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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Prosocial Leadership and Creativity: How Perceived Social Proximity and Trust Shape Helping Behaviors and Response to Negative Feedback

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Abstract— Organizations' reactions to unfavourable managers input are garnering more and more scholarly and public attention. Thus far, the majority of the work has been on the prosocial motivation of organisational leaders, their impact on helpful behaviour, and the negative feedback that creativity targets. This study, which has its roots in trait activation theory, investigates how and to what degree prosocial motivation, perceived social proximity, and affect-based trust influence organisational leaders' helpful conduct and constructive criticism directed at innovation. We test our hypotheses on a sample of packing organisation leaders using two waves of original survey data, including a conjoint experiment. Our research adds to the body of knowledge on organisational prosocial motivation, negative feedback, and helping behaviour.

Index Terms— Prosocial motivation, Perceived social proximity, Affect based trust, Helping behaviour, Negative feedback targeted by creativity

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Introduction

Organisations can maintain their competitiveness in the market by consistently producing innovative items thanks to creativity. Thus, management experts have long been interested in learning ways to increase employee creativity (Forgeard, 2024). Employees frequently try to make other members of the organisation unhappy with the status quo or the present levels of creativity by giving them negative feedback because innovation entails a shift from the conventional ways of thinking and doing (Islam et al., 2022). Negative comments draw attention to issues with contemporary creativity and raise awareness of the discrepancy between it and the norms. Employees may be inspired to improve their present inventiveness in order to narrow the gap after it has been identified (Kim & Kim, 2020).

One crucial employee proactive behaviour that maintains an organization's competitiveness in the current dynamic and uncertain business environment is taking charge, which entails implementing functional changes in work methods, policies, or procedures within one's work, team, or organisation (Forgeard, 2024). With an emphasis on implementation rather than just communication (e.g., voice), it embodies the core of proactive behaviours (i.e., self-initiation, future-oriented, and execution of constructive changes) (Au et al., 2024). It is essentially an other-oriented rather than self-concerned proactive behaviour Smaliukienė et al. (2023) because taking charge eventually benefits the organisation and its members with constructive changes (Jordan et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2022), while the initiator himself or herself runs the risk of being labelled a “troublemaker” (Xu et al., 2022). For a number of reasons, including financial performance,

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stakeholder trust and engagement, and reputation management, it is critical to respond meaningfully to unfavourable comments (Arshad et al., 2021; Tiwari et al., 2022). However, we still don't fully understand "which" specific characteristics of leaders such as their values, behaviours, or thought processes have an impact on their choice to respond substantively, and how (Kil et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2022).

In order to explain the emergence of a social proximity, research has so far identified a number of situational criteria, including aspects of the controversial subject, the feedback, or the organisation. According to Bicchieri et al. (2022), social proximity is the perceived separation between each supply chain participant. For instance, some earlier research uses distance declarations to identify family-run farms in order to boost the perceived proximity between the producing farm and the consumer, much like local products (Deschênes, 2024; Hasanzade et al., 2022; Kuchler et al., 2022). Even if one does not physically visit the organisation, there is evidence that social proximity rises when there is a chance to see the performance (Bicchieri et al., 2022). Therefore, the goal of this study is to comprehend how situational and individual factors work together to explain a leader's choice to embrace prosocial drive. The following research questions are put forth by us: How organizational leader's prosocial motivation has direct influences on helping behaviour?, How organizational leader's prosocial motivation has direct influences on negative feedback targeted at creativity?, How perceived social proximity has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and helping behaviour?, How perceived social proximity has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and negative feedback targeted at creativity?, How affect based trust has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and helping behaviour?, How affect based trust has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and negative feedback targeted at creativity?

To develop a conceptual model of organisational leaders' prosocial motivation to negative feedback aimed at creativity, we draw Trait Activation Theory (TAT) (Tett et al., 2021). Our hypotheses regarding the interaction between situational circumstances and personal characteristics are guided by both theories. According to TAT, trait-relevant environmental cues that is, the kind of information that causes people to show a certain trait are what activate individual characteristics, which are latent propensities to behave in particular ways (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022). We contend that when creativity is hampered by negative feedback, it presents a chance to demonstrate two kinds of traits that boost the possibility of a meaningful response: normative-oriented traits, which influence behaviour based on moral, ethical, and relational factors, and instrumental-oriented traits, which influence behaviour based on strategic, outcome-oriented, and self-interest factors. These characteristics, which we operationalize as prosocial motivation and fear of failure, respectively, are crucial to how people commit to helpful behaviour and how negative feedback is evaluated (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022; Tett et al., 2021). They also reflect the normative and instrumental paths, respectively, that leaders typically follow to address stakeholder demands (Tett et al., 2021).

Leaders are motivated by prosocial motivation, which is the desire to help others, to understand the demands of stakeholders and react favourably to criticism, even when it is unfavourable (Kil et al., 2021; Smaliukienė et al., 2023). Prosaically motivated leaders are more likely to adopt moral principles and act decisively to allay stakeholder worries. On the other hand, fear of failure is a self-centered characteristic that drives leaders to react to unfavourable comments in order to prevent unfavourable consequences, demonstrating an instrumental approach to decision-making (Tett et al., 2021). Since these cues are thematically related to the expression of prosocial motivation and fear of failure, respectively, we operationalize them as stakeholder social proximity (a social cue) and long-term reputational threat to the organisation (a strategic cue) (Lam, 2021; Yuan et al., 2020).

We test our hypotheses using two waves of original survey data, the second of which includes a conjoint experiment. In order to have a better chance of observing replies from senior organisational leaders, we purposefully decided to concentrate on relatively young organisations. Decision-making, on the other hand, may be more bureaucratic and disengaged from the main organisational leader in older organisations. About 430 senior managers from Chinese packaging companies are included in our final sample. We discover that the chance of a helpful behaviour in the face of criticism aimed at innovation is positively correlated with leaders' prosocial motivation. Additionally, we find that organisational leaders who are afraid of failing are more likely to act helpfully, and that criticism directed at innovation is thought to cause long-term harm to one's reputation.

Two theoretical contributions are the goal of our research. Our first contribution to the literature on creatively targeted negative feedback and helpful behaviour (Mercer & Gulseren, 2024; Rösler et al., 2023) is the demonstration of the use of a dual-path framework of affect-based trust and perceived social proximity (Pan et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Building on this approach, we show how prosocial motivation and fear of failure, affect helpful behaviour and negatively targeted feedback. This research shows that negative feedback is indirectly impacted by affect-based trust and perceived social proximity. This demonstrates the importance of taking into account both the affect-based trust and perceived social proximity described by theory (McQuillan et al., 2022) as additional ways to encourage leaders to enhance their feedback, which is a crucial duty implied by their position (Kim & Kim, 2020; Mercer & Gulseren, 2024). All things considered, our research confirms that various leaders may be inspired to react differently.

Theoretical background

Given that it involves questions of social proximity, trust, and responsibility, how organisational leaders handle unfavourable comments takes on strategic importance in this setting (Chliova et al., 2025; van Tonder et al., 2024). In order to present an integrative framework of the impact of organisational leaders' prosocial motivation on negative feedback targeted by creativity and helpful behaviour, we draw on the TAT (Tett et al., 2021). Based on helping behaviour and negative feedback, this concept aims to disentangle the relationship between affect-based trust and social closeness that drives top leaders' motivation (Mercer & Gulseren, 2024; van Tonder et al., 2024).

Trait activation theory

The immediate leader serves as a proximal context sending cues that prosocial motivation employees to behave consistently with specific aspects of their traits, in accordance with (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022) proactive motivation model and trait activation theory (Tett et al., 2021). Therefore, another goal of this research is to better understand how leaders may encourage proactive people to take control by bringing out their prosocial (as opposed to self-serving) side. For instance, affection will only predict helpful behaviour to the extent that the circumstance allows for its expression (Tett et al., 2021). A significant amount of behavioural expression flexibility is permitted in weak to moderately strong trait relevant settings, which offers a chance to highlight individual differences. On the other hand, people are more likely to follow social norms and have less freedom to express own preferences when confronted with strong situational cues. When asked to give a public speech, for instance, an introverted person is inclined to imitate extraversion since the circumstance demands it. Individual-level influences are less likely to affect observed outcomes in those situations (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022). It is suggested that leaders with high prosocial motivation (a normative-oriented trait) are naturally inclined to respond substantively because the experience and interests of their stakeholders have intrinsic value. For organisational leaders, the normative pathway is supported by the ethical and moral imperatives that drive them to act (Tett et al., 2021). On the other hand, the instrumental pathway embodies a strategic or utilitarian orientation, implying that leaders who possess a high level of fear of failure (an instrumental-oriented trait) are motivated to act when unfavourable criticism collides with practical organisational objectives, like preserving a competitive edge or shielding the company's reputation. According to the Trait Activation Theory (TAT), particular situational cues trigger particular personality traits, which in turn affect behaviour in the workplace. According to Tett et al. (2021), when it comes to prosocial leadership and creativity, managers who create trusting and socially close workplaces encourage staff members to be helpful and to react positively to criticism, even if it is unfavourable. Prosocial leaders serve as activating cues in these settings, encouraging team members to exhibit qualities like empathy, openness, and resilience. Employees are more inclined to cooperate cooperatively and accept constructive criticism well, utilising it as a springboard for innovative development, when they feel near and connected, which is known as perceived social proximity (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022; Tett et al., 2021).

TAT emphasises the significance of identifying certain aspects of a circumstance that can enhance a trait's presentation in professional settings (Tett et al., 2021). As a result, we also look at how particular environmental signals can amplify the effect of unfavourable stakeholder feedback on prosocial motivation and failure-related fear. Therefore, we propose that two situational factors social signals and strategic cues that influence the potency of each attribute, respectively, further nuance the dual normative-instrumental pathway (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022). In particular, we suggest that the degree to which social cues are prevalent in this case, the social proximity of the stakeholder group informing the organisational leader of the negative feedback determines whether the effect of prosocial motivation is amplified or diminished. This refers to how visible and close the stakeholder group is to an organization's operations (Liao et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2021). The leader's empathy and, consequently, the moral assessment of his or her acts increase with the proximity of the stakeholder group giving the negative feedback (McQuillan et al., 2022). For instance, a normatively motivated leader may react differently to criticism from community groups, a model secondary group to the operation of the organisation, than from employees, a prototypical proximal group (Pérez-Fernández et al., 2022). Given that the degree of strategic pressure can change the perceived significance of negative feedback and, thus, the strength of the response to helpful behaviour, we anticipate that strategic cues will interact with leaders' fear of failure (Kil et al., 2021; Kuchler et al., 2022). Our theoretical model was synthesized, and Fig. 1 shows the theoretical and particular operationalization's within the framework of this investigation.

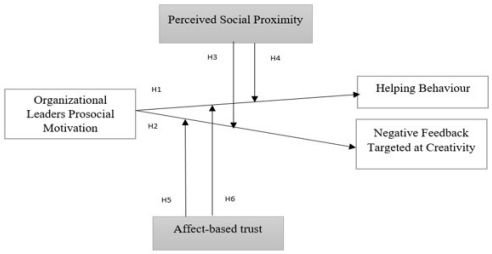

Fig. 1 *Integrative model of organizational leader's prosocial motivation to helping behaviour and negative feedback targeted at creativity.*

Hypothesis development

Integrative model of organizational leader's prosocial motivation to helping behaviour and negative feedback targeted at creativity.

Prosocial motivation guides workers towards worthwhile objectives that benefit others (Forgeard, 2024). Employees with high prosocial drive will concentrate on creating concepts that benefit others, whether clients, consumers, managers, or coworkers (Xu et al., 2022). Furthermore, prosaically motivated workers are more likely to come up with novel concepts and solutions that will benefit future generations (McAdams and de St Aubin, 1992). As a result, when leaders impart knowledge, followers who exhibit high levels of prosocial motivation focus on work-related details, recommendations, ideas, experience, and expertise that can enable them to develop beneficial solutions for others, including clients, customers, supervisors, or coworkers (Arshad et al., 2021; Liao et al., 2022). Prosocial motivation is the drive to "expend effort to benefit other people" (Kil et al., 2021) and is typically regarded in the literature as a "trait-like other orientation" (Zhong et al., 2022). Accordingly, prosaically motivated leaders are inclined to think about and respond to the needs of others as well as form moral opinions regarding the motivations behind and consequences of their actions for those individuals (Au et al., 2024; Kil et al., 2021). These "others" are the stakeholder groups that the organisation affects and is affected by in an organisational context, particularly one of a younger organisation whose leaders have probably played a defining role in its development (Thuan & Thanh, 2020). One form of citizenship behaviour that is known to help leaders is helpfulness towards coworkers (Arshad et al., 2021; Jordan et al., 2021). For example, assisting colleagues with a task that the leader depends on advances the leader's task-related objectives. Additionally, the leader may be able to "conserve energy" and focus on more crucial facets of the work if seasoned followers assist in orienting new followers (Sun et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). In this setting, followers' helpful actions towards their colleagues are viewed as a way for them to return the leader's valuable resources in a socioemotional connection (Au et al., 2024; Smaliukienė et al., 2023; Thuan & Thanh, 2020; Zhong et al., 2022). Motivated by the duty to reciprocate, followers view helpful behaviour as a resource for social exchange that helps leaders. Specifically, followers' perceptions that leaders will react with a fair social interaction in relations are strengthened by helping behaviour (Zhu & Akhtar, 2014). Consequently, we anticipate that:

H1: Organizational leader's prosocial motivation has direct influences on helping behaviour.

Negative feedback and prosocial motivation are tightly and favourably related for a number of reasons. First, it has been discovered that people who are highly motivated by prosocial factors are more likely to improve the welfare of others (Arshad et al., 2021). This could be as a result of their innate desire to assist others and their general heightened awareness of the needs and worries of those who are thought to be in distress (Kil et al., 2021). Second, people with strong prosocial drive feel obligated to confirm their belief that they are responsible and attentive to others' expectations, but they also do not want to disappoint those (Tiwari et al., 2022). Third, they are more likely to demonstrate increased perspective-taking, which makes the sense of wellbeing they can experience from responding to stakeholders' concerns more concrete. Fourth, people's reactions to criticism are greatly influenced by prosocial incentive, which makes them more inclined to act on it even when doing so will negatively affect them personally (Kim & Kim, 2020). Fifth, when thinking about an organization's stakeholders, leaders who are highly motivated by prosocial principles are more likely to perform prosocial cost-benefit analyses Rösler et al. (2023), which influences their choice to take meaningful action in response to criticism (Mercer & Gulseren, 2024). These leaders tend to see the advantages of responding to stakeholder feedback as outweighing the costs, are willing to restore a sense of fairness towards stakeholders Chliova et al. (2025), and disregard the personal costs of acting to allay others' concerns (Kim & Kim, 2020). Consequently, we anticipate that:

H2: Organizational leader's prosocial motivation has direct influences on negative feedback targeted at creativity.

Perceived social proximity: prosocial motivation and helping behaviour and negative feedback targeted at creativity

Participants feel closer to their counterparts as their social closeness increases or decreases, which makes them more (less) inclined to associate and identify with them. Actually, research has previously shown that identification procedures play a significant role in building confidence. Prosaically motivated workers focus their energies on applying their capacity to generate constructive ideas to assist others (Wei et al., 2021). Employees that exhibit high levels of prosocial motivation are able to manage their skills in order to perform better (Hasanzade et al., 2022). Prosocial behaviour on the part of employees is always a contributing component in this perspective, since coordination and collaboration between management and employees may make difficult jobs easier to complete (Kuchler et al., 2022). Assisting coworkers fosters the well-being of others and establishes the idea that people are an organization's most significant resource (Deschênes, 2024). According to Labrado-Antolín et al. (2024); Wei et al. (2021), motivated people prioritise helping others over their own return on investment. These workers handle organisational pressures more effectively and attain true long-term success. Because they believe their work is important and meaningful, prosaically motivated employees are typically not deterred by everyday difficulties (Nguyen et al., 2020). These workers are the organizations' first choice for support because of their readiness to participate, according to managers and supervisors. This type of conduct has several positive effects on the organisation and encourages proactive behaviour that eventually receives administrative backing (Deschênes, 2024). Given the discussion above, we arrive at the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived social proximity has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and helping behaviour.

Similar results can be anticipated when stakeholders provide unfavourable input. The frequency and degree of interaction between stakeholders and leaders varies; some groups have a tight contact with leaders, while others have a more distant, secondary one. Specifically, earlier research has distinguished between groups that are and are not critical to an organization's existence (Wei et al., 2021). For instance, employees are a group that is near to and usually in daily proximity to an organisational leader, according to these conceptualizations. Conversely, secondary groups are ones that don't always have an impact on the main functions of an organisation. Accordingly, a leader's discussions with secondary stakeholders are regarded as infrequent and voluntary, but interactions with more proximal stakeholders are frequent and frequent (Deschênes, 2024; Labrado-Antolín et al., 2024). This is pertinent to our theory because social closeness among stakeholders is typically thought to increase a more compassionate reaction since proximal stakeholders' demands and interests are more widely seen and sympathized with. In fact, a number of studies indicate that increasing leaders' responsiveness to stakeholder feedback requires closer communication with them (Kim & Kim, 2020; Yuan et al., 2020). Accordingly, the social proximity of worried stakeholders should serve as a social cue that might reinforce this innate tendency for leaders who have a strong prosocial motive and are therefore predicted to respond significantly to negative stakeholder feedback (Trach & Hymel, 2020). Being in close proximity to the "wronged" stakeholder group enables a better understanding of their needs, which probably enhances leaders' perspective taking Bicchieri et al. (2022), consideration of fairness aspects McQuillan et al. (2022), and perceived "net benefit" of substantive action (Tiwari et al., 2022). Consequently, we forecast that:

H4: Perceived social proximity has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and negative feedback targeted at creativity.

Affect-based Trust: prosocial motivation and helping behaviour and negative feedback targeted at creativity

The many mechanisms outlined in the research on prosocial motivation offer valuable perspectives on the possible moderating impacts of prosocial drive (Wang, 2020). As said earlier, affect-based trust is a deeper social exchange relationship in which followers feel obligated to give back to leaders and organisations in the form of helpful behaviour and emotional attachments. In a social exchange connection, followers' reciprocal acts are probably driven by heuristic processing since the reciprocal norm is thought to be a universal standard that has developed through natural selection (Islam et al., 2022; Legood et al., 2023). The degree to which affect-based trust promotes helpful behaviour can vary depending on prosocial motivation, according to research on prosocial motivation. In particular, followers with strong prosocial motivation are more likely to adhere to the reciprocity norm ingrained in affect-based trust since they are prepared to accept and act upon social norms. Furthermore, participants in a social transaction do not look for instant advantages for themselves (Lam, 2021). These actions align with the objectives of prosaically motivated individuals who seek to help others (Wang, 2020). Conversely, followers with low prosocial motivation are less likely to adhere to the reciprocation norm that is a fundamental component of affect-based trust because they rely on rational cognitive processes (Yuan et al., 2020). Rather, independent of the interests of others, people are probably driven to act in a helpful manner in order to get advantages in the future (Cafferkey et al., 2024; Trach & Hymel, 2020). The sincere feeling of concern and caring that characterizes affect-based trust seems to be less sensitive to this motive (Fu et al., 2024). Therefore, it makes plausible that affect-based trust would have little effect on helpful behaviour among followers who lack prosocial incentive from a logical, self-interested standpoint. Consequently, we forecast that:

H5: Affect based trust has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and helping behaviour.

According to earlier studies on prosocial motivation, situational conditions have the potential to initiate it (Forgeard, 2024). Given

that prosocial motivation is fundamentally other-oriented, it would appear that the identity of those individuals and their relationship to the individual are crucial since they influence how attached and sympathetic the individual is to the concerns of others (Rösler et al., 2023). Such one-on-one interactions reinforce people's perceptions that their work matters to others and offer evidence of favourable purported advantages. According to Deschênes (2024), "pro-sociality is ineffective when perspective-taking fails, leaving employees with an inaccurate understanding of what others need or want." As a result, having intimate relationships with people promotes understanding between them and supports acting to meet their needs and enhance their quality of life. Although assisting colleagues is not officially recognised by organisations, followers may strategically employ this behaviour to cultivate and promote a positive self-image in an effort to win the leaders' approval (Liao et al., 2022; Rösler et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2022). However, because leaders might not actually make up for citizenship behaviours that fall outside the purview of followers' professions, acting in a helpful manner could make followers feel vulnerable (Au et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2023; Tiwari et al., 2022). According to the character-based view of trust, followers who have cognitive faith in their leader are less likely to feel exposed in a hierarchical relationship (Forgeard, 2024; Xu et al., 2022). Rather, followers may feel at ease taking risks because they think leaders are trustworthy and honest Rösler et al. (2023) and will reciprocate their civic engagement actions (Tiwari et al., 2022). Therefore, it seems that leadership-derived cognition-based trust might foster confidence in leaders' future choices, which in turn may encourage followers to act in a helpful manner (Pan et al., 2023). Consequently, we forecast that:

H6: Affect based trust has moderating impact on organizational leader's prosocial motivation and negative feedback targeted at creativity.

Method

Data collection

This study uses financial data from a database and two waves of original survey data collected from managers of Chinese packaging companies that are among the top 430 in China. With the assistance of a reputable research organisation hired to oversee the data collecting, we created the survey tools in English and translated them into Chinese. Following that, we have a separate researcher who is proficient in both Chinese and English and is not involved in the project translations. To guarantee that the questions and objects' meanings remained consistent in both languages, any problems that were brought to the attention of the author team were debated and then fixed. Individual psychometric measures were employed as independent variables in the analysis in the first wave of survey data collecting (2023), and a metric conjoint experiment was used in the second wave (2024) to capture the dependent variable and situational circumstances. While the second wave experiment showed how situational variables interact with trait propensities, the first wave survey allowed us to separate individuals' trait propensities that were unaffected by the situational variables of the experiment.

The names and contact details of every commercial organisation established in China were taken from the database to produce the first sample for the survey data collecting. In order to have a better chance of observing responses from top organisational leaders, we purposefully choose to concentrate on relatively packing organisations, measured by age since inception. Decision-making, on the other hand, may be more bureaucratic and disengaged from organisational leadership in older organisations (Chliova et al., 2025; van Tonder et al., 2024). The research agency called a random sample of 554 people within the parameters of our research resources and requested that they talk with the founder who held the bulk of the shares. After contacting that person, the research agency requested their consent to send an email with a link to an online survey, clarified that they were actively participating in the organization's top leadership, and described the study's general goals. The wave-1 poll was completed by 215 people in total (response rate: 38%). In a similar manner, a year later, a research agency called the same leader to verify their identification, their position within the company, and to urge them to fill out the wave-2 survey. Wave 2's response rate was also 38%, resulting in 430 organisational leaders as the final analytical sample. The common technique bias and associated social desirability biases were lessened by the one-year interval between the two waves.

Only 8% of the top organisational executives in the analytic sample are women, and they are typically 50 years old. According to the phone screening, all 430 are top executives, including 76 CEOs, 16 other managerial personnel, 21 board chairpersons, 1 board member, 5 founders, and 2 none of the above. Manufacturing accounts for 16% of the industry, followed by development at 19%, retail and wholesale commerce at 12%, IT and other computer services at 10%, specialised services (such as accounting, law, leadership, engineering, etc.) at 29%, managerial and administrative operations at 8%, and a variety of industries at the remaining 13%. The database provided the measurements. The non-participants were found to be businesses that were, on average, larger than those that replied (mean number of employees was 47), whereas the differences in the averages of liquidity and performance were not significant using standard statistical criteria ($p < 0.10$). It should come as no surprise that speaking with leaders of smaller organisations is frequently simpler than doing so with those of larger ones. We added organisation size as a control variable to our regression model to make sure the size bias wouldn't distort our findings.

Additionally, we examined attrition bias between survey waves 1 and 2 using the same metrics. There was no discernible difference

between the organisations that took part in both waves and those who only took part in wave 1. Based on the personal characteristics that were available in our data, we also examined attrition bias. These included the respondent's age, years of work experience, whether or not they were the CEO, and whether or not they had previous start-up experience. When it comes to job experience, the only notable difference is that, according to wave 1 work experience measurements, individuals who chose not to engage in wave 2 had an average of 10 years of work experience (at wave 1), whereas those who took part in both waves had an average of 16 years (at wave 1). We used work experience as an extra control variable in a version of our major regression model to make sure that this discrepancy wouldn't skew our findings. We discovered that the model findings were unaffected by its inclusion.

Variables

Dependent variables and moderators (Wave2)

Because negative feedback targeted by creativity is rare and sensitive in most organisations, it would have been prohibitively difficult to gather observational data on responses, so we decided to use a conjoint design. By inferring preferences rather than depending on statements of preferences (Louviere, 1994), conjoint experiments are scenario experiments that are particularly well-suited to breaking down the impact of multiple variables on a decision-making task (Popovic et al., 2018). They also incorporate trade-offs associated with a decision-making situation.

Conjoint experiments calculate the effects of several "attributes" (i.e., variables) and several "levels" of those attributes on people's preferences and proposed decisions (Eggers et al., 2021). For instance, (Toubia, 2018) examined a variety of qualities, including the venture capitalist's age, educational background, and field of study, to determine whether or not these factors affect their choice to invest in an entrepreneurial team. In contrast to methods measuring the influence of each characteristic on the dependent variable independently (Popovic et al., 2018; Toubia, 2018), conjoint experiments mimic real-time decision-making and reduce the risk of post-hoc rationalizations common to many other types of research (Eggers et al., 2021). This is because each scenario, which is similar to a short story, includes every characteristic, but the amounts of these vary across scenarios, so that each scenario makes up an individual combination.

Every participant in our study evaluated three potential outcomes. The conjoint experiment design is shown in Table 1, along with the respondents' instructions, the scenario's qualities and levels, a sample scenario, and the question meant to gauge the probability of a meaningful reaction to negative feedback at targeted creativity after each scenario. Based on previous state-of-the-art theorizing that identifies actual changes in decision-making, operations, and human resource management processes in nature, the dependent variable the likelihood of choosing a negative feedback and helpful behavior was operationalized (Eggers et al., 2021; Toubia, 2018). In accordance with these studies, we developed our dependent variable as "adopting or reinforcing socially responsible procedures in strategic decision-making, operations, and human resource management" (see also Table 1) in theoretically sound but understandable language for use in the scenarios of the conjoint experiment. The decision became more comparable to a real-life scenario where significant action is expensive when the statement "taking into account your available resources and time constraints" was included (Popovic et al., 2018).

Since the chance of a specific, concrete decision being made is being examined rather than an overall construct that synthesizes several characteristics, it is typical in conjoint analysis to utilize a single-item operationalization of the dependent variable (Cafferkey et al., 2024).

Similar methods have been frequently employed in earlier research that used conjoint trials as a stand-in for actual decision-making scenarios (Fu et al., 2024; Jang et al., 2020). Reliability in conjoint designs comes from comparing scenarios rather than from factor analysis and many items (Toubia, 2018). Very unlikely, slightly unlikely, somewhat likely, and very likely are the four categories for the dependent variable. Since Likert scales are good at realistically capturing enough variance in decision-making, measuring the dependent variable using a Likert-type likelihood scale is generally a tried-and-true method in conjoint experiments (Popovic et al., 2018; Toubia, 2018).

Additionally, two moderating variables; perceived social proximity and affect-based trust were recorded by the conjoint experiment. Conjoint experiments use statements or descriptions that are a part of the scenario to represent variables, or "attributes." We purposefully alter the "levels" of intensity of these traits, as is common in conjoint designs, as opposed to assessing their variance as it naturally arises in the actual world, for instance, using a scale. In order to maintain a conjoint experiment's greatest strength the simulation of a real-life decision-making scenario we operationalize the moderating variables based on earlier academic theories that have been put into clear and understandable language (Eggers et al., 2021; Toubia, 2018).

In particular, we choose two groups that are obviously different in terms of their social proximity to leaders in order to proxy the social proximity of the relevant stakeholder group. Proximal stakeholders are groups that formally interact with the organisation on a regular basis, like employees, suppliers, or customers, while secondary stakeholders are those that interact with the organisation less formally and more ad hoc, like the media, special interest groups, and community groups, according to influential conceptualizations put forth by TAT scholars (Lam, 2021; Tett et al., 2021). As a result, we selected community and team members to represent two exemplary levels of perceived social proximity. Throughout their everyday work, employees are in close physical and social proximity to the organisational

leader, are integral to the organization's being alive, and are part of its very fabric. In comparison, community groups are external to the organization, ancillary to its main operation, and their role results in infrequent interactions, not daily ones (Tett et al., 2021).

Instilling a sense of duty is the second moderating variable, affect-based trust, which may encourage followers to act in a helpful manner (Yuan et al., 2020). Emotional investments and sincere displays of care and concern in trust relationships are the foundation of affect-based trust. According to Lam (2021), affect-based trust is a social exchange process that expresses a sense of duty to return the favor and strengthen emotional ties between leaders and followers. Employees with high prosocial motivation are more likely to be influenced by social influence processes and motivated by interest in others when engaging in citizenship behaviours, according to research on the topic. In contrast, employees with low prosocial motivation are more likely to rationally weigh the personal consequences of their own actions and place a higher value on self-interest (Islam et al., 2022; Legood et al., 2023).

Table I
Conjoint experiment

Attribute	Level	Operationalization
Conduct with customers	High	Your organization has received negative feedback targeted by creativity on its customers from concerned employees.
Conduct with suppliers	High	Your organization has received negative feedback targeted by creativity on its suppliers from concerned employees.
Community development	Low	Your organization has received negative feedback targeted by creativity on its community development from concerned employees.

Independent variable (Wave1)

In wave 1, self-administered rating scales were used to measure the study's independent variables. Zhu and Akhtar (2014) 4-item scale was used to operationalize prosocial motivation in relation to an organisational setting. Several subsequent studies on the subject have successfully used this scale, which has become as the most widely used measure of the construct in contemporary organisational literature. Sample items include: "It is important to me to do good for others through my work and I want to have a positive impact on others through my work". Seven-point rating scales anchored by disagree strongly (1) and agree strongly (7) were used to measure the items. The four items have a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.95. Using confirmatory factor analysis, we looked at the multi-item assessment scales' discriminant validity. When compared to a model where all items load on one component, a two-factor solution with items loading on their intended constructions demonstrated a better match ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, it is evident that the two latent variables' average variance extracted scores exceed their squared correlation. Consequently, we thought it reasonable to draw the conclusion that fear of failure and prosocial incentive are statistically separate concepts. By averaging the corresponding item ratings, we calculated an index score for each.

Common biased method

During the study design phase, we adjusted for typical technique bias (Hair et al., 2024). We combined information from the database with data from primary surveys to employ a variety of data sources. Furthermore, there was a one-year lag between the measurements of the independent and dependent variables, despite the fact that the same individual provided the information for both. Additionally, the methods used to measure the independent and dependent variables differed: multi-item rating scales were used for the former, while the conjoint experiment produced the latter.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and HTMT for each of the three scenario variables which were intentionally placed at various "levels" of variance in the conjoint experiment are shown in Table 2. Instead of being continuous, the dependent variable in the HTMT reported is ordinal. We chose to estimate our model since the dependent variable includes four different levels of likelihood of acting in a scenario where one receives negative feedback that is aimed at innovation. Within-respondent ratings are not independent since we calculated standard errors when each respondent evaluated four scenarios in the conjoint experiment.

Table II
Table 2: Discriminant Validity, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Mean	SD	ABT	HB	NF	PSP	PM
Affect-based Trust	2.34	1.47	0.732				
Helping Behaviour	3.25	1.87	0.728	0.906			
Negative Feedback Targeted at Creativity	3.48	1.97	0.541	0.774	0.888		
Perceived Social Proximity	3.42	1.85	0.481	0.690	0.729	0.845	
Prosocial Motivation	2.12	1.98	0.417	0.390	0.436	0.609	0.802

The estimates of the logit coefficients, their standard errors, p-values for the conservative two-tailed test, and odds ratios as indicators of effect size are shown in Table 3. In addition to estimating the interaction effects, Model 1 in Table 3 displays the findings of the conjoint experiment, dependent and independent variables measured in survey wave 1. Prosocial motivation's coefficient is significant at p = 0.000 and its effect size in the model is comparable to that of helping behaviour. All of these indicators point to Hypothesis 1 being supported. Nevertheless, we also contended that prosocial motivation had a considerable impact on the negative feedback of targeted creativity, with a value of p = 0.000. All of these indicators point to support for Hypothesis 2.

The results are shown in Table 3, where the moderating influence of perceived social closeness on prosocial motivation and helpful behaviour is substantial (p = 0.012). All of these indicators point to support for Hypothesis 3 (see figure 2). However, we also contended that prosocial motivation and the negative feedback of targeted creativity are impacted by the moderating influence of perceived social proximity, with a significant coefficient at p = 0.021. All of these indicators point to support for Hypothesis 4 (see figure 3).

The findings are shown in Table 3; prosocial motivation and helpful behaviour are impacted by affect-based trust, which also plays a moderating function. The coefficient is significant at p = 0.009. All of these indicators point to support for Hypothesis 5 (see figure 4). However, we also contended that prosocial motivation and the negative feedback of targeted creativity are impacted by the moderating role of affect-based trust, with a significant coefficient at p = 0.011. All of these indicators point to support for Hypothesis 6 (see figure 5).

Lastly, even though it goes beyond the theoretical purview of our model, it is crucial to remember that the two situational aspects of affect-based trust and perceived social proximity have direct, positive, and significant influence on the likelihood of both negative feedback and helpful behaviour. Therefore, when a) the organisational leader engages with a close group of stakeholders who are giving the negative feedback, b) believes that affect-based trust lasts longer, and c) the organisation is the only one in its industry receiving such feedback, we can anticipate a higher likelihood of response. These impacts are extra to the effects we directly hypothesize in our study because they are not influenced by the organisational leader's steady attributes.

Table III
Moderating influence

	t-value	p-value
Independent Variable		
Prosocial motivation ->Helping Behaviour	14.271	0.000
Prosocial motivation ->Negative feedback Targeted at Creativity	7.050	0.000
Moderator 1		
Prosocial motivation* Perceived Social Proximity ->Helping Behaviour	10.000	0.012
Prosocial motivation* Perceived Social Proximity ->Negative feedback Targeted at Creativity	15.834	0.021
Moderator 2		
Prosocial motivation* Affect Based Trust ->Helping Behaviour	3.441	0.009
Prosocial motivation* Affect Based Trust ->Negative feedback Targeted at Creativity	8.340	0.011

Notes: "340 observations on organizations. P-values are based on the two-sided test".

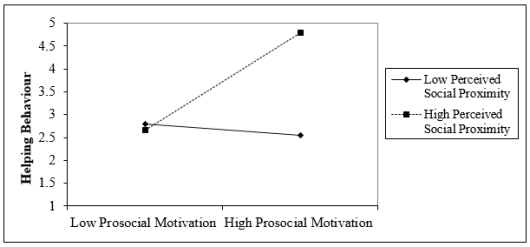

Fig. 2 *Moderating effect of perceived social proximity on prosocial motivation and helping behaviour. The average effect of perceived social proximity is 0.012, when behaviour is perceived to be high, and similarly if proximity is low helping behaviour also low.*

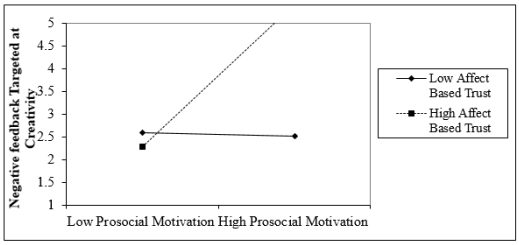

Fig. 3 *Moderating effect of perceived social proximity on prosocial motivation and negative feedback targeted at creativity. The average effect of perceived social proximity is 0.021, when feedback is perceived to be high, and similarly if proximity is low negative feedback targeted at creativity also low.*

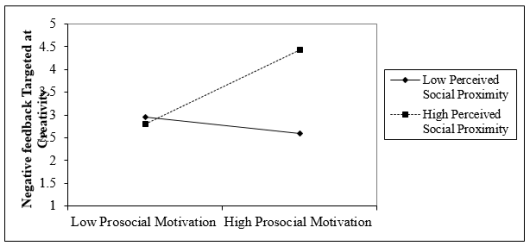

Fig. 4 *Moderating effect of affect based trust on prosocial motivation and negative feedback targeted at creativity. The average effect of perceived social proximity is 0.011, when feedback is perceived to be high, and similarly if affect based trust is low negative feedback targeted at creativity also low*

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between perceived social proximity to negative feedback and the prosocial drive of organisational leaders. This is a serious problem because it takes a lot of work and is uncommon for organisations to provide better feedback (Kim & Kim, 2020). Our hypothesis that certain affect-based trusts play a significant role in forecasting the probability of helpful behaviour has been validated. In particular, we discover that leaders who exhibit prosocial drive and social proximity the latter of which is a component of helping behavior are more inclined to think about using negative feedback. Additionally, we discover that the characteristics of leaders function differently. Perceived social proximity, which our study conceptualized as a crucial social cue in the context of stakeholder feedback, is something that leaders with higher prosocial motivation are more likely to think about implementing. On the other hand, the impact of affect-based trust on the probability of a response being implemented is contingent upon the continued existence of the helpful behaviour strategy cue.

These results demonstrate how these qualities can independently influence leaders' decisions depending on community and consumers, supporting the dual-path concept of motivator traits (Chliova et al., 2025; Mercer & Gulseren, 2024) (see Fig. 1). We accessible the door for greater creativity and comprehension of literature through an examination at both situational and individual characteristics, which together paint a clearer picture of how they affect leaders' reactions to unfavourable criticism (Rösler et al., 2023).

Theoretical contribution

The outcomes of this study add to the corpus of research that examines the factors that influence organisational leaders' prosocial motivation in response to unfavourable criticism that is directed at innovation. Generating negative feedback is essential given the growing concern about commercial organizations' moral and practical duty to lessen their detrimental effects on society and to constructively address instances of organisational helping behaviour. By responding to requests for the recognition of particular specific variables and their relationship with scenario variables in order to explain our focal outcome of helpful behaviour and negative feedback targeted by creativity (McQuillan et al., 2022), we add to previous literature (Pan et al., 2023; Rösler et al., 2023). Our understanding of how contextual and personal variables influence organisational leaders' prosocial motivation to receive negative social performance feedback is improved as a result of our conceptualization and subsequent illustration of how a framework of relationships may influence leaders' negative feedback (Kim & Kim, 2020; McQuillan et al., 2022). This study shows how prosocial motivation especially influences leaders' reactions to critical feedback, even though earlier research has shown the benefits of prosocial motivation on overall staff performance. This study adds to our knowledge of how interpersonal closeness and trust alter the perceived impact of leaders' prosocial responses by introducing affect-based trust and perceived social proximity as moderating factors. It suggests that by constructively responding to criticism, leaders with a strong prosocial orientation may not only increase organisational cohesiveness and employee satisfaction but also

help to create a positive cultural shift. By placing prosocial motivation in the context of feedback circumstances, where it interacts with creativity and helpful behaviour to produce more customised and successful organisational improvements, this theoretical lens broadens the conceptual boundaries of prosocial motivation.

Practical implications

Organizations' motivational efforts on the path towards stakeholder helping behaviour Cafferkey et al. (2024) are an outcome of potentially crucial societal importance in an era where the overall negative effects of business on society are being acutely problematized. Our discovery that top executives with high prosocial motivation scores are more likely to respond to stakeholder concerns raises the possibility that policymakers can actively assist these leaders. For example, policymakers should create specific standards that evaluate leaders' and organizations' societal goals rather than supporting or subsidizing prospective leaders and their commercial enterprises solely on the basis of their declared financial expectations. This may be especially important for organisations that are younger (in terms of years after establishment), as their leadership may have a greater influence on them (Trach & Hymel, 2020). likewise, by giving awards and other forms of acknowledgement to prosocial leaders who have demonstrated that they take social performance into consideration, policymakers, professional organisations, societies, and other parties involved for whom the creativity of business organisations is a significant objective might actively encourage models of excellence. A number of strategies may be helpful, therefore stakeholders thinking about how to effectively influence leaders' behaviour to raise an organization's prosocial motivation should keep that in mind. Giving negative social performance evaluation could be enough on its own if stakeholders believe the organisational leader they are trying to persuade is motivated by a true normative perspective. On the other hand, stakeholders may try to encourage an organisational leader to adopt a substantive response by highlighting the long-term effects of inaction on their organization's reputation if they believe that the leader is resistant to such feedback but may be afraid of the consequences.

Prosaically motivated leaders are able to use innovative approaches to problem-solving and turn criticism into chances for constructive change. Leaders who recognise the importance of affect-based trust can act in ways that build real emotional bonds with their teams, which will increase trust and make it easier for new projects to be adopted. Stronger interpersonal ties, which are crucial for sustaining commitment and morale, can also result from improving perceived social proximity through increased direct engagement between managers and staff. In order to empower leaders to transform potentially harmful feedback into a catalyst for positive change, organisations may want to explore educating them in prosocial motivation and trust-building techniques. Organisational leaders themselves may find our insights useful as well. Understanding how characteristics affect negative feedback decision-making and the circumstances in which this happens can be a useful tool. Specifically, leaders who are very prosocial, or normatively orientated, should be aware that they may unintentionally be disproportionately inclined to take significant action, sometimes at the expense of other practical concerns. Similar to this, leaders who display a prosocial motivation or a high sense of social proximity and who may be threatened by long-term reputational issues should be conscious of their strong propensity to respond significantly and weigh their personal preferences against the organization's larger goals and priorities. Prosocial motivation can also be developed as a condition, even though stable features are challenging to consciously alter (Jordan et al., 2021). By reading pertinent books or going to conferences or workshops on the subject, for instance, leaders who want to become more receptive to societal issues can consciously cultivate their prosocial motivation.

Limitations and future research

There are certain limitations to our investigation. In particular, our sample was created in a single country (China) and is primarily composed of male senior organisational executives, which is indicative of the widespread under-representation of women in these roles across a variety of situations. Even though we adjusted for these factors in our analysis, it's possible that the techniques we've seen differ slightly for female organisational leaders, those who work in other places, or those who are part of much larger organisations. Therefore, it is crucial that future research examine more closely at how gender, culture, and organisational size affect the linkages our study examined.

Furthermore, our final sample size is somewhat little. Studies based on samples of leaders that also apply a conjoint design, even when they are cross-sectional, differ from those that survey larger samples of employees. As a result, our sample is comparable to similar studies for our technique, which includes using a longitudinal design, and is in a good position to contribute to the growing corpus of research on the subject. A larger sample size and/or different operationalization's applied to the relationships we study, however, may help clarify whether unsupported hypotheses are proof that these relationships do not exist in empirical reality, that sample size is limited, or that the conceptualizations we used were particular. Additional reliability tests, like a holdout analysis, would also be feasible with a bigger sample. Additionally, the time gap between the two waves was rather long roughly a year even though it was necessary to conduct the data collection over two waves in order to reduce common technique and social attractiveness biases as well as the cognitive load on respondents. Future research could attempt to reproduce the results using a shorter time delay, such as three to six months, even though we believe our approach to be better than a single-wave design.

However, researchers have found an elevated relationship between simulated choices made in conjoint studies and real behaviour, indicating that the method has a high level of external validity generally. According to Toubia (2018), "there is evidence that conjoint analyses significantly reflect the decision policies individuals actually use, even in the most artificial situations." Nevertheless, the application of other techniques or metrics might support our findings even more. This study's use of negative feedback scenarios, which might not adequately represent the intricacy of interactions in the actual world, is one of its limitations. In order to examine the effects of prosocial motivation on feedback response over time while taking into consideration contextual factors that can affect the leader's response strategy, future study could look at longitudinal studies conducted in real organisational contexts. Furthermore, although affect-based trust and perceived social proximity are the main topics of this study, organisational culture and individual variations in employees' openness to criticism may also be important considerations. To give a more thorough insight of the leader-employee relationship in feedback situations, future research could look into these elements.

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