, with specific pathways and effects depending on employees' perceived rarity of competence and traditionalness; (2) leaders' liking can directly or indirectly influence followers' organizational citizenship behavior and organizational deviance through followers' hubristic pride or gratitude.

**Theoretical Contributions** This study makes several theoretical contributions to workplace liking and emotion research. First, by introducing an “emotional reactions” perspective based on appraisal theories of emotion, we reveal the double-edged sword effect of leaders' liking on followers' behavioral performance, expanding research perspectives on workplace liking and advancing emotion research. Previous workplace liking research has primarily examined positive effects on workplace relationships from a social exchange perspective (Cogliser et al., 2009; Moideenkutty & Schmidt, 2016) or discussed interference in cognitive evaluation processes from a cognitive bias perspective (Schraeder & Simpson, 2006; Sutton et al., 2013; Wessels et al., 2020). However, these studies have not comprehensively revealed the negative effects hidden beneath the benevolent intention of liking. Our study introduces an emotional perspective to reveal the double-edged sword effect of leader liking, showing that it can trigger followers' hubristic pride and gratitude under certain conditions, thereby exerting dual effects on extra-role behaviors.

Second, limited research has examined how leader liking affects employees' actual performance, especially extra-role behaviors driven more by emotional factors. Our study reveals how leader liking influences extra-role behaviors through followers' emotional reactions. We propose that when followers' perceived rarity of competence is high or traditionalness is low, leader liking will more strongly influence organizational citizenship behavior negatively and organizational deviance positively through hubristic pride (the “becoming arrogant from favor” path). When perceived rarity of competence is low or traditionalness is high, leader liking will more strongly influence organizational citizenship behavior positively and organizational deviance negatively through gratitude (the “living up to expectations” path). These findings enrich outcome research on workplace liking, respond to scholars' calls for further examining liking's effects on other employee attitudes and behaviors from different theoretical perspectives (Kong et al., 2017), advance emotion research, and help researchers more comprehensively

sively understand the complex relationship between leader liking and follower behavioral performance.

Finally, by introducing individual traditionalness as a contextual factor, we validate the important role of cultural values in the influence of liking and reveal the unique impact of leader liking in Chinese cultural contexts. In Chinese culture, gratitude integrates benevolence and emotion, manifesting as a moral and emotional reciprocal responsibility that drives social exchange (Liu et al., 2019). Focusing on the emotional concept of “leader liking for subordinates” in the Chinese cultural context, our study provides an in-depth exploration of the antecedents of indigenous “workplace gratitude,” helping researchers better understand gratitude in Chinese culture and enriching antecedent research on gratitude. Previous research suggests that cultural factors may affect the expression, interpretation, and actual impact of workplace liking (Zheng et al., 2023; Chen & Chen, 2008), but no empirical studies have examined the important role of cultural factors in leader liking’s influence mechanisms. By introducing traditionalness—a culturally representative variable in the Chinese context—as a contextual factor, our study reveals the important boundary role of cultural values in the relationship between leader liking and followers’ emotional and behavioral responses, helping researchers more deeply understand the unique influence of workplace liking in Chinese culture.

**Practical Implications** Our findings offer important implications for effectively managing workplace liking in three ways. First, this study demonstrates that leaders’ liking for subordinates plays a key role in influencing followers’ extra-role behaviors. This highlights that in modern management practice, beyond focusing on work tasks and performance goals, organizations should emphasize establishing and maintaining good emotional connections. Leaders need not only effective management skills and business knowledge but also high emotional communication abilities, including understanding and respecting subordinates’ emotional needs and appropriately expressing support, liking, and appreciation. This emotional communication capability is crucial for building stable and positive work environments. Organizations should also provide relevant training and resources to help leaders learn and practice effective emotional communication skills, and encourage leaders to apply these skills in daily management through regular team-building activities and formal feedback mechanisms.

Second, when expressing liking for subordinates, managers need to carefully consider and adjust their behaviors and communication styles to promote followers’ gratitude while minimizing hubristic pride. Our research indicates that leader liking can elicit either gratitude or hubristic pride, which have different behavioral consequences. Therefore, on one hand, managers should understand different subordinates’ personality characteristics and emotional needs to better adjust their expression of liking, ensuring it conveys sincere support and affirmation without causing misunderstanding or excessive self-satisfaction. On the other hand, managers should adopt more balanced and objective ways to

express appreciation and liking. For example, they can provide regular feedback and praise to encourage excellent performance while also offering constructive suggestions to help subordinates maintain humility and self-improvement awareness.

Finally, managers should more effectively adjust their management styles and emotional communication strategies based on follower characteristics to build more harmonious and positive work relationships. Our findings show that followers' perceived rarity of competence and traditionality play important moderating roles in influencing emotional reactions. When subordinates perceive their abilities as rare and uniquely valuable, they are more likely to develop hubristic pride in response to leader liking; those who view their abilities as common or easily replaceable are more likely to feel gratitude. Similarly, individual traditionality influences how subordinates understand and respond to leader liking. Subordinates high in traditionality are more likely to view leader liking as a favor that reflects respect for leader authority and benevolence (Cheng et al., 2021), and are thus more likely to engage in behaviors beneficial to leaders or the organization (e.g., organizational citizenship behavior) to reciprocate. Therefore, managers should timely understand subordinates' self-perceptions of their abilities and develop deeper understanding of subordinates' cultural backgrounds and values, thereby more effectively adjusting management styles and emotional communication strategies to build more harmonious and positive work relationships.

**Limitations and Future Directions** This study has several limitations that warrant future research. First, we focused on the effects of leaders' liking for subordinates, but other forms of liking exist in organizations, including subordinates' liking for leaders, leader-team liking, and team member (peer) liking. Future research could examine the effects of these other forms of liking. Additionally, with the development of digital technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, robots are increasingly used in enterprises, and organizational management research is paying growing attention to AI (Tang et al., 2023; Yam et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). In this context, future research could examine the antecedents and effects of employees' liking for robots in human-robot interaction, or how incongruence between team leaders' and members' liking for robot members affects human-robot collaboration effectiveness.

Second, this study focused on individual-level emotional effects, examining the mediating roles of hubristic pride and gratitude and the moderating effects of perceived rarity of competence and traditionality. Although these factors are important for understanding leader liking's influence, they reveal only part of the story. Future research should expand perspectives to consider other potential mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions for a more comprehensive understanding. For example, future research could examine mediation from perspectives of justice or self-verification. For moderation, leader liking differentiation may importantly affect inter-employee interactions and attitudes. Leaders'

emotional intelligence and political skills are also crucial for establishing and maintaining complex leader-subordinate relationships, making examination of these leader characteristics important boundary conditions. Additionally, team competitive climate may influence liking's mechanisms by affecting team member interaction patterns. Finally, organizational-level factors such as organizational justice and high-commitment work systems may also moderate workplace liking's influence. Future research should examine these leader, team, and organizational boundary conditions to provide more comprehensive insights into leader liking's effects.

Finally, although we examined leader liking's effects on employee extra-role behaviors, we did not investigate its dynamic and congruence effects. Compared to similar constructs, workplace liking as a subjective judgment has temporal characteristics—liking from the same subject toward a specific object changes over time. During this process, the object's behavioral performance may cause dynamic changes in liking. Therefore, future research could use diary and experience sampling methods to capture the dynamic influence of leader liking → employee behavior → leader liking. Additionally, liking has directional characteristics, making it suitable for congruence research perspectives and response surface analysis to deeply examine matching effects between leader and subordinate liking.

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### Scales Used in This Study

**Leader Liking for Subordinates** 1. I like this subordinate very much.

**Hubristic Pride** 1. I sometimes feel arrogant.

**Gratitude** 1. I am grateful to my supervisor for his/her appreciation.

**Organizational Deviance** 1. I sometimes intentionally reduce my work input.

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior** 1. Even when not asked, this subordinate takes the time to help new employees in the department.

**Individual Traditionality** 1. It is natural for superiors to criticize young subordinates.

**Perceived Rarity of Competence** 1. The knowledge and skills I possess are rare in our team.

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

*Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.*