# Leader humor, workplace gossip, and employee authentic self-expression: implications for employee proactive behaviors

Qian Wang[1] · Hai-Jiang Wang[1] · Lixin Jiang[2] · Ziyi Li[1] · Serena Changhong Lyu[3]

## Abstract

Employee proactivity has been shown to play an important role in contemporary organizations. In the present study, we intended to understand the predictors of employees' proactive work design behaviors, such as task i-deals and job crafting, based on the symbolic interactionist perspective on identity. Specifically, we investigated the effects of leader humor on employees' task i-deals and job crafting behaviors through the mediating mechanism of authentic self-expression and the moderating role of receiving negative workplace gossip from an identity perspective. The four-wave data were collected from a sample of 320 employees to test the hypotheses. The results confirmed that leader humor as a form of positive social interaction promoted employees' proactive behaviors by influencing the levels of authentic self-expression. In addition, the effect of leader humor became more pronounced in a gossipy work environment. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

**Keywords** Leader humor · Authentic self-expression · Proactive behaviors · Gossip · Symbolic interactionist

## Introduction

In the fast-paced and dynamic business world, employees must exhibit proactivity to instigate constructive changes in their work. Proactivity enables employees to effectively manage growing work demands and emerging opportunities (Demerouti, 2014; Grant & Parker, 2009). Research has consistently shown that employee proactivity is linked to significant work outcomes such as career success (Blickle et al., 2009; Seibert et al., 2001) and organizational innovations (Ahlin et al., 2012). Recognizing the necessity of employee proactivity, work design scholars have switched to a more proactive, bottom-up approach to understand how employees design their work instead of the classic top-down approach (Oldham & Hackman, 2010; Parker et al., 2010). Among various proactive work design behaviors, task i-deals and job crafting allowing employees to tailor, customize, and redesign their jobs to suit their needs have been widely studied (Rofcanin et al., 2016). Task i-deals, for instance, involve customizing job content through an agreement between employers and employees, considering the interests and influences of both parties (Hornung et al., 2010). Meanwhile, job crafting involves employees making changes to their job demands and resources to achieve their personal and work-related goals (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Both task i-deals and job crafting require a redesign of one's job based on the individual's self-identity and expression (Wang et al., 2016).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding how the social environment impacts the proactive behaviors of employees. Positive social interactions, including support from supervisors and coworkers (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013), trust among coworkers

✉ Serena Changhong Lyu
lv.changhong@mail.shufe.edu.cn

Qian Wang
wangqian123@hust.edu.cn

Hai-Jiang Wang
wanghaijiang@hust.edu.cn

Lixin Jiang
l.jiang@auckland.ac.nz

Ziyi Li
liziyizoe@163.com

[1] School of Management, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China

[2] School of Psychology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

[3] College of Business, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Shanghai, China

**Fig. 1** The Proposed Model
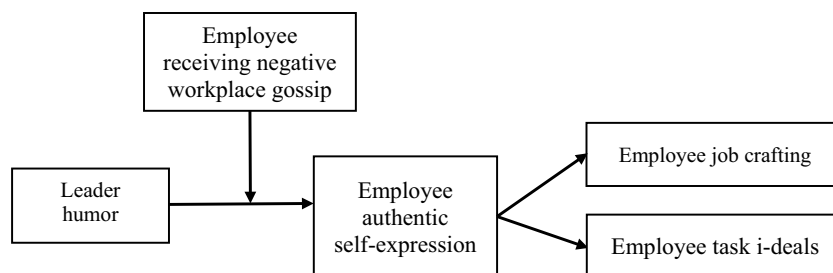


(Parker et al., 2006), and positive relationships within teams (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) have been identified as catalysts for enhancing employee proactivity. Leaders play a crucial role in guiding and shaping the behavior of their followers, acting as role models and key influencers in influencing how employees navigate and interpret their work environment (Shamir et al., 1993). Leader humor as a typically positive leader-member interaction (Cooper, 2008; Yam et al., 2018) has been examined as an antecedent of employee proactive behaviors, such as feedback-seeking behavior (Karakowsky et al., 2020) and voice (Tan et al., 2021). These empirical investigations have delved into how humor influences pro-activity by testing the roles of relationship (Tan et al., 2021) and trustworthiness (Karakowsky et al., 2020). Proactivity is inherently linked with an individual's self-concept (Strauss & Kelly, 2016). The internal and external coherence and continuity of one's self-identity serve as motivating factors, inclining employees to engage in proactive behaviors geared towards self-development (Strauss & Kelly, 2016; Strauss et al., 2008). Consequently, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how social interactions impact proactive behavior, a deeper exploration of the identity mechanisms is warranted. Thus, we direct our focus towards these identity mechanisms to understand how leader humor is associated with employees' proactive behaviors.

Drawing upon the symbolic interactionist perspective on identity, we propose that leader humor, as a form of positive social interaction (Cooper, 2005, 2008), can stimulate task i-deals and job crafting of employees by influencing their authentic self-expression, which is defined as the free and natural expression of individual's true self (Kernis, 2003). The core idea of the symbolic interactionist perspective on identity is that individuals' identities are not only shaped by themselves but also by their social interactions with primary groups and significant others (Serpe & Stryker, 2011; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Leaders' behaviors and social interaction styles (e.g., leader humor) can transmit powerful messages and social cues to followers, thereby allowing followers to understand the rewards, punishments, and expectations of an organization (Hogg, 2018). By reducing hierarchy saliency, leader humor allows employees to infer that authentic self-expression is accepted and expected and be more motivated to design their jobs to meet their needs (Parker et al., 2010).

We further consider the contexts under which the impact of leader humor will be more prominent. Workplace gossip is an informal and evaluative communication between one or more members (the gossip recipients) and an absent third party (the target) conducted by another member (the gossiper) (Foster, 2004; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). By this definition, gossip is a private, informal activity that occurs when the target of the gossip is not present. Negative work-place gossip (NWG) is a negative, evaluative discussion that can harm employees' sense of psychological safety and create uncertainty in interpersonal relationships (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Receiving NWG about others may make employees feel that their self-disclosure is risky and uncertain, resulting in identity conflict. The symbolic and guiding role of leaders in employee identity expression becomes more prominent in such a conflicting and uncertain work environment (Hogg, 2018; Serpe & Stryker, 2011). By sending signals of safety and support, leader humor may help employees maintain consistency and continuity of self-identity expression in the workplace (Cable et al., 2013; Guignon, 2004). Hence, we suggest that the positive impact of leader humor on employees' authentic self-expression and subsequently proactive behaviors may be stronger in an environment where employees frequently receive NWG than in settings with little negative gossip. Figure 1 presents the proposed model.

This study makes several contributions to the leader humor and proactivity literature. First, we examine the relationship between leader humor and employees' proactive work design behavior. Leader humor, a commonly recognized form of positive interaction, has generated widespread interest among researchers in recent years. Scholars in organizational behavior have called for more studies to understand the consequences of leader humor in the workplace (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). A few empirical investigations have suggested that leader humor is positively associated with employee proactive behavior, such as feedback-seeking and voice (Karakowsky et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2021). Our study aims to advance this line of research by focusing on the mechanisms and bound-ary conditions of the link between leader humor and employ-ees' task i-deals and job crafting behaviors. Task i-deals and job crafting are viewed as employees' proactive work design

behaviors to modify the design of the job to better meet their own needs (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010).

Second, we apply and extend the identity-based perspective on proactivity, which shows that proactive behavior is often identity-congruent. The individual self is a motivational resource for proactivity and drives self-directed behaviors aimed at development and change (Strauss & Kelly, 2016). From a symbolic interactionist perspective on identity, employees' identities shaped by primary groups and significant others in the process of work interaction are important determinants of employees' social behaviors. We argue that social interaction between leaders and employees will affect how employees express their authentic selves and the extent to which they modify their jobs to reveal their personal identity. Leader humor can be viewed as a positive interaction that decreases hierarchy saliency and increases self-disclosure (Cooper, 2008; Cooper et al., 2018). As a result, employees are likely to perceive a signal that their authentic self-expression is accepted and expected. Therefore, we propose that authentic self-expression as an identity mechanism could be an underlying mechanism explaining the positive impact of leader humor on employees' task i-deals and job crafting behaviors.

Finally, we contribute to work gossip literature by investigating the role of receiving NWG on the relationship between leader humor and employee authentic self-expression and proactive behavior. Repeated calls have been made to understand recipients' reactions to gossip as scholars have recently recognized the significant and far-reaching implications of receiver reactions (Bai et al., 2020; Lee & Barnes, 2020). Despite these calls, research from the gossip recipient perspective is still in its early stages (see Lee & Barnes, 2020 for a notable exception). Consistent with third-party justice literature, we propose the recipients of gossip as the third-party observers who lie outside the dyad of perpetrator and victim in a gossip episode. Receiving NWG about others can lead to confusion and uncertainty among employees, and they then turn to signals or guidance from their leaders to make judgments about self-disclosure and proactive behavior. Therefore, we propose that receiving NWG will be a critical contextual factor that can enhance the importance of leader humor's impact on employee self-identity development (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). Our study contributes to understanding how and why leader humor and receiving NWG jointly influence employees' proactive job redesign behaviors.

## Theory and hypotheses development

### The symbolic interactionist perspective on identity

The expectations, assessments, and perceptions of others affect one's sense of self during social interaction (Ashforth

& Schinoff, 2016). The notion of the symbolic interactionist perspective on identity is that identities are taken to be determinants of social behavior, but the link between identities and behavior is both facilitated and constrained by where persons are in social structures (Serpe & Stryker, 2011; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Based on this theory, the self is defined and developed via interactions, and primary groups and significant others shape it. The self is also a product of a looking-glass process involving impressions of how we appear to others, others' assessments and expectations of us, and our feelings of pride or shame deriving from these imaginations (Serpe & Stryker, 2011; Stets & Serpe, 2013).

Empirical research drawing upon a symbolic interactionist perspective on identity has indicated that those with whom individuals interact frequently can impact their self-conceptions. For instance, researchers have found that group members had a significant impact on individuals' selves in group interactions and that the quality of interpersonal bonds predicted feelings of belonging (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013). Ingroup identification among newcomers has been found to be mainly determined by interpersonal attraction and ingroup favoritism (van Veelen et al., 2016). Another empirical study found that organizational practices such as serving customers led employees to become like those they served, as the interactions affected their self-identity (Cardador & Pratt, 2018).

Taken together, the symbolic interactionist perspective posits that an individual's self-identity and social behavior can be influenced by the expectations and evaluations of significant others. This perspective is especially relevant in leadership as leaders are role models or symbols that shape how followers perceive and respond to their environment (Shamir et al., 1993). In conflict-ridden and uncertain situations—such as receiving NWG—the symbolic and guiding role of leadership in employee identity development becomes even more crucial.

### Leader humor and employee authentic self-expression

Authenticity is the free and natural expression of core feelings, motives, and inclinations (Kernis, 2003). As it reflects human beings' ideals and desires, authenticity can help employees achieve self-fulfillment by expressing a true inner self through actions in the external world (Cable et al., 2013; Guignon, 2004). Leaders' expectations and attitudes influence employees' perceptions of what is appropriate self-expression (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Serpe & Stryker, 2011). Unlike general leader support, leader humor is particularly effective in reducing the perception of hierarchical differences (Romero and Cruthirds, 2006), promoting informal communication (Mallett & Wapshott, 2014), and signaling leaders' approachability and openness (Cooper, 2008).

We propose that leader humor has a positive impact on employees' authenticity. Individuals develop and form their identities through interactions with significant others (Serpe & Stryker, 2011; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Given that leaders play a significant role in shaping their subordinates' self-identity development, leader humor may typically foster a sense of support and amiability, satisfying followers' desires for psychological safety (Cooper et al., 2018; Yam et al., 2018), which leads to a higher inclination for authentic self-expression, rather than abiding by self-regulatory mechanisms (Coan & Sbarra, 2015). Furthermore, a leader's behavior and interpersonal style can provide powerful cues to subordinates regarding expectations, rewards, and punishments in the organization (Hogg, 2010). Leader humor signals a leader's willingness to share information with the followers and to diminish the social distance between them (Cooper, 2008; Cooper et al., 2018). When leaders with status and authority engage in self-disclosure, they reinforce the belief that authentic self-expression is encouraged and accepted, thus increasing employees' willingness to express their true selves. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1** Leader humor is positively related to employee authentic self-expression.

## Employee authentic self-expression and proactive behaviors

As authentic self-expression is the state of the true self and maintains human well-being and motivation, employees are motivated to articulate, project, and exercise their best selves at work (Cable et al., 2013; Guignon, 2004; Roberts et al., 2005). Authentic individuals desire to craft and/or negotiate their tasks or working environments according to their unique preferences and dispositions (Wang et al., 2016). Employees who authentically express themselves can feel more self-valued and motivated to achieve a better future self. In addition, authentic self-expression also makes employees cognitively align with their inner selves and satisfies their well-being (Cable et al., 2013; Settles et al., 2002). Employees who can express themselves authentically have enough resources to engage in proactive behaviors by reducing the resource consumption and negative affect arising from identity conflict. We, therefore, suggest that authenticity motivates employees to bring about changes in the environment and/ or themselves to fulfill their needs, values, and identities (Parker et al., 2010).

We examine two types of proactive behaviors related to job redesign (i.e., task i-deals and job crafting). As mentioned above, both task i-deals and job crafting highlight employees' proactivity in shaping, molding, and

redesigning their jobs (Rofcanin et al., 2016). Task i-deals involve a formal process where employees need approval from the leader; in contrast, job crafting is not explicitly authorized by the leader and operates within the sphere of perceived acceptance from the leader (Wang et al., 2023). Both task i-deals and job crafting, though different, result in tasks being done in unique ways within a work group. These personalized approaches can help employees use their skills better and express their true selves more genuinely (Cable et al., 2013). Thus, we posit that there is a positive relationship between employee authentic self-expression and job crafting and task i-deals and propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2** Employee authentic self-expression is positively related to employee task i-deals (H2a) and job crafting (H2b).

## The mediating role of authentic self-expression in leader humor and proactive behaviors

The engagement of employees in the initiative-taking process is greatly influenced by leaders (Grant & Parker, 2009; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Zhang et al., 2012). Research on leadership has shown that transformational leadership (Belschak & Hartog, 2010; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Strauss et al., 2008), supportive leadership (Ohly et al., 2006), and participatory leadership (Rank et al., 2007) can affect employees' proactive behavior (Grant & Parker, 2009; Strauss et al., 2008). Although numerous studies have been conducted on the outcomes of leader humor, there has been little research on the relationship between leader humor and employee proactive behaviors. Proactive behavior is inherently linked to how individuals think about themselves, that is, their self-concept and identity (Strauss & Kelly, 2016). As a form of positive social interaction, leader humor helps employees express themselves and realize their true potential, which relates to employees proactively making changes to their jobs. By integrating the abovementioned augments, we propose the mediating role of authentic self-expression in the association between leader humor and employee proactive job redesign behaviors.

**Hypothesis 3** Leader humor has a positive indirect effect on employee task i-deals (H3a) and job crafting (H3b) through employee authentic self-expression.

## The moderating role of receiving NWG

Furthermore, we contend that in unfriendly and uncertain contexts, such as receiving NWG, the influential and symbolic role of leader humor in shaping employee identity becomes notably pronounced. Receiving NWG

may trigger concerns that the recipients could potentially become targets of such rumors, and thus they are likely to undergo emotional stress stemming from interpersonal interactions (Martinescu et al., 2014). Consequently, individuals are driven by a heightened necessity to seek social cues to ascertain whether they should genuinely express themselves. Stated differently, in situations characterized by ambiguity and stress (i.e., receiving NWG), employees are more prone to rely on cues provided by their leaders to gain direction for guiding their behaviors, judgments, values, and ideals (Hogg, 2018). As a result, when confronted with NWG, the guiding and symbolic function of leader humor in shaping employee identity becomes considerably more powerful. The reasoning is also supported by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which states that individuals strive to obtain, retain, foster, and protect those things they value centrally (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The gain paradox principle of COR states that resource gain increases in salience in the context of resource loss. When resource loss circumstances are high, resource gains become more important—they gain in value (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Employees receiving NWG may fear becoming targets of similar gossip and face interpersonal pressure and a lack of resources for authentic self-expression (Brady et al., 2017). Leader humor serves as a resource supplement offering interpersonal and emotional resources to promote employees' authentic self-expression, and this support mechanism becomes more effective when employees are subjected to NWG. Drawing upon the symbolic interactionist perspective on identity and the logic of the COR theory, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4** Receiving NWG moderates the positive relationship between leader humor and employee authentic self-expression, such that the positive relationship is stronger when the level of receiving NWG is high (vs. low).

Taken together, in a gossipy work environment, leader humor can have a more significant impact on an employee's authentic self-expression, which in turn promotes proactive behavior among employees. By encouraging employees to express their genuine thoughts and feelings, leader humor fosters employees' engagement in redesigning their jobs, particularly in threatening and uncertain social environments. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5** The positive indirect effect of leader humor on employee task i-deals (H5a) and job crafting (H5b) via employee authentic self-expression is stronger when the level of receiving NWG is high (vs. low).

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Our data was completed with the help and support of the employment guidance departments from several universities in China's central and eastern regions. These departments are primarily responsible for gathering and managing employment information for graduates. With their assistance, we contacted alumni via email/WeChat and invited them to participate in our four-wave longitudinal study. We informed them that participation was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential and solely used for research purposes. To incentivize participation, each alumnus was offered a bonus of USD 15 upon completing all four waves of surveys. The alumni who expressed interest in participating in our data collection joined the WeChat groups, where the research team reminded them to complete the questionnaires.

In the first wave of the survey (Time 0), we collected data on demographics and control variables (proactive personality, core self-evaluations, and leader aggressive humor; see below). In the second wave of the survey (Time 1), we collected data on the independent variable (leader humor) and the moderator (receiving NWG). To control the baseline levels of the mediators and outcome variables, we also measured them at Time 1. In the third and fourth waves of the survey (Time 2 and Time 3), we measured the mediator and the outcomes, respectively. The first wave of surveys (Time 0) was distributed in early July and included measures of demographic and individual difference variables. The second wave of surveys (Time 1) was sent out two months later, in early September, followed by subsequent surveys with a one-month interval between each.

In the first-wave of data collection, we distributed digital questionnaires to 492 alumni via the WeChat group and received 410 completed responses (83.3%). We received 352 completed responses in the second-wave (71.6%), 327 completed responses in the third -wave (66.5%), and 320 completed responses in the fourth -wave (65.04%). After matching responses from the four-wave surveys, our final sample was 320 respondents (65.04%) including 129 males (40.3%) and 191 females (59.7%). The mean age was 23.45 (SD = 1.99). The participants were all full-time employees and worked in a variety of industries, such as financial industry (20.3%), internet (17.5%), construction industry (17.2%), education and training (11.3%), transportation (7.2%), manufacturing industry (6.3%), restaurants and tourism (5%), medicine and medical treatment (4.1%), government agencies (3.4%), retail (3.4%) and others (4.4%).

## Measures

All the questionnaires were presented in Chinese. Scales that do not have Chinese versions were translated by two doctoral students from the original English into Chinese versions using back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1986).

**Leader humor** A 3-item scale developed by Cooper et al. (2018) was used to measure leader humor. An example item was "How frequently does your leader express humor with you at work, overall?" The response scale ranged from 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("very often"). Cronbach's alpha was 0.89.

**Receiving NWG** Receiving NWG was measured using five items adapted from Brady et al. (2017). An example item was "In the last month, how often have you heard an unflattering story about your supervisor or other colleagues while talking to a work colleague?" The response scale ranged from 1 ("never") to 7 ("more than once a day"). Cronbach's alpha was 0.90.

**Employee authentic self-expression** A 3-item scale developed by Cable et al. (2013) was used to assess authentic self-expression. An example item was "In this job, I can be who I really am." The response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Cronbach's alpha was 0.76 at Time 1 and 0.82 at Time 2.

**Employee job crafting** We asked employees to report how often they sought resources and challenges using Petrou et al. (2012) 9-item measure. We did not include the items for reducing demands from the original scale because whether reducing hindering demands is a proactive behavior or a passive adaption is under debate (Zhang & Parker, 2019). The response scale ranged from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). An example item was "I ask others for feedback on my job performance." Cronbach's alpha was 0.85 at both Time 1 and Time 3.

**Employee task i-deals** We measured task i-deals using the 5-item scale developed by Hornung et al. (2010). The participants were asked to recall how frequently they had successfully changed their "skill development, performance goals, arrangements of daily work activities, job responsibilities, personally interesting and challenging work tasks" by communicating and negotiating with superiors or leaders. The response scale ranged from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). Cronbach's alpha was 0.82 at Time 1 and 0.78 at Time 3.

**Control variables** Following Bernerth and Aguinis's (2016) recommendation regarding controls, we identified several potentially relevant control variables: proactive personality, core self-evaluations (CSE), and leader aggressive humor.

Given that an individual with a highly proactive personality is more likely to engage in proactive behavior, we controlled for proactive personality ($\alpha = 0.68$) and measured it with the 6-item scale developed by Parker (1998). We also controlled for CSE because the literature has highlighted that individuals with high levels of self-worth, effectiveness, and capability have more psychological resources that may help them to craft their job challenges and resources (Cheng et al., 2022). We measured CSE ($\alpha = 0.79$) with the 12-item scale developed by Judge et al. (2003). Additionally, leader expression of humor may bore or offend employees (Yam et al., 2018). To account for the possibility that leader humor may cause unpleasant experiences, we controlled for leader aggressive humor ($\alpha = 0.81$) and measured it with the 4-item scale developed by Martin et al. (2003). In addition, we also included demographic variables such as age, gender, and industry as controls.

## Results

### Confirmatory factor analysis

We assessed the distinctiveness of our core constructs with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015). Our theoretical model consists of five main variables: leader humor (3 items), receiving NWG (5 items), authentic self-expression (3 items), job crafting (9 items), and task i-deals (5 items). We conducted CFA with parcels to achieve a satisfactory ratio of the sample size to the number of estimated parameters (Little et al., 2002). Specifically, we created two parcels for the two dimensions of job crafting. The results of our CFA are presented in Table 1, which indicated that our hypothesized model with five factors fit the data well, as evidenced by the following indices: $\chi^2/df$ (355.14/125) = 2.84; SRMR = 0.08; CFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.89; RMSEA = 0.06. We therefore concluded that the scales measured distinctive constructs, and we then tested the proposed hypotheses.[1]

### Descriptive statistics

The means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables are presented in Table 2. T1 leader humor was positively related to T2 authentic self-expression ($r = 0.36$,

---

[1] We also conducted the CFA of five main variables and three control variables: Core self-evaluations (T0), leader aggressive humor (T0), and proactive personality (T0). The results indicated that the eight-factors model fit the data well, as evidenced by the following indices: $\chi^2/df$ (640.31/322) = 1.99; SRMR = .06; CFI = .91; TLI = .89; RMSEA = .06.

**Table 1** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model Comparison

| Model | $\chi^2$ | df | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | SRMR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| One factors model (A + B + C + D + E) | 1873.78 | 135 | .30 | .21 | .20 | .18 |
| Two factors model (A + B, C + D + E) | 1213.22 | 134 | .57 | .51 | .16 | .18 |
| Three factors model (A, B, C + D + E) | 559.15 | 132 | .83 | .80 | .10 | .09 |
| Four factors model (A, B, C, D + E) | 525.32 | 129 | .84 | .81 | .10 | .10 |
| Five factors model (A, B, C, D, E) | 355.14 | 125 | .91 | .89 | .06 | .08 |

N = 320. Main variables: A = Leader humor (T1); B = Receiving NWG (T1); C = Employee authentic self-expression (T2); D = Task i-deals (T3); E = Job crafting (T3)

$p < 0.01$). T2 authentic self-expression was positively related to T3 job crafting ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) and T3 task i-deals ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$). These bivariate results provided preliminary support for our hypotheses.

## Hypothesis testing

We used path analysis with Mplus 7.4 to simultaneously analyze the two outcomes to test all the hypotheses. Specifically, we examined the proposed relationships by controlling for CSE, proactive personality, leader aggressive humor, and demographic variables such as age, gender, and industry.[2] We also accounted for the baseline effects by including authentic self-expression, task i-deals, and job crafting at T1. The results are presented in Table 3 and Fig. 2.

### The mediating role of authentic self-expression (Hypotheses 1–3).

As shown, T1 leader humor was positively related to T2 authentic self-expression ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$), which was positively related to T3 job crafting ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$) and T3 task i-deals ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$). We calculated the indirect effects and the results showed that the indirect effects of T2 authentic self-expression were significant (task i-deals: estimate = 0.019, 95% CI [0.005, 0.046]; job crafting: estimate = 0.014, 95% CI [0.002, 0.034]). Therefore, Hypotheses 1, 2a, 2b, and 3 were supported.

### The moderating role of receiving NWG (Hypotheses 4 and 5)

T1 receiving NWG moderated the relationship between T1 leader humor and T2 authentic self-expression ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$). The simple slope was examined to visualize the interaction effect. Following Aiken and West's (1991) recommendation, we plotted the interactions at conditional values of receiving NWG (1 standard deviation above and

below the mean). As shown in Fig. 3, T1 leader humor was more strongly related to T2 authentic self-expression when T1 receiving NWG was high ($b = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) but was not related to T2 authentic self-expression when T1 receiving NWG was low ($b = 0.06$, $p > 0.05$). The difference between the high and low receiving NWG simple slopes was also significant ($b = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Further, we tested the conditional indirect effects of leader humor on task i-deals and job crafting via authentic self-expression. As shown in Table 4, the conditional indirect analysis showed that T1 leader humor was not related to T3 task i-deals (estimate = 0.007, 95% CI [-0.007, 0.030]) or job crafting (estimate = 0.005, 95% CI [-0.005, 0.026]) via T2 authentic self-expression when T1 receiving NWG was low. The indirect effects were stronger and significant when receiving NWG was high (task i-deals: estimate = 0.031, 95% CI [0.011, 0.068]; job crafting: estimate = 0.022, 95% CI [0.004, 0.051]). Additionally, the difference in indirect effects between high and low workplace gossip is significant (task i-deals: estimate = 0.024, 95% CI [0.004, 0.053] or job crafting: estimate = 0.017, 95% CI [0.001, 0.048]). Therefore, Hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported.

## Discussion

Taking a symbolic interactionist perspective on identity, this study examined how leader humor and employee receiving NWG impacted employee authenticity and subsequent proactive behaviors. In a longitudinal study of 320 Chinese employees, we found that leader humor was positively associated with employee authentic self-expression, which in turn related to employee task i-deals and job crafting. Furthermore, our results showed that in a social environment where employees receive negative gossip, leader humor exhibited a stronger impact on employee authentic self-expression and proactive behaviors. These findings provide several contributions to the literature and valuable managerial implications.

---

[2] Excluding the control variables from the path analysis did not influence the significant level of the hypothesized relationships.

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations of the Study Variables

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Gender | 1.60 | 0.49 | — | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 23.45 | 1.99 | -.16 | — | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Industry | 5.95 | 2.88 | -.05 | .07 | — | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Core self-evaluations (T0) | 3.43 | 0.48 | .00 | .13* | .08 | (.79) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Proactive personality (T0) | 3.56 | 0.51 | .02 | .18** | .10 | .42** | (.68) | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Leader aggressive humor (T0) | 3.40 | 1.27 | .02 | -.15** | -.05 | -.14* | -.25** | (.81) | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Employee authentic self-expression (T1) | 4.37 | 1.20 | -.03 | .02 | -.09 | .13* | .23** | -.34** | (.76) | | | | | | | |
| 8. Task i-deals (T1) | 2.93 | 0.71 | -.02 | -.05 | .03 | .13* | .09 | -.22** | .33** | (.82) | | | | | | |
| 9. Job crafting (T1) | 3.04 | 0.62 | .03 | .08 | .09 | .18** | .22** | -.31** | .27** | .47** | (.85) | | | | | |
| 10. Leader humor (T1) | 3.51 | 1.02 | -.01 | -.07 | -.02 | .16** | .24** | -.27** | .40** | .30** | .34** | (.89) | | | | |
| 11. Receiving NWG (T1) | 3.11 | 1.11 | -.04 | -.12* | -.01 | -.19** | -.15** | .25** | -.23** | -.05 | -.02 | -.01 | (.90) | | | |
| 12. Employee authentic self-expression (T2) | 4.31 | 1.18 | -.01 | .00 | -.14* | .16** | .21** | -.29** | .57** | .23** | .23** | .36** | -.18** | (.82) | | |
| 13. Task i-deals (T3) | 2.79 | 0.67 | .00 | .09 | .04 | .17** | .03 | -.14* | .21** | .38** | .34** | .19** | -.05 | .27** | (.78) | |
| 14. Job crafting (T3) | 2.93 | 0.60 | -.02 | .05 | .05 | .11 | .07 | -.26** | .16** | .37** | .55** | .16** | -.02 | .23** | .52** | (.85) |

N = 320. Receiving NWG = receiving negative workplace gossip. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are listed on the diagonal

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

## Theoretical implications

Our study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it enriches the understanding of the antecedents of proactivity through the lens of social interactions and employee authenticity. Multiple theoretical perspectives have emerged to understand the antecedents of employee proactivity (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Parker et al., 2010). However, few studies have examined a social interaction perspective (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Li et al., 2021). As a result, knowledge about why social interactions influence the extent to which employees take proactive actions remains limited. This is a critical research gap because understanding the reason is fundamental for theoretical development (Sutton & Staw, 1995; Whetten, 1989) and a key step in integrating the literature on social interactions and proactivity. We demonstrated that leader humor is positively related to proactive behaviors via authenticity. This study provides empirical evidence for the symbolic interactionist perspective on identity. Although the impact of social context on identity has been discussed in the literature on symbolic interactionism (Serpe & Stryker, 2011; Stets & Serpe, 2013), there have been few empirical studies in the organizational context. By connecting a symbolic interactionist perspective on identity with the proactivity literature, we showed that the interplay of positive and negative social interactions affected individuals' authenticity and proactivity.

Second, we contribute to the literature on leader humor by demonstrating its positive impact on proactive behavior. Humor is widely recommended in interactions between leaders and employees, and organizational researchers have called for more studies on its consequences at work (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Our research answers this call by showing that leader humor makes employees feel that authenticity is safe and expected, especially when faced with negative interpersonal pressure such as negative gossip. Previous studies have found that employees' engagement in the initiative-taking process is greatly influenced by leaders (Grant & Parker, 2009; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Zhang et al., 2012). Consistent with these findings and extending the research on the outcomes of leader humor, we found that leader humor helps employees to engage in more task ideals and job crafting via authentic self-expression.

Third, this paper enriches the literature on the identity-based perspective on proactivity. According to the identity perspective, proactivity is inherently linked to how individuals think about themselves; in other words, their self-concept and proactive behavior are based on an identity-congruent motivation (Strauss & Kelly, 2016). Some empirical studies from an identity perspective have found that the internal and external consistency and continuity of self-identity prompt employees to actively match and integrate identity with the environment and actively engage in behaviors related

**Table 3** Standardized Results of Regression Analyses to Test the Hypotheses

| Predictor | Employee authentic self-expression T2 | | Job crafting (T3) | | Task i-deals (T3) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Control variables* | *Estimate* | SE | *Estimate* | SE | *Estimate* | SE |
| Gender | .01 | .11 | -.04 | .06 | .04 | .07 |
| Age | -.02 | .03 | -.00 | .02 | .04 | .02 |
| Industry | -.04 | .02 | .00 | .01 | .01 | .01 |
| Core self-evaluations (T0) | .15 | .12 | .03 | .07 | .18[*] | .07 |
| Proactive personality (T0) | .08 | .13 | -.09 | .06 | -.17[*] | .08 |
| Leader aggressive humor (T0) | -.07 | .05 | -.06[*] | .03 | -.00 | .03 |
| Employee authentic self-expression (T1) | .45[***] | .06 | -.04 | .03 | .00 | .04 |
| Task i-deals (T1) | – | – | – | – | .24[***] | .06 |
| Job crafting (T1) | – | – | .45[***] | .05 | – | – |
| *Independent variable* | | | | | | |
| Leader humor (LH) (T1) | .17[**] | .06 | .04 | -.03 | .04 | .04 |
| *Mediator* | | | | | | |
| Employee authentic self-expression (T2) | | | .08[*] | .04 | .11[**] | .04 |
| *Moderator* | | | | | | |
| Receiving NWG (T1) | -.04 | .05 | | | | |
| *Interaction* | | | | | | |
| LH (T1) * Receiving NWG (T1) | .11[*] | .05 | | | | |
| **R²** | | .38 | | .29 | | .18 |

N = 320. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$;

**Fig. 2** Results of the Proposed Model. *Note.* Control variables were not presented for the sake of clarity. Standardized coefficients were reported
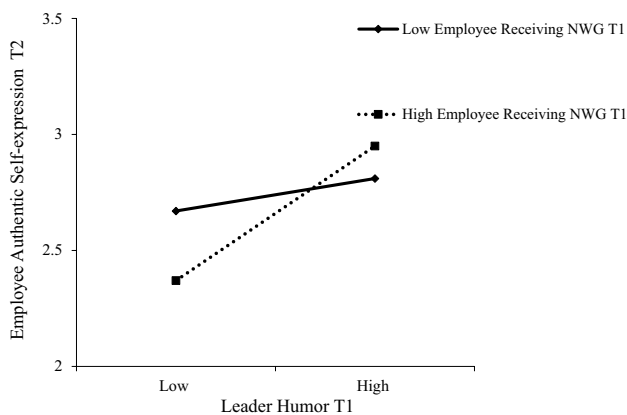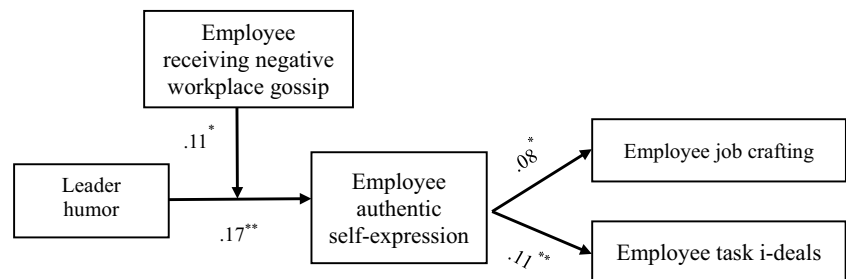


**Fig. 3** The Moderating Role of Employee Receiving Negative Workplace Gossip (NWG). *Note.* Low = mean – 1SD. High = mean + 1SD



to future self-development (Strauss & Kelly, 2016; Strauss et al., 2008). Consistent with these studies, we found that an individual's authentic self-expression is an important antecedent of proactive job redesign.

Finally, scholars have called for greater attention to the effects of NWG (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004). Most of the research on NWG has adopted the perspectives of the gossiper or the gossip object (Brady et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2018). We investigated the receiver's perspective on NWG and found that when employees receive NWG, leader humor has a stronger positive effect on employee authenticity and proactive behavior. This finding corroborates other theoretical perspectives. For instance, COR states that resource gain increases in salience in the context of resource loss. Resources become more salient and motivating when

**Table 4** Results for Indirect Effects and Conditional Indirect Effects

| | Leader humor T1→Employee authentic self-expression T2→Task i-deals T3 | | | Leader humor T1→Employee authentic self-expression T2→Job crafting T3 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Estimate | 95% LLCI | 95%ULCI | Estimate | 95%LLCI | 95%ULCI |
| Workplace gossip T1 | | | | | | |
| Difference | 0.024[*] | 0.004 | 0.053 | 0.017[*] | 0.001 | 0.048 |
| High (+1 SD) | 0.031[*] | 0.011 | 0.068 | 0.022[*] | 0.004 | 0.051 |
| Low (-1 SD) | 0.007 | -0.007 | 0.030 | 0.005 | -0.005 | 0.026 |

*Note.* N=320. Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals is 5000

[*] Confidence interval without 0; $p < .05$

resource loss potentials are high. Receiving NWG about others might elicit the receiver's worries and concerns that they could also be a potential target of gossip, which may increase employees' emotional and interpersonal demands. Leader humor as a job resource is vital under such a demanding situation, as it provides interpersonal resources and induces positive emotions such as joy and happiness (Abel, 2002; Cooper et al., 2018; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Therefore, leader humor can supplement interpersonal and emotional resources to enable employees to better cope with a psychologically threatening social context (e.g., receiving NWG), helping employees be more courageous and authentically express themselves.

## Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, individuals from an Eastern cultural background tend to be concerned about the harmony of interpersonal relationships and sensitive to the atmosphere of interpersonal interactions in their teams (Farh et al., 1998; Luo et al., 2012). As our participants were from China, we suggest that researchers conduct comparative studies in different cultural contexts to verify the mechanisms and boundaries of the relationship between leader humor and employee proactivity. In addition, although our longitudinal design alleviated the concern of common method bias, our single-source data may still have biased the relationships found in our study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Second, we explored the impact of positive and negative social interactions on employee identity and proactive behavior from the perspective of symbolic interactionism. However, there may be other explanatory mechanisms underlying the relationship between leader humor and employee proactivity, such as the effects of emotions. Research on NWG has shown that workplace gossip is associated with negative emotional experiences, such as fear and emotional exhaustion (Martinescu et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2018), and studies have shown that leader humor can provide employees with positive emotional resources (Cooper, 2008; Yam et al., 2018). According to the conservation of resources

theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), leader humor is a supplement to employees' positive emotional resources, while receiving NWG consumes employees' emotional resources. The ability to maintain a true self-perception and identity may depend on whether positive or negative emotions have a greater effect on employees. We suggest that future research examines the explanatory mechanism of emotions.

Third, with respect to measures, using a shortened version of the six-item scale may be a contributing factor to the low alpha score. Upon searching research employing the same six-item shortened version scale within the past ten years, we observed a total of 37 articles. Based on a descriptive analysis of these identified articles, we found that Cronbach's alphas ranged from 0.65 to 0.94. Despite our Cronbach's alphas (0.68) falling into this range, we admit it is not high. Additionally, according to a meta-analysis, alphas for trait constructs are slightly lower than alphas for attitudes and behaviors, and alphas of these trait constructs may exhibit wide credibility intervals, sometimes falling below 0.70 (Greco et al., 2018). In addition, our measure of receiving NWG may reflect the overall negative atmosphere within the organization. To more accurately capture this atmosphere, it would be necessary to employ a team-level research design. However, our research design is limited to the individual level and does not allow us to precisely measure the overall negative gossip atmosphere. We encourage future team research to address this issue.

## Practical implications

We found that leader humor can provide a positive interpersonal interaction signal that helps employees to discover their true selves and better realize their self-values and identities at work, especially in uncertain interaction workplaces where gossiping is prevalent. Organizations should encourage leaders to use humorous ways to communicate with employees to increase employees' self-identity and mobilize their proactivity. Especially in a context of tension and conflict, managers can consider leader humor as a management tool and increase humorous leadership style in

their interaction with employees. Furthermore, encouraging employees to show their authentic selves benefits employees and organizations. We found that employees' authentic self-expression is conducive to stimulating proactive work redesign behaviors. Therefore, we suggest that organizations could consider expanding the channels for employees to authentically express themselves and managers could find ways to provide opportunities for employee self-expression.

## Conclusion

Our findings suggest that leader humor has a positive effect on two forms of employee proactive behaviors, task i-deals and job crafting, and that authenticity is the mechanism transmitting the effect of leader humor. Receiving NWG moderates the positive relationship between leader humor and authentic self-expression such that the positive relationship is stronger when employees receive higher levels of NWG. Our study advances the understanding of the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions of the relationship between leader humor and employee proactivity.

## Declarations

## References

Abel, M. H. (2002). Humor, stress, and coping strategies. *Humor, 15*(4), 365–381. https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.15.4.365

Ahlin, B., Drnovšek, M., & Hisrich, R. D. (2012). Exploring moderating effects of proactivity on the relationship between market information and innovation performance. *Economic and Business Review, 14*(2), 121–146. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/exploring-moderating-effects-proactivity-on/docview/1035297203/se-2.

Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Sage.

Andersen, S. M., & Chen, S. (2002). The relational self: An interpersonal social-cognitive theory. *Psychological Review, 109*(4), 619–645. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.4.619

Ashforth, B. E., & Schinoff, B. S. (2016). Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 3*, 111–137. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062322

Bai, Y., Wang, J., Chen, T., & Li, F. (2020). Learning from supervisor negative gossip: The reflective learning process and performance outcome of employee receivers. *Human Relations, 73*(12), 1689–1717. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0018726719866250.

Bateman, T. S., & Crant, J. M. (1993). The proactive component of organizational behavior: A measure and correlates. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 14*(2), 103–118. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030140202

Baumeister, R. F., Zhang, L., & Vohs, K. D. (2004). Gossip as cultural learning. *Review of General Psychology, 8*(2), 111–121. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.2.111

Belschak, F. D., & Den Hartog, D. N. (2010). Pro-self, prosocial, and pro-organizational foci of proactive behaviour: Differential antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 83*(2), 475–498. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317909X439208

Bernerth, J. B., & Aguinis, H. (2016). A critical review and best-practice recommendations for control variable usage. *Personnel Psychology, 69*(1), 229–283. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12103

Blickle, G., Witzki, A. H., & Schneider, P. B. (2009). Mentoring support and power: A three year predictive field study on protégé networking and career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 74*(2), 181–189. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.12.008

Brady, D. L., Brown, D. J., & Liang, L. H. (2017). Moving beyond assumptions of deviance: The reconceptualization and measurement of workplace gossip. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 102*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000164

Brislin, R. W. (1986). The wording and translation of research instruments. In W. J. Lonner & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Field methods in cross-cultural research.* (pp. 137–164). Sage Publications, Inc.

Cable, D. M., Gino, F., & Staats, B. R. (2013). Breaking them in or eliciting their best? Reframing socialization around newcomers' authentic self-expression. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 58*(1), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839213477098

Cardador, M. T., & Pratt, M. G. (2018). Becoming who we serve: A model of multi-layered employee–customer identification. *Academy of Management Journal, 61*(6), 2053–2080. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.1201

Cheng, S. Q., Costantini, A., Zhou, H., & Wang, H. J. (2022). A self-enhancement perspective on organizational socialization: Newcomer core self-evaluations, job crafting, and the role of leaders' developmental coaching. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 31*(6), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2022.2077724

Coan, J. A., & Sbarra, D. A. (2015). Social baseline theory: The social regulation of risk and effort. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 1*, 87–91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2014.12.021

Cooper, C. (2008). Elucidating the bonds of workplace humor: A relational process model. *Human Relations, 61*(8), 1087–1115. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094861

Cooper, C. D. (2005). Just joking around? Employee humor expression as an ingratiatory behavior. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(4), 765–776. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2005.18378877

Cooper, C. D., Kong, D. T., & Crossley, C. D. (2018). Leader humor as an interpersonal resource: Integrating three theoretical perspectives. *Academy of Management Journal, 61*(2), 769–796. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0358

Demerouti, E. (2014). Design your own job through job crafting. *European Psychologist, 19*(4), 237–247. https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000188

Den Hartog, D. N., & Belschak, F. D. (2012). When does transformational leadership enhance employee proactive behavior? The role of autonomy and role breadth self-efficacy. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 97*(1), 194–202. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024903

Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2002). Trust in leadership: Meta-analytic findings and implications for research and practice. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(4), 611–628. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.611

Dunbar, R. I. (2004). Gossip in evolutionary perspective. *Review of General Psychology, 8*(2), 100–110. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.2.100

Easterbrook, M., & Vignoles, V. L. (2013). What does it mean to belong? Interpersonal bonds and intragroup similarities as predictors of felt belonging in different types of groups. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 43*(6), 455–462. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1972

Farh, J. L., Tsui, A. S., Xin, K., & Cheng, B. S. (1998). The influence of relational demography and guanxi: The Chinese case. *Organization Science, 9*(4), 471–488. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.9.4.471

Foster, E. K. (2004). Research on gossip: Taxonomy, methods, and future directions. *Review of General Psychology, 8*(2), 78–99. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.8.2.78

Greco, L. M., O'Boyle, E. H., Cockburn, B. S., & Yuan, Z. (2018). Meta-analysis of coefficient alpha: A reliability generalization study. *Journal of Management Studies, 55*(4), 583–618. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12328

Grant, A. M., & Ashford, S. J. (2008). The dynamics of proactivity at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 28*, 3–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2008.04.002

Grant, A. M., & Parker, S. K. (2009). 7 redesigning work design theories: The rise of relational and proactive perspectives. *Academy of Management Annals, 3*(1), 317–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520903047327

Guignon, C. (2004). *On being authentic*. Routledge.

Hobfoll, S. E., Halbesleben, J., Neveu, J. P., & Westman, M. (2018). Conservation of resources in the organizational context: The reality of resources and their consequences. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 5*, 103–128. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032117-104640

Hogg, M. A. (2010). Influence and leadership. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 1166–1207). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy002031

Hogg, M. A. (2018). Self-uncertainty, leadership preference, and communication of social identity. *Atlantic Journal of Communication, 26*(2), 111–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2018.1432619

Hornung, S., Rousseau, D. M., Glaser, J., Angerer, P., & Weigl, M. (2010). Beyond top-down and bottom-up work redesign: Customizing job content through idiosyncratic deals. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 31*(2–3), 187–215. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.625

Judge, T. A., Erez, A., Bono, J. E., & Thoresen, C. J. (2003). The core self-evaluations scale: Development of a measure. *Personnel Psychology, 56*(2), 303–331. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2003.tb00152.x

Kammeyer-Mueller, J., Wanberg, C., Rubenstein, A., & Song, Z. (2013). Support, undermining, and newcomer socialization: Fitting in during the first 90 days. *Academy of Management Journal, 56*(4), 1104–1124. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0791

Karakowsky, L., Podolsky, M., & Elangovan, A. R. (2020). Signaling trustworthiness: The effect of leader humor on feedback-seeking behavior. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 160*(2), 170–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2019.1620161

Kernis, M. H. (2003). Toward a conceptualization of optimal self-esteem. *Psychological Inquiry, 14*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1401_01

Kurland, N. B., & Pelled, L. H. (2000). Passing the word: Toward a model of gossip and power in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(2), 428–438. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2000.3312928

Kuvaas, B., & Dysvik, A. (2010). Exploring alternative relationships between perceived investment in employee development, perceived supervisor support and employee outcomes. *Human Resource Management Journal, 20*(2), 138–156. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2009.00120.x

Lee, S. H., & Barnes, C. M. (2020). An attributional process model of workplace gossip. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 106*(2), 300–316. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000504

Li, R., Chen, Z., Zhang, H., & Luo, J. (2021). How do authoritarian leadership and abusive supervision jointly thwart follower proactivity? A social control perspective. *Journal of Management, 47*(4), 930–956. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206319878261

Little, T. D., Cunningham, W. A., Shahar, G., & Widaman, K. F. (2002). To parcel or not to parcel: Exploring the question, weighing the merits. *Structural Equation Modeling, 9*(2), 151–173. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15328007SEM0902_1

Luo, Y., Huang, Y., & Wang, S. L. (2012). Guanxi and organizational performance: A meta-analysis. *Management and Organization Review, 8*(1), 139–172. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8784.2011.00273.x

Mallett, O., & Wapshott, R. (2014). Informality and employment relationships in small firms: Humour, ambiguity and straight-talking. *British Journal of Management, 25*(1), 118–132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2012.00836.x

Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the humor styles questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality, 37*(1), 48–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00534-2

Martinescu, E., Janssen, O., & Nijstad, B. A. (2014). Tell me the gossip: The self-evaluative function of receiving gossip about others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 40*(12), 1668–1680. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214554916

Mesmer-Magnus, J., Glew, D. J., & Viswesvaran, C. (2012). A meta-analysis of positive humor in the workplace. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 27*(2), 155–190. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683941211199554

Muthén, L.K., & Muthén, B.O. (1998–2015). *Mplus User's Guide* (7th ed). Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén.

Ohly, S., Sonnentag, S., & Pluntke, F. (2006). Routinization, work characteristics and their relationships with creative and proactive behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 27*(3), 257–279. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.376

Oldham, G. R., & Hackman, J. R. (2010). Not what it was and not what it will be: The future of job design research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 31*(2–3), 463–479. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.678

Parker, S. K. (1998). Enhancing role breadth self-efficacy: The roles of job enrichment and other organizational interventions. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, 83*(6), 835–852. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.83.6.835

Parker, S. K., Bindl, U. K., & Strauss, K. (2010). Making things happen: A model of proactive motivation. *Journal of Management, 36*(4), 827–856. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310363732

Parker, S. K., Williams, H. M., & Turner, N. (2006). Modeling the Antecedents of Proactive Behavior at Work. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(3), 636–652. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.3.636

Petrou, P., Demerouti, E., Peeters, M. C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Hetland, J. (2012). Crafting a job on a daily basis: Contextual correlates and the link to work engagement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 33*(8), 1120–1141. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1783

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879–903. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879

Pundt, A., & Herrmann, F. (2015). Affiliative and aggressive humour in leadership and their relationship to leader–member exchange. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 88*(1), 108–125. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12081

Rank, J., Carsten, J. M., Unger, J. M., & Spector, P. E. (2007). Proactive customer service performance: Relationships with individual, task, and leadership variables. *Human Performance, 20*(4), 363–390. https://doi.org/10.1080/08959280701522056

Roberts, L. M., Dutton, J. E., Spreitzer, G. M., Heaphy, E. D., & Quinn, R. E. (2005). Composing the reflected best-self portrait: Building pathways for becoming extraordinary in work organizations. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(4), 712–736. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2005.18378874

Rofcanin, Y., Berber, A., Koch, S., & Sevinc, L. (2016). Job crafting and I-deals: A study testing the nomological network of proactive behaviors. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 27*(22), 2695–2726. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1091370

Romero, E. J., & Cruthirds, K. W. (2006). The use of humor in the workplace. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 20*(2), 58–69. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMP.2006.20591005

Seibert, S. E., Kraimer, M. L., & Crant, J. M. (2001). What do proactive people do? A longitudinal model linking proactive personality and career success. *Personnel Psychology, 54*(4), 845–874. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2001.tb00234.x

Serpe, R. T., & Stryker, S. (2011). The symbolic interactionist perspective and identity theory. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 225–248). Springer.

Settles, I. H., Sellers, R. M., & Alphonse, D., Jr. (2002). One role or two? The function of psychological separation in role conflict. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(3), 574–582. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.3.574

Shamir, B., House, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1993). The motivational effects of charismatic leadership: A self-concept based theory. *Organization Science, 4*(4), 577–594. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.4.4.577

Stets, J. E., & Serpe, R. T. (2013). Identity theory. In J. DeLamater & A. Ward (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 31–60). Springer.

Strauss, B. K., & Kelly, C. (2016). An identity-based perspective on proactivity: Future work selves and beyond. In S. K. Parker & U. K. Bindl (Eds.), *Proactivity at work* (pp. 348–372). Routledge.

Strauss, K., Griffin, M. A., & Rafferty, A. E. (2008). Proactivity directed toward the team and organization: The role of leadership, commitment and role-breadth self-efficacy. *British Journal of Management, 20*(3), 279–291. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2008.00590.x

Sutton, R. I., & Staw, B. M. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 371–384. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2393788

Tan, L., Wang, Y., & Lu, H. (2021). Leader humor and employee upward voice: The role of employee relationship quality and traditionality. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 28*(2), 221–236. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051820970877

Van Dyne, L., & LePine, J. A. (1998). Helping and voice extra-role behaviors: Evidence of construct and predictive validity. *Academy of Management Journal, 41*(1), 108–119. https://doi.org/10.5465/256902

van Veelen, R., Eisenbeiss, K. K., & Otten, S. (2016). Newcomers to social categories: Longitudinal predictors and consequences of ingroup identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 42*(6), 811–825. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216643937

Wang, H. J., Demerouti, E., & Bakker, A. B. (2016). A review of job crafting research: The role of leader behaviors in cultivating successful job crafters. In S. K. Parker & U. K. Bindl (Eds.), *Proactivity at work: Making things happen in organizations* (pp. 77–104). Routledge.

Wang, H. J., Jiang, L., Xu, X., Zhou, K., & Bauer, T. N. (2023). Dynamic relationships between leader-member exchange and employee role-making behaviours: The moderating role of employee emotional ambivalence. *Human Relations, 76*(6), 926–951. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221075253

Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review, 14*(4), 490–495. https://doi.org/10.2307/258554

Wrzesniewski, A., & Dutton, J. E. (2001). Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *Academy of Management Review, 26*(2), 179–201. http://www.jstor.org/stable/259118

Wu, L. Z., Birtch, T. A., Chiang, F. F., & Zhang, H. (2018). Perceptions of negative workplace gossip: A self-consistency theory framework. *Journal of Management, 44*(5), 1873–1898. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316632057

Yam, K. C., Christian, M. S., Wei, W., Liao, Z., & Nai, J. (2018). The mixed blessing of leader sense of humor: Examining costs and benefits. *Academy of Management Journal, 61*(1), 348–369. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.1088

Zhang, F., & Parker, S. K. (2019). Reorienting job crafting research: A hierarchical structure of job crafting concepts and integrative review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 40*(2), 126–146. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2332

Zhang, Z., Wang, M., & Shi, J. (2012). Leader–follower congruence in proactive personality and work outcomes: The mediating role of leader–member exchange. *Academy of Management Journal, 55*(1), 111–130. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.0865