

Leader Organizational citizenship behaviour and Perceived Followers Support as Outcomes of Proactive Followership: A Social Exchange Perspective

Sajjad Nawaz Khan* Zaheer Ahmed** Asad Khan*** Hamad Ul Haq Ansari****

Abstract

In recent decades, leadership research has tended to focus on leaders and the role of followers has been given less attention. This study, which uses the social exchange theory, investigates the role of proactive followership in leadership outcomes, considering the moderating influence of individual-level power distance orientation (PDO). Non-probability sampling was employed to tests the proposed hypotheses, 182 respondents participated in the research. The data was analysed using SmartPLS 3. The results showed that proactive followership has a positive effect on leader organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and the perceived support of followers. PDO significantly moderates the relationship between proactive followership and leader OCB, with low PDO strengthening the role of proactive followers in shaping leader OCB. These findings suggest that organizations should focus on developing their followers in order to improve leadership outcomes and strengthen relationships.

Keywords: Proactive followership; leadership; power distance; leader OCB; perceived follower support; social exchange theory; organizational behaviour.

JEL Classification: M19, J24

1. Introduction

After more than five decades of research on leadership, it has been acknowledged that leadership and followership are closely related to organisational success (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Leroy et al., 2015; Carsten et al., 2018). Leaders are seen as the primary drivers of an organization; they set long-term strategies, goals, and objectives, design processes and policies, and ensure that their followers follow them to achieve the organization's goals. As a result, much of the previous research on

*Assistant Professor, Faculty of Business Administration, Iqra University Karachi, Pakistan. Email: sajjadnawazkhan@gmail.com

**MPhil Scholar, Iqra University Karachi, Pakistan. Email: zaheerjumani@gmail.com

***Assistant Professor, University of Haripur Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Pakistan. Email: asadkhan@uoh.edu.pk

****PhD Scholar, Iqra University Karachi, Pakistan. Email: hamad.ansari37@yahoo.com

leadership has focused on leaders and has given less attention to followers (Tewari et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2021; Farid et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2022). While it is important to understand leaders and their roles, it is also crucial to recognize that leaders are not the only ones responsible for organizational success; followers also play a role (Aghaei et al., 2021). Leadership skills are often particularly important in times of crisis, but it is clear that followers also have a role to play in achieving organizational goals.

Essentially, the leadership perspective needs to incorporate the followership perspective, and we ought to recognise that “leadership initiative can’t be concentrated separated from followership” (Ronald & Julia, 2021). Identifying the role of followers in leadership behaviour is exceptionally significant. Therefore, followership is gradually gaining popularity and relevance in the leadership domain. Alvesson (2020) detailed the proposal for ‘reversing the lens’ and downplayed the importance of the role and influence of followers in the leadership process. Leadership cannot succeed without followers, and follower behaviours have become vital knowledge. Behind the success of every organisation, the leaders and followers contribute a vibrant role. According to Bastardoz and Van Vugt, (2019), “On the off chance that leadership involves effectively impacting others, followership involves permitting oneself to be impacted”. Research on the subject of ‘Leadership’ has gained traction following the identification of new study features from the perspective of ‘followership’. Several scholars’ studied follower’s identities and styles (Epitropaki, 2017), follower’s behaviour (Siangchokyo et al., 2020), follower’s effect on a leader’s emotional level (Wong & Law, 2017), changing leadership behaviour (Khan et al., 2020) and role of followers in the development of leader’s perception and motivation (Carsten et al., 2018) demonstrate researchers’ attention to this vantage point (Carsten et al., 2018). Consequently, the present study investigates the role of proactive followership in a leader’s organisation citizenship behaviour (LOCB) and perceived followers’ support. Based on the role orientation perspective of Zhao et al. (2019) and Maden-Eyiusta (2021), Proactive followers contribute ideas and thoughts, discover problems and help solve them, and actively challenge the status quo.

They believe that the active participation of the followers completes the leadership process. Specifically, the paper aims to establish the connection between follower role orientation (proactive followership), LOCB, and perceived followers’ support. For example, Vipraprastha et al. (2018) Anand et al. (2018) found that OCB has been the area of strength for a leader’s behaviour, either at an individual or group level. Indeed, OCB has been examined broadly as a result of leadership styles, particularly transformational and transactional leadership styles (Alshihabat & Atan, 2020; Young et al., 2021; Kao, 2017; Dewi et al., 2022). On the other hand, no such effort has been made to reverse the lens and investigate the role of followers (proactive followership) in LOCB. According to Hackett et al. (2018), to understand the modelling of leader OCB for the process and effectiveness of leadership. Leader OCB is direct to the group of individuals and can possibly spur the entire

group (Zhang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2017), which prompts organizational adequacy and effectiveness (Lasrado & Kassem, 2021).

Similarly, A leader's overall sense of workgroup dedication, empowerment and support influences many leadership decisions (Arshad et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2023). Leaders must forestall their team's readiness to work together. Perceived Follower Support is defined by leaders' thoughts that their followers their commitments and care about their prosperity. According to Herttalampi et al. (2023), perceived follower support directs leaders' expectations of follower support in various settings. According to Carsten et al. (2018), When leaders see a belief that directs follower behaviour towards the vision and mission of the organization, they anticipate more positive results. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge the uncovered areas and understand the proactive followership role in identifying a leader's outcomes (i.e. leader OCB and perceived followers' support).

Considerable research highlighted that within the same society cultural values may differ among individuals (Smith & Bond, 2019; Sarwar et al., 2020), and these individual differences have a profound role in leader-follower relationships. This study further examined individual power distance orientation (PDO) as a moderator to comprehend its role in a leader's outcomes. Bao et al. (2021) and Sarwar et al. (2020), express that to understand its role on the micro-level in organizations. Similarly, it is one of the most essential cultural elements found in almost all cultural frameworks. Thus, it is mandatory that we investigate PDO at the employee level. PDO implies the level to which an individual gives importance to status, authority, and power in an organisation. Culture in Pakistan is moderately high in terms of power distance orientation.

This study was conducted in public sector organisations in Pakistan with tall organisational hierarchies, which resulted in higher power distance. Mansoor et al. (2011) suggested that a distinct feature in Pakistan government organisations is that their "tall structures constituted by many levels of hierarchy" power and authority are centralised at the top of these organizational structures. Job titles carry much weight. Previous studies from a leader-centric perspective highlighted that higher power distance mitigates the positive outcomes of different leadership styles, like Transformational leadership (Shahzad et al., 2024), ethical leadership (Ahmad & Gao, 2018), benevolent leadership (Koveshnikov et al., 2022) and visionary leadership (Luo et al., 2020). Therefore, this study investigates the moderating role of (PDO) from the follower-centric perspective.

In previous studies leadership and its types have been thoroughly examined and studied in the context of organizational success, but the role of followers has been minimally explored. In this given context, the roles of followers focused on the contribution of leadership behaviour and organizational achievement. However, this idea or area has not been investigated earlier.

In a nutshell, to study the impact of proactive followership on leader outcomes, this study followed the role-orientation perspective of followership, which explains the role of followers in leadership by explaining leaders' behavioural and attitudinal outcomes (Carsten et al., 2018; Velez & Neves, 2022). To highlight the role of followership the theoretical framework is based on social exchange theory. First, a theoretical framework followed by research hypotheses was discussed. Second, the methodology and results are provided, followed by the conclusion and contribution. Following are the research questions of the study;

1. What is the impact of proactive followership on leader's OCB?
2. How does PDO moderate the relationship between proactive followership and leader's OCB?
3. What is the impact of proactive followership on Perceived follower support?
4. How does PDO moderate the relationship between proactive followership and perceived follower support?

2. Theoretical Framework

This study relies on social exchange theory (SET) to anchor the theoretical opinions. The basic premise of SET is comprehending the role of leaders and organizations in providing a positive attitude and a feeling of responsibility. SET is pertinent to an endless series of favourable actions started by an organization's treatment of its employees, with the assumption that such conduct will be eventually reciprocal (Gergen 2021; Knapp et al., 2020). According to Nazir et al. (2018), strengthening the relationship between two parties, social exchanges requires a long-term perspective based on continuous exchange and obliged feelings. Understanding SET is based on two notions reciprocal interdependence and self-interests. Before involving in any social interaction, employees review the perceived rewards and the cost associated with tasks. However, this probably won't imply that people try to amplify their advantages (rewards) at the expense of others (Stafford et al., 2014). In leadership scholarship, the focus of SET is relational, which means that a leader must focus on developing a solid relationship with followers (McCauley & Palus, 2021; Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2022; Jian, 2022).

Conversely, from the followership viewpoint, the role of followers does not get any active consideration in social exchange relationships. Instead, they passively form or control leadership outcomes (Carsten et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2020). The position of followers in leader-member relationships was mostly termed as "targeted individuals or recipients (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2022). Hence, the present study endeavours to verbalise the followers' part in return connections with the leader by featuring the role of proactive followership in leadership results.

2.1 *Proactive Followership and LOCB*

Followership entails more than simply following the leader's orders. "Followership is the qualities, activities, and individual process of actions in association with leaders," according to Uhl-Bien et al. (2014). "Strong" co-creation convictions and beliefs describe proactive followership, though "frail" co-creation convictions portray a more detached development (Freder, 2019; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Effective and proactive followers are admired at work, and as a result, they are willing to take on additional responsibilities, look for problems that are not being handled, and reduce the need for intensive supervision (Thompson & Wilson, 2020). In general, leaders' value proactive followers who are enthusiastic about their jobs. Successful leader initiative is the consequence of a collective endeavour of followers. Literature supported the premise that followers can help the leader (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020; Ford et al., 2020). Proactive behaviour is the conduct of discretionary extra-role behaviour that is self-stated, future-oriented and consistent (Frese & Fay, 2001).

OCB is another voluntary conduct meant to aid/help with tasks that are not explicitly needed to be completed (Deprez, 2017). Cunningham (2019) considers how followership can generate upward influence based on the bond/relationship between the two. Leader OCB helps to the smooth operation of any organisation (Elche et al., 2020) and is essential for improving social connections and organizational effectiveness at all three levels (Podsakoff et al., 2014). According to Mi et al. (2019), Proactive followers endeavor to lay out an excellent relationship with their bosses, resulting in more OCB and greater job satisfaction. How leaders respond to proactive followership activities is a complicated and persistent issue. The social exchange mechanisms in leader-follower interactions play a role in inducing OCBs in leaders. Therefore, the following hypothesis develops:

H1: Proactive followership significantly affects a Leader's Organizational Citizenship Behaviour.

2.2 *Proactive Followership and Perceived Follower Support*

Individuals must demonstrate more than just executing assigned activities in the face of volatility and organisational dynamism since survival and success now entail proactivity. Although leaders have conflicting sentiments regarding their followers' proactive behaviour, leaders admire followers who proactively aid them with their job load and stress (Wu & Parker, 2017). For at least two reasons, followers play an active role in the leadership process: first, there is no leader without followers; second, all leaders are followers at times (Ahmad & Loch, 2020). A proactive follower can assist the leader in meeting deadlines, integrating operational activities with corporate goals, sharing experiences to address gaps, and providing a frank stance for needed change.

As a result, when leaders perceive mutual partnership and mission development beliefs of followers are steady with co-growth direction, leaders experience more favourable results (Carsten et al., 2018). A rigorous analysis in an organizational setting is essential to determine how leaders understand proactive followership in general and whether they see the same support and aid. The proactive follower will take the initiative to discuss with their leader if their tasks or performance style are altered. Followers' utilization of voice conduct (endeavors to help the leader or group testing the leader positively) (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018) and innovation development (Chen et al., 2018) developed as followers' way of behaving turned out to be proactive. Given the above conversation, the accompanying hypothesis proposed:

H2: Proactive Followership significantly affects a Leader's Perceived follower's support.

2.2.3 The moderating role of PDO

The validity of unequally dispersed power in institutions and organizations is term as power distance (Puni & Hilton, 2020). It establishes the legality of unequal power distribution in organizations (Amis et al., 2020), which can be seen in the majority of organizations studied and is likely to influence the actions and reactions of subordinates. individuals with a more power distance are all the more mentally dependent on their leader for defining clear objectives and group goals (Miao et al., 2018) and regard their bosses as superiors with elite rank (Merkin & Merkin, 2018). They believe that because they consider themselves inferior, leaders are in charge of directing activities and controlling substantial resources. On the other hand, lower PDO employees regard themselves as equals to leaders and place a premium on fairness (Masih, 2022). PDO may influence subordinates' perceptions of leaders' reactions. Congruence in power-distance orientation between leaders and followers has significant consequences for followers (Cole et al., 2013). Employees with high PDO are submissive, defer to their leaders, consider their leaders to possess more power than what they have and are more willing to accept the organizational relationship (Peltokorpi, 2019).

Instead of contradicting the leader, they accept and obey leaders; these individuals are likely to remain passive compared to low power distance individuals, for whom disagreement and criticism with supervisors are not inappropriate (Mackey et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2013). Leader-centric perspective highlighted that higher power distance extenuates the positive outcomes of different leadership styles, like Transformational leadership (Epitropaki et al., 2020), ethical leadership (Ahmad & Gao, 2018), benevolent leadership (Koveshnikov et al., 2022) and visionary leadership (Luo et al., 2020). Therefore, the present study examined the moderating role of PDO at the individual level from the followers' perspective, and developed the following hypotheses:

H3: Individual-level PDO significantly moderates the relationship between Proactive Followership and Leader's OCB such that when PDO is higher, the relationship between Proactive Followership and Leader's Organizational Citizenship Behaviour will be weaker.

H4: Individual-level PDO significantly moderates the relationship between Proactive Followership and Perceived follower Support such that when PDO is higher, the relationship between Proactive Followership and Perceived follower Support will be weaker.

3. Method

3.1 Sample and Procedure

A bureaucratic structure based on British colonial rule in public sector organization employees took part in the research. The employees are called "civil servants," holding various job titles (Taj, 2017). Independent of their work titles, government employees are perceived in light of their basic pay scale (BPS), going from BPS-1 to BPS-22: the most minimal are BPS-1, while BPS-22 are viewed as the most noteworthy. Also, these organizations are described fundamentally by high power distance. Employees acknowledge inconsistent power distribution and answer well to the top leaders (Huang et al., 2015). For this study, convenience sampling has been employed to get the maximum responses from readily accessible employees. Therefore, the study sample consisted of employees working in Administrative Services, Inland Revenue Services, Pakistan Customs, Office Management Group and Audit and Accounts Service of Pakistan. Questionnaires were distributed among 182 respondents. A total sample size of 182 respondents was collated and it is considered a significant for many social science's statistical analysis (Cohen, 1988).

The study examination does not provide a clear justification on the specific number for power analysis through which the true effects within the data could be detected. 5 points Likert-type scale used as 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 5 described "Strongly Agree". The respondents consisted of 76.92% of males and 23.08% of females. Age-wise, 29.7% of the respondent's range in the age group of 25-30, and 41.8% belong to the age group of 31-35. Most respondents have a master's level qualification (60.1%), and the majority of respondents fell in the experience bracket of more than 10 years (32.8%) and 1-5 (32.2%).

3.2 Measures

For measuring Proactive Followership, a 10-item shortened version of Bateman and Crant (1993) was used, sample item was "My subordinates in my organization are constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve their life". A leader's OCB was measured by using 14 14-item scale of Podsakoff et al. (1990); the sample item was "Being a leader I willingly give my time to help others (subordinates) who have work-related problems". Perceived follower support was measured with Eisenberger et al. (2004) 5-item scale, i.e. "As a Leader, I feel my subordinates strongly consider my goals and values". Finally, Power Distance Orientation was assessed with an 8-item scale adapted from Earley and Erez (1997) i.e. "In

my organization in most situations, leaders / higher management make decisions without consulting their subordinates”.

4. Analytical Approach

PLS-SEM has gained extensive admiration across numerous fields (Cheah et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2017). Cheah et al. (2019) and Hair et al. (2011) argued that PLS-SEM is considered the Holy Grail and silver bullet of advanced research analysis in investigating complex latent variables models. There are two models through which PLS-SEM analyses the data. First is the measurement model (relationship between observed and latent variables) and second is a structural model (relationships between the latent variables) (Hair et al., 2019).

4.1 Assessment of Measurement Model

The measurement model explains that convergent, discriminant validity, internal consistency and indicator reliability are used to assess the validity and reliability. Instrument reliability, convergent and discriminant validity are achieved using composite reliability values, average variance extracted values and Fornell and Lacker (1981) Criterion, respectively. The degree to which each item of the construct is interrelated is explained by the internal consistency, i.e. Composite reliability (CR) (Karstoft et al., 2018). The CR values greater than 0.60 are acceptable; values between 0.70 and 0.90 are satisfactory (Ramayah et al., 2018). In Table 1, the CR Value of each construct is greater than 0.8, supporting that all items under a single construct have a higher inter-item correlation.

Furthermore, to obtain convergent validity, each construct under study requires 50% variance by the assigned items/indicators values (Hair et al., 2017), which is illustrated in Table 1. Table 2 shows the discriminant validity using Fornell and Larker (1981) criterion. The diagonal values are higher than off-diagonal ones, thus highlighting discriminant validity.

Table 1
Measurement model items loading, Composite Reliability and AVE

Construct	CR	AVE
Proactive Followership	0.925	0.555
Leader's Organizational Citizenship Behavior	0.922	0.501
Perceived Follower's Support	0.918	0.692
Power Distance Orientation	0.801	0.507

Note: LOCB7, LOCB9, PDO1, PDO2, PDO3 & PDO8 were deleted due to low loading.

Table 2
Discriminant Validity using Fornell and Lacker Criterion

Construct	LOCB	PDO	PFS	PF
LOCB	0.706			
PDO	-0.145	0.712		
PFS	0.345	0.244	0.832	
PF	0.364	0.027	0.452	0.745

4.2 Structural Model Assessment

To test hypotheses, the structural model provides the capability to try and predict the hypothesized relationships. Table 3 highlights the results generated through 5000 bootstrapping resamples. In table 3, for H1 ($\beta=.36$, $t>1.65$, LLCI (0.234), ULCI (0.477), and H2 ($\beta=.44$, $t>1.65$, LLCI (0.303), ULCI (0.571), shows a significant positive effect of proactive followership on leader OCB and perceived followers support. Hence, it supported H1 and H2. Moreover, for moderation testing, the results of bootstrapping (see table 3) highlighted that PDO significantly moderates the relationship between proactive followership and leader OCB ($\beta= -0.19$, $t>1.65$, LLCI (-0.384), ULCI (-0.014); therefore, H3 is supported. Finally, for H4, table 3 showed ($\beta= -0.02$, $t<1.65$, LLCI (-0.153), ULCI (0.124), which is not significant. Hence, H4 is not supported. Table 3 further highlights the model predictive power i.e. R2 values.

It shows ($R^2=0.23$), and ($R^2=0.26$), indicating weak predictive power (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2014). To understand the individual contribution of exogenous variables f^2 (effect size) values were generated. Table 3 showed that proactive followership (H1) and the interaction term (H3) showed low effects ($f^2= 0.17, 0.10$), On the other hand, proactive followership (H2) showed a medium effect ($f^2=0.26$), while no effect was found for the interaction term (H4) on perceived follower support. Moreover, to understand the moderating role of PDO between proactive followership and leader OCB a graph was generated at 1 standard deviation above and below the mean (Figure 2).

It shows that when power distance is lower (red line), the relationship between proactive followership and leader OCB is higher and vice versa when the PDO is higher (green line).

Table 3
Hypotheses Testing Results

Relationships	β	SD	T	LLCI	ULCI	R ²	f ²
Proactive Followership -> Leader's OCB	0.36	0.07	4.92	0.234	0.477	0.23	0.17
Power Distance Orientation*Proactive Followership1 -> Leader's OCB	-0.19	0.12	-1.966	-0.385	-0.014		0.10
Proactive Followership -> Per Follower Support	0.44	0.08	5.453	0.303	0.571	0.26	0.26
Power Distance Orientation *Proactive Followership -> Per Follower Support	-0.02	0.08	-0.507	-0.153	0.124		0.00

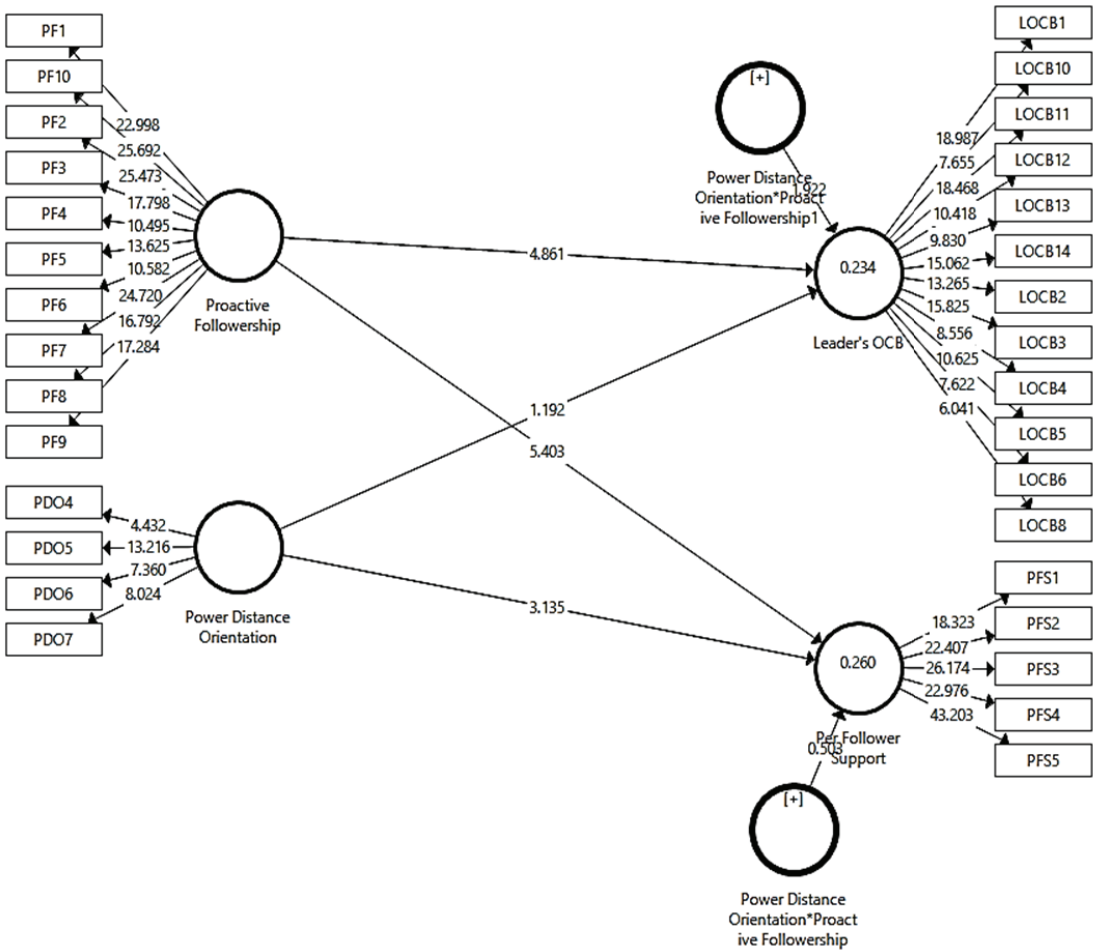


Figure 1: Structure Model

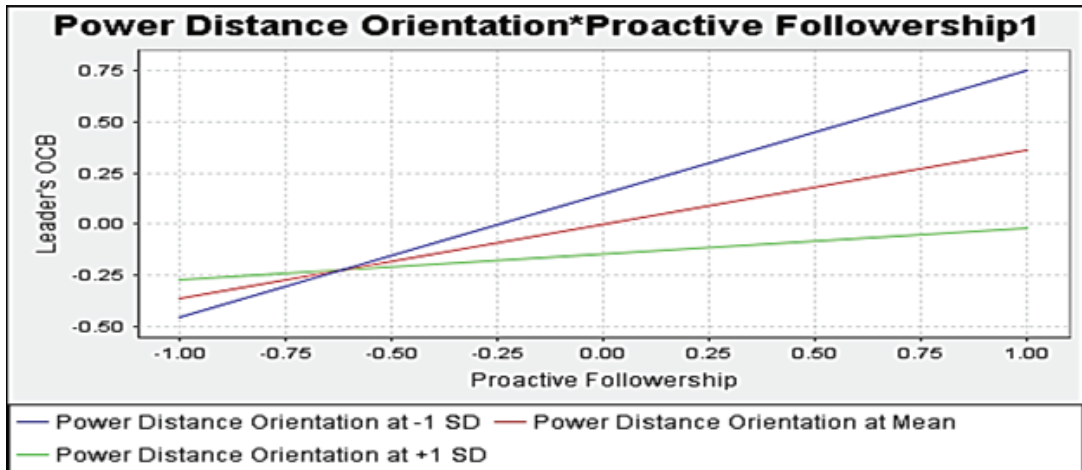


Figure 2: Moderation Graph

5. Discussion

Based on the study's quantitative analysis, it has been concluded that proactive followership promotes a leader's OCB and perceived follower support. Proactive personalities employees are more willing to engage in tasks (Wang & Liang, 2020). Involving themselves in citizenship behaviour and eventually exerting upward influence (Cunningham, 2019) allows us to conclude that Leader's OCB is the outcome of the follower's proactive behaviour (Jiwen Song et al., 2024). Furthermore, this study supports the "reverse the lens" perspective of followership playing a substantial role in leadership behaviour (Khan et al., 2020). Schneider et al. (2014) revealed that passive followers provoke the negative emotions of the leader as compared to active followers who trigger positive feelings. This study concludes that followers who create ideas and express their opinions, can recognize the problems and hold a participative view in decision making and constructively challenge the status quo. These activate, elevate and trigger the leader's cooperative, helping, congenial, altruistic and volitional behaviour. Therefore, the organization's success or failure depends on how the leaders lead and equally on how the followers follow (Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017). Influential followers not only manage themselves but also create a competitive environment of efficacy. Cremers et al. (2019) summarise that contemporary managers now desire active participants in contrast to passive recipients.

This study also concludes that proactive followership encourages the leader's perceived followers' support. This study ascertains Montani et al. (2020) finding that supervisors recognize and motivate subordinates who actively participate in their assignments. There is a positive relationship between trust and proactive followership (Khan et al., 2020). This study further aligned with Carsten et al. (2018) findings that leaders view followers with strong PDO. Thus, proactive behaviour yields positive impressions in the leader's mind. A leader's

trust and perception are enhanced when followers align with their mission and act proactively and courageously.

Furthermore, to highlight the cultural dimension of South Asia this study incorporated PDO as a moderating variable. The unique geographical terrain and its contribution to the world population (India (second), Pakistan (sixth), and Bangladesh (eight)) South Asia is one of the largest continents on earth. According to Yang (2020) and Thach (2021) south Asian countries have a collectivist cultural orientation and collectivism and Power distance are positively correlated. Similarly, from a leader-centric perspective, PDO has been extensively highlighted as a moderating mechanism in the Asian context (Mulki et al., 2015; Nabi & Liu 2021; De Clercq et al., 2021). However, limited attention has been given from the followership perspective. Therefore, in this study, the moderation of PDO indicates a significant negative effect of PDO's direct relationship between LOCB and proactive followership. With higher PDO, the association of Proactive followers and Leader OCB decays, and with lower PDO, the strength of the direct relationship enhances. Obedience and dependence are plausible characteristics of societies having high PDO (Bao et al., 2021).

Employees in such organizations tend to believe that their voice would be assumed as insubordination; consequently, they behave in a docile manner to avoid any disagreement. They are building the argument based on the notion that employees with high PDO are submissive and defer to their leaders. Instead of contradicting the leader, they accept and obey leaders; these individuals are likely to remain passive compared to low PDO individuals, for whom disagreement and criticism with supervisors are part of the work environment (Lin et al., 2013). This study concludes that the passive behaviour of individuals due to high PDO is not likely to increase the leader's citizenship behaviour. In contrast, employees with lower power distance orientation who comfortably place their opinions are presumed to be proactive and likely to increase the leader's OCB (Chen et al., 2018).

Furthermore, there is an insignificant negative effect of PDO found between the direct relationship of proactive followership and the perceived follower's support. According to the Power Distance Index utilized by Hofstede, for Pakistan with an intermediary score of 55, finishing up the inclination for Pakistan in this dimension isn't striking. Perhaps the people do not intend to disclose their inclination to either side. Bao et al. (2021) elucidate that individuals with high PDO do not open up, and their restricted behaviour is due to their mistrust of the reciprocal relation. They prefer to maintain a considerable distance from their bosses and do not tend to develop strong bonds with their managers. On the other hand, from the social exchange perspective, trust plays a vital role in establishing a solid relationship with leaders. According to Zanini and Migueles (2018), to overcome the fear of employees expressing disagreement with their leader, participation and engagement play an essential role which enhances the perception of integrity and results in the continuous development of trust. Therefore, in the public sector of Pakistan, individual PDO does not play any role in

mitigating the relationship between proactive followership and a leader's perceived follower support.

5.1 Theoretical Contribution

A follower engaged and proactive role profoundly affects the leader's behaviour, motivation and performance over time (Carsten et al., 2018). This study empirically supports the social exchange perspective that followers are not only on the recipient side in the leadership process. However, they have an active role and participation in establishing a solid relationship. Moreover, this study has contributed by highlighting the prominence of followers as influencers in the leader and follower exchange relationship. Leadership has enjoyed dominance in the exchange relationship, being the influence rather than the recipient, while the conclusion drawn through this study illuminates that followers are not passive recipients. Instead, they can actively participate in making the leader-follower relationship more robust. This study progresses social exchange theory on leader perceptual and persuasive results. As per Carsten et al. (2018) and Uhl Bien et al. (2014); Co-production direction featured that followers ought to accomplice and effectively draw in with leaders to improve the adequacy of the work unit. In like manner, Pioneer OCB and saw adherents help bring about the proactive way of behaving of supporters (Khan & Khan, 2022). Proactive followers have major areas of strength for co-production orientation and acknowledge independent decision-making as a chance to help their leader in departmental efficiency (Carsten et al., 2018).

Conversely, reactive followers hold a passive co-production orientation and are more likely to engage in upward delegation. As per previous studies, individuals with strength for power distance view directors are liable for critical thinking and navigation and experience more pressure when requested to be engaged in decision-making (Tabesh & Vera, 2020; Carsten et al., 2018). Therefore, followers' proactive behaviour is essential for establishing a robust social exchange relationship with leaders.

5.2 Practical Implications

The followers' role in the leadership process has been highlighted in the study, considering followers as essential to leadership outcomes. This study suggests that followers' proactive involvement in the public sector of Pakistan promotes leader OCB and perceived follower support. The practical implications effectively contribute to followers' successful engagement to co-produce leadership outcomes (Schlappa et al., 2021; Carsten et al., 2018). Managers and leaders must implement the 'reversing the lens' concept to attain the desired efficiency level. Furthermore, the power distance orientation role as the constituent of bringing requisite modification.

High power distance has contributed to a culture where taller and more centralized organizational structures are normal, and decision-making is concentrated at higher levels, collectively resulting in sycophancy (Pandey, 2022; Mansoor et al., 2011). The results suggest that leaders can appropriately utilise PDO to strengthen the leader-follower relationship. Recognising that followers, when exposed to high power distance, would not behave proactively can open new avenues in the leader-follower relationship. It is recommended that organizations use training programs, mentoring, inclusive decision-making, and feedback systems to empower followers, minimize power distance, and improve leadership outcomes. These actions enhance the organization's overall performance by fostering proactive employee participation and cooperation.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations such as the sample is limited and derived from a single sector which may limit its generalizability to other cultural contexts. Therefore, researchers need to explore the followership theory and its implication in the leadership process using diverse samples and organizational backgrounds. Although the results are specific to the Pakistani context, future studies could be employed in different economies. Moreover, longitudinal studies could enhance more robust outcomes, and a mixed-method study will generalize the results and provide more insights into respondents through focus groups. This article only focused on proactive followership. At the same time, there is still a need to investigate other followership constructs (personality traits, implicit followership theories, followership types and demographics). Finally, this research focused on PDO as an essential cultural dimension; future studies should investigate the role of other cultural dimensions to understand the moderating mechanism in the proposed relationship.

7. Conclusion

Due to its significant importance research is growing to study the role of followership in the leadership process/outcomes. This study articulates that proactive followers contribute to positive leadership outcomes. For Leader citizenship behaviour and perceived follower support the role of proactive followers is important in the sense that when followers contribute ideas, discover problems and actively participate in the exchange relationship their leaders will exhibit more OCB and their perception of their followers' support will be more positive. Similarly, this relationship will be stronger when the power distance between leaders and followers is minimal because in higher power distance culture followers feel detached and cannot share ideas and not actively participate in social exchange relationships with their leaders.

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