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# Linking leader–follower proactive personality congruence to creativity

Proactive  
personality  
congruence

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Drawing from the literature on person–environment fit and proactive personality, the purpose of this paper is to empirically examine whether congruence between the proactive personality of a leader and his/her follower is facilitative/inhibitive of creativity of the follower.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected in two waves from 355 followers and 36 corresponding leaders working in a large manufacturing company in India. Hypotheses were tested using polynomial regression analysis and response surface method.

**Findings** – The results indicate that leader–follower congruence in proactive personality is more likely to encourage followers' creativity. Moreover, leader–follower congruence at higher levels of proactive personality showed higher levels of followers' creativity than when dyads are congruent at lower levels.

**Practical implications** – Findings suggest that human resource management in organizations should consider matching leaders' proactive personality with that of followers' to foster employee creativity. This is critical from the perspective of recruitment and dyad formulation for jobs that demand creativity.

**Originality/value** – Research examining why and how congruence in personal characteristics between a leader and his/her follower foster followers' creativity is at best scant. The study is a novel attempt to examine the effect of congruence in leader–follower proactive personalities on workplace creativity of the follower.

**Keywords** Quantitative, Creativity, Personality, Person–environment fit (P–E fit)

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

In a highly changeable global marketplace, innovation is widely accepted as an important determinant for organizations competitiveness and growth (Baer, 2012; Huang *et al.*, 2016; Shalley *et al.*, 2004). In particular, employee creativity which refers to the generation of novel and useful ideas about products, services or procedures, provides the raw material needed for innovation leading to firm's competitive advantage (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Anderson *et al.*, 2014; Shalley *et al.*, 2009). As organization's innovativeness is hinged on employees' creativity (Tang, Yu *et al.*, 2017; Seeck and Diehl, 2017), human resource management (HRM) plays a significant role in facilitating creativity of employees for achieving innovation (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2017; Cerne *et al.*, 2017; Mumford *et al.*, 2002).

Although a fair amount of empirical work has been done to understand individual and contextual factors which shape employee's creativity (see Shalley *et al.*, 2004 for a recent review), the “understanding of the link between HRM and employee creativity” is in its early stages (Bamber *et al.*, 2017, p. 1217). There is a felt need to conduct more studies to understand the role of HRM in employee creativity (see the special issue of *Personnel Review*, 2017). Conceptual discussions on HRM capabilities have been initiated to understand how immediate leaders support the creativity of their followers (Anderson *et al.*, 2014; Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2017; Garavan *et al.*, 2015; Lepak and Snell, 1999). This is so because the dyadic



interaction with the immediate leader provides contextual cues about the relevance of creative ideas and their acceptance in organizations. Considering the devolution-to-the-line perspective in HRM, in which immediate leaders are increasingly considered to shape the work context (Cerme *et al.*, 2017), there is a merit to understand how the personal characteristics of a leader interact with the similar characteristics of a follower to shape employees' creativity. This knowledge could help HRM to incorporate practices that support employee level creativity (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2017).

Specifically, the present study seeks to examine an important yet neglected contextual factor, i.e., congruence in proactive personality between a leader and his/her follower in relation to follower's creativity. Proactive personality is referred to as an enduring behavioral tendency through which employees actively improve their work environment, and persevere until meaningful changes take place (Bateman and Crant, 1993; Seibert *et al.*, 2001). In the present study, we focus on proactive personality for two reasons. First, individuals, having proactive personalities exhibit high levels of openness to new ideas (Fuller and Marler, 2009), engage in problem-solving and improvement-oriented ideas for work-related outcomes (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Second, it has been found to outperform the Big Five traits in predicting numerous workplace phenomena (Fuller and Marler, 2009; Marinova *et al.*, 2015).

Proactive employees are embedded in a social-political context where leader controls job-resources and evaluates performance outcomes (Anderson *et al.*, 2014; Zhou and Hoever, 2014). Given their status, leaders serve as potential contextual facilitators or inhibitors of followers' creativity (Koseoglu *et al.*, 2017; Shalley and Gilson, 2004). Studies have argued that immediate leaders may impact the creativity of their followers (Koseoglu *et al.*, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Thus, managing creativity involves not only identification of creative employees but also awareness about how the immediate leaders influence their creativity. In this regard, previous studies have indicated three facets of leadership, namely, leader's relationship with followers, leader behavior and leader's personal characteristics (Tierney, 2008), that could impact employee level creativity (Huang *et al.*, 2016; Shalley and Gilson, 2004). However, past research predominantly focused on the first two facets (Zhou and Hoever, 2014), ignoring the third, i.e. how leader's personal characteristics influence proactive followers' creativity (for exceptions, see Koseoglu *et al.*, 2017; Tierney, 2008). As creative ideas challenge the existing processes and, thus, require flexibility, contextual support and resources (Parker *et al.*, 2010), we argue that proactive personality of a leader is critical in planning and managing the creativity of a proactive follower.

To understand this contextual support, we draw from the study of Kamdar and Van Dyne (2007) who demonstrated that leaders act as a critical force in shaping how follower's personality influences work outcomes. In fact, followers are more successful in creativity when there is a similarity in goals and interests between the leader and his/her followers (Shalley and Gilson, 2004; Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Zhang *et al.* (2012) argued that congruence in proactive personalities between leader and follower can potentially influence several workplace outcomes. Hence, it is critical to investigate whether congruence in proactive personality between the followers and their immediate leader predicts follower creativity over and above the mere influence of individual-level proactive personality. To unravel this, we draw from the literature on person–environment (P–E) fit and proactive personality (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). The degree of match between a person and some aspect/s of his/her work environment is referred to as P–E fit (Edwards and Cable, 2009; Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005).

In P–E fit literature, one relevant conceptualization is that of person–supervisor (P–S) fit, which is defined as the dyadic relationship between individuals and their supervisors (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005, p. 287). Supervisor's personal characteristics represent the environment to the follower. The P–S fit was conceptualized in the current study as proactive personality

congruence between a supervisor and his/her follower. We chose to focus on P–S fit in proactive personality because of two theoretical reasons. First, it is commonly accepted among leadership theorists that, leader's impact on their followers are interactive which involves interpersonal social exchanges (Byza *et al.*, 2017). Hence, considering leaders' personal attributes in congruence with the similar personal attributes of their followers would provide a better understanding of the effect of the dyad on follower's workplace outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Second, prior research has highlighted that leaders serve as the representative of organizational and HR values and resources. Hence, if followers share their deep level characteristics, such as proactive personality, with their supervisors, they would be having more opportunities to enact their work outcomes (Schaubroeck and Lam, 2002).

Given that proactive personality motivates individuals to generate ideas (Kim *et al.*, 2009); leader's evaluation of his/her own proactive personality may facilitate or dampen the necessary instrumental support for the creativity of his/her followers. The present study has three important contributions. First, even though congruence in proactive personality of a leader and that of his/her follower has received some scholarly attention in predicting workplace outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2012; Zhang and Bartol, 2010), the influence on employee level creativity is at best unexplored. The present study, we believe, extends the implications of P–S fit in the domain of creativity. In doing so, our study answers calls to examine the influence of leader specific trait on employees in the field of creativity and, thus, contribute to the structural knowledge of HR practitioners (Anderson *et al.*, 2014). Second, from an empirical standpoint, using response surface analysis, our research provides an important finding, that just congruence alone is not sufficient for creativity; rather, congruence at higher levels is critical in fostering follower's creativity. It provides empirical evidence through an integration of theory development on proactive personality (Seibert *et al.*, 2001) and P–S fit (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). Third, by incorporating leader's proactive personality, the present study contributes to the domain of proactive personality research which has so far neglected the role of leader's proactive personality while analyzing workplace outcomes (Anderson *et al.*, 2014).

### Theory development and hypotheses

Creativity as an important workplace outcome is grounded in the social-psychological view and is defined as the production of novel and useful ideas concerning products, processes, procedures and services (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Shalley and Gilson, 2004). Prior studies have suggested that in global competitive marketplace some or potentially all employees are expected to be creative in their jobs to produce outcomes which could range from minor adaptations in the workflow to major breakthrough ideas for the development of new products and procedures (Shalley and Gilson, 2004; Unsworth, 2001). Shalley and Gilson (2004) argued that level of creativity depends on the job and hence desirable creative outcome varies from requiring a highly breakthrough idea to incremental change at workplace. For example, the desirable creative outcomes for shop-floor associates in a manufacturing firm could be related to improvement in assembly line work processes.

As creativity is influenced by context (Mumford *et al.*, 2002), leaders job is to ensure that the work environment, organization culture and climate, and the HRM practices are facilitative for follower level creative outcomes (Shalley and Gilson, 2004). Studies suggest that leaders are in the best position to influence followers' creativity (Cerne *et al.*, 2017; Shalley *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, we focus on the relationship among leader characteristics, follower characteristics and individual creativity.

#### *Leader–follower congruence in proactive personality*

Specifically, creativity at workplace is often the result of individual's characteristics and motivations. However, the context in which a person works has a significant influence on

the transference of his/her creative ideas into useful solutions. Therefore, organizational theorists have empirically examined the interaction of personal and situational factors at work that is instrumental in facilitating creativity (i.e. generation of novel and useful ideas) (Shalley *et al.*, 2004). Studies also have indicated that specific attributes of a leader influence follower's creative outcomes (Mumford *et al.*, 2002). In the realm of leaders' influence on followers, Huang *et al.* (2016) found that leaders who have high levels of creative self-efficacy set higher expectations for their followers which is more likely to encourage their creativity. In this line of argument, past research has examined other noteworthy effects of the leader on employee creativity: being creative role models (De Jong and Den Hartog, 2007), leader self-efficacy (Huang *et al.*, 2016) and leader creativity (Koseoglu *et al.*, 2017). While these studies have advanced our understanding of workplace interactions for the creativity of individuals, we believe that leader's characteristics exert strong situational influence on follower's creativity.

We borrowed literature from another stream of research which underlines that merely working with creative leaders does not engender employee creativity. For instance, studies found that employee's psychological involvement mediated the leader's expectation for employees to be creative (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2007). Moreover, "not all leaders are equally prone to engaging in behaviors that help improve employee creativity" (Huang *et al.*, 2016, p. 58). The current study addresses this concern by expecting that, when follower's creativity-specific characteristics are congruent with leader characteristics, it facilitates creativity. This is because the congruence engenders a shared vision related to workplace (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Taking this perspective, we draw upon the P-E fit theory (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005) and introduce proactive personality congruence in leader-follower dyads as an enabling mechanism for follower's creativity.

Under P-E fit, P-S fit appears to be an under-researched process in the field of creativity (Anderson *et al.*, 2014; Huang *et al.*, 2016). P-S fit is an effective approach to examine the dyadic congruence between a leader and a follower and has been shown to predict followers' behaviors and attitude toward workplace outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). The supplementary P-S fit directs leaders and their followers to share their views of the workplace, and because there is a fit in their proactive personality, they share a mutual understanding of work goals and have similar expectations regarding workplace change and initiatives (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). Prior research shows that individual personality is a deep level trait that directs behavior and has a more lasting effect on several workplace outcomes (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Unfortunately, literature examining personality congruence at leader-follower level is scant in the creativity domain (Anderson *et al.*, 2014).

Prior research noted that an individual with proactive personality is more active with broader cognitive and attentional resources to influence the work environment (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, evidence suggests that proactive behavior usually involves identification of problems or opportunities in the work environment, and subsequent generation of new ideas to solve those problems (Parker *et al.*, 2010). For an individual, creativity (generating and developing new ideas) incorporates an action-based orientation which is an attitudinal and behavioral outcome, affected by individual's proactive personality (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Hence, individuals with proactive personality traits are more actively engaged in creativity to improve their workplace (Parker *et al.*, 2010). However, a critical question that still remains unanswered is whether congruence in proactive personality between a leader and a follower fosters creativity in employees.

Congruence in proactive personalities, leads to internalization of a shared vision by the followers and, hence, they define themselves at work by the relational identification with their leaders (Yang *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, followers of proactive leaders, when engage in creativity due to their proactive personality, are more successful due to the congruence in their role orientation and a sense of legitimacy they derive from their proactive leaders

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(Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). Congruence in proactive personality will engender psychological safety in a follower due to commensurate capabilities with the leader, it gives cushion for the followers to learn, develop and master their creative skills, take risks and suggest novel and useful ideas to their leader (Cerne *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, in assessing incongruence of a proactive follower working with a not-so-proactive leader, the dyad will envisage different work goals because of dissimilarity in role orientation. In this case, proactive followers would experience low relational identification with the leader, which may reduce psychological safety in the dyad (Collins and Feeney, 2000), resulting in low levels of creativity. In sum, we expect that congruence in proactive personality between a leader and follower engenders better creativity in the follower. We, thus, propose the following hypothesis:

*H1.* Congruence in proactive personality between leaders and followers is positively related to followers' creativity.

The central tenet of leader–follower congruence in proactive personality is that similarity in proactive personality fosters mutually beneficial goals which improves exchange relationships and, thus, drives change initiatives through creativity. However, in assessing congruence, prior P–S fit research has predominantly considered the positive effects of congruence on the criterion variable (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005) which may perhaps obscure differential effects, if present, on creativity, resulting from higher and lower level of congruence in proactive personality. To achieve a more complete picture, we argue that there are no uniform effects of leader–follower similarity in proactive personality. When a high proactive follower works with a high proactive leader, then they share goals for various change initiatives which promotes follower creativity. In contrast, when congruence in proactive personality happens at low levels, then leader–follower dynamics tend to settle for low key initiatives or maintaining the status quo (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). This would still result in a good dyadic relationship, and leaders are generally satisfied with followers when they withhold their ideas and remain passive in creative role orientation. We, thus, hypothesize the differential impact of congruence in proactive personality at high vs low levels on creativity:

*H2.* Creativity is higher when congruence in proactive personality between the leaders and followers are at higher levels compared to the situation when they are congruent at lower levels.

## Method

### *Sample and procedure*

The sample was drawn from an Indian manufacturing organization operating in the production of engines and generators, and other ancillary businesses, and is the recipient of several awards for innovative solutions. The primary occupations were, coil winding, sub assembly, quality assurance and control, rotor and stator manufacturing, soldering, design and development, testing, fuel systems, turbochargers, maintenance, safety and purchase. In the study context, the innovation required at the workplace acts as a situational feature for employees, inducing proximal stimulus for the generation of ideas (Axtell *et al.*, 2000; Hoyrup, 2010; Skerlavaj *et al.*, 2014). These creative ideas ranged from working on customer needs regarding usage of engines and generators to improvements like placing a stand for better access of tool box by multiple teams to reduce the cycle time or modifying the turbine cap for ease in assembly operations. Although, manufacturing sites have obvious norms and rigid roles, yet the need for continuous improvement in products, processes and procedures engender sufficient situations which abet individuals with opportunities to express more of their individual differences (Mowday and Sutton, 1993). For instance,

Hoyrup (2010) underlined the importance of employee-driven innovation, stressing that, if properly nurtured, manufacturing workforce can engage in creativity for innovative solutions at the shop-floor.

In our initial meeting with the HRM department, we learned about the encouragement (e.g. rewards, innovation contests, etc.) toward generating creative ideas. The followers and their leaders interacted on a daily basis for review of activities related to current work processes and improvements. Any employee in this organization, who generates ideas usually, works in team-based structure. Once a creative idea is discussed with the team members and immediate leader, it is submitted by the idea generator in a suggestion box. The senior leaders evaluate these ideas in consultation with the immediate leader of the concerned follower. We expected that due to close proximity of a follower with his/her leader, the effect of congruence in proactive personality between a leader and his/her follower at the shop-floor has more meaningful effect on follower's creativity (Anderson *et al.*, 2014).

We invited 44 leaders and 412 followers to be participants in the study. We distributed questionnaires in sealed envelopes in a designated room during their free time in two waves and at two hierarchical levels. The cover page of the questionnaire outlined the study objectives, assurance of confidentiality and voluntary nature of the survey. We received back questionnaires from 36 leaders and 355 followers, and were able to match 346 leader–follower dyads. We eliminated a few more followers as they reported to multiple leaders, thus reducing noise in our data to 336 leader–follower dyads. To remove any selection bias, we compared demographic information from official records and found no significant difference. The number of direct reports per group leader who answered the survey ranged from 4 to 20. All the leaders were males with a mean age of 31.05 years (SD = 3.60), the average tenure of 7.11 years and an average education of 15 years (SD = 0.58). Among the followers, 95 percent were male with an average age of 26 years (SD = 3.90), an average organizational tenure of 4.50 years (SD = 3.20) and an average dyadic relationship of 4.10 years (SD = 2.34).

### *Measures*

*Control variables.* To eliminate alternative reasons for follower's creativity, our study controlled for a range of psychological, organizational and demographic factors (Bernerth and Aguinis, 2016). Previous empirical research, including a meta-analysis by Ng and Feldman (2012), suggested that even older people can be creative in their jobs as against the negative stereotype. Some other studies have reported that older people have better cognitive adaptive styles (Kirton, 1976) and it may affect creative ideation due to personal sources (Ng and Feldman, 2013). Age was measured in years. Moreover, in consistent with the suggestions of past studies, we controlled for gender (Baer, 2012) though in our sample we have few female employees, yet it could influence the innovative initiatives. It was measured as a dichotomous variable (1 for male and 2 for female). We controlled for education as a categorical variable since Ng and Feldman (2009) suggested a relationship between education and creativity. It was measured on a scale that ranged from (1) "high school" to (4) "graduate's degree or higher".

For the organizational variables, we controlled for leader–follower dyad tenure length (how long an employee had been working with a designated leader at the workplace) as followers with more dyad tenure might have greater familiarity with shop-floor work processes that might enhance their confidence about sharing their ideas with leaders (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Creativity, in our context, essentially involves interdependence on other team members, therefore, we controlled for task interdependence which is defined as the extent to which followers are dependent on team members to carry out their jobs. This was

measured through a five-item scale (Van Der Veegt *et al.*, 2000: Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.76$ ). All these control variables were captured in a five-point self-report scale.

*Proactive personality.* At time 1, using a ten-item proactive personality scale (Seibert *et al.*, 2001), as adapted from Bateman and Crant (1993), we captured the self-rated measure of proactive personality independently from both the leaders and the followers. In line with Zhang *et al.* (2012), participants (leaders and followers) were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements. A sample item of the scale is, "If I see something I don't like, I fix it" (1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree"). Reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.79 for followers and 0.80 for leaders.

*Creativity.* Perceptual measures of creativity have been well accepted as they highlight the subjective assessment of domain-specific creativity from the actors involved in workplace social settings. For this measure, it was not possible to have leaders to rate creativity since our methodology assured participant anonymity in line with past study (for details please refer to Shalley, Gilson and Blum, 2009). Prior research has suggested that employees are best suited to self-report their creativity as they are fully aware of the tasks they perform to be creative in their jobs (Shalley *et al.*, 2009). At time 2, follower's self-rated their creativity by using the scale developed by Zhou and George (2001). Consistent with past research (Skerlavaj *et al.*, 2014) we used eight items concerning the generation of novel and useful ideas. A sample item of the scale is, "How often do you suggest new ways to increase quality?" Reliability coefficient  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.81.

Since our respondents were speakers of Hindi language, we used the back-translation procedure to translate the questionnaire from English to Hindi (Brislin, 1980). Moreover, we administered a pretest of the measure's content validity and generalizability by inviting 5 leaders and 30 shop-floor followers (who were not considered in the final study) to inspect our survey. The pilot test confirmed that the study measures were reliable ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ) and valid. Based on their comments, certain refinements were made. For example, following their inputs, at the beginning of the survey instrument, we added the phrase "please rate the following items according to your experience in your current organization." Unless otherwise specified, we used five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree", to measure the study variables.

*Procedure.* At time 1, demographic details and proactive personality were collected from both the leaders and the followers separately. After two months (Time 2), we measured our dependent variable, i.e., creativity, through self-rating by shop-floor employees. Consistent to the recommendations of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003, p. 887), in the procedural approach, we collected the data on proactive personality from both the employees and their leaders (multiple sources). We further collected data on creativity from the employees after two months (temporal separation). After data collection, we conducted the statistical analysis (common latent factor analysis) to check whether method bias is a concern in our data. The calculated variance was 17.64 percent, which was less than the threshold of 25 percent (Williams *et al.*, 1989). Hence, CMV is not a major concern in the present study. Our approach is consistent to the methods used in past studies for controlling common method bias (Koseoglu *et al.*, 2017).

#### *Polynomial regression with response surface analysis*

We tested the congruence effect of proactive personality between the leader and the follower on follower-rated creativity by using polynomial regression and response surface methodology (see Edwards and Cable, 2009; Shanock *et al.*, 2010), which helps to generate three-dimensional response surfaces. Polynomial regression overcomes statistical problems inherent in difference scores indices such as extenuated reliability (Edwards and Parry, 1993) and, hence, provides more accurate insights into congruence effects than difference scores.

Specifically, creativity was regressed on the control variables, follower proactive personality ( $F$ ), leader proactive personality ( $L$ ), follower proactive personality squared ( $F^2$ ), follower proactive personality times leader proactive personality ( $F \times L$ ), leader proactive personality squared ( $L^2$ ). To reduce noise due to multi-collinearity and for interpretation of the results, proactive personality of both the leader ( $L$ ) and the follower ( $F$ ) was mean centered on the pooled grand mean before the analysis. The regression equation used for analysis is shown below (for simplification controlled variables are not included):

$$C = b_0 + b_1F + b_2L + b_3F^2 + b_4F \times L + b_5L^2 + e,$$

where  $C$  denotes creativity of follower,  $F$  and  $L$  are follower and leader-centered proactive personality, respectively; and  $b_0$  is the constant,  $b_1$  is the unstandardized coefficient for the centered follower proactive personality,  $b_2$  is the unstandardized coefficient for the centered leader proactive personality,  $b_3$  is the unstandardized coefficient for the squared centered follower proactive personality,  $b_4$  is the unstandardized coefficient for the product of the centered leader and follower proactive personality,  $b_5$  is the unstandardized coefficient for the squared centered leader proactive personality and  $e$  is the error term.

Following procedure suggested by Edwards and Parry (1993), we used regression coefficients of  $F$  and  $L$  in the horizontal axes, and creativity in the vertical axis to plot the three-dimensional response surfaces. We constructed the response surface plots with the surface indicators  $a_1$ – $a_4$  to conduct the significance tests (Edwards and Cable, 2009; Edwards and Parry, 1993). We conducted additional tests to examine slopes and curvatures along two critical lines of interest which are the congruence line ( $F=L$ ) and the incongruence line ( $F=-L$ ). While  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  represent the slope and curvature of the congruence line ( $F=L$ ), the surface indicators  $a_3$  and  $a_4$  represent the slope and curvature of incongruence line ( $F=-L$ ). In accordance with Edwards and Parry (1993), the joint significance of the coefficients for the three second-order polynomial terms (i.e.  $F^2$ ,  $F \times L$  and  $L^2$ ) and the significant curvature along the incongruence line (i.e.  $a_4 = b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ ) proves the existence of a significant congruence effect. The slopes and curvatures along the congruence ( $F=L$ ) and incongruence lines ( $F=-L$ ), with the estimated coefficients, are presented in Table III.

## Results

Table I presents descriptive statistics of the variables, e.g. mean, standard deviation and correlation along with the reliability coefficients. Creativity was found to be significantly correlated with follower's proactive personality ( $r = 0.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Among control variables, only task interdependence was significantly correlated with creativity.

As shown in model 2 of Table II, the three second-order polynomial terms are jointly significant ( $F = 3.98$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and as evident in Table III, the surface along the incongruence line has shown a significant downward curvature ( $a_4 = -0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Taken together, these two findings support  $H1$ .

The diagrammatic representation in the form of response surface plot of this relationship is shown in Figure 1, which indicates that creativity increases more sharply as the congruence between proactive personalities of follower and leader increases. This further supported  $H1$ .

$H2$  posited that creativity is higher when proactive personalities of leader and follower are aligned at a higher level as compared to when they are aligned at a low level. A significant and positive slope along the congruence line ( $a_1$ ) indicates that congruence at high levels of proactive personality between leader and follower would result in higher outcomes than congruence at low levels. As is evident in Table III, the congruence line has a significant and positive slope ( $a_1 = 0.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The back corner of Figure 1 also reveals that creativity is higher where proactive personalities of both leader and follower are high which supported  $H2$ .

S.No.	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Age dissimilarity, time 1	4.988	3.774								
2.	Gender similarity, time 1	0.973	0.161	-0.001							
3.	Education similarity, time 1	0.556	0.497	0.043	0.037						
4.	Dyadic tenure, time 1	4.107	2.34	-0.141*	-0.063	0.053					
5.	Task Interdependence, time 1	3.687	0.743	-0.173**	0.011	-0.012	0.088	(0.76)			
6.	Follower proactive personality, time 1	4.064	0.472	0.068	-0.020	0.090****	0.061	0.213***	(0.79)		
7.	Leader proactive personality, time 1	3.994	0.456	0.199***	0.126*	0.127*	-0.006	-0.098****	0.070	(0.80)	
8.	Creativity, time 2	3.845	0.529	0.006	-0.049	-0.008	-0.004	0.161**	0.669***	0.033	(0.81)

**Notes:**  $N = 336$ . Reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*\*\* $p < 0.0001$ ; \*\*\*\*\* $p < 0.10$

Proactive  
personality  
congruence

**Table I.**  
Means, standard  
deviations and  
correlations among  
variables

Variables	Creativity	
	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	4.001*** (0.13)	4.106*** (0.14)
Age dissimilarity	-0.006 (0.01)	-0.007 (0.01)
Gender similarity	-0.12 (0.13)	-0.141 (0.13)
Education similarity	-0.07 (0.04)	-0.091* (0.04)
Dyadic tenure	-0.012 (0.01)	-0.014 (0.01)
Task Interdependence	0.007 (0.03)	0.008 (0.03)
Follower proactive personality ( <i>F</i> )	0.783*** (0.05)	0.732*** (0.05)
Leader proactive personality ( <i>L</i> )	0.007 (0.05)	0.065 (0.05)
$F^2$		-0.138*** (0.07)
$F \times L$		0.198* (0.10)
$L^2$		-0.213* (0.11)
$R^2$	0.486***	0.504***
$\Delta R^2$ for 3 quadratic terms		0.020**
$\Delta F$ for the 3 quadratic terms		3.980**

**Notes:**  $N = 336$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*\*\* $p < 0.10$

**Table II.** Results of polynomial regressions in predicting creativity

Variable	Idea implementation
Congruence line ( $F = L$ )	
Slope ( $a_1$ )	0.80***
Curvature ( $a_2$ )	-0.15
Incongruence line ( $F = -L$ )	
Slope ( $a_3$ )	0.67***
Curvature ( $a_4$ )	-0.55***

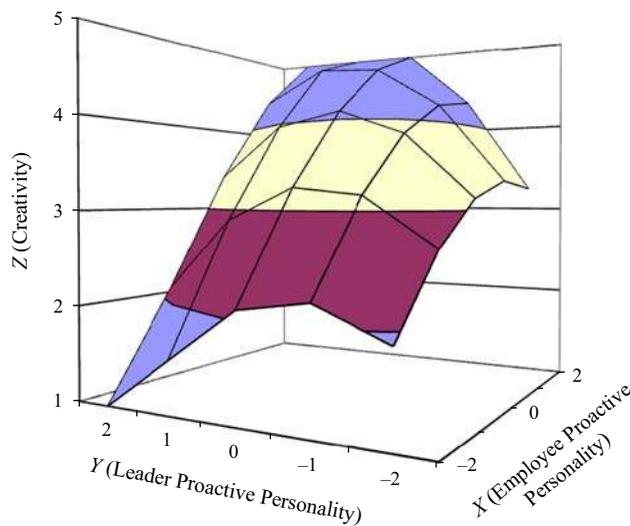
**Notes:**  $N = 336$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.  $a_1 = (b_1 + b_2)$ , where  $b_1$  is  $\beta$  coefficient for follower proactive personality and  $b_2$  is  $\beta$  coefficient for leader proactive personality;  $a_2 = (b_3 + b_4 + b_5)$ , where  $b_3$  is  $\beta$  coefficient of follower proactive personality squared;  $b_4$  is  $\beta$  coefficient of the cross-product of leader–follower proactive personality;  $b_5$  is  $\beta$  coefficient of leader proactive personality squared;  $a_3 = (b_1 - b_2)$ ;  $a_4 = (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table III.** Surface values for subordinate–follower congruence on creativity

## Discussion

The present research extended the theory on P–E fit and proactive personality, and examined the role of congruence in leader–follower proactive personality as an underlying mechanism in influencing follower’s creativity. We adopted a time-lagged multi-source research design to test our hypotheses. In support of the proposed hypotheses, our findings demonstrated that congruence in proactive personality between a leader and his/her follower is more likely to encourage followers’ creativity. Moreover, leader–follower dyads that are congruent at higher levels of proactive personality show higher levels of followers’ creativity than when dyads are congruent at lower levels. Our findings strengthens the understanding of antecedents of workplace creativity as it may not be enough if scholarship continues to examine standalone effect of specific individual traits on creativity rather it requires an in-depth investigation that how dispositional trait of a leader activates or suppresses the effect of similar dispositional trait of a follower on follower level creativity (Anderson *et al.*, 2014). In doing so, the study suggests that HRM practitioners should be cognizant of the effect of dyadic proactive personality congruence for facilitating creativity.

One interesting finding, which we did not hypothesize, was that creativity is higher where the proactive personality of the follower is higher than that of the leader (see the right



Proactive  
personality  
congruence

**Figure 1.**  
Creativity as predicted  
by follower proactive  
personality and leader  
proactive personality  
congruence

corner of the graph in Figure 1) compared to the situation where the follower's proactive personality is lower than that of the leader ( $a_3 = 0.67, p < 0.001$ ; see the left corner of the graph in Figure 1). These findings suggest that not only congruence but also incongruence in proactive personality is critical to understand follower's creativity. One probable explanation of the above findings is as follows. Followers having higher levels of proactive personality can extend themselves in building internal and external information networks to gain better contextual knowledge that helps them to bond with low proactive personality leader, providing them certain information and initiatives which otherwise they would be deprived. These activities may help increase creativity as the negative effects of incongruence get reduced. In situations where the followers have low proactive personality than their leaders, the followers might fail to meet the initiatives taken by high proactive leaders, thus fail to develop relationships with them which results in low creativity. However, future studies may explore the effect of incongruence situation on follower level creativity.

Taking together we suggest that HRM should put efforts in matching proactive personality of a leader and a follower, which can exert a positive influence in building a unique set of dyadic abilities, such that organizations' human capital, as a whole, can become a source of competitive advantage through creativity (Lepak and Snell, 1999).

#### *Theoretical implications*

This study addresses the concern raised by Bos-Nehles *et al.* (2017), about the lack of scholarly attention in investigating the contextual factors that HRM should consider to promote employee creativity. It also contributes to existing literature in a number of ways. First, it adds to the body of research on creativity by integrating P-E fit framework and leader characteristics toward examining the influence of leaders in facilitating follower creativity. Existing studies on follower's creativity are limited to exploring leader behaviors (Zhang and Bartol, 2010) and their relationship with followers (Tierney, 2008), thus ignoring important leader characteristics. Taking cognizance of the suggestion by Tierney (2008)

about the critical role of leader characteristics, the present study reveals that proactive personality of a leader is a contingent force which, if supplemented with follower's proactive personality, facilitates creativity.

Moreover, this study extends the previous work on leader's role in developing a work context that supports employee level creativity (Koseoglu *et al.*, 2017; Shalley and Gilson, 2004). For instance, Shalley *et al.* (2004) highlighted that researchers should consider investigating the contextual factors that have a positive relationship with creativity. Since creative outcomes cannot and do not occur in a vacuum, the present study incorporates the above suggestion in investigating the role of leader's specific characteristics that are favorable for follower creativity. To understand contexts where leaders have to facilitate follower's creativity, our study theoretically advanced creativity research by examining leader's proactive personality as an underlying force that can match the proactive personality of followers' who generate creative outcomes. Therefore, creativity scholarship should theorize congruence in leader–follower characteristics while investigating creativity at the workplace.

Second, this research makes a contribution to proactive personality literature. Prior studies have suggested that employee's proactive personality predicts creativity (Kim *et al.*, 2009), overlooking role of leaders' proactive personality in stimulating proactive followers' creativity. Our study extends prior proactive personality research from the individual level to the dyadic level (e.g. leader–follower proactive personality congruence). Complementing prior research on proactive personality, our findings indicated that proactive personality congruence at the leader–follower dyad is critical for follower-rated creativity. Thus, dyadic congruence should be an important consideration for proactive personality research in general for work-related outcomes.

Third, to understand the congruence effect, we unpacked it at two different levels, i.e. congruence at higher and lower level of proactive personality, and extended the P–S fit literature by demonstrating that simply seeing the congruence effect of P–S dyad may overlook the more nuanced effects of different levels of congruence on followers' creativity. Our results show that creativity is high when leader and followers' proactive personality are congruent at high levels rather than at low levels. Investigating such differential effects is critical in developing P–E fit theory (P–S fit in our case) because prior research on person and environment is dominant in examining fit only from the matching perspective, irrespective of their absolute values. Apart from congruence, P–S fit research may benefit if researchers pay attention to different levels of incongruence in proactive personality as evidenced in our analysis.

### *Practical implications*

To achieve the organizational goal of creativity, HRM usually expects an immediate leader to foster follower level creativity in their work role since followers are closer to processes and products (Cerne *et al.*, 2017). It is more so because they continuously interact, monitor and give feedback on various work-related in- role and extra-role behaviors to their followers in line with the HRM goal. Given this requirement, HRM practices regarding leader–follower dyadic congruence become paramount for creativity related outcomes in an organization. However, extant HRM research has neglected an important contextual situation-dyadic congruence in proactive personality between a leader and a follower. Our research offers several practical implications for both HRM and leaders, who are continuously in need of creative ideas to gain competitive advantage.

We found that it is not only congruence that counts; rather, congruence at higher levels of proactive personality facilitates creativity. This is critical while making recruitment decisions and also in assigning followers to leaders. Studies argued that opportunity enhancing HRM practices can support follower level creativity (Seeck and Diehl, 2017).

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Based on a qualitative study, Malik *et al.* (2017) suggested that the use of sets of HRM practices such as recruitment is critical for exploration of new ideas by the employees. Our study extends their proposition by providing a specific aspect to consider (i.e. matching proactive personality of a leader with his/her follower) while hiring people in a context where creativity is important. In addition, leaders predisposed in proactive personality, recognize the opportunities and creative ideas generated by their proactive followers. Hence, even though leaders are predisposed with proactive personality, the probability that they can foster creativity in their followers depends upon the organization's dyad structure design—those leaders that happen to have followers with similar proactive personality disposition. Studies also argued that in order to overcome incongruence, HRM should alter aspects of job-design (Jiang *et al.*, 2012). Therefore while assigning employees to different jobs, HRM practices should focus on matching leaders' proactive personality with that of the followers to foster employee creativity.

With increasing emphasis on creativity at workplace, there is a felt need for more studies to understand “the relationship between HRM processes and employee creativity” (Tang *et al.*, 2017, p. 1328). Our study suggests that training leaders and followers in tandem for creativity-specific skills can reap benefits as it could increase the congruence at higher levels. This is in line with the human capital perspective which suggests that skill training enhances employee's creativity and can potentially contribute in making these dyads as valuable resources (Jiang *et al.*, 2012; Seeck and Diehl, 2017). Hence, both followers and supervisors can be exposed to various work-related experiences through variations in tasks that can hone their skills, increasing their repertoire of knowledge about several cross-functions. This is so because training and development are argued to be one of the best HRM practices for enhancing employee innovative work behavior (Bos-Nehles *et al.* (2017). In case, subordinates possess lower level of proactive personality, leaders may attempt to create developmental platforms where they can train their followers for creativity-specific skills (Strauss and Parker, 2018). Prior research shows that simulation workshops and training focused on problem solving can enhance the creativity of employees (Seeck and Diehl, 2017; Shalley *et al.*, 2004). Hence, leader support in enhancing skill set would influence follower's self-expansion to become creative as they feel psychologically safe in being creative at workplace (Ma Prieto and Pilar Perez-Santana, 2014). In contrast, in a situation where followers have higher levels of proactive personality than their immediate leaders, the incongruence effect (immediate leaders with low proactive personality) as pointed out in our analysis, increases creativity. The training and development activities in organizations should make their immediate leaders aware of their low proactive personality levels which would help them to re-assess themselves to promote their followers' creativity. As immediate leaders play an important role in engaging and developing their followers (Bamber *et al.*, 2017), training and development of immediate leaders is an equally important HR activity.

#### *Limitations and directions for future research*

The current study has certain limitations that indicate ample opportunities for future research. Although our study collected data from two sources (both leaders and followers reported their own proactive personality; followers rated their creativity), and used a time-lagged design (i.e. follower creativity was measured after two months the predictor variables were measured) it did not allow testing for causality. Future research could test the proposed relationships with a longitudinal design. Although prior studies have found a strong correlation of self-rated measures of creativity with single leader creativity rating (0.65) (Axtell *et al.*, 2000), yet self-rated creativity measure can induce the common method variance. Hence, future studies should focus on leader rated creativity and validate it with objective assessments. Another limitation of our sample is that participants' context led

them to conceive ideas related to their workplace improvements, where they actively searched for problems based on their ability to generate ideas. The results of this study could differ in the situations where creativity is more internally driven (e.g. intrinsic motivation) and need time to show results (Unsworth, 2001). Future studies should probe the effect of congruence in proactive personality in other contexts where creativity requirement is different.

On further analysis, we found that (in-)congruence in proactive personality between the leader and his/her follower has significant impact on creativity. Creativity is better when the followers have higher levels of proactive personality than their leaders compared to the situation where the leaders possess higher levels of proactive personality than their followers. Future research may theorize and investigate the asymmetrical incongruence in proactive personality in the leader–follower dyads and its impact on follower’s creativity. Finally, our study was conducted in India; hence it is difficult to generalize the study findings to other cultural contexts. As Zhang *et al.* (2012) noticed high power distance in India and China may encourage employees to positively evaluate their leaders’ characteristics which can result in a higher level of congruence effects. Therefore, future research could address this limitation to test congruence relationships in both high and low cultures.

### Conclusion

In the field of creativity, scholars have strongly recommended examining how leaders’ personal characteristics interact with follower’s individual characteristics to influence creativity (Anderson *et al.*, 2014; Shalley and Gilson, 2004). Answering to this call, the present study has integrated three previously disconnected research streams, i.e. creativity, proactive personality and P–E fit in order to examine the proactive personality congruence between leader and follower on creativity. Our findings reveal that the indirect effect of leader’s proactive personality on proactive follower’s creativity is an important underlying mechanism that perhaps is the reason that why leaders tend to differ in their encouragement and support to followers for creative ideas. More pointedly, we found that congruence at a higher level is more conducive to follower’s creativity. Since organizations could benefit from creative ideas of employees, we hope scholars would extend our work to shed more light on the psychology of in-congruence effect.

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