

## **Abstract submitted to stream: Proactivity and job design in employment relations**

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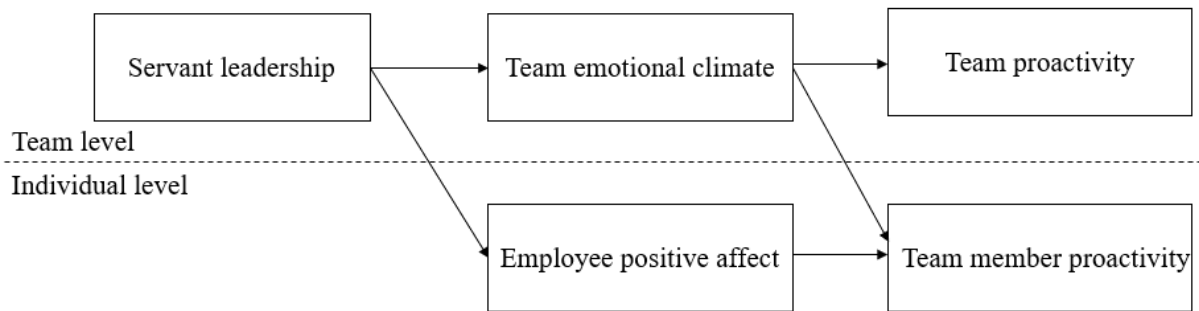
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### **Title: A multi-level investigation of the effect of servant leadership on proactivity in a team context: Positive affect and team emotional climate as mediators**

This paper tests a multi-level model in which servant leadership is hypothesized to predict proactivity at the individual and team-level through the mediating effect of positive affect (at the individual level) and team emotional climate (at the team level). We define and operationalize the term servant leadership after Liden and his colleagues (2008) who, inspired by the work of Greenleaf (1970), identified nine dimensions that constitute servant leadership as a construct. The dimensions are 1) *emotional healing*, 2) *creating value for the community*, 3) *conceptual skills*, 4) *empowering*, 5) *helping subordinates grow and succeed*, 6) *putting subordinates first*, 7) *behaving ethically*, 8) *relationships*, and 9) *servanthood*. Furthermore, due to our focus on professional work teams, servant leadership in this study refers to how all members of a team perceive to be treated by the servant leader.

We use the leader member exchange (LMX) theory to argue that there exists a mediated relationship between servant leadership, positive affect, positive team emotional climate and proactivity at the individual and team-level. This idea is derived from van Dierendonck (2011) who proposed an overall theoretical framework for servant leadership highlighting its most important antecedents, underlying processes, and consequences. One proposition of his model focuses on the high-quality dyadic relationship between the servant leader and his followers which is characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation. Van Dierendonck (2011) posits that the quality of the servant leader-follower relationship is best understood using the four-dimensional model of the leader-member-exchange (LMX) theory of Liden and Maslyn (1998). Their model consists of the four dimensions affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect. The authors refer to positive affect as having positive feelings toward a leader, but we take a more broader definition of positive affect and refer to it as brief or longer lasting positive feelings, such as happiness, joy, excitement, enthusiasm, and contentment, that reflect a level of pleasurable engagement with the environment (Clark et al., 1989).

The LMX theory posits that leaders develop unique leader-follower relationships with each follower based on the unique character and needs of the follower. These relationships can be characterized as “weak relationships” or low LMX when they are strictly based on employment contracts and as “strong relationships” or high LMX when they are characterized by mutual trust, respect, liking and reciprocal influence (Dansereau et al., 1975). Because servant leaders develop unique relationships with their followers in which they address their individual needs and demonstrate that they appreciate their individual value and contribution to the team (Greenleaf, 1998), individuals are likely left with positive feelings and emotions in the team. In turn, research shows that such positive emotions foster proactivity at the individual and team-level (Wu & Wang, 2015; van Kleef et al., 2010). Our hypotheses are summarized in the model below:



## Research methods

We test our model with three studies: **Study 1** involves a time-lagged survey study with 291 Chinese employees and 52 supervisors. Employees rated the constructs servant leadership, team emotional climate, and employee positive affect. Their direct supervisors rated employees' team member proactivity (individual level) and team proactivity (team-level). **Study 2** involves an experiment with approximately 585 students from a Dutch public university. **Study 3** involves an experiment with approximately 300 participants from M-Turk. Findings of **study 1** provide evidence for the model.

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