



# Proactivity at Work

## The Roles of Respectful Leadership and Leader Group Prototypicality

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**Abstract.** We propose that two aspects of leadership, perceived respectful leadership and the degree of leaders' prototypicality, positively affect employee proactivity. A multisource and multilevel field study of 234 employees supervised by 62 leaders shows that respectful leadership relates positively to employee proactivity in terms of personal initiative and that leader group prototypicality diminishes this effect. Moreover, perceived respectful leadership and prototypicality substitute for one another in their relation to follower proactivity. This study contributes to previous research that shows leader–follower relationships enhance proactivity by showing the impact of perceived respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality.

**Keywords:** proactivity, personal initiative, respectful leadership, leader group prototypicality, multilevel modeling

As leaders face increasing demands to communicate, motivate, and navigate their staff through daily hassles, tasks, and deadlines toward meeting organizational goals, employees' proactive contribution is an invaluable asset (Urbach & Fay, 2020). Proactive employees create value in organizations by generating continual improvement, especially when using their proactivity for the benefit of their organizations, for example, in the form of personal initiative (Fay & Frese, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Thomas et al., 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013). Leaders set the tone in motivating employee initiative (Rank et al., 2007; Urbach & Fay, 2020). They invite employees to be proactive through creation of a safe climate, for example, by using communicative means such as respectful inquiry (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). The present study explores whether and how *follower perceptions of respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality* – the leader's value congruence with the workgroup – support employee proactivity.

Followers who perceive their leader as respectful feel seen as worthy human beings, regardless of their merits or work accomplishments (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). Leader group prototypicality signals how strongly a leader embodies the group norms (Hogg, 2001). Highly

group-prototypical leaders represent congruence with in-group positions and distance from outgroup positions (Hogg et al., 2012). For followers, this encourages a comfort with leaders who express known values of the group. In combination, these two factors can enhance employees' comfort in showing proactivity in the form of personal initiative. Because of this, we expect that follower perceived respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality compensate for one another in fostering proactivity.

Recent research has provided new insights into how leader–follower relationships support proactive behavior among followers (Urbach & Fay, 2020). We contribute to this research by exploring the role of perceived respectful leadership in creating an environment for follower proactivity in terms of personal initiative. Moreover, as studies have shown that followers may receive differential treatment by their leaders and thus experience these relationships differently (e.g., Henderson et al., 2009), we focus on perceived respectful leadership specifically. In addition, we explore how leader group prototypicality supports such follower proactivity. Moreover, we extend previous research on the positive effects of leader group prototypicality on effectiveness to proactivity (Barreto & Hogg, 2017).

## Proactive Behavior

Research on proactive behavior has flourished over the past 20 years (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010). Proactive behavior includes elements of taking charge, identifying problems and their solutions (Parker et al., 2010). Proactive employees can act in their own favor and/or positively affect organizations by smoothing organization processes (Parker & Collins, 2010). The latter has been framed as *personal initiative* in the literature (Fay & Frese, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008) and defines the lens through which we view proactivity in this paper. Research emphasizes that proactive employees perform better (Frese & Fay, 2001) and that their success drives innovation (Glaub et al., 2014; Hakanen et al., 2008).

However, proactive behavior poses risk to employees should their creative actions fail or face underappreciation (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Leaders may downplay innovations and ostracize employees' initiatives that undermine leaders' reputations (Fay & Sonnentag, 2002), and leaders may question the prosocial motives of employees more when the extant relationship with the employee is weaker (Urbach & Fay, 2020). Therefore, employees need to feel safe engaging in initiatives based on their relationship with their leaders (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009; Urbach et al., 2016).

Good leadership encourages employee proactivity as suggested by research showing that transformational leadership positively relates to proactive employee behavior (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Griffin et al., 2010; Rank et al., 2007), as does a positive leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship (Urbach & Fay, 2020), because good leaders provide opportunities for their followers to engage safely in proactive initiatives. Employees are more inclined to initiate organizationally beneficial activities when they do not fear punishment (Baer & Frese, 2003; Urbach & Fay, 2020). Leaders' behavior therefore affects how safe employees feel to demonstrate proactivity (Urbach et al., 2016).

## Respectful Leadership and Employee Proactivity

Respectful leadership promotes a workplace climate that supports proactive risk-taking (Ellemers et al., 2013). Unconditional respect supports employees' feelings of belongingness, allowing them to express themselves and take initiative without fear of retribution (Grover, 2014). Respectful leadership is defined as "treating others as equals or, at least, extending them equal dignity" (Decker & Van Quaquebeke, 2015, p. 544) because it touches employees' core needs of being recognized and respected as human

beings (Darwall, 1977). Perceiving respectful leadership provides employees with the impression that their leader takes them and their work seriously, treats them with honesty and politeness, and shows genuine interest in their opinions (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010).

Respectful leadership positively affects employees' work experience – including job satisfaction (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010) and evaluations of leader effectiveness (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2013) – as well as on pro-organizational behaviors like participation (Stürmer et al., 2008) and academic performance (Mertz et al., 2015). In short, perceiving that they work with a respectful leader, based on the own experience and comparisons within the team, creates a positive environment for employees to safely take proactive initiatives.

Respectful leadership signals to employees that they can confidently assume the risk of acting proactively (Baer & Frese, 2003; Grover, 2014). Respectful leadership confirms that employees belong to the group and serves as a central source of self-esteem and motivation (Grover, 2021). Respectful leadership relieves employees' uncertainty and grants the latitude to identify with the team and to exert influence on its team (De Cremer, 2002). By communicating acceptance and consideration to employees, respectful leadership provides the foundation for acting autonomously (Renger et al., 2017), which in turn leads to higher levels of personal initiative or proactive behavior. In summary, we hypothesize that perceiving that the leader treats the follower with respect cultivates psychological resources to fuel proactivity.

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceived respectful leadership relates positively to employee proactivity.

## Leader Group Prototypicality and Employee Proactivity

Leader's group prototypicality describes the degree to which leaders represent ingroup similarities and intergroup differences (Hogg et al., 1998). By communicating that they view themselves as team members and share group objectives (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003), group-prototypical leaders signal that they uphold the group's norms and objectives (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001). Group prototypicality is an essential asset for leaders to guide their employees (Reicher et al., 2005) and to allow leeway for mistakes (Giessner et al., 2009). Highly group-prototypical leaders appear more similar to team members and are more easily assimilated into the ingroup (Hogg, 2001). In turn, their employees are more inclined to

cooperate with the group through increased proactivity (Cicero et al., 2008), knowing that they will be treated with, as well as protected by, the group norms (Hogg, 2001). In consequence, highly group-prototypical leaders are stronger in stimulating employee proactivity because employees are more willing to cooperate with their leaders' requests (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008) as they appreciate working for group-prototypical leaders (Engle & Lord, 1997). Leaders' group prototypicality thereby supports identification with followers' work group and enhances employee cooperation with the group (Steffens et al., 2015).

Less group-prototypical leaders, in contrast, do not enjoy these positive mechanisms as they serve neither as a signpost nor as a safeguard of the group's norms (Hogg, 2001). As these leaders are not part of their employees' cognitive representation of the "us" (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003), it is hard for employees to predict their leaders' reactions to their proactive initiatives. Research shows that leaders who are more uncertain about their own power position are perceived as less effective by their followers (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Thus, while group-prototypical leaders increase followers' feelings of safety, non-group-prototypical leaders may interact with groups in a more dominant or self-promoting way (Rast et al., 2018). This may result in employees showing proactivity in response to group-prototypical leaders, while leader non-group-prototypicality leaves less space for employees' initiative or proactivity. In short, leader's perception of their group prototypicality corresponds to the leader's willingness to support employees and cooperate with the team. This should make employees of such leaders feel more comfortable with showing proactivity. For these reasons, we propose that leader group-prototypicality fosters employee proactivity:

*Hypothesis 2:* Leader group-prototypicality relates positively to employee proactivity.

## The Interaction Between Respectful Leadership and Leader Group Prototypicality

Both perceived respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality are expected to promote employee proactivity for similar reasons. We therefore propose that perceived respectful leadership and leader group

prototypicality substitute for one another. Theory on respectful leadership suggests that leaders' respect positively affects employees' motivated work behavior (personal initiative) as it communicates that the leader upholds norms of respect and even failed personal initiative will not question the employees' belongingness to the work group (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Moreover, "prototypical group leaders are, in a way, the embodiment of the group, they are trusted to further the group's interest without having to display their group-orientedness" (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005, p. 28). De Cremer et al. (2010) find that followers endorse prototypical leaders because they expect these leaders to act benevolently. However, when a leader's group prototypicality is low – and thus, the group faces weaker social tethers – respectful leadership becomes a more important basis for social interaction and connection within the team (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010).

Research shows that leader group prototypicality substitutes for the effect of leader self-sacrifice on leadership effectiveness (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005); it also substitutes for goal setting (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008) and information on leader performance (Giessner et al., 2009).<sup>1</sup> As respectful leadership helps to overcome the difficulties arising when followers work atypical or dissimilar leaders (van Gils et al., 2018), being led by a group-prototypical leader may be at least as important for employees as the degree of respectful leadership.

We suggest that perceived respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality substitute for one another based on their similar functions for personal initiative. First, they both emphasize the common group membership of leaders and employees: Respectful leadership does so by taking employees seriously (De Cremer, 2002), while leader group prototypicality does so by emphasizing the leader's belongingness to the employee's group (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Second, respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality both emphasize the equality of leaders and employees – for the former, on the basis of equal dignity (Renger & Simon, 2011); for the latter, on the basis of shared group norms (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Thus, the followers of prototypical leaders can feel more comfortable taking initiative and being proactive, knowing that their actions will be supported by the group (Frese & Fay, 2001). Third, both respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality imply a higher social connectedness (Ellemers et al., 2013) that fosters a willingness to contribute to work groups (Grant & Ashford, 2008). This might be based on employees' individual perception of the leader or on a comparison of their own perceptions of

<sup>1</sup> This effect may be limited to the extent that the group norms entail appreciation and do not reduce psychological safety.

respectful leadership with the consensus in the group. In any case, the higher social connectedness manifests as less fear over being punished by or ostracized from the team (De Cremer et al., 2010). Thus, as conveyed in Hypothesis 3, experiencing that one's leader is leading with respect may be even more important for showcasing leaders' group-orientedness to make employees feel comfortable and to fuel proactivity.

*Hypothesis 3:* The effects of perceived respectful leadership on employee proactivity are stronger for less prototypical leaders than for more prototypical leaders.

## Method

### Sample

We collected our data during the course of executive leadership training in Turkey and Germany.<sup>2</sup> The goal of the training was to provide participants understanding of their own leadership styles in light of classic and contemporary leadership theories. The data collection was conducted before the training. At this time, the participating leaders had no information about the concrete contents of the training, nor the three measured construct or what any of the items are measuring. They completed an online self-assessment and then were asked to send a web link to all their employees with the other-assessment survey. We matched the data based on a unique anonymous password for each leader. Surveys were conducted in English, the main language of the companies. To protect employees' anonymity, we provided aggregated feedback for the leaders only if at least three employees participated. The personalized results of both self-assessment and aggregated other assessment were reported confidentially and individually to each leader during the training.

The final sample included 62 teams. The Turkey subsample consisted of 49 teams with 195 employees, all employed at one large international bank based in Turkey. The German subsample consisted of 13 teams with 39 employees, all of whom worked at an internationally operating law firm based in Germany. Altogether, the average group size was 3.77 ( $SD = 4.14$ ). The average age of the employees was 33.45 years ( $SD = 7.32$ ); 62% were male. The average age of the leaders was 35.03 years ( $SD = 5.20$ );

79% were male. To minimize the risk of common method variance, we collected one variable, leader group prototypicality, from an external source by asking leaders to rate this variable. In this way, we sought to reduce the probability that the discovered relations originate from a methodological bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

### Leader Survey

We opted to measure leader group prototypicality not from the employee perspective (Lipponen et al., 2005), but, following a more conservative approach, from the leader perspective. In fact, leaders actively shape their own appearance of group prototypicality rather than merely being passive recipients of employees' perceptions (Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008). We used Giessner and van Knippenberg's (2008) adapted version of the three-item leader group prototypicality scale that is especially formulated for self-ratings. One sample item is "I represent what is characteristic about my team." Items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

### Employee Survey

#### Perceived Respectful Leadership

We measured follower perceptions of respectful leadership with the 12-item scale developed by Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff (2010). One sample item is "My leader takes me and my work seriously."

#### Employee Proactivity

We assessed this construct using the 7-item personal initiative scale developed by Frese et al. (1997). One sample item is "Whenever something goes wrong, I search for a solution immediately."

All items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

### Analysis Strategy

To test our hypotheses, we tested a multilevel random slope model in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). We followed recommendations by Bliese (2016) and Bell et al. (2019) to specify a model separating within-group and between-group effects. We tested Hypothesis 1 specifying perceived respectful leadership as a group-mean centered level 1

<sup>2</sup> This research was part of a larger data collection effort. For the sake of brevity, we only list the scales that were included for the purpose of the current study.

predictor, allowing us to focus on within-group effects at level 1 (Enders & Tofghi, 2007). To account for between-group effects of respectful leadership that are removed by the group mean centering, we included respectful leadership as an aggregated variable at the group level in the analysis of the main effects as well as for the interaction effect (see Bell et al., 2019). For testing Hypothesis 2, we specified group prototypicality as a grand mean-centered level 2 predictor. We tested Hypothesis 3 by specifying a random intercept and random slope model and including the cross-level interaction. Extending the equations presented by Bell et al. (2019), we specify the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{PersInit}_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_{1W}(\text{Resp}_{ij} - \text{RespMean}_i) \\ & + \beta_{2B}\text{RespMean}_i + \beta_{3B}\text{Proto}_i + \beta_4\text{Resp}_{ij}\text{Proto}_i \\ & + U_{i0} + U_{i1}(\text{Resp}_{ij} - \text{RespMean}_i) + \varepsilon_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

Model fit statistics show a slight improvement in the model by including the interaction term ( $\Delta\text{AIC} = 2.5$ ).

## Results

Table 1 presents *M*, *SDs*, and unnested correlations of the main variables. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's for all scales are presented on the diagonal.

Before conducting our main analyses, we first inspected the intraclass correlation ( $\text{ICC}_2 = .29$ ) for respectful leadership. Given Bacharach et al.'s (2008) argument that lower values for  $\text{ICC}_2$  can be acceptable when group sizes are small, we proceeded with our analyses. Employee proactivity displayed an  $\text{ICC}_1$  of .06, indicating that only 6% of the variance was between-leader variation, while 94% of the variance was between-employee variation.

In Hypothesis 1, we predicted that perceived respectful leadership related positively to employee proactivity. The

results of our random slopes random intercept multilevel model can be observed in Table 2. Operationalizing perceived respectful leadership, we were specifically interested in individual level (level 1) effects. The results for the main effects model are listed in Table 1, which supported the hypothesized positive relationship between respectful leadership and employee personal initiative (estimate = 0.35,  $p < .001$ ).

Hypothesis 2 focused on the positive relationship between leader group prototypicality and employee proactivity. We tested this hypothesis in the random slopes random intercept multilevel model listed as main effects model in Table 2. We operationalized prototypicality as a leader self-rated variable and thus were specifically interested in between-group (level 2) effects. The main effects model showed a marginally positive relationship between leader group prototypicality and employee proactivity (estimate = 0.08,  $p = .08$ ). Implications are discussed below.

To test Hypothesis 3, predicting that leader group prototypicality would moderate the relationship between perceived respectful leadership and employee proactivity, we included a cross-level interaction term in our model. The results are listed as interaction model in Table 2 and show a significant effect for the cross-level moderation (estimate =  $-0.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3.

## Supplementary Analyses

### Group Size

To rule out artifacts in our effects that might have been due to some groups in our sample consisting of only two members, we reran the analyses including only teams for which three or more members completed the survey. This produced a sample of 199 employees, nested in 47 teams.  $\text{ICC}_2$  increased to  $\text{ICC}_2 = .33$ , and the pattern of results remained the same.

**Table 1.** *M*, *SD*, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (diagonal), and correlations of the independent and dependent variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(1) Employee personal initiative <sup>a</sup>	5.71	0.38	.74	.28*	.29*	.24	-.09	-.12	.06	.00
(2) Perceived respectful leadership <sup>a</sup>	6.04	0.51	.41**	.93	.72**	.11	-.13	.01	-.07	-.03
(3) Leader group prototypicality <sup>b</sup>	4.96	1.03	.31**	.61**	.69	.50**	-.27*	.07	-.19	.00
(4) Nationality <sup>b</sup> (Turkish = 83.0%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.27*	-.12	-.06	.19
(5) Leader age <sup>b</sup>	35.05	5.29	—	—	—	—	—	.24	.54**	.01
(6) Leader gender <sup>b</sup> (male = 79.0%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.18	.23
(7) Employee age <sup>a</sup>	33.42	7.20	.06	.07	-.03	—	—	—	—	.09
(8) Employee gender <sup>a</sup> (male = 61.2%)	—	—	.13	.11	.07	—	—	—	.13	—

Note. Pooled within-group correlations below the diagonal and between-group correlations above the diagonal.  $N^a = 234$ ;  $N^b = 62$ . <sup>a</sup>Measured at the individual level. <sup>b</sup>Measured at the unit level. Variable coding for demographics: gender (1 = female, 2 = male) and nationality (1 = German, 2 = Turkish). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 2.** Random intercept random slope models testing the main effects and cross-level interaction of respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality on employee personal initiative

	Main effects model			Interaction model		
	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>
Within level <sup>a</sup>						
Perceived respectful leadership	0.35	0.07	<.001	0.35	0.06	<.001
Residual	0.36	0.04	<.001	0.35	0.04	<.001
Between level <sup>b</sup>						
Intercepts	4.52	0.77	<.001	4.53	0.77	<.001
Leader group prototypicality	0.08	0.04	.08	0.08	0.04	.08
Group mean respectful leadership	0.20	0.13	.12	0.19	0.13	.12
Residual	0.03	0.03	.28	0.03	0.02	.24
Cross-level interaction				-.11	0.04	.003
Model fit information						
Loglikelihood	-219.75			-217.49		
AIC	451.49			448.99		
BIC	472.22			473.17		

Note. *N*<sup>a</sup> = 234; *N*<sup>b</sup> = 62. <sup>a</sup>Measured at the individual level; <sup>b</sup>Measured at the unit level. Variable coding for demographics: gender (1 = female, 2 = male) and nationality (1 = German, 2 = Turkish). AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion.

## Control Variables

Leader gender and participant nationality showed significant correlations with the core variables in our model. Following recommendations about the inclusion of control variables (Spector & Brannick, 2011), we included those variables in the analysis. This rendered the main effect of leader group prototypicality on employee proactivity nonsignificant (estimate = 0.06, *p* = .17) but did not change any of the other results.

## Discussion

The results show that perceived respectful leadership positively related to employee proactivity and that this effect reduced as leader group prototypicality increased. The findings therefore support the first hypothesis regarding perceived respectful leadership and show that prototypicality substitutes for respectful leadership (Hypothesis 3), although the hypothesis that prototypicality directly affects proactivity was not supported.

## Explanations

Perceived respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality support employee proactivity. Treating employees as valued human beings supports self-esteem to make them feel comfortable extending themselves and

taking risks associated with personal initiative and proactivity (Grover, 2021). This supportive mental state provides the latitude to expand and think about and pursue changes as well as the resilience to recover from setbacks or failures (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016).

We show that leader group prototypicality substitutes for the effect of perceived respectful leadership on proactivity. Formal leaders have asymmetric power compared to followers, making it risky to be proactive if one does not fully understand the predisposition of the leader. However, people implicitly understand group values and norms and know where they might be proactive without violating those norms. As leaders' values increase in their representation of the group's values – become more prototypical – followers have a greater understanding of the boundaries around which they can safely take initiative. Knowing those boundaries well therefore diminishes the importance of respectful leadership in making people feel safe being proactive. That is, understanding the boundaries and potential risks when the leader's values reflect the group's values creates a security that substitutes for, or reduces the importance of, respectful leadership.

## Theoretical Implications

Recent research shows that leadership relates to proactivity, specifically that LMX relationship promotes proactive behavior among followers (Urbach & Fay, 2020). This important advance to the understanding of proactivity supports the notion that a good relationship between

leaders and their employees facilitates proactivity. Proactivity has a long history of demonstrating its positive effect for organizations, and now, we have a stronger sense of the central role of leaders to encourage proactivity. The present findings extend the understanding of how leadership enhances proactivity in terms of personal initiative.

Our research adds to the research by Urbach and Fay (2020) to extend previous proactivity scholarship that focuses on working conditions and employee variables to describe the antecedents that fuel the self-starting nature of personal initiative (Parker et al., 2006). As Belschak and den Hartog (2010) note, proactivity in terms of personal initiative arises from multiple antecedents, which need to be addressed to develop a comprehensive psychological theory. Respectful leadership cultivates psychological resources that facilitate employee proactivity – namely, by helping employees feel that they will retain their worth as human beings, even in the face of a failed proactivity (Grover, 2014).

Respectful leadership research remains in its infancy, and we extend the respectful leadership literature by incorporating employee proactivity as a dependent variable. Treating others respectfully has value in itself, and when incorporated into leadership, it benefits the individual and the organization (Grover, 2014). The resulting perception of respectful leadership, either individually or compared to others, has positive effects on employees. The present findings extend the range of positive outcomes to include proactivity.

The current research responds to the growing call to identify moderators of respectful leadership (Decker & Van Quaquebeke, 2015; Grover, 2014). Respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality both express leaders' progroup orientation (De Cremer, 2002), communicating safety to employees within the group. An implication of this similarity, established empirically by the present study, is that both perceived respectful leadership and prototypicality contribute to positive group experience that in turn has positive organizational outcomes.

A large body of literature has already linked leader group prototypicality and organizational effectiveness (but not employee personal initiative; Ullrich et al., 2009). However, the relationship between both variables is more complex than assumed in Hypothesis 2. Although the correlation analysis shows a positive, significant relationship between both variables (Table 1), the multilevel regression, which accounts for the nesting of the data, shows a compensatory, rather than direct, effect. This effect aligns with the substitute logic of leader group prototypicality (Giessner et al., 2009).

Finally, our results help broaden our conceptual understanding of how the interactive nature of perceived respectful leadership and leader group prototypicality

affects proactivity. We assume that both factors foster similar social processes (signaling common group membership, equality, and social connectedness; Renger & Simon, 2011) that mitigate employees' sense of vulnerability. As a result, employees can feel more comfortable showing proactive behaviors (Grant & Ashford, 2008).

## Practical Implications

Practical implications from our research are that leaders should treat employees with respect regardless of their accomplishments at work (Van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). To support respectful leadership, HR managers should collect information on a candidate's (dis)respectful leadership style through initiatives like 360° feedback or an employee feedback program similar to Google's (Bryant, 2013). Also, leaders could be trained in respectful inquiry techniques (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

Second, organizations may want to actively promote highly group-prototypical individuals who embody work-group norms and align with the organizational mission (Reicher et al., 2005). Currently, leader group prototypicality is understood as being flexible and learnable to a certain extent (Hogg et al., 2012); thus, one way to sensitive leaders is by training them to adopt a more negotiating style of communication. Van Knippenberg (2011, p. 1086) also recommends "cultivating leaders' self-perception as a prototypical group member (through socialization processes and leadership development programs)."

Assembling these findings together suggest that positive team leadership in organizations is multimodal. Not any one set of training or leadership techniques leads to the positive outcomes. Rather, having supportive relationships (Urbach & Fay, 2020), treating people with the respect they deserve, and leading from a position supporting group values all contribute to the proactive work behavior desired within competitive organizations.

## Limitations, Strengths, and Suggestions for Future Research

Our multilevel field data from employed respondents working in real teams support the robustness and external validity of our results, and using multisource data reduces the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Despite these positive aspects, some limitations should be acknowledged. One limitation is that the group sizes in our sample were relatively small (Bacharach et al., 2008). This might have restricted the groups' mean reliability and the variability of slopes across the different teams. Moreover,

the smaller group sizes may have reduced the power of our cross-level moderation test. Future research should aim to replicate our findings in a sample with larger group sizes. Although the significance of our cross-level interaction boosts our confidence in the model, extending the current findings into a longitudinal design would help to provide support for the proposed causal relationships in our model.

Second, personal initiative is a motivation-driven behavior (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013), and we assumed that using self-ratings would validly reflect motivated individuals. However, personal initiative is also tangibly reflected in workplace behavior, which is why research points to the added value of external ratings (Bommer et al., 1995). Thus, future research should include ratings of employees' personal initiative by leaders or colleagues (Fay & Frese, 2001).

A third limitation comes from the fact that the mean for respectful leadership appeared to be quite high ( $M = 6.04$  on a 7-point scale), which could suggest a ceiling effect. One might assume that this was not a problem, considering that respectful leadership showed a sufficient variance ( $SD = 0.51$ ), and comparable studies have generally shown higher levels of respectful leadership (Decker & Van Quaquebeke, 2015). However, this potential ceiling effect could be working against the substitution logic we proposed in this paper. Moreover, as we operationalized perceived respectful leadership at the within-group level, high overall levels of respect may mean that even those in the team who perceive lower respect score relatively high. To test this, future studies could use a scale that illuminates finer distinctions in the higher range, which might provide more insight into the exact point at which substitution happens.

Fourth, the cross-sectional nature of the data also allows for a potential (additional) reverse causality of the main effect found for Hypothesis 1. It is possible that employees that show initiative motivate supervisors to showing more respect toward them. The cross-level interaction effect does not change the possibility of the alternative explanation of this level 1 relationship. Equally, it is possible that employees are treated more respectfully by their leaders when their leaders are more prototypical for the groups they lead. Results of a scenario experiment by Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2014) provide first support of the path from respectful leadership to employee satisfaction. Nonetheless, the causality underlying our assumptions still needs to be tested.

A last peculiar point was the finding of national differences in the core variables that nationality had a significant effect on the findings. Specifically, the Turkish respondents reported significantly higher values on both leader group prototypicality and employee personal initiative compared to the German respondents. Controlling

for nationality, or analyzing the results only for the Turkish data set, did not, however, yield different results for our main model. Future research could extend the results to other countries and cultures.

Future research should expand the theoretical scope of the presented research model by including underlying mechanisms that could drive the substitute effect of leader group prototypicality and perceived respectful leadership. Moreover, the current study mainly explained the group level effects through leader group prototypicality. Other characteristics of groups such as group level respect or the climate in a group could be interesting moderators as well.

Altogether, the multilevel field data from employed respondents working in real teams support the robustness and external validity of our results. A further strength is that we avoided the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) in our findings by using multi-source data (involving both leaders and employees).

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