ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Being Trusted Requires Being Proactive: An Empirical Investigation of Proactive Followership

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Abstract— This study examines the role of followers' characteristics and proactive followership behavior in leaders' perceptions and attitudes. We tested that politically skilled followers are proactive in their followership behavior; followers' proactive behavior, in turn, engenders their leaders' perception of followers' support. Further, it is proposed that proactive followership and perceived follower support con-construct dyadic trust between leader and follower. It is a quantitative study. We conducted two self-administered surveys with a sample of 229 (leader-follower dyads) from Pakistan organizations to test the proposed relationships. Overall, we find support for the followership theory. Results suggest that followers' political skill impacts the followers' proactive behavior, which becomes a source to improve the leaders' perception of followers' support. Moreover, the results confirm that the followers' proactivity combined with perceived followers' support and con-construct dyadic trust between followers and leaders. Very few research studies investigate leadership outcomes resulting from followers' behavior. Understanding followers' role in effective leadership outcomes can provide us with unique visions on the drivers of follower behaviors concerning their leaders. Therefore, this study investigates an essential aspect of the leadership process, currently missing in recent research.
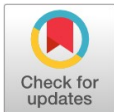
Introduction

Followership is defined as "the characteristics, behaviors, and processes of individuals acting in relation to leaders" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 96). It highlights the role of followers in the leadership process. Scholars argue that followership and leadership are two sides of the same coin because both play active and essential roles, which is necessary for organizations' success (Gilani et al., 2020; Kark & Dijk, 2019; Küpers & Weibler, 2008; Jam, Singh, Ng, & Aziz, 2018). The modern theories suggest followers as active agents and essential elements of the leadership process because leadership has no existence without followership (Blair & Bligh, 2018; Ford & Harding, 2018). Carsten et al., 2017). Despite the accepted significance of followership, very few research studies investigate leadership outcomes resulting from followers' behavior. In recent years, most leadership studies have given leaders a central position in their studies (Ponting,

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2020). The scholars criticize prior leadership research for its over-focus on leaders ignoring followers' roles and involuntary compliance in the leadership process (Khan et al., 2020; Blom & Lundgren, 2020; Jam, Akhtar, Haq, Ahmad-U-Rehman, & Hijazi, 2010; Zhao et al., 2016). Understanding followers' role in effective leadership outcomes can provide us with unique visions on the drivers of follower behaviors concerning their leaders. Therefore, this study investigates an essential aspect of the leadership process, currently missing in the recent research conducted on how followers' characteristics and proactive behavior shape the dyadic trust and how leaders' perception of follower support explains the proposed relationship.

There is a growing consensus on the effectiveness of proactive behaviors, i.e., future-focused, self-initiated, change-related behavior, crucial for organizational success. It can generate many employee-related benefits, like better performance, boosted psychological outcomes, and improved decision-making (Ziauddin, Khan, Jam, & Hijazi, 2010; Dooley & Fryxell, 1999; Thomas et al., 2010; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). However, instead of increased literature on the effectiveness of proactive behavior, there is still much to be learned. Because prior research primarily focused on the outcome of proactive behavior related to the employee and mostly ignored its impact on leaders and their behaviors/attitudes. Given the advantages of proactive behavior, it may not be astonishing that leaders encourage those followers' who behave proactively in their jobs. The researcher also suggested exploring the role of transcendent followers in leadership effectiveness in a recent dynamic environment (e Cunha et al., 2013). Transcendent followers are proactive, self-aware, and proactive incompetence; therefore, this study suggests that leaders who appreciate proactive followership behavior have good relations with followers. Consequently, followers perform better (Benson et al., 2016; Han et al., 2019).

It is evident that leaders encourage proactive follower characteristics, but there is a potential drawback to these self-started behaviors. A central component of proactive behavior is that these behaviors are expectant and authorized out independently (Grant & Ashford, 2008). From one perspective, some leaders encourage such agentic quality. For example, when a leader wishes to ensure positive changes and take it as personal responsibility, proactive followers are evaluated as better performers (Fuller et al., 2015). However, this additionally implies that proactive behaviors can exist without leaders' consent and guidance. Therefore, considered risky behaviors, proactive behaviors can be misjudged by leaders as demonstrations of disobedience or danger to their position (Burris, 2012; Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Excessively energetic followers can undermine cooperative endeavors and create tensions from a leader's point of view. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend when leaders are progressively open to proactive behaviors.

This study attempts to understand when and how proactive followership behaviors help develop dyadic trust. A leader's trust is a central boulevard that followers can adopt to influence their leaders' behavior (Lapierre & Bremner, 2010). The social networks of followers have a profound influence on the organization's decisions and allocation of resources in their favor because of the political nature (Mintzberg, 1985). Therefore, both followers and leaders need to build a strong network and trust each other. This study proposes that followers may use their political skills to develop their leader's trust in them. Proactive personality is the personal ability of politically skilled employees (Ferris et al., 2007). Politically skilled followers are assumed to behave proactively, leaving a positive perception in the leader's mind. Furthermore, it is posited that a positive impression of a leader about followers' proactive behavior will co-construct the leader's trust. In turn, it increases followers' trust in their leader, complying with social exchange theory.

Our study aims to advance the followership theory in two ways. First, several studies on employee-related consequences of proactive behavior (e.g., career success, task performance, innovative behavior) are available. However, comparatively fewer studies examine how followers' proactive behavior impacts their leaders' response, particularly perceived follower support and dyadic trust. Scholars also called for research examining how leaders perceive proactive followership behavior (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Our study responds to these calls by investigating how proactive followership behavior influences leadership. Secondly, existing leadership research is mainly leader-centric (Schedlitzki et al., 2018; Crossman & Crossman, 2011; Lambrechts, Sips, Taillieu, & Grieten, 2009). Therefore, this study reverses the lens (Uhl-Bien, & Carsten, 2018) in which followers impact their leaders' cognitions, behaviors, and attitudes. Overall, the paper enhances the insight into the impact of proactive followership behavior on dyadic trust.

Literature and Hypotheses

Followership and followership theory

Regardless of increasing consideration to followership, leadership overshadows it till recently. Previous research signifies the noteworthy differences in outcomes for both areas. For instance, between 1928 to 2004, the ratio of books published in followership compared to leadership was 1:120, respectively (Bjugstad et al., 2006). The researchers in this field suggest considering the followers and their responsibilities as the active connotation of the leadership process rather than passive (Kim, 2014; Malakyan, 2014; Zhao et al., 2016). Ulh-Bien et al. (2014) reviewed the leadership literature and published the followership theory. Their focus was on studying the leadership phenomenon from the perspective of followers.

According to the followership theory, followers' characteristics influence their following behavior, which interacts with leaders' characteristics (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). The following behavior and leaders' characteristics co-create effective followership outcomes, ultimately

enhancing leadership. There are two main views of followership. The first is concerned with how individuals enact leadership and follow-ership in hierarchical roles. Second stems from how people come together in a social process to co-create leadership and followership. The latter is the constructionist approach and was named "the leadership process." The former is the role-based approach, and they re-ferred to it as "reversing the lens." This model investigates how followers' characteristics and roles influence leaders and outcomes of leadership (Uhl-Bien, & Carsten, 2018). This view investigates follower traits and behavior as the antecedents of leader attitudes and behavioral outcomes. This study follows this thread of inquiry, i.e., emphasizing the role of followership in leadership. That is, we are testing the followership theory is under the role-based approach.

Hypotheses development

Effective followership contributes to leadership and organizational outcomes. Proactive followership behavior refers to "taking the ini-tiative, voicing concerns, taking ownership, and offering solutions before being asked to do so by the leader." (Carsten et al., 2010). Ferris et al. (2005) found that followers proactively acquire the desired outcomes with political skill because political skill is strongly correlated with proactive personality (Liu et al., 2007; Thompson, 2005). The political skill enables individuals to combine their ability of social un-derstanding to modify their behavior as per the demand of a particular situation in manners that seem genuine, reliable, and adequately impact others (Ferris et al., 2005). It is defined as "the ability to understand others at work effectively and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and organizational objectives" (Ferris et al., 2005).

Research showed that the proactive personality has a strong developmental and dispositional impact on political skills via networking ability and interpersonal influence (Liu et al., 2007, Thompson, 2005). Due to this built-in ability, politically skilled followers proactively behave to influence their leader's behavior. Proactivity is an essential ingredient of political skill. Therefore, we can predict that followers with high political skills would display more proactive followership behavior and vice versa. Consequently, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Followers with higher political skills exhibit more apparent proactive followership behavior.

Perceived follower support is a leader's "general belief that followers value their contributions and cares about their well-being." It plays a vital role in shaping the leaders' perception of followers' benevolent intentions. When followers behave proactively, it is more likely that their leaders perceive them as benevolent and think positively about them. Bremner (2011) recommends that proactive followers are considered benevolent; therefore, we propose that the positive impression about followers may increase the leaders' perception of followers' support. Another study on proactive roles reveals that leaders are more pleased and thankful towards their active colleagues rather than passive (Schneider et al., 2014).

Furthermore, followers with high political skills are considered genuine and sincere. Such a favorable reputation of politically skilled followers may induce leaders' belief even more than followers' proactive actions are for their and organizations' best interest. Conse-quently, the leader's opinion about their followers' contributions and care becomes stronger. By keeping the above arguments in mind, we hypothesize that:

H2: A leader's perceived follower support will be higher for those followers who exhibit more proactive followership behavior.

Perception about high followers' support positively influences the leaders' confidence level in their followers. It could further help set higher-level goals, satisfy socio-emotional needs, and believe in rewarding efforts (Ali, Ahmad-Ur-Rehman, Haq, Jam, Ghafoor, & Azeem, 2010). Perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment. European Journal of Social Sciences, 17(2), 186-192.Wu, 2013, Bailey, 2014). Therefore, we suggest that the perception of solid follower support may generate a sense of obligation to pay back the followers' sincere and genuine proactive actions. In exchange for it, leaders show more trust in their followers. Trust is the psychological state of one person, which involves a readiness to accept vulnerability built on favorable perceptions about the other person's intentions and behavior (Wu, 2013). Therefore, when leaders observe their follower support as consistent, they are more motivated to trust them. The social exchange also provides logic in explaining the suggested relationship between perceived follower support and leaders' trust in their followers. The social exchange process endorses trust because leaders interpret their behaviors to ensure that trust is appropriate in response to the followers' sincere and genuine support (Blau, 1964). For example, a leader perceives plenty of followers' support. He can expect the followers to co-lead the group. In this situation, the leader readily shares power with their followers. It also enhances the perception of followers' ability, benevolence, and integrity, positively affecting the leader's trust in their followers. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Proactive followership behavior and positively perceived follower support result in leaders' trust in their followers.

Leaders are typically trusted with the accountability of improving the value of social exchange relations with followers (Whitener et al., 1998). In this regard, Brower et al. (2000) suggested that leaders' trust in followers is fundamental to such social exchange relations. If leaders trust their followers, they may take proactive risks in relationships with those followers, consequently triggering followers' perception of being trusted by their leaders (Serva et al., 2005). According to the norm of reciprocity, a follower perceiving the leader's trust will respond by increasing trust in the leader. Trust can constitute a socio-emotional outcome that can be socially exchanged. In line with the above discussion, we proposed that:

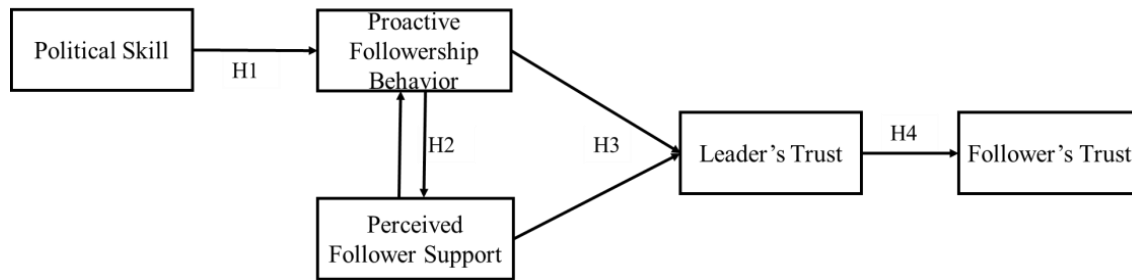**H4:** Perceived leader's trust in a follower is positively related to the follower's trust in the leader.

Fig. 1. Study model

Methods

Procedure and sample

The dyadic data is collected from leaders (middle managers/team leaders) and their followers with the help of the human resource department from different organizations. A confidentiality and ethics agreement was signed. We distributed self-administered questionnaires in paper form to the identified dyads, including a consent letter, the questionnaires, and an envelope to return the survey's questionnaire. In the first survey, leaders rated the followers' political skills, proactive followership behavior, and trust. In the second survey, the followers rated the perceived support and leader's trust. Followers would be the best to answer how they play organization politics and what they do under the followership behavior (Uhl Bien & Carsten, 2018).

A unique code is assigned to each dyad (e.g., F1, L1) written on each questionnaire. We distributed 400 questionnaires and received back 260 questionnaires leaving a response rate of 65 percent, which is considered acceptable in leadership studies (Yeşiltaş, & Tuna, 2018). However, 16 of the 260 questionnaires were not assigned the code properly due to some administrative difficulties in the above-outlined procedure and were not usable. In addition, ten questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete answers, and five were dismissed in the data screening process because of a minor variance in response.

The followers' sample consists of 229 followers. Most respondents are male, which is 85 percent. The average education of respondents is almost 15 years. The average tenure at an organization is almost 3.5 years; we can assume that respondents are experienced and professional. Furthermore, the respondents have average supervisory tenure of 2.6 years under the current leader, which is enough to study the dyadic relationship of follower-leader. It can be noticed that the leaders in this sample are also highly-educated and skilled, as the average value of both leaders' education and their experience is 16 and 3.5 years one-to-one.

Measures

Political skill is measured by the 18-item scale given by Ferris et al. (2007) on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1; strongly agree = 5). The Cronbach alpha for this scale is 0.98. Carsten et al. (2008) developed the measure of both domains (passive to proactive) of followership behavior. They developed the 10-item scale related to both domains (passive to proactive). Five items were adopted to measure proactive followership behavior on the five-point Likert scale (not at all = 1; to a great extent = 5). The Cronbach alpha for this scale is 0.92. Perceived follower support is measured with a 10-item five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1; strongly agree = 5) developed by Eisenberger (2013). The Cronbach Alpha is 0.92. Finally, both followers' and leaders' trust are measured by adopting the items of Lagace (1991) on a five-point Likert scale (not true at all = 1; true all the time = 5), having Cronbach Alpha 0.93 and 0.94 respectively. This study used the followers' age, gender, education, organizational, and relationship tenure as controlled variables because of their possible impact on study relationships.

Data analysis and results

For data analysis, SPSS and AMOS statistical software are used. Before hypotheses testing, missing values and multivariate outliers are screened to improve the data quality. The data is also analyzed for linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity. The results of the curve estimate show that the data is sufficiently linear. It has no multicollinearity issues as the values of VIF are below 3. Table I represents the descriptive statistics. Pearson correlation values show that the study variables are significantly correlated. The researcher considered only those control variables in the structural model that significantly correlates with study variables (Petersitzke, 2009). The reliability of all the scales is above the acceptable Alpha value of all variables is above 0.70, given in Table I in brackets.

Table I
Descriptive and correlation analysis

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Political Skill	3.89	0.74	(0.98)								
2. PFB	4.38	0.76	0.65**	(0.92)							
3. PFS	2.84	0.54	0.84**	0.71**	(0.92)						
4. Trust (L)	3.73	0.70	0.33**	0.44**	0.30**	(0.94)					
5. Trust (*F*)	3.40	0.85	0.34**	0.70**	0.30**	0.32**	(0.93)				
6. Gender	1.16	0.36	0.14	0.22*	0.05	0.08	0.27**	-			
7. Age	2.62	0.99	0.12	0.07	0.20*	0.11	-0.06	-0.24*	-		
8. Education	15.26	1.17	0.07	0.03	0.02	0.08	0.03	0.18	0.12	-	
9. Tenure (O)	3.50	2.51	-0.01	-0.03	0.09	-0.05	-0.12	-0.30**	0.49**	-0.19	-
10.Tenure (S)	2.65	2.10	-0.05	-0.07	0.02	-0.07	-0.23*	-0.30**	0.44**	-0.29**	0.73**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; PFB = Proactive Followership Behavior;
PFS = Perceived Follower Support; L= Leader's; F = Follower's;
O = Organizational; S = Supervisory

Confirmatory factor analysis is conducted to assess the validity of constructs by using the AMOS 19. Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), CMIN/df, and Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) are used to evaluate the model fitness (Byrne, 2013). The values of TLI and CFI are above 0.90, and RMSEA values are below 0.08, which refers to the good model fitness (Hair, 2010; Kline, 2005). The values of 4 factor measurement model with 38 indicators show good model fit indices (CMIN/df = 1.41; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.06).

We adopted the procedure given by Hair et al. (2010) to ensure study constructs' convergent and discriminant validity. They propose that convergent validity is recognized if the value of AVE (average variance extracted) is less than 0.50. Table II shows the model fit indices values and suggests that all used scales are reliable as the value of composite reliability (CR) for these scales is above 0.70. Further, the value of MSV of all variables is less than their AVE values; therefore, it ensured the discriminant validity of all scales. The detailed results are given in Table II, clearly showing that validity assumptions are fulfilled. There is no major issue of discriminant and convergent validity.

Table II
Reliability and validity of study variables

Variables	Items	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Political Skill	16	0.98	0.73	0.66	0.31
Proactive Followership Behavior	5	0.91	0.68	0.46	0.36
Perceived Follower Support	6	0.92	0.66	0.66	0.32
Leader's Trust	6	0.94	0.72	0.17	0.11
Follower's Trust	5	0.94	0.75	0.45	0.18

The results of structural equation modeling (SEM) are given in Table III. The result supports H1, showing a direct positive relationship between political skill and proactive followership behavior (β = 0.65; $p < 0.001$). The second hypothesis is also supported (β = 0.71; $p < 0.001$). Followers behaving proactively in followership behavior with their leaders are intended to be more likely to be perceived as supportive in the leader's perception.

The third hypothesis (H3) states that employees with proactive followership behavior and high perceived follower support are more trustworthy by their leaders. Another variable, PFB_PFS, is created by multiplying the mean values of proactive followership behavior and perceived follower support to check their combined effect on a leader's trust. A significant combined effect of PFB_PFS on leader's trust (β = 0.35, $p < 0.001$) supports the proposed hypothesis. The results (β = 0.32, $p < 0.001$) provide support to the fourth and final hypothesis (H4) that a leader's trust in a follower is positively related to the follower's trust in the leader.

Table III
Standardized regression weights for SEM

Hypotheses	Coefficients
Political Skill → Proactive Followership Behavior	0.65***
Proactive Followership Behavior → Perceived Follower Support	0.71***
Proactive Followership Behavior → Perceived Follower Support → Leader's Trust	0.35***
Leader's Trust → Follower's Trust	0.32***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

Despite the increasingly important role of followers in the leadership process, followers have been given minor importance in leadership research. However, recognizing their contribution in developing leadership outcomes, researchers have started investigating followers' role in this domain (Jia et al., 2018). The current study is also among those that test the followership theory in a leadership context. We developed four hypotheses to study the path leading to leadership trust, investigating the role of political skills, proactive followership behavior, and perceived follower support in this entire process. The results support our assumption that followers' skills and characteristics combined with leaders' perceptions co-create positive leadership outcomes.

We find that the political skill of followers significantly affects the leader's trust. This relationship is explained by followers' proactive followership behavior (Kelly, 1992) and the leader's perceived follower support. This research advances the leadership literature by turning the research lens from leaders to followers through followership theory. Furthermore, the study findings are consistent with the proposed model.

We tested the "reversing the lens" model, and results suggest that followers' characteristics affect their following behavior. These findings align with Kimura (2015), who indicated that political skill plays a predictive role in organization politics (Al-Madadha et al., 2021) and leader-member exchange. The study advances the previous knowledge by adding the empiricism in this phenomenon that followers' characteristics are as important for leadership outcomes as leaders' characteristics besides their personal growth. The researchers suggest that political skill employees are more likely to gain more career success and supervisory rewards (Shi et al., 2013; Treadway et al., 2010; Treadway et al., 2005; Waheed, Klobas, & Kaur, 2017). These findings are also aligned with the followership research of Melisa (2014), suggesting that followers' work value (self-transcendence) positively affects their directing behavior. Recently, a study evidenced that followers' characteristics (e.g., role orientations) and behaviors positively impact leaders' perceptions about their followers 'contribution and support towards goal attainment and leaders' motivation (Carsten et al., 2017).

In another study, political skill was also an essential contingent factor in translating proactive followership behavior into the leader's trust (Qazi, Raj, Tahir, Waheed, Khan, & Abraham, 2014; Shahzadi et al., 2017). Thus, political skill is an advantageous follower characteristic in the leadership process. Secondly, the leaders perceive their followers as supportive if they display proactive behavior. These findings are aligned with previous studies (Melisa, 2014; Torres, 2014; Zhang et al., 2012), who suggested that the following behavior has a significant impact on positive followership outcomes. A meta-analysis study revealed that proactive employees are high performers and gain more career success than others (Fuller & Marler, 2009). Followers' proactive behavior corresponds to greater leader relationship satisfaction (Hoption, 2016). Current findings significantly contribute to this stream of research.

Finally, the data shows that the follower's proactive followership behavior and perceived follower support will co-create the leader's trust in followers. This finding depicts the equal and essential roles of followers and leaders in leadership. The results indicate that neither leaders nor followers can be sole proprietors of the leadership outcomes. Instead, positive and constructive outcomes are the product of the synergetic relationship of both parties. It suggests that followers' proactive behavior and leaders' positive perceptions are good predictors of their trust. The level of leaders' trust in their followers is an essential factor that is more likely to affect the choice of a leader about the subsequent leadership style (Lapierre & Bremner, 2010). This finding is aligned with a recent study that suggested that proactive personality stimulates their leaders' trust, which positively affects empowering leadership (Han et al., 2019).

Our finding bolsters that proactive behavior positively influences leaders' trust, enriching followership theory. These findings align with the recent results of Sy et al. (2018), which suggested that followers' emotions impact their illicit behavior, which ultimately affects the leadership outcome. In addition, khan et al. (2020) found that followership changes transformational leaders through trust mediation. Carsten et al. (2017) also argued that exemplary followers behave more proactively towards solving the problems before reaching the leader who ultimately motivates leaders to give their best performance at the workplace.

Implications

Theoretical implications

The study responded to the recent call of research from various scholars to examine the dynamic role of followers in the leadership process (Kim, 2014; Malakyan, 2014; Riggio, 2014; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2016). Thus, it advances the body of knowledge that contributes to examining the followership theory by focusing on the impact of followers' characteristics and behaviors on their leaders' perception and behavior. As a result, the effective followership is engaged and actively assists their leaders in advancing the organizations' mission (Carsten et al., 2010; Kellerman, 2013); however, the empirical evidence is deficient.

Current findings provide empirical support by demonstrating that proactive followership behavior affects the leaders' perception of followers' support and co-produce the leader and follower trust. Leaders perceive proactive followership behavior as supportive and valuable for achieving the goal because of their future-focused, self-initiated, change-related behavior. The finding theoretically implies

that possibly the proactive behavior literature, which has demonstrated the mixed findings regarding managers' responses to proactive behavior, might get an advantage by framing the followership theory. In general, current results highlight the requirement for substantially more studies to examine how followers and leaders connect. Another major inquiry raised by our findings is whether co-creation consistently converts into positive results for the leader or relies upon different factors.

This study demonstrates that proactive behavior influences perceived followership support and trust. Although proactive followers are characterized as those who deliberately alter, influence, or change the environment (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2006), we don't know much about the process. Similarly, many researchers have encouraged scholars to examine how leaders perceive their followers' proactive behavior, and more precisely, how these leaders' perceptions impact leadership outcomes (Carsten et al., 2017; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). We validated that proactive followership behavior can induce leader-follower trust through perceived follower support. By doing so, this study provided initial support for the idea that proactive followers can influence their leader's perceptions and behaviors positively. Furthermore, this study advances our understanding of why proactive followership positively influences dyadic trust. Very few studies investigate leaders' trust in followers (Lapierre & Bremner, 2010; Sy, 2010).

Further, it is contended that followers' characteristics influence the leaders' trust (Lapierre & Bremner, 2010; Sy, 2010). Anyhow, not much is known about the characteristics and behavior that influence leaders' trust. This study finds that their leaders trust politically skilled followers more, and this relationship is serially mediated by proactive followership and perceived follower support. Moreover, study results suggest that leaders' positive evaluation of followers' behavior (i.e., perceived follower support) is a proximate antecedent of leaders' trust, and these findings are aligned with prior studies that imply that leaders' positive evaluation has an impact on managerial decisions taken by the leaders about their followers (Hakimi et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2002)

Practical implication

The findings have several practical implications for facilitating the follower and leader bond. Leaders always perceive followership as fundamental to the leadership phenomena because they expect their followers to support their decisions. In addition, they depend on followers for offering alternate solutions or insights for work issues. Further findings imply that managers should support the setting to encourage the proactive behavior of followers that ultimately advance the leadership outcome (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Furthermore, leaders' preferences for followers' skills and behaviors enable them to provide proper feedback and help them assess their followership behavior (Schyns et al., 2008). Scholars should carefully study the follower's role in influencing a leader's behavior to comprehend the situations in which a leader's behavior is more effective.

Political skill is positively related to proactive behavior, perceived follower support, and dyadic trust. Therefore, it implies that managers should prioritize more politically skilled followers at hiring. Furthermore, managers might focus more on training followers to improve their political skills to learn to use their skills positively. Study findings also demonstrated that proactive followership behavior plays a mediating role between political skill and leaders' trust. Subsequently, managers should provide their followers with a culture that allows and encourages them to behave proactively.

For example, an organization can advance proactive followership by requesting that followers provide recommendations on the most proficient method to improve the works processes and organizations. In addition, organizations can offer freedom to their followers to deal with anything they desire during part of their customarily planned working hours. Being proactive at the workplace can be risky for followers sometimes (Benson et al., 2016) and thus constrain followers to show their proactivity the expression of their proactive personalities. However, followers may realize that organizations value their proactivity. This is possible by eliminating punishments and providing proper training.

Limitations and Future Directions

Though this study has several strengths, it still bears some limitations. First, the study findings are based on data collected from one large service firm in Pakistan. We cannot preclude the likelihood of unique norms of the workplace that can influence the leader-follower relationship. For example, organizational policies that encourage creative and novel behaviors from their followers might change leaders' evaluation of proactive followership behavior. As a result, the leaders might negatively respond to some proactive risks the followers take. The sample could have invalidated this if the leaders encouraged proactive behaviors. Second, we followed a cross-sectional design to collect the data through questionnaires. However, the researchers collected the dyadic level data to improve this limitation; still, the use of experimental design or longitudinal methods may help to understand this phenomenon better.

The study utilizes only one follower characteristic for explaining their behavior to influence leadership ultimately. Other characteristics, for example, goal orientation and Machiavellianism, are also very relevant. Likewise, followers' motivation to lead, power orientations, their perceptions about FIFTs, and role orientation are also applicable in this regard (Carsten et al., 2017; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Followership behaviors, including initiative-taking, obedience, resistance, voice, dissent, and feedback-seeking behavior, are also worth

investigating as the mediation mechanism for future research. A leader's trust in followers is a vital followership outcome that can lead to an effective leadership process. However, other factors, such as informal leadership, follower effectiveness, organizational advancement, LMX (Çetin et al., 2021) and leader's derailment, can also contribute to effective leadership that needs to be thoroughly investigated in the development of followership theory.

Conclusion

The followership theory is empirically plausible to understand leadership. In line with this theory, politically skilled followers show proactive behavior at the workplace, which impacts their leaders' perceived follower support, affecting dyadic trust. These findings confirm the "reversing the lens" view of followership provided by Shamir (2007), which refers to followers' characteristics and behavior playing an active role in developing effective leadership outcomes. A proactive individual has been considered those who are oriented to change or influence their work environment. Despite this, prior studies on proactivity have rarely studied how followers' proactive behaviors affect leaders. Proactive followership behavior influences leaders' perception of followers' support positively. It acts as causing agents of dyadic trust in leader-follower trust. The role of proactive followership behavior on leaders' cognition, behavior, and attitude needs to be understood more. A better understanding of the nature of the interplay between leadership and proactive followership in improving the pace of workplace demands is provided.

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