PROACTIVE FOLLOWERS WITH LEADERS IN MIND:
UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY BEHIND THIS OXYMORON

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by
Alissa D. Parr

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The dissertation of Alissa D. Parr was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Samuel T. Hunter  
Associate Professor of Psychology  
Dissertation Adviser  
Chair of Committee

Rick R. Jacobs  
Professor of Psychology

Susan Mohammed  
Associate Professor of Psychology

Stephanie T. Lanza  
Research Associate Professor

Melvin M. Mark  
Professor of Psychology  
Head of the Department of Psychology

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to better understand followership behaviors and its effects on leadership by examining conditions when follower proactivity may positively or negatively influence leader well-being. Through an online questionnaire with 79 pairs of supervisors and subordinates, results indicated that general impressions and task-oriented variables have their greatest impact on leader emotional exhaustion when followers fail to be proactive while relationship-oriented variables have their greatest impact on leader emotion exhaustion when followers are proactive. Findings highlight that leader well-being is affected not only when followers are proactive, as would be implied by the initiative paradox, but also, and more critically, when followers fail to be proactive. Implications and future research directions are discussed.
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Introduction

Despite conventional beliefs suggesting that followers should be very passive, acquiescent, and quiet, there is a growing view that followers can be active players in the leadership process (Shamir, 2007; Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007). In particular, recent research has demonstrated that perceptions of followership behavior can range from being very passive to proactive (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010). In today’s work environment that is often characterized as unpredictable and ambiguous, proactivity and initiative has become a valued asset. However, a paradox arises because this behavior counters traditional beliefs of followers. Specifically, the initiative paradox suggests that if expectations are not aligned between leaders and followers when followers are being proactive, there can be negative implications (Campbell, 2000). In short, it is open to question whether a proactive follower is an asset, or hindrance, to leaders.

Taking a step forward, as job roles and expectations continue to be ambiguous and ill-defined, proactivity may be needed in the workplace. Uncertainty at work constrains the degree to which individuals can be effective by adhering to specific job requirements and hence there is a need for flexibility and initiative (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). However, simply encouraging proactivity may not be enough to facilitate positive outcomes. Even though proactive work behavior is often associated with effective functioning at work, research has demonstrated that it is possible for these behaviors to have negative consequences (Bindl & Parker, 2010; Bolino, Valcea, & Harvey, 2010). For example, Chan (2006) found that performance decreased when proactive employees misjudged their work situations. This demonstrates that proactivity may not always be appreciated or rewarded by leaders. In addition to proactivity’s direct effect on performance and on the various consequences for followers,
proactivity may have an influence on leader well-being depending on whether leaders interpret these behaviors as a reward or demand.

Recognizing this challenge, it is important to consider the broader role of the situation and how leadership may facilitate positive outcomes. Through their interaction with followers, leaders can profoundly influence followers’ behaviors and thereby can play as a key role in this process and the resulting outcomes. In particular, focusing on followership behaviors can provide insight into how leaders respond to follower behavior that is directed towards them. This added knowledge into what influences leader well-being is important because it can ultimately impact their future interactions and performance at work.

Thus, the objective of this research is to better understand followership behaviors and its effects on leadership by examining conditions when follower proactivity may positively or negatively influence leader well-being. In particular, this research investigates how leader schemas of followers (i.e., implicit followership theories) and their own behaviors towards followers (i.e., goal alignment and information sharing) affect the relationship between followership behavior and leader emotional exhaustion and satisfaction. Overall, the end goal of the research is to better understand the leadership process by identifying followership behaviors that may enhance leadership and leader well-being.

**Literature Review**

**Followership Perspectives**

While the role of followers in leadership has been recognized and some leadership research has shifted towards being more follower-centric (e.g., Howell & Shamir, 2005; Meindl, 1995; Shamir, Pillai, Bligh, & Uhl-Bien, 2007), *followership* has received limited attention. In
particular, there has been quite a bit of research on traits of followers as well as follower-centric approaches to studying leadership. For example, research has examined factors differentiating between leaders and non-leaders (e.g., Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984; Borman, 1987) as well as how certain follower traits enhance perceptions of transformational leadership or relationship quality (e.g., Dvir & Shamir, 2003; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994; Schyns & Felfe, 2006). Although this stream of research brings to light the role of followers in the leadership process, its focus is primarily leader-centric (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007).

While the above research exclusively focused on conceptions of followers or how followers impact the construction of leadership, followership specifically addresses behaviors of individuals acting in relation to those of a higher status (Carsten et al., 2010). Followership differs from previous research incorporating followers such that it focuses on how followers characterize their own behaviors and roles when engaging with leaders (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007). Alternatively, traditional leadership research incorporating followers focuses on how followers conceptualize their leaders’ behaviors. Specifically, followership behaviors may include the way followers communicate with leaders, their method of problem-solving in relation to leaders, and the way they interact and cooperate with leaders (Carsten et al., 2010). Core to all of these behaviors and those behaviors typical of followership involves some form of deference to the leader because, without some implicit agreement of guidance on the part of the leader, leadership cannot exist (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007).

Although deference may be a common element to all acts of followership, followers display their behaviors differently to leaders. Recently, Carsten and colleagues (2010) conducted a qualitative study differentiating conceptualizations of effective followership. The researchers interviewed a range of participants, who represented various organizational levels and industries,
and asked them questions about the benefits and drawbacks of being in a follower role as well as qualities and behaviors they believe make effective followers. Overall, they found that some individuals expect followers to be very passive while a slightly lower percentage of participants expect them to be very proactive in the way they relate to their leader. In particular, passive followership involved being very obedient, demonstrating the ability to be flexible, and having a positive attitude. This is consistent with the traditional view of subordinates being less skilled than leaders and displaying loyalty to leaders without question. Alternatively, proactive followership involved taking ownership, offering opinions, and taking initiative. In this sense, proactive followership shows a greater degree of active participation while still demonstrating some deference to the leader. Overall, Carsten and colleagues (2010) showed that followers can enact different roles which vary on the degree of proactivity. This can have implications for how leaders view followers as well as how they react cognitively and behaviorally to followers.

These findings dovetail very nicely with the separate stream of research examining proactivity as a form of performance. Proactive work behavior is defined as self-directed and future-oriented action in which individuals strive to bring change to the situation or within oneself (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Forms of proactive work behaviors include taking charge, expressing voice, building networks, issue selling, problem prevention, and feedback inquiry (Parker & Collins, 2010). Studies have demonstrated proactivity is associated with a range of individual, team, and organizational-level outcomes including performance, job crafting, social integration, and team learning (Bindl & Parker, 2010). Thus, given its effects on a range of key outcomes, interest in studying proactivity has grown in recent years.

While the proactivity literature does not specifically focus on how this type of behavior relates to followership, it can help to inform the types of behaviors that might be exemplified by
followers. Since there is an increased attention towards proactive work behaviors and a realization that followers may be breaking the mold from the traditional view of passivity and the “subordination of followership” (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007), it is important to examine how these proactive followership behaviors may impact leader outcomes.

**Followership Proactivity and Leader Outcomes**

In response to Shamir’s (2007) call to have a more balanced view of leadership and followership, it is important to examine how followership influences leader outcomes with respect to their well-being. Numerous studies have explored how leadership behaviors influence follower attitudes and behaviors and therefore it seems natural to “reverse the lens” and explore the opposite phenomenon.

At first glance, it seems that proactive followership behaviors would enhance leader well-being because followers are going above and beyond to fulfill their duties therefore making the leaders’ role less demanding. However, the relationship may not be as simple. In a theoretical paper describing proactive employees, Campbell (2000) explained the initiative paradox. Traditionally, organizations often attempted to suppress qualities such as initiative, judgment, and speaking out. However, as job demands expand and become more ambiguous, behaviors expected from employees require more independence and initiative. Employees must be able to use their own judgment and make decisions when faced with unusual or new work situations (Griffin et al., 2007). The problem arises when organizations and managers expect employees to act in accordance to how they would. Thus, the initiative paradox suggests that employees are expected to be independent and take initiative while, at the same time, think and behave as their manager would (Campbell, 2000).
Furthermore, employees, managers, and organizations all have a set of expectations regarding the type and degree of employee initiative appropriate for a specific situation. This may impact various outcomes depending on the degree of alignment or misalignment between the parties (Bolino et al., 2010). For example, consider a customer service representative who is attempting to resolve a conflict with an unhappy customer. The representative independently decides that the customer should receive an upgrade for his troubles. While some managers may feel satisfied that their employee successfully resolved the situation, other managers may feel uncomfortable since this runs the risk of the representative potentially second-guessing or challenging the manager in the future. Thus, the representative may be considered a threat to the manager.

Alternatively, there is also a subpopulation of individuals, albeit smaller, which expect proactive followership (Carsten et al., 2010) and thus it is possible that they may have a different interpretation of similar situations. Those who have a more proactive mindset and expect proactivity from followers, are more likely to include proactive behavior in the role definition of a follower (Unsworth & Parker, 2003). As such, these managers may be more inclined to feel distraught if the customer service representative did not attempt to independently resolve the conflict because these managers expect initiative and proactivity from their employees. In this case, the initiative paradox would not hold. Instead of viewing high proactivity as being a resource or a demand, they would be more likely to consider high proactivity as a resource and instead focus on the absence of proactivity as a demand to them. Thus, there would be a higher degree of variance in well-being followed by a lack of initiative. However, given that there are fewer individuals who hold these expectations of proactive followers (Carsten et al., 2010), it is more likely that leaders will have a stronger response to higher levels of proactivity.
Key Variables of Study

In turn, proactive followership behaviors may elicit positive or negative outcomes depending on various factors. In particular, it is proposed that leader implicit followership theories (IFTs), leader goal alignment, and leader information sharing may influence the relationship between proactive followership behaviors and leader well-being. Implicit schemas guide interpretations of situations and may influence a leader’s reaction towards behavior that may seem atypical to some. In addition, Sy (2010) suggested that IFTs may ultimately influence affective reactions, which is why IFTs were chosen as a moderator. Additionally, leader behaviors, including goal alignment and information sharing, may help to resolve some differing expectations between the leader and follower thereby fostering greater well-being because followers are working in line with the interests of the leader. Ultimately, these variables were chosen as moderators because they may guide how leaders’ interpret behaviors and events, they may facilitate follower behavior that is more in line with the leader, and they have been suggested by Campbell (2000) as factors that may ease the initiative paradox, which in the end may impact leader well-being. Thus, all of these factors are expected to influence the relationship between proactive followership behaviors and leader well-being. Below is a discussion for each of these moderators.

Role of Implicit Followership Theories

Turning towards the first factor, implicit followership theories (IFTs) are beliefs concerning the traits and behaviors of followers (Carsten et al., 2010; Sy, 2010) and serve as a mechanism by which individuals interpret actions by followers. IFTs also have an influence on
affective reactions to events (Sy, 2010). Thus, how leaders react to certain follower traits and behaviors depends on whether they hold a more positive, proactive schema or a more negative, passive schema of followers. Ultimately, IFTs may influence the relationship between proactive followership behaviors and leader well-being because they may define the conditions when proactive followership behaviors are interpreted as being positive or negative thereby inclining the leader towards similar affective experiences. Thus, IFTs were chosen as a moderator of the proactivity-well-being relationship because these schemas may guide how followership behaviors are interpreted (i.e., as a resource or demand) and then in turn influence well-being.

IFTs are formed through socialization processes as well as through direct experiences with followers and in follower roles (Sy, 2010). IFTs are conceptually similar to implicit leadership theories such that they both elicit conceptions about the qualities of a certain role. Furthermore, they both suggest that these qualities have implications for leadership or followership processes, respectively. Overall, IFTs not only guide expectations of how followers should act and display oneself but also influence behaviors towards followers and while in the role of a follower.

Recent research provides evidence for IFTs. In particular, through a series of several studies, Sy (2010) found that IFTs consist of both prototypic and antiprototypic dimensions. Prototypic dimensions include Good Citizen, Enthusiasm, and Industry. These dimensions are in line with Cartsten and colleagues’ (2010) work such that they both imply prototypic or effective followers should take ownership, be team players, and have a positive attitude. Alternatively, antiprototypic dimensions include Conformity, Insubordination, and Incompetence. In a follow-up study, Sy (2011) found that leader prototypic IFTs and follower prototypic IFTs were both positively related to relationship quality and follower performance.
Overall, research suggests that leaders hold schemas about followers and then use this information to form first impressions and to inform their own behaviors. Additionally, IFTs may guide their expectations for how followers should behave. In turn, the degree of congruence between the leader’s expectations and the follower’s behaviors could result in two outcomes. First, this correspondence may influence subsequent impressions of that employee (Sy, 2010). For example, if leaders hold a more prototypic view of followers and followers show initiative, are respectful, and are reliable, leaders are likely to have positive impressions of the followers. Second, and more critical to this research, this correspondence may predispose leaders towards certain affective experiences (Sy, 2010).

Following this logic, it is likely that the interaction between followership behaviors and leaders’ IFTs can influence the well-being and overall quality of the leader’s experience and functioning at work. With regard to leader well-being, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction will be the key variables examined. Although these outcomes are similar in that they both contribute to well-being and tend to be moderately related (Pugh, Groth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2011), emotional exhaustion focuses on affective and stress reactions while satisfaction focuses on cognitive evaluations. Thus, including both emotional exhaustion and satisfaction can provide unique information.

First, emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being overextended by demands as well as being depleted of one’s resources (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Emotional exhaustion resembles typical stress reactions, including fatigue, job-related depression, psychosomatic complaints, and anxiety (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Additionally, emotional exhaustion is thought to be the most central dimension characterizing job burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).
According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, every occupation has a set of risk factors associated with job stress that include job demands and resources. Job demands refer to “physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and therefore are associated with certain physiological and psychological costs” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). These may include work pressure, emotionally demanding interactions with coworkers, or poor work environments. Alternatively, job resources are physical, social, or organizational elements of the job that help to achieve work goals, lessen job demands, or encourage growth and learning. Resources may include social support, job autonomy, or role clarity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006). Overall, the JD-R model suggests that as demands increase and resources decrease, stress increases. Furthermore, there is an interactive effect such that resources can buffer the negative impact of job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Relating the JD-R model to proactive followership behaviors, proactivity can be viewed as a resource to leaders. Followers displaying proactive behaviors may be more willing and able to anticipate and deal with potentially stressful situations (Ashford & Black, 1996; Frese & Fay, 2001). In this sense, by resolving problems, followers are also reducing the demands for additional work needed by leaders. However, the interpretation of these behaviors may differ depending on the leader’s IFTs and expectations. If leaders hold a prototypical IFT and followers display proactive behaviors, these behaviors may be interpreted as a resource to the leader because they are expected and relieve some of the demands associated with potentially ambiguous circumstances. Thus, emotional exhaustion should be lessened.

However, if leaders do not hold a prototypic IFT and followers display proactive behaviors, the leaders’ expectations and the followers’ behaviors are misaligned. Therefore, instead of interpreting the proactive behaviors as a resource, leaders may be more likely to
consider their actions as a threat because followers are acting outside of their role boundaries. Research has begun to show that proactive behaviors are sometimes negatively interpreted by leaders as threats, ingratiation attempts, or distractions (e.g., Bolino, 1999; Chan, 2006; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011; Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006) and IFTs may be a potential reason for this interpretation. Thus, without the impression that these behaviors are an added resource but instead a potential demand, emotional exhaustion may increase in those leaders. Thus, it is expected that leader IFTs will moderate the relationship between proactive followership behaviors and emotional exhaustion.

_Hypothesis 1A: Proactive followership behaviors will be negatively related to leader emotional exhaustion when leaders hold a prototypic IFT and will be less negatively, or even positively, related when leaders do not hold a prototypic IFT._

The interaction between followership behaviors and IFTs is expected to have an influence on leader satisfaction as well. Satisfaction is defined as an evaluative judgment made about one’s job (Weiss, 2002). Two reasons why this interaction may influence satisfaction include role conflict and person-supervisor fit. First, role conflict occurs when there is confusion about the expectations of one’s job. Role conflict has been demonstrated to be an antecedent of satisfaction (Schleicher, Hansen, & Fox, 2010). When there is misalignment between leaders’ IFTs and followership behaviors, leaders may feel a sense of role conflict. As followers are engaging in anticipatory and proactive behaviors, leaders may feel that followers are engaging behaviors typical of a leader, not a follower. As a result, leaders may feel uncertain of their own
role boundaries as well as the role boundaries of their followers. This sense of role conflict may elicit feelings of dissatisfaction in leaders.

Additionally, person-supervisor fit is defined as the degree of compatibility between individuals and supervisors and has also been shown to be an antecedent of satisfaction (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). When leaders do not hold a prototypic IFT and followers engage in proactive behaviors, there is incongruence between leaders’ values or expectations and followers’ behaviors. Thus, this inherently suggests that values between the leaders and followers are misaligned. Meaning, leaders are valuing more passive and subservient followers while followers are valuing proactivity, which is being conveyed through their actions. In turn, this may result in low person-supervisor fit and, ultimately, lower levels of satisfaction. Alternatively, if leaders endorse a prototypic IFT and followers engage in proactive behaviors, there should be a greater degree of fit between the dyad resulting in greater leader satisfaction. Therefore, it is expected that leader IFTs will moderate the relationship between proactive followership behaviors and leader satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 1B: Proactive followership behaviors will be positively related to leader satisfaction when leaders hold a prototypic IFT and will be less positively, or even negatively, related when leaders do not hold a prototypic IFT.*

Shifting from leader cognitions to leader behaviors, the below sections discuss how leader goal alignment and leader information sharing may impact the relationship between followership behaviors and leader well-being.
Role of Goal Alignment

In addition to implicit cognitions leaders hold, their own behaviors may influence how leaders respond to proactive followership behaviors. As noted before, the initiative paradox occurs when leaders or organizations encourage employees to behave proactively but punish proactive behavior that they consider misguided (Bolino et al., 2010). The initiative paradox results when the expectations between the follower, leader, and organization are misaligned. When expectations do not align, this may result in surprises and ultimately impact whether or not the leader feels as though employees are successfully contributing towards leader and organizational goals. Furthermore, when expectations do not align, proactive behavior may also be interpreted as a threat rather than as a resource because they are not working towards the interests of the leader.

One method Campbell (2000) suggested for resolving the initiative paradox is for leaders to ensure interests and goals are aligned thereby reducing any discrepancies between expectations. When leaders clearly explain the goals and interests of the organization as well as the group decisions made, the follower is more knowledgeable of expectations and therefore may act in accordance to those. In turn, when employees make judgments as to what to do, it is more likely that the behaviors will not result in surprises or negative consequences. Underpinned by the JD-R model, it is argued that proactive followership behaviors, which are aligned with leader and organizational goals, will be interpreted by leaders as an added resource thereby reducing emotional exhaustion. In other words, the initiative paradox may be reduced because there is greater alignment between leader expectations and follower behaviors. In turn, this greater alignment results in increased leader resources and reduced leader demands.
Alternatively, when leaders do not engage in goal sharing and alignment, proactive followership behaviors may be misdirected and be contrary to leader and organizational goals. This misdirection may increase work pressure and demands on leaders. Therefore, leaders are faced with reduced resources from misdirected proactivity as well as increased demands from resolving problems that may have occurred. Therefore, it is suggested that leader goal alignment will moderate the relationship between proactive followership behaviors and leader emotional exhaustion.

_Hypothesis 2A: Proactive followership behaviors will be negatively related to leader emotional exhaustion when leaders engage in goal alignment and will be less negatively, or even positively, related when leaders do not engage in goal alignment._

Furthermore, it is anticipated that there should be comparable effects on leader satisfaction as there are on leader emotional exhaustion. When leaders engage in goal alignment and, as a result, proactive followership behaviors are more in line with leader and organizational goals, these behaviors may be interpreted by leaders as a source of support rather than a threat. Not only would leaders see these behaviors as supportive, but they may also see this response from followers as an indicator that the leaders are being effective in their own role because followers are heeding their direction. Thus, a sense of satisfaction may be derived from the intrinsic rewards produced by their effective performance (Vroom, 1964). Finally, this alignment between goals may increase the fit between the leader and follower because their values are more compatible.
Alternatively, if the proactive behaviors are being guided towards the follower’s own set of goals because the leader did not engage in behaviors related to goal alignment, the proactive followership behaviors may be more likely to be interpreted as a threat thereby reducing leader satisfaction. Therefore, it is suggested that leader goal alignment will moderate the relationship between proactive followership behaviors and satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2B: Proactive followership behaviors will be positively related to leader satisfaction when leaders engage in goal alignment and will be less positively, or even negatively, related when leaders do not engage in goal alignment.*

**Role of Information Sharing**

In addition to goal alignment, Campbell (2000) also suggested that information sharing may be a mechanism to reduce the initiative paradox. Essentially, leader information sharing occurs when leaders try to minimize unshared expectations by providing followers with the same information they use when leading the team or unit. This information can range from broader organizational policies to insider knowledge to strategies for completing various tasks (Butler, 1999). Information sharing gives followers a frame of reference to help direct their behaviors appropriately. The major element differentiating information sharing from goal alignment is that information sharing is characterized by openness and embodies a sense of trust to the employees because leaders are sharing their own perspectives on important issues, policies, and procedures.

As employees are more informed of how organizational procedures work and of strategies to help them accomplish their goals, expectations leaders have for followers may become clearer. By reducing potential discrepancy between expectations, followers may be
better able to respond and behave in ways leaders deem appropriate. Thus, when engaging in
proactive behaviors as a result of unexpected and unusual situations, followers can refer to
related knowledge and strategies that leaders have shared with them. These behaviors, which are
in alignment with leader expectations, may be seen as a resource to leaders.

Alternatively, when followers are not provided this information, they will have less
direction as to how tasks interconnect and how to best accomplish leader and organization goals.
These behaviors, which may be more likely to stray from leader expectations, may be perceived
as an added demand because the follower may come across as acting out. Therefore, it is
suggested that leader information sharing will moderate the relationship between proactive
followership behaviors and leader emotional exhaustion.

*Hypothesis 3A: Proactive followership behaviors will be negatively related to leader
emotional exhaustion when leaders engage in information sharing and will be less
negatively, or even positively, related when leaders do not engage in information sharing.*

Furthermore, the relationship between proactive followership and leader satisfaction may
depend on whether leaders engage in information sharing. By providing important information
and greater clarity to work functions, leaders are providing a frame of reference for employees so
they can guide their behaviors more effectively. Doing this, leaders must trust employees
enough to know that they will use that information appropriately. This sense of trust may incline
leaders to interpret proactive followership behaviors as being more supportive rather than
threatening. On the other hand, if leaders do not share relevant information, proactive
followership behaviors may be more likely to be interpreted as a threat since leaders are not
inherently showing trust towards the follower by sharing information thereby reducing leader satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 3B: Proactive followership behaviors will be positively related to leader satisfaction when leaders engage in information sharing and will be less positively, or even negatively, related when leaders do not engage in information sharing.*

The model below depicts the above hypotheses.
Method

Participants

The sample consisted of supervisors and their subordinates from a variety of industries and geographic locations. Supervisors were first contacted; following, they nominated a particular subordinate. To implement a degree of randomization, it was suggested that supervisors choose the subordinate who they met with most recently. Supervisors were recruited from personal contacts as well as a Penn State University Engineering Forum, which invited several large organizations to participate at the event. The personal contacts yielded a diverse set of supervisors and subordinates representing a wide-range of industries including education, professional services, and finance. Additionally, the Penn State University Engineering Forum, which had representation from several manufacturing companies, was an avenue to solicit participation from organizations in an effort to have a company-wide distribution of the survey. As a result of attending the forum, a few organizations agreed to participate. While the survey was not distributed company-wide, requests for participation were sent within specific divisions of each organization. All of these organizations represented the manufacturing industry.

A total of 79 pairs of supervisors and subordinates were sampled. In the supervisor sample, 53% were men and 47% were women, the average age was 45.6 (SD = 10.2), and 91% were Caucasian. In the subordinate sample, 39% were men and 61% were women, the average age was 43.7 (SD = 11.4), and 85% were Caucasian. The majority of the supervisor and subordinate pairs interacted daily (71%) and worked in the same location as one another (71%).
Procedure

Supervisors were provided an online questionnaire to complete and were asked to nominate one subordinate. The supervisor questionnaire included items regarding their relationship with their subordinate, specific behaviors of their subordinate, as well as their well-being at work. The subordinate was asked to complete a similar questionnaire with the supervisor as the referent. The subordinate questionnaire included items about their relationship with their supervisor as well as specific behaviors of their supervisor. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Materials

In order to reduce the occurrence of common method variance, supervisor and subordinate surveys collected different pieces of evidence. Below is a summary of what is contained in each survey. Additionally, Appendices A, B, and C include a detailed list of all measures included in the surveys.

Supervisor Survey

Implicit followership theory. IFTs were assessed using the implicit followership theories scale (Sy, 2010). This scale is composed of two higher-order factors: prototypic IFTs and antiprototypic IFTs. Prototypic IFTs were utilized for this study because the focus is on effective followers. This falls in alignment with Carsten and colleagues (2010) study who also focused on effective followers when defining how individuals conceptualize followership. Participants were asked to indicate how characteristic each of the items was for the prototypic follower using a scale of 1 (not at all characteristic) to 10 (extremely characteristic). Example
items for the prototypic scale included hardworking, goes above and beyond, and loyal. Internal consistency for the prototypic scale was .90.

**Proactivity.** Supervisors, rather than subordinates, made ratings for follower proactive behaviors. In order for those behaviors to influence the leadership process, supervisors need to know that subordinates are engaging in these behaviors. Three types of proactive work behaviors were measured: taking charge, voice, and rational issue-selling. These three subscales of proactivity were chosen because they captured a broad array of the types of proactive behaviors that exist (Grant et al., 2010). These subscales were also chosen because they can be displayed across all kinds of organizations and job types.

Taking charge was measured using three of the highest loading items from Morrison and Phelps (1999; see also Grant et al., 2010). Responses were made using a scale of 1 (very infrequently) to 5 (very frequently). Items included: (a) “My subordinate tries to bring about improved procedures in my workplace,” (b) “My subordinate tries to institute new work methods that are more effective for the company,” and (c) “My subordinate tries to implement solutions to pressing organization problems.”

Voice was measured using four items from Van Dyne and LePine’s (1998) scale. These items were most consistent with the construct and did not have any overlap with other proactive behaviors (e.g., taking charge; see also Grant et al., 2010). Participants were asked to indicate the frequency of items using a scale from 1 (very infrequently) to 5 (very frequently). Example items included “My subordinate speaks up and encourages others in the workplace to get involved with issues that affect him/her” and “My subordinate speaks up with new ideas or changes in procedures.”
Rational issue-selling was measured using three items from Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson (1980). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items included: (a) “My subordinate uses logic to convince me,” (b) “My subordinate explains the reasons for his/her request, and (c) “My subordinate presents me with information in support of his/her point of view.”

While all of these represent different forms of proactivity, a recent-meta-analysis suggested that proactive behaviors often cluster together to form one construct (Tornau & Frese, 2013) and therefore scores on each of the above dimensions were aggregated by averaging all 10 items. The reliability of this scale was .90.

In addition to these quantitative measures, three qualitative questions were asked to gather supplemental information regarding the supervisor’s perspectives on proactive followership behavior. For example, one prompt was: “Please describe a time when your follower showed initiative (e.g., independently generated new ideas, spoke up about implementing changes to a procedure, took charge of a situation). How did you react to this event? What elements of the situation—including the follower’s and your behaviors—led you to react this way?”

**Emotional exhaustion.** Emotional exhaustion was measured using five of the highest loading items from Pines and Aronson’s (1988) scale (see also Pugh et al., 2011). In order to determine whether the relationships might be more proximal or distal, the referents, subordinate and job, were included. Therefore, a total of 10 items measured emotional exhaustion. Participants were asked to indicate how often they experience the following items with reference to their subordinates and their job using a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Example items
included “I feel tired while working with my subordinates” and “I feel run-down while working in my job.” Internal consistency was .84 and .87 for the subordinate and job scale, respectively.

**Satisfaction.** Satisfaction was assessed using three items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire satisfaction subscale (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). Similar to emotional exhaustion, the referents, subordinate and job, were added to each item. Thus, a total of 6 items measured satisfaction. Responses were made using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Example items included “All in all, I am satisfied with my job” and “In general, I like working with my subordinates.” Internal consistency was .66 and .85 for the subordinate and job scale, respectively.

**Subordinate Survey**

**Goal alignment.** Leader goal alignment was measured using six items from the “Informing” subdimension on Arnold and colleagues’ (2000) Empowering Leadership Questionnaire. Responses were made using a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Example items included “Explains company goals” and “Explains his/her decisions and actions to my work group.” Internal consistency for the scale was .94.

**Information sharing.** Faraj and Sproull’s (2000) four-item scale will be used to measure information sharing by leaders. The original scale sought to measure knowledge sharing among team members and therefore items were adapted to refer to leaders. Example items included “My leader shares his/her special knowledge and expertise with me” and “My leader freely provides me with hard-to-find knowledge or specialized skills.” Additionally, a three-item scale developed by Durham (1997) was used. Items included: (a) “My leader shares a lot of information with me,” (b) “My leader does not offer suggestions to me,” and (c) “My leader helps me develop strategies for assignments.” Responses to all items were made using a scale of
1 (a very small extent) to 5 (a very large extent). Previous research by Srivastava and colleagues (2005) found support to collapse all items into one factor. Overall, reliability for the combined scales was .83.

**Proactivity.** To supplement the opinions leaders have regarding proactivity, additional qualitative questions were asked to the subordinate to determine whether their viewpoints are similar or different. Two questions were included. For example, one prompt was: “Do you think that proactive behaviors are valued by leaders? What are some factors that enable these behaviors to be rewarded or not rewarded?”

**Control Variables**

Demographic variables, including gender, age, job tenure and leader level, were considered as potential control variables because they have been shown to be related to proactive behaviors in previous research (Bindl & Parker, 2010). In particular, supervisors may have different expectations for men and women to engage in these behaviors and may interpret these behaviors differently in men versus women (Kidder & Parks, 2001). Additionally, older, more experienced employees may have greater knowledge and resources to direct proactive behaviors appropriately (Grant & Ashford, 2008).

Furthermore, relationship duration and the frequency of contact between leaders and followers were considered as potential control variables because these factors may influence the leaders’ ability to see employee behaviors and to engage in their own behaviors.

**Analysis**

Data collected for this study were entered and analyzed using *SPSS 20.0*. Before performing any analyses, data were cleaned through a series of steps. First, frequencies were run
to determine whether any data were missing or out of range. Second, appropriate items for the predictor and outcome criteria were reverse coded according to the instructions from the instruments. Third, composite measures were computed for the independent variables (i.e., proactivity, IFT, goal alignment, and information sharing) and dependent variables (i.e., emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction). Finally, all scales were tested for reliability.

Aside from using the established scales to assess proactivity, qualitative responses regarding the merits and downfalls of proactivity were coded by a team of coders who received extensive training. Before the team coded the responses, themes were generated by using some of the tenets of grounded theory, an analytic approach used to generate a theory based in data (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative work, and, in particular, grounded theory has been suggested as a good methodology because of its sensitivity to contextual factors, its flexibility in recognizing and accepting unexpected ideas, and its ability to study social meaning (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman, Bresnen, Beardsworth, & Keil, 1988; Conger, 1998). More specifically, Parry (1998) suggested that leadership research is very well-suited to the use of grounded theory because leadership is inherently a social influence process and incorporates many variables as part of this process. Grounded theory has the ability to capture and integrate these variables for generating a theory. As such, using grounded theory to examine how followership, also a social influence process, impacts leader well-being and leaders processes, seemed appropriate.

Themes were extracted based on three of the four features of grounded theory: fit, relevance, and workability (Glaser, 1978). Thus, all themes were chosen because they were highly related to the data, were well represented by the data, and served to explain the problem at hand. The fourth feature, modifiability, was less relevant to the current study as data analysis
occurred in one wave, unlike traditional grounded theory approaches which occurs over time (Glaser, 1978).

The first phase of analysis began with open coding in which all the data were examined to identify thought units, or simply stated, actions or behaviors (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result of this first phase, several behaviors as well as personality factors were identified as being influential in determining how proactivity is received by the leader. Next, in the categorizing phase, all thought units were organized into categories with the goals of minimizing differences between thought units within a category and maximizing differences between thought units in different categories (Gioia & Sims, 1986). Definitions of each theme were guided by the thought units.

Based on the categorizing phase, four themes emerged: need for alignment and direction, need for information, need for a relationship, and need for results. Need for alignment and direction was defined as the degree to which information is directed and provided regarding the overall goals of the work assignments or organization as well as the degree to which the behavior aligns with current goals and strategies. Need for information was defined as the extent to which leaders are informed or want to be informed of the subordinate’s actions. Third, need for results was defined as the degree to which the leader focuses on the outcome of behavior and its necessity to impact positive change, while not at the expense of other job tasks. Finally, need for a relationship was the degree to which communication and trust exists between the supervisor and subordinate.

After determining and defining the themes, a team of four was formed to code the data. Coders received two days of training: one focused on introducing the constructs and the other focused on alignment of ratings. Inter-rater reliability was adequate, with an average of .75.
Specific values were .85 for *Need for Information* (leader), .78 for *Need for a Relationship* (leader), .74 for *Need for Alignment and Direction* (follower), and .65 for *Need for Results* (follower).

To test the hypotheses, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted by entering control variables (if applicable), proactive followership behaviors, and the study variables into different steps of the equation.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics and correlations are provided in Table 1 below. Overall, the subordinates displayed a high degree of proactivity (*M* = 3.99, *SD* = .64). Supervisors reported that their nominated subordinate tended to be more proactive than their average or typical subordinate (mean difference = .66, *SD* = .76). Additionally, goal alignment and information sharing were positively and moderately correlated suggesting there are similarities between these constructs (*r* = .68).
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities for Study Variables (N = 79)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Proactivity</td>
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<td>.64</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>IFT</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Goal Alignment</td>
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<td>.79</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>.57</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.10</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion: Job</td>
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<td>.70</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Satisfaction: Subordinates</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>(.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Satisfaction: Job</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** All correlations in bold significant at $p < .05$. Reliabilities are indicated in parentheses along the diagonal.
After examining basic descriptive statistics, a stepwise regression analysis procedure was conducted to assess all potential covariates for their applicability to include in the final analyses based on their significance and the benefit of maximizing degrees of freedom. As a result, relationship duration was used as a covariate for emotional exhaustion from subordinates ($F(1, 76) = 4.39, p \leq .05$). No covariates emerged as meaningful for emotional exhaustion from the job as well as satisfaction with subordinates and the job.

**Tests of Hypotheses: Quantitative Results**

The first hypothesis, which stated that IFTs would moderate the relationship between (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) satisfaction, was tested using regression. Results are displayed in Tables 2 through 5 below. For the outcome emotional exhaustion from subordinates, the test revealed that the interaction term was significant at a .10 level ($\beta = .20, p \leq .10$; simple slopes: high IFT $b = .06, p \geq .10$, average IFT $b = -.16, p \leq .10$, low IFT $b = -.38, p \leq .05$) and accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in the outcome.

**Table 2**

*Regression Results for Proactivity and IFTs Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from Subordinates*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
<td>-.03**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.06†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.16†</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFT</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.03†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X IFT</td>
<td>.18†</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; † = $p \leq .10$. 

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Additionally, for the outcome emotional exhaustion from the job, the interaction term was significant ($\beta = .23, p < .05$; simple slopes: high IFT $b = 0.01, p \geq .10$, average IFT $b = -.29, p \leq .05$, low IFT $b = -.59, p \leq .01$). The interaction term accounted for an additional 5% of the variance in emotional exhaustion from the job. Although the interaction effects were significant, the form of the interaction was not in the hypothesized direction.

Table 3
Regression Results for Proactivity and IFTs Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from the Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.07†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFT</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X IFT</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
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</table>

Note. ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; † = $p \leq .10$.

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 (see below), results demonstrated a strong negative relationship between proactivity and emotional exhaustion when leaders hold less prototypic IFTs and a slightly positive, but nonsignificant, relationship when leaders hold prototypic IFTs. Contrary to the hypothesis, the differences in emotional exhaustion were most apparent at low levels of proactivity, rather than high levels. Instead, data suggested that proactivity is considered a resource regardless thereby contradicting the tenets of the initiative paradox.

Additionally, emotional exhaustion was exacerbated in leaders who hold less prototypic IFTs when followers are less proactive implying that leaders who have negative impressions of followers interpret low proactivity more negatively. Alternatively, when leaders held positive impressions of followers, level of proactivity did not have a large influence on leader well-being. In this sense, prototypic IFTs acted as a buffer when followers did not display initiative.
Figure 1. Plot of interaction for proactivity and IFTs predicting emotional exhaustion from subordinates. Higher and lower points are defined as +/- 1 SD from the mean of proactivity.

Figure 2. Plot of interaction for proactivity and IFTs predicting emotional exhaustion from the job. Higher and lower points are defined as +/- 1 SD from the mean of proactivity.
Furthermore, for the outcome variables satisfaction with subordinates and the job, the interaction terms were not significant thereby providing no support for the Hypothesis 1B.

Table 4
Regression Results for Proactivity and IFTs Predicting Satisfaction from Subordinates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
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<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFT</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X IFT</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **p ≤ .01  *p ≤ .05 †p ≤ .10.

Table 5
Regression Results for Proactivity and IFTs Predicting Satisfaction from the Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
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<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFT</td>
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<td>.31</td>
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<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X IFT</td>
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<td>.19</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **p ≤ .01  *p ≤ .05 †p ≤ .10.

To test the second hypothesis, which stated that goal alignment would moderate the relationship between (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) satisfaction, regression was run. Tables 6 through 9 display the results from the analyses below. The interaction effect of goal alignment was significant at a .10 level for emotional exhaustion from subordinates (β = .18, p ≤ .10; simple slopes: high goal alignment b = -.002, p ≥ .10, average goal alignment b = -.15, p ≥ .10, low goal alignment b = -.30, p ≤ .05) and accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in the outcome.
Table 6
Regression Results for Proactivity and Goal Alignment Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from Subordinates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
<td>-.03*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.06†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Alignment</td>
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<td>-.14</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.03†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Goal Alignment</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** = p ≤ .01; * = p ≤ .05; † = p ≤ .10.

Figure 3 shows that leaders who engaged in goal alignment had low levels of emotional exhaustion, regardless of levels of proactivity. Alternatively, leaders who did not engage in goal alignment experienced greater levels of emotional exhaustion when followers were not proactive. These results imply that leaders who fail to set goals to ensure alignment among their followers and who have less proactive followers perceive greater demands on the job. As such, they have fewer resources thereby increasing levels of emotional exhaustion. These results corroborate with the prior findings suggesting that lower levels of proactivity can be a greater demand than high levels of proactivity.
Figure 3. Plot of interaction for proactivity and goal alignment predicting emotional exhaustion from subordinates. Higher and lower points are defined as +/- 1 SD from the mean of proactivity.

For the remaining outcomes, including emotional exhaustion from the job, satisfaction with subordinates, and satisfaction with the job, the interaction term of goal alignment was not significant. On the whole, although Hypotheses 2A and 2B were not well supported, results did reveal several significant interactions that will be discussed later.

Table 7
Regression Results for Proactivity and Goal Alignment Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from the Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Alignment</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.05</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Goal Alignment</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** = p ≤ .01; * = p ≤ .05; † = p ≤ .10.
Finally, the third hypothesis stated that information sharing would moderate the relationship between (a) emotional exhaustion and (b) satisfaction. Results from a series of regression analyses showed that the interaction of information sharing was not significant for the outcomes (see Tables 10-13). Hypotheses 3A and 3B were not supported.
Table 10
Regression Results for Proactivity and Information Sharing Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from Subordinates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
<td>-.02*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Information</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** = p ≤ .01; * = p ≤ .05; † = p ≤ .10.

Table 11
Regression Results for Proactivity and Information Sharing Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from the Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
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<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.07†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Information</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** = p ≤ .01; * = p ≤ .05; † = p ≤ .10.

Table 12
Regression Results for Proactivity and Information Sharing Predicting Satisfaction from Subordinates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
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<td>.07</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.77</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Information</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** = p ≤ .01; * = p ≤ .05; † = p ≤ .10.
Overall, the results from the quantitative data suggested that leaders were more affected by a lack of initiative rather than proactivity from followers. Lower levels of initiative are perceived as demands, especially when leaders hold less prototypic IFTs and when leaders do not engage in goal alignment, thereby increasing levels of emotional exhaustion. As will be discussed in the following section, coded data were analyzed to determine if similar relationships hold true as well as to explore whether other variables, not originally proposed but found to be relevant in the open-ended responses, serve to moderate the relationship between proactivity and leader well-being.

Tests of Hypotheses: Qualitative Results

To gain more insight and to provide supplemental tests of the hypothesized relationships, the open-ended questions from both supervisors and subordinates were coded and analyzed. While the themes resulting from the open-ended questions did not provide a direct link to all of the constructs, they offered some additional understanding regarding when proactivity is helpful or harmful to the leader’s well-being. To this end, regression analyses were conducted by entering control variables (if applicable) in the first step, proactivity and the coded variables in the second step, and the interaction term in the third step of the equation.
To begin, *need for alignment and direction*, which paralleled “goal alignment” was tested as a moderator of the relationship between proactivity and leader well-being. The interaction effect of *need for alignment and direction*, as reported by subordinates, was significant (β = .25, \( p \leq .05 \); simple slopes: high *need for alignment and direction* \( b = .03, p \geq .10 \), average *need for alignment and direction* \( b = -.25, p \leq .10 \), low *need for alignment and direction* \( b = -.53, p \leq .01 \)) in predicting emotional exhaustion from the job. The interaction term accounted for an additional 6% of the variance in emotional exhaustion from the job as may be seen in Table 14, below.

**Table 14**

*Regression Results for Proactivity and Need to Align (Follower) Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from the Job*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.25†</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to Align</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Need to Align</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ( R^2 )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.** \( p \leq .01 \); * \( p \leq .05 \); † \( p \leq .10 \).*

The simple slopes are consistent with the quantitative results for “goal alignment.” While the referent for emotional exhaustion differed between analyses, both outcome variables are moderately and positively correlated suggesting there would be overlap in their relationships with other variables. As such, when leaders did not engage in goal alignment and when followers were not displaying high levels of proactivity, leaders experienced more emotional exhaustion not only from subordinates but also from the job. In this regard, leaders experienced greater demands resulting from subordinate lack of initiative as well as from the overall job by not providing alignment for their followers.
Second, moderation was tested for the coded theme, *need for information*. Unlike the construct “information sharing,” which suggested that supervisors should provide knowledge to subordinates to help them direct their efforts appropriately, *need for information* suggested that supervisors need to be aware of what subordinates should be doing so they can respond accordingly (e.g., potentially “fix” an initiative that has gone astray). The interaction term of *need for information*, as reported by supervisors, was significant at a .10 level (β = -.19, p ≤ .10; simple slopes: high *need for information* b = -.50, p ≤ 0.01, average *need for information* b = -.24, p ≤ .05, low *need for information* b = .02, p ≥ .10) for emotional exhaustion from the job (see Table 15 below). The interaction term accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in emotional exhaustion from the job.

### Table 15
*Regression Results for Proactivity and Need for Information (Leader) Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from the Job*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1: Main Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Information</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2: Interaction Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Need for Information</td>
<td>-.27†</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.03†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total R²</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.** = p ≤ .01; * = p ≤ .05; † = p ≤ .10.*

The nature of this relationship, which is depicted in Figure 4, shows that there was greater variance in emotional exhaustion at lower levels of proactivity. In particular, when leaders conveyed a high need for information, emotional exhaustion was much higher when followers were less proactive than more proactive. Alternatively, when leaders did not convey the need for information, emotional exhaustion was less affected across levels of proactivity.

Stated another way, although extra information can serve as a resource when followers are being
proactive, when followers are not proactive, seeking out unnecessary information could be perceived as a burden and an added demand thereby increasing levels of emotional exhaustion.

![Interaction of Proactivity & Need for Information on Emotional Exhaustion from the Job](image)

**Figure 4.** Plot of interaction for proactivity and need for information predicting emotional exhaustion from the job. Higher and lower points are defined as +/- 1 SD from the mean of proactivity.

Next, need for a relationship was tested as a moderator and analyses revealed that the interaction term, as reported by supervisors, was significant ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < .05$; simple slopes: high need for a relationship $b = -0.38$, $p \leq 0.01$, average need for a relationship $b = -0.13$, $p \geq .10$, low need for a relationship $b = 0.12$, $p \geq .10$) for emotional exhaustion from subordinates (see Table 16 below). The interaction term accounted for an additional 5% of the variance in the outcome.
Table 16
Regression Results for Proactivity and Need for a Relationship (Leader) Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from Subordinates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>(\Delta R^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Control</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Duration</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Main Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for a Relationship</td>
<td>-.13‡</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Need for a Relationship</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (R^2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** = \(p \leq .01\); * = \(p \leq .05\); † = \(p \leq .10\).

The form of this interaction is displayed in Figure 5 below. As can be seen, unlike prior analyses which revealed greater variance in emotional exhaustion when there was a lack of initiative, these analyses showed greater variance when proactivity was high. When leaders had good relationships with their followers, proactivity was much more likely to be considered a resource. Alternatively, when leaders did not convey a sense of trust and build a good relationship with followers, proactivity was more likely to be considered a threat or demand. These results are in line with the initiative paradox because proactivity was interpreted differently depending on the type of relationship leaders had with followers.
Finally, the interaction effect of need for results, as reported by subordinates, was tested as a moderator and was found to be significant at a .10 alpha level (β = .19, p ≤ .10; simple slopes: high need for results b = -.08, p ≥ 0.10, average need for results b = -.31, p ≤ .05, low need for results b = -.54, p ≤ .01) for the outcome emotional exhaustion from the job (see Table 17 below).
Table 17
Regression Results for Proactivity and Need for Results (Follower) Predicting Emotional Exhaustion from the Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.07†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Results</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Need for Results</td>
<td>.22†</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.04†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** = p < .01; * = p < .05; † = p < .10.

Figure 6 shows that there was a much stronger negative relationship between proactivity and emotional exhaustion when leaders had a low need for results than when they had a high need for results. Meaning, when leaders were solely outcome-focused, proactivity was more likely to be interpreted as a demand. Alternatively, when leaders were more focused on the process of experimentation and learning, proactivity was more likely interpreted as a resource thereby lowering levels of emotional exhaustion. This fits with the findings from the theme, need for a relationship, because it demonstrates that the environment and the relationship established with followers are critical factors in how leaders interpret proactivity.
To summarize the quantitative and qualitative findings, there was a lack of evidence in support of the hypotheses as originally specified. However, the overall premise that specific variables, including those originally proposed, moderate the relationship between proactivity and leader emotional exhaustion was found. The proposed hypotheses were based on the initiative paradox, which suggests that proactivity may be interpreted differently. While there was some support that the initiative paradox may still hold true when considering the relationship and environment, on the whole, leaders tended to interpret a lack of initiative more critically. Thus, leaders do see value in proactivity and their opinions about lower levels of proactivity differ depending on their general expectations and their behaviors.

As the goal of the research was to better understand the relationship between proactivity and leader well-being, supplemental analyses were conducted on other potential moderator
variables. In particular, performance was examined as a variable that may influence the relationship between proactivity and well-being.

**Exploratory Results**

Supplemental analyses were conducted to determine whether there were any other potential moderators of the relationship between proactivity and well-being. Performance was chosen as a potential moderator because while there is support that proactivity often leads to beneficial individual outcomes (Parker & Collins, 2010), proactivity can sometimes be misguided or not rewarded (Bindl & Parker, 2011). The amount of resources that leaders can draw from may depend on whether proactivity and performance are aligned thereby affecting well-being. In other words, if subordinates are directing their extra efforts towards positive outcomes, then leaders may be more inclined to interpret these behaviors as a resource to them.

Following this logic, performance was entered into a regression analysis as a moderator of the relationship between proactivity and well-being. Analyses revealed that the interaction term of performance was significant ($\beta = -3.55, p \leq .05$; simple slopes: high performance $b = .75$, $p \leq 0.01$, average performance $b = .47, p \leq .05$, low performance $b = .19, p \geq .10$) for job satisfaction (see Table 18 below).

### Table 18

*Regression Results for Proactivity and Performance Predicting Job Satisfaction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Step 1: Main Effects</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.06†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td>-3.38†</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>-2.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
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<td>.80</td>
<td>-1.83</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity X Performance</td>
<td>.43*</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-3.55</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.** $= p \leq .01$; *$= p \leq .05$; †$= p \leq .10$.*
The nature of this interaction effect is depicted in Figure 7. As can be seen, there was a much stronger positive relationship between proactivity and job satisfaction when performance was high rather than when performance was low. Meaning, job satisfaction was much lower when high performers were not being proactive compared to when they were being proactive. Overall, this is consistent with previous findings which suggested that well-being was more likely to be influenced when followers were less proactive.

![Figure 7. Plot of interaction for proactivity and performance predicting satisfaction. Higher and lower points are defined as +/- 1 SD from the mean of proactivity.](image)

**Discussion**

The aim of the current study was to better understand followership behaviors and its effect on leadership by examining conditions when follower proactivity may positively or negatively influence leader well-being. The results of the study challenged many of the proposed hypotheses. However, several findings emerged that do support the ultimate goal of
the study of better understanding relationship between proactivity and leader well-being by determining occurrences when proactivity (or lack of proactivity) impacts leader well-being. Three broad themes capture the results from the study. First, findings reveal that general impressions and task-oriented variables have their greatest impact on leader emotional exhaustion when followers fail to be proactive. Second, relationship-oriented variables have their greatest impact on leader emotion exhaustion when followers are proactive. Finally, overall performance of followers influences the relationship between proactivity and job satisfaction.

Effects of Failing to Act on Leader Emotional Exhaustion

Despite the original proposition of the initiative paradox, which suggested leaders may or may not reward proactivity (Campbell, 2000), findings reveal that leader emotional exhaustion is most influenced by followers’ lack of proactivity, especially in relation to general impressions and task-oriented variables. While this finding was unexpected, it may be indicative of the nature of work required by the knowledge economy as well as the shift in opinions of those in the workplace towards valuing more active performance concepts.

As organizations have shifted from traditional work towards more production and service procedures, work requirements have changed. In a knowledge-based economy, there are more demands placed on employees and there is a greater focus on proactivity as a form of performance (e.g., Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Employees are encouraged to take charge and go the extra mile to accomplish the goals of the organization. As such, it may be the case that since the sample included mostly professional and white-collar workers (i.e., knowledge workers), they saw a stronger need for proactivity as well as greater value that it has on work outcomes.
In addition to this possible reason for the unexpected findings, it may also indicate a shift in opinions over time. It is common in industrial/organizational psychology, and other fields, that there is often a disconnect between science and practice (Cascio, 2008; Silzer & Cober, 2010). This may be one of those occurrences whereby research was ahead of practice with regard to seeing the value of proactivity. Therefore, when originally proposed, the initiative paradox may have been very relevant because proactivity may not have been as valued in practice, as it was touted to be in research. However, since then, it is possible that practice has come more in line with research such that the workplace sees the need for and value of proactivity. Additionally, while Carsten and colleagues (2010) found that fewer individuals endorsed proactive followership compared to passive followership, it is possible that these numbers may have shifted in that past couple of years. As such, leaders may be more likely to see follower proactivity as a resource overall. Furthermore, the paradox may now occur when proactivity is lacking such that leaders interpret lower levels of proactivity differently depending on the situation. The results from the current study are supportive of this transition.

With regard to particular results, findings from the study showed that proactivity was more strongly and negatively related to emotional exhaustion from subordinates and the job when leaders had less positive IFTs. As such, when leaders have a more negative impression of followers, in general, emotional exhaustion is exacerbated when subordinates are not proactive because this reinforces their negative conception that followers do not and will not go above and beyond to serve as a resource for leaders. On the other hand, when leaders have a good impression of followers, in general, emotional exhaustion is not affected by follower proactivity because they inherently interpret followers as being resources. This notion that implicit theories, particularly IFTs, guide interpretations of behaviors fits with the findings of Sy (2010; 2011).
Furthermore, similar trends were found for more task-oriented variables, including goal alignment and the *need for information*. Goal alignment, which occurs when leaders clearly convey the interests and strategies of the organization as well as the group decisions made, may serve as a resource to leaders because they are setting expectations for what the end state should be. Results revealed that the negative relationship between proactivity and emotional exhaustion was much stronger when leaders were not engaging in goal alignment. In this sense, demands increase because leaders are not providing a vision for subordinates to direct their behaviors towards and subordinates are only doing the bare minimum in their job. Thus, leaders must make up for these missing elements, or demands, by being more proactive themselves, which ultimately creates more stress for them. Not only was this apparent in the quantitative data but simple slopes from the qualitative data were consistent thereby increasing the support for this finding overall. Consistent with these ideas, one supervisor wrote:

*The key reason [for whether proactivity is rewarded] depends on how much the initiative is aligned with existing goals. Helping out "someone else" is good, but hard to reward if my own management does not support the effort.*

Furthermore, the results were supportive for both referents: subordinates and the job. This reinforces the notion that subordinates’ failure to act as well as the general sense that leaders are not providing alignment impacts a leader’s emotional exhaustion because it may influence their interpretation of subordinates as resources as well as impact the number of demands they must now do for successful job performance.

Furthermore, the construct, *need for information* was defined as the extent to which leaders want to be in the loop regarding everything that the subordinate is doing. Having a high *need for information*, when subordinates are not proactive, exacerbates leader emotional exhaustion. In this regard, when leaders feel the need to be privy to everything the subordinate is
doing, this can lead to information overload, especially when subordinates are not behaving proactively. However, when subordinates are proactive and leaders have a sense of what subordinates are doing, this information can be resourceful because it allows them to intervene if some of the initiatives begin to go astray. For example, one supervisor commented:

*I am concerned when team members fail to keep me informed. If they get too far out in front, their action surprises me and typically lands them in a difficult situation. As long as they are "managing me," I can pave the way through difficult situations. If they are headed in the wrong direction or are getting too far out in front, I can help redirect them and keep them in sync with others.*

Alternatively, when leaders do not feel compelled to micromanage, emotional exhaustion is low regardless of proactivity.

Taken together, leader emotional exhaustion is more affected by *lack of initiative* when taking into account task-oriented variables. When goals and strategies are not being made and when leaders are fully informed of the inactions from subordinates, lack of proactivity is more strongly related to increased levels of leader emotional exhaustion because of the added demands this incurs.

These overall findings showing differences in how leaders interpret the lack of proactivity are similar to recent evidence from Fuller, Marler, and Hester (2012), which suggested that the degree to which supervisors reward proactivity depends on leaders’ values towards proactivity in general. They found that for supervisors who valued proactivity, there was a strong, positive relationship between proactivity and performance ratings such that these supervisors rewarded subordinates for proactivity but penalized them for not displaying proactivity. Essentially, these supervisors viewed proactive behaviors as valuable and interpreted low levels of proactivity as a lack of effort, rather than ability, on the part of subordinates. Alternatively, there was a weak relationship between proactivity and performance
ratings for more passive supervisors. In a sense, these passive supervisors merely endured the behaviors but did not reward or penalize subordinates for proactivity. Overall, this is supportive of the evidence from this study suggesting that general impressions may influence interpretation of proactivity and that the initiative paradox may not hold for all leaders.

**Effects of Proactivity on Leader Emotional Exhaustion**

In comparison to the above results indicating there was a degree of variance in leader well-being at low levels of proactivity, there were some findings to indicate that the initiative paradox still hold when considering more relationship-oriented variables. To begin, *need for a relationship*, which suggests that leaders should maintain a high degree of trust and cooperation with subordinates, was found to be a moderator of the relationship between proactivity and emotional exhaustion from subordinates. As indicated by the nature of the relationship, there was a strong negative association between proactivity and emotional exhaustion when leaders have a good relationship with their subordinates. When leaders were very trusting and encouraging of their subordinates, leaders were more likely to interpret proactive behaviors as an added resource thereby decreasing emotional exhaustion from subordinates. In particular, one supervisor commented, “Employees who earn my trust get less management and more freedom to operate on their own.” This suggests that the supervisor trusts that the subordinate’s proactivity will be directed in positive ways, and, for the good of the group. Alternatively, proactivity did not have an influence on emotional exhaustion when the pair did not have a good relationship. While the simple slope was positive, indicating that high levels of proactivity may exacerbate emotional exhaustion when leaders do not have a good relationship with their subordinates, it was not significantly different from zero.
Second, proactivity and emotional exhaustion from the job was more strongly and negatively related when need for results was high. As the construct implies, need for results suggests that outcomes are important. However, low need for results stresses the importance of learning, with less of a focus on the outcomes. Thus, when leaders emphasized the importance of trying and experimentation, their emotional exhaustion was reduced when subordinates were demonstrating initiative rather than when they were passive. These results imply that the leader is building an environment such that subordinates can feel comfortable to take risks thereby taking into account more process, softer issues rather than tactical issues.

Both of these findings are related to a recent study examining the relationship between proactivity, challenging goals, trust in supervisors, and unit performance. Crossley, Cooper, and Wensing (2013) tested the model that proactive leaders set more challenging goals, which is ultimately related to increased unit performance. However, the model included trust in managers as a moderator of the relationship between challenging goals and unit performance. Results indicated that challenging goals (which was linked to proactivity) were more strongly related to unit performance when managers were trusted by their subordinates. Essentially, the findings suggested that trust in managers shaped subordinates’ interpretations and expectations of the goals such that the goals were perceived to be made for the good of the unit without exploitative motives on the part of the manager. In turn, this influenced subordinates’ desire to work towards those goals and achieve high performance. Similarly, in the current study, it was the good relationship and trust that the pair exhibited as well as the learning environment the leader fostered which guided more positive interpretations of the proactive behaviors. Ultimately, these behaviors were seen as resources and emotional exhaustion was lessened.
Before proceeding with a discussion of the third theme, it is important to note how the referents associated with emotional exhaustion were related. The moderators, which were associated with emotional exhaustion from subordinates, captured implicit ideas about followers as well as factors related to the leader-follower relationship. Specifically, IFTs are directly related to how leaders would interpret follower behaviors so it logically follows that they would be related to emotional exhaustion from subordinates. Additionally, goal alignment, which involves interacting with followers to ensure understanding of organizational strategies, and need for a relationship, which defines the essence of the leader-follower interactions, both are rooted in communication and collaboration with followers and therefore would have a relationship with emotional exhaustion from subordinates.

On the other hand, the moderators which were associated with emotional exhaustion from the job, captured implicit ideas about followers as well as factors related to structuring the task. Implicit theories have the potential to color how you interpret all events. While IFTs may more closely relate to followers, by nature, it has the potential to shape interpretations regarding the overall job. In addition to the interaction piece associated with goal alignment, this construct is also focused on framing tasks and therefore would influence emotional exhaustion from the job. Finally, need for information as well as need for results are both focused on task structuring and framing and would have a closer link to emotional exhaustion from the job.

Performance as an Influential Variable

The third key finding from the current study was the influence that performance has on the relationship between proactivity and job satisfaction. Several researchers have suggested that proactivity may not always lead to positive outcomes (e.g., Bindl & Parker, 2010; Bolino, Valcea,
& Harvey, 2010). In particular, researchers have found that proactivity is not always related to higher performance (Chan, 2006; Fuller et al. 2012). Integrating these ideas into the overall goal of this study, analyses were conducted to determine how performance and proactivity interact to influence job satisfaction. Findings revealed that leaders were much more satisfied when proactivity was appropriately guided and being performed successfully. On the other hand, if subordinates were good performers but were not proactive, leaders were less satisfied. This may be because leaders are disappointed that followers are not fulfilling their potential. As a result, leaders must compensate for the lack of initiative. Results also revealed that if followers were low performers, level of proactivity did not impact job satisfaction. Either way, leaders must endure the poor performance, whether it is resulting from everyday tasks or other initiatives, and therefore it does not impact job satisfaction.

One of the possible reasons for this overall effect may stem from the sense of support that the leader feels from the follower. While researchers have mostly focused on the positive relationships between support from leaders and the organization with job satisfaction, support from coworkers is also positively related to satisfaction (Schleicher et al., 2010). Tying this relationship to the findings, leaders may feel a good deal of support when high performers are very proactive because they are being resourceful and directing their initiatives towards positive outcomes. Alternatively, if followers have the potential for enacting positive change but fail to do so (i.e., are good performers but lack initiative), then leaders may be more likely to see this as unsupportive towards the leader and organizational goals. As such, the leader’s satisfaction is reduced. Thus, leaders feel the most benefit and greatest satisfaction when followers, who are high performers, are proactive because this displays a sense of support to the leader.
Limitations

Before turning to the contributions of and implications for the study, a few limitations should be noted. The first of these limitations concerns the sample size. A total of 79 supervisors and subordinates were obtained for the study. Several measures were taken to recruit as many participants as possible, as detailed in the methods section, but it would be important to replicate these findings using a larger sample to provide more weight to the conclusions. Along these lines, the sample tends to be rather homogeneous with regard to type of workers. While several steps were taken to achieve a broad range of industries, all of the workers sampled are professional, white-collar workers. It would be important to expand the sample to more types of workers in future research.

The second limitation deals with experiment-wise error rate. Experiment-wise error rate is the probability that one or more of the significance tests results in a Type I error. Given the large number of analyses conducted and the low sample size, experiment-wise error rate is a concern. Therefore, caution is warranted when interpreting and generalizing the noted effects.

Third, the nomination procedure for subordinate was not completely at random. While it was suggested that supervisors nominate the subordinate who they had met with most recently, it is not known for certain as to whether this attempt at randomization was utilized. Results showed that the majority of subordinates were rated as being very proactive and good performers indicating this attempt at randomization may not have been implemented in practice. Along these lines, one of the assumptions associated moderation analysis is that the variables must be normally distributed (Carte & Russell, 2003) and therefore it was important to ensure that proactivity was normally distributed and had low values of skewness and kurtosis. According to many researchers, any values for skewness and kurtosis less than +/- 2 are acceptable (Azzalini,
and this was the case for the current study as the values were -.69 and .38 for skewness and kurtosis, respectively. Therefore, since proactivity was normally distributed concerns regarding the higher levels of proactivity were lessened.

Fourth, the initiative paradox highlights that surprises may arise when there are discrepancies between subordinate, supervisor, and organizational goals. However, this study made the assumption that supervisor and organization goals are aligned. Therefore, the focus of this study was to ensure a match between supervisor and subordinate goals only. However, given that leader outcomes were specifically being examined, focusing on both the supervisor and subordinate goals, rather than the organizational goals, seemed appropriate.

Finally, the study design was cross-sectional in nature. As such, the exact causal direction of these relationships cannot be determined. It may be the case that some of the leader behaviors influenced degree of proactivity from followers. Furthermore, in order to understand how well-being is affected by proactivity over time, longitudinal research is needed. The current study was able to provide a snapshot but the entire story would be more effectively captured using a longitudinal design.

**Theoretical Implications**

Despite the limitations listed above, the results from this study have several implications to add to the limited knowledge on followership and how followers can influence leadership. Regarding the theoretical contributions, results suggested that followership does influence leadership well-being and that proactivity as well as a lack of proactivity may not always lead to positive outcomes for leaders. In particular, there are boundary conditions, such as IFTs, goal
alignment, *need for information*, *need for a relationship* and *need for results*, that influence whether the absence or presence of proactivity impacts emotional exhaustion.

Second, there is very limited research on leader well-being. The majority of research incorporating leadership and well-being focuses on how leaders affect the well-being of their subordinates. However, it is well-known how impactful leadership can be on influencing followers, creating a climate, and determining performance (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). The ability to effectively and efficiently lead may not only depend on one’s knowledge and skills about leadership in general but may also depend on one’s ability to think clearly without emotional preoccupations. In turn, leader well-being may subsequently affect leadership processes and performance. Furthermore, research has shown that individuals react quite differently in response to emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004) and therefore it is important to understand whether there is anything specific to the leadership process which may exacerbate or lessen emotional exhaustion. Thus, this research attempted to shed more light on how followership impacts leader well-being. Following this logic, the current study found particular followership behaviors were shown to influence leader emotional exhaustion thereby suggesting there are unique variables associated with the leadership process that may influence leader well-being.

Furthermore, this study serves as a reminder of the bidirectional relationship between leaders and followers and the necessity to consider all elements (i.e., leader, subordinate, process, outcomes) in order to better understand leadership (Hunter, Bedell-Avers, & Mumford, 2007). Leadership cannot exist without some implicit agreement of guidance or deference (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007) and therefore incorporating both the follower and the leader is critical to better understand the relationship between followership proactivity and leader well-being.
Along these lines, a strength of the study was the use of multiple sources and methods. Common method bias is often a concern for survey methods, especially when considering leadership research (Friedrich, Byrne, & Mumford, 2009). However, by triangulating across both leaders and followers as well as quantitative and qualitative research methods, the likelihood of common method bias was reduced (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) and a more complete story was achieved.

Finally, the unexpected finding that leaders are more likely to value proactivity and instead interpret a lack of proactivity as more demanding, which in turn contradicts the initiative paradox, suggests the need that researchers should be open to notion that propositions and theories change as the environment and established norms adapt. As modifiability, one of the features of grounded theory, implies, researchers must be willing to modify their preconceived notions based on emerging data. Thus, this study captures the idea that as values and norms change in the workplace (i.e., the necessity of proactivity as commonplace), established ideas (i.e., the initiative paradox), may not hold as strongly anymore. Therefore, it is important for researchers to continue to have a critical eye when conducting research and refining established theories.

**Practical Implications**

The research also provides valuable practical implications for organizations interested in enhancing leader well-being. First, while the results of the study cannot inform leaders how to increase or decrease proactivity in followers, there are certain actions that leaders can take in reaction to these behaviors. For example, leaders should foster good relationships with their subordinates by showing encouragement, coaching them, and building trust with them. If leaders have a good relationship with their subordinates, leader emotional exhaustion will likely be
lessened when followers are very proactive. Similarly, leaders who foster an environment that is focused on learning from failures rather than always focusing on the end result, will also see a decrease in emotional exhaustion when followers are proactive.

On the other hand, if subordinates tend to be less proactive, leaders can engage in more task-oriented behaviors to enhance leader well-being. In particular, leaders can ensure more goal alignment as well as be less concerned in knowing all of the details of the follower’s efforts. By focusing more on alignment, which provides utility for everyone, and less on information seeking, which may create a sense of micromanaging and foster a reduced sense of trust, leader emotional exhaustion would reduce when followers are less proactive. Ultimately, incorporating the above behaviors may enhance the leadership process.

Finally, provided that leaders have a much stronger response following a lack of initiative, from a practical standpoint, it would be important for followers to display more proactivity. Thus, it is necessary for followers to take more initiative in the workplace by offering their opinions, making suggestions for changes, and pushing forward new ideas. Leaders can also help to encourage more proactivity in their followers. For example, they could share examples of employees taking initiative thereby conveying a sense that these behaviors are more likely to be valued and less likely to be punished. Additionally, leaders could role model such behavior to show that there can be positive outcomes after taking risks.

**Future Directions**

The results and limitations from this study highlight the need for future research in the domains of proactivity, followership, and leadership. With regard to proactivity, one of the major findings resulting was the notion that lack of proactivity can sometimes be more impactful
than proactivity from subordinates. Thus, future research may examine actions leaders can take to encourage more proactivity in their subordinates. For example, fostering the relationship and creating a safe environment for experimentation might be influential in encouraging proactivity. Additionally, research may examine how implicit theories of followers may or may not guide them to behave more or less proactively.

Future research should also examine whether the initiative paradox and these findings hold true for all levels and types of subordinates. While the current sample had a fairly large range of subordinates, including those who did not have anyone reporting to them and those who did have employees reporting to them, the sample included all white-collar workers. It may be the case that in a sample of blue-collar workers, proactivity is not as valued because of the stricter regulations and standardization of practices. Alternatively, white-collar jobs, which often tend to be more knowledge- and team-based, may be more likely to value proactivity.

Furthermore, focusing on how followership influences the leadership process, future research would gain from a better understanding of how proactive versus passive followers influence leader behaviors and styles. Proactive and passive followers may arouse different feelings in leaders thereby affecting their behaviors. Howell and Shamir (2005) suggested that followers can be a source of empowerment for leaders by providing them with resources, showing them respect, and demonstrating approval. As a result, they suggested that when leaders feel empowered, they are more likely to engage in socialized charismatic behaviors. Proactive followers, who by nature are more involved and show a heightened degree of interest in work, may empower leaders to a greater extent than passive followers. Thus, proactive followers may foster more socialized, charismatic leadership styles.
Finally with regard to leadership, future research should more closely examine leadership satisfaction. The majority of the findings from the study did not find evidence that satisfaction was influenced by proactivity when the moderators were present or not. The chosen variables for the study more closely related to affective outcomes and therefore it would be important to consider variables that relate to attitudinal outcomes. Although it was found that leader job satisfaction was influenced when taking into consideration performance, there may be other potential variables to consider. Focusing on more outcome-oriented variables, which may imply leader success might gain more insight into leader satisfaction.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to better understand how followership impacts leader well-being. Through an online questionnaire distributed to matched supervisors and subordinates, this study provided a clearer picture on occurrences when proactivity and lack of proactivity influence leader well-being. Specifically, it was found that general impressions and task-oriented variables have their greatest impact on leader emotional exhaustion when followers fail to be proactive while relationship-oriented variables have their greatest impact on leader emotional exhaustion when followers are proactive. Furthermore, it was also found that expectations for good performers increase such that job satisfaction is negatively influenced when subordinates fail to behave proactively, as compared to poor performers. Overall, this study integrated the separate fields of followership, leadership, and proactivity fields to better understand how these influence processes are impacted by each other. Ultimately, it is hoped that this information can be used to strengthen leader-follower relationships and to enhance followership and leadership processes.
References


Appendix A: Supervisor Survey

Implicit Followership Theory (Sy, 2010)
Please indicate how characteristic each of the below items are for followers using a scale of 1 (not at all characteristic) to 10 (extremely characteristic).

Not At All Characteristic                Unsure                Extremely Characteristic

1----------2----------------3----------------4----------------5----------------6----------------7----------------8----------------9----------------10

1. Hardworking
2. Productive
3. Goes above and beyond
4. Excited
5. Outgoing
6. Happy
7. Loyal
8. Reliable
9. Team player
10. Easily influenced
11. Follows trends
12. Soft spoken
13. Arrogant
14. Rude
15. Bad tempered
16. Uneducated
17. Slow
18. Inexperienced

Proactivity
Please indicate how frequently your subordinate engages in each of the following activities using a scale of 1 (very infrequently) to 5 (very frequently).

Very Infrequently     Infrequently     Neither Frequently Nor Infrequently     Frequently     Very Frequently

1----------------------------2-----------------------------3------------------------------------4--------------------------------------5

Taking Charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999)
1. My subordinate tries to bring about improved procedures in your workplace.
2. My subordinate tries to institute new work methods that are more effective for the company.
3. My subordinate tries to implement solutions to pressing organization problems.

Voice (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998)
1. My subordinate communicates his/her views about work issues to others in the workplace, even if his/her views differ and others disagree with him/her.
2. My subordinate speaks up and encourages others in the workplace to get involved with issues that affect him/her.
3. My subordinate keeps well informed about issues where his/her opinion might be useful to your workplace.
4. My subordinate speaks up with new ideas or changes in procedures.

Please consider how your subordinate goes about changing your mind to get you to agree with him/her and indicate how much you agree with the following items using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nor Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rational Issue-Selling** (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980)
1. My subordinate uses logic to convince me.
2. My subordinate explains the reasons for his/her request.
3. My subordinate presents me with information in support of his/her point of view.

Please respond to the following questions:
1. Do you appreciate when followers take initiative and are proactive? Why or why not?
2. Are there times when your opinion about follower initiative change? If so, what are some reasons why you may reward or not reward these behaviors?
3. Please describe a time when your follower showed initiative (e.g., independently generated new ideas, spoke up about implementing changes to a procedure, took charge of a situation). How did you react to this event? What elements of the situation—including the follower’s and your behaviors—led you to react this way?

**Emotional Exhaustion** (Pines & Aronson, 1988)
In general, how often do you experience the following at your job on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I feel tired while working with my subordinates.
2. I feel “wiped out” while working with my subordinates.
3. I feel run-down while working with my subordinates.
4. I feel rejected while working with my subordinates.
5. I feel exhausted while working with my subordinates.
6. I feel tired while working at my job.
7. I feel “wiped out” while working at my job.
8. I feel run-down while working at my job.
9. I feel rejected while working at my job.
10. I feel exhausted while working at my job.
**Satisfaction** (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nor Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. All in all, I am satisfied with my subordinates.
2. In general, I like working with my subordinates.
3. In general, I don’t like my subordinates.
4. All in all, I am satisfied with my job.
5. In general, I like working here.
6. In general, I don’t like my job.
Appendix B: Subordinate Survey

Goal Alignment (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000).
Please indicate how frequently your leader engages in each of the following behaviors using a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Explains company decisions.
2. Explains company goals.
3. Explains how my work group fits into the company.
4. Explains the purpose of the company’s policies to my work group.
5. Explains rules and expectations to my work group.
6. Explains his/her decisions and actions to my work group.

Information Sharing (Faraj & Sproull, 2000; Durham, 1997)
Please indicate the extent to which your leader engages in each of the following behaviors using a scale of 1 (a very small extent) to 5 (a very large extent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Very Small Extent</th>
<th>Average Amount</th>
<th>A Very Large Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. My leader shares his/her special knowledge and expertise with me.
2. If my leader has some special knowledge about how to perform the task, he or she is not likely to tell me about it.
3. There is virtually no exchange of information, knowledge, or sharing of skills from my leader.
4. My leader freely provides me with hard-to-find knowledge or specialized skills.
5. My leader shares a lot of information with me.
6. My leader does not offer suggestions to me.
7. My leader helps me develop strategies for assignments.

Proactivity
Please respond to the following questions:
1. Provide an example of a time when you took initiative (e.g., independently generated new ideas, spoke up about implementing changes to a procedure, took charge of a situation). Were your efforts successful? How did your leader react?
2. Do you think that proactive behaviors are valued by leaders? What are some factors that enable these behaviors to be rewarded or not rewarded?
Appendix C: Control Variables

Demographics
Gender
Age
Race
Job tenure
Industry

Relationship Duration
How long have you been working with your supervisor/direct report?
_____ years  _____ months

Frequency of Contact
How often do you interact with your supervisor/direct report?
Daily
Weekly
Monthly

Colocation
Do you work in the same office location as your supervisor?
Yes, we work in the same location.
Some days of the week we work in the same location and other days we work remote from each other.
No, we work in different locations.
Alissa Parr
111 Moore Building, University Park, PA 16801
alissa.parr@gmail.com
(410) 591-7252

EDUCATION:

Pennsylvania State University
M.S., Industrial-Organizational Psychology (2011)

Eckerd College

Service & Honors
George C. Thornton Graduate Scholarship (2013)
Penn State I/O Service Award Winner (2012)
I-O Graduate Distinguished Speaker and Colloquium Chair (5/2010 – 5/2012)

APPLIED & WORK EXPERIENCES:

Assessor for Penn State’s PNC Leadership Assessment Center (10/2009 – 3/2013)
Consultant
Select International (Current)
Innovative Thought (10/2012 – 7/2013)
ICF International (5/2012 – 6/2013)

Director of Penn State’s PNC Leadership Assessment Center (8/2010 – 5/2012)
Practicum Experience at Penn State University (5/2009 – 5/2012)

SELECTED TEACHING & PUBLICATIONS:

Instructor
Research Methods in Psychology Laboratory, Penn State University (2013)
Research Methods in Psychology, Penn State University’s World Campus (2013)

Publications