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When and why does proactive personality inhibit corner-cutting behaviors: A moderated

mediation model of customer orientation and productivity climate

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Abstract

This study extends prior research by examining when and why proactive employees are less likely to engage in corner-cutting behaviors. We proposed that proactive personality is negatively related to corner-cutting behaviors via customer orientation, and productivity climate further enhances this negative effect. In Study 1, data collected using a two-wave panel survey from 191 working adults with customer-facing roles from the United Kingdom and the United States supported the hypotheses. Results were replicated in Study 2, using a multi-wave field survey of 209 frontline service employees from restaurants in China. The findings imply that to mitigate the occurrence of corner-cutting behaviors, organizations can screen job applicants based on their traits (i.e., proactive personality) and promote service employees' customer orientation.

Keywords: Corner-cutting behavior, proactive personality, customer orientation, productivity climate

1. Introduction

In today's service environment, featuring competing demands and time pressures, employees sometimes manage increased work demands and expectations by bypassing required procedures in an attempt to perform their job with minimal effort (Mitchell et al., 2008; Oliva & Sterman, 2001). Such behavior is known as corner-cutting behavior, defined as when "employees skip one or multiple steps for the purpose of completing the task sooner than standard or typical procedures" (Beck et al., 2017, p. 42). In the service industry, cutting corners is considered to be an undesirable work behavior because it often leads to declined service quality or can create health hazards for customers (Komaki et al., 1978; Oliva & Sterman, 2001). The potential negative consequences of corner-cutting have inspired scholars to explore its drivers or inhibitors (e.g., Beck et al., 2017; Jonason & O'Connor, 2017).

A recent study by Jonason and O'Connor (2017) demonstrated that corner-cutting can be a function of personality traits, indicating that individuals higher in proactive personality are less likely to engage in corner-cutting behaviors. Although the findings are insightful, this research does not specify when or why those high in proactive personality are less likely to engage in corner-cutting behaviors. To address these questions and extend Jonason and O'Connor's research, in this study we adopt the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010) and goal-regulation framework (Carver & Scheier, 1998). In brief, the model of proactive motivation (Parker et al., 2010) suggests that a proactive personality can elicit proactive motivational states, which in turn govern individuals' goal-regulation and behavior choices (e.g., Ouyang et al., 2019; Wu & Parker, 2017). In the customer service context, such proactive motivational states manifest themselves as customer orientation, which helps to inhibit corner-cutting—a behavior aimed at meeting productivity goals at the expense of service quality.

Furthermore, we identify a productive climate as a situational factor that can strengthen the inhibiting effect of customer orientation on corner-cutting behavior. The goal-regulation perspective (Carver & Scheier, 2001, 2019) suggests that individuals are motivated to enlarge the discrepancy between their present condition and an anti-goal so as to avoid value threat or the attainment of an anti-goal. When productive climate is high, productivity is prioritized over service in the workplace. Consequently, customer-orientated employees will experience a mismatch between their own goals (i.e., customer first) and the organization's goals (i.e., production first); thus, they are more motivated to move away from corner-cutting behavior, which is conducive to attaining anti-goals (i.e., meet production goals at the cost of service). Overall, our study aims to identify specific mechanisms linking proactive personality and corner-cutting behavior and the boundary conditions in the service context, where corner-cutting behavior is prevalent. We tested our prediction across two diverse samples from the hospitality industry. Figure 1 shows our conceptual model.
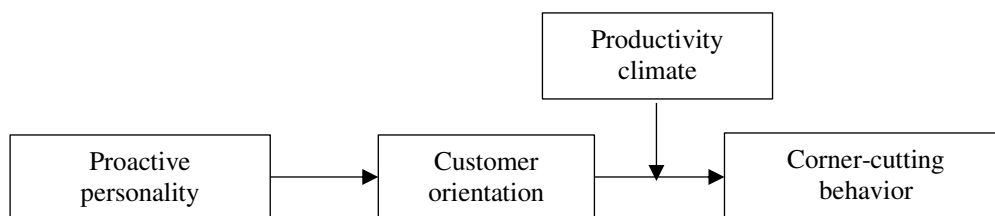
Fig. 1 Theoretical model

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1.   Proactive personality and corner-cutting behavior, the mediating role of customer orientation

Proactive personality refers to a dispositional tendency to identify opportunities, take initiative, and to persevere to bring about change (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). Proactive individuals tend to exert control over their work situations and ultimately select and create favorable situations for individual or organizational effectiveness (Li et al., 2010; Valls

et al., 2020). Empirically, proactive personality has been linked to positive work behaviors, including innovation, voice, and job performance (see the meta-analysis by Fuller & Marler, 2009). Regarding corner-cutting behaviors, Jonason and O'Connor (2017) have found that those high in proactive personality are less likely to engage in such behaviors. Nevertheless, why they are less likely to do so and when such dispositional effect is more critical has not been investigated.

In this study, we draw on existing research on proactive motivation to unveil the psychological mechanism that links proactive personality and corner-cutting behaviors. According to the model of proactive motivation developed by Parker et al. (2010), there are three proactive motivational states: can-do motivation, reason-to motivation, and energized-to motivation. The "can-do" motivational state captures individuals' beliefs that they have the capabilities to perform particular tasks (Parker et al., 2010). The "reason-to" state refers to the internal forces that drive employees to embrace challenges rather than passively adapt to the situation (Parker et al., 2010). Finally, the "energized-to" state concerns the activated positive affect that fuels individuals' striving at work (Ouyang et al., 2019).

In the service context, we focus on customer orientation as a manifestation of these proactive motivational states. Customer orientation is defined as "the importance that service providers place on their customers' needs relating to service offerings and the extent to which service providers are willing to put forth time and effort to satisfy their customers" (Susskind et al., 2003, p. 181). According to Brown et al. (2002), there are two specific dimensions of customer orientation: 1) the needs dimension, capturing employees' beliefs about their ability to satisfy customer needs, which aligns well with the notion of the "can-do" motivational state; and 2) the enjoyment dimension, capturing the degree to which interacting with customers is inherently enjoyable for an employee, which dovetails with the "reason-to" and "energized-to" motivational states.

Furthermore, the proactive motivation model has shown that proactive personality can affect individuals' behavior via these motivational states (Parker et al., 2010). In line with this notion, we posit that a proactive personality will be positively related to a customer orientation for two reasons. First, proactive employees have a greater sense of self-efficacy (Seibert et al., 1999), which enables them to perceive themselves as competent initiative-takers capable of coping with challenges during service encounters. Supporting this notion, research has shown that proactive personality is positively related to self-efficacy (Wu & Parker, 2017). As such, proactive employees are likely to feel confident that they are able to achieve customer satisfaction goals; that is, having higher scores in the need dimension of customer orientation. Second, proactive employees are also more intrinsically motivated because of their strong commitment to their goals (Newman et al., 2017). The enjoyment derived from pursuing intrinsically satisfying goals (i.e., serving customers), in turn, stimulates greater efforts and confidence during customer interactions, leading to a higher level of customer orientation. In brief, among service employees, a proactive personality is expected to be positively associated with a higher level of customer orientation.

In turn, we expect that customer orientation suppresses the tendency to cut corners during service encounters. Customer orientation reflects a service provider's desire to meet customers' needs and the amount of effort they intend to invest to that end (Grizzle et al., 2009). Indeed, prior research has documented the positive association between customer orientation and a list of customer-directed behaviors, such as customer-directed voice behavior (Lam & Mayer, 2014), employees' service performance (Lee et al., 2020), and customer-directed citizenship behaviors (Donavan et al., 2004). Thus, we propose that employees with a higher level of customer orientation are less likely to cut corners concerning service offerings because such behavior has the consequences of service quality erosion (Oliva & Sterman, 2001), which contradicts their underlying goals (i.e., to meet

customers' needs). Moreover, with a strong desire to satisfy customer needs, customer-oriented employees are willing to take more initiative to achieve service goals rather than taking shortcuts that may harm customers' interests (Bakker et al., 2012). As such, we hypothesize:

>   *Hypothesis 1: Customer orientation mediates the negative effect of proactive*
>
>   *personality on cutting corners.*

2.2.   *The moderating role of productivity climate on the relationship between customer*

   orientation and corner-cutting behavior

   The degree to which one's customer orientation can prevent cutting corners will depend on the work situation. One of the most relevant and important situational factors in understanding corner-cutting behaviors could be productivity climate (Jiang & Probst, 2015), due to its potential to influence the level of work demands and expectations. Productivity climate is defined as "employees' perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures that are rewarded, supported and expected concerning productivity" (Jiang & Probst, 2015, p.176). A strongly perceived productivity climate signals to employees that the organization prioritizes efficiency and meeting schedules, thus motivating them to direct their efforts to achieve productivity goals (Zohar & Luria, 2005). In line with this notion, prior research has mainly examined productivity climate as a situational constraint that delivers a sense of time pressure and has the potential to drain employees' resources, leading to negative outcomes (such as poor safety compliance and service quality) because employees tend to give priority to production over these important organizational goals (Probst & Graso, 2013; Jiang & Probst, 2015).

   However, we argue that productivity climate is not universally negative, and it can strengthen the inhibiting effect of customer orientation on corner-cutting. This view is

consistent with the goal-regulation perspective (Carver & Scheier, 1998), which concerns the self-regulation of present states in relation to goals and anti-goals (unwanted values/states). Through self-regulation processes, individuals sense their present states, compare them to the goals and anti-goals, and adapt their behaviors accordingly. Specifically, in pursuing desired goals, individuals are motivated to invest effort into reducing the discrepancy between the present and desired states. Comparatively, in the face of anti-goals, individuals are motivated to enlarge the discrepancy between their present state and the anti-goals (Carver & Scheier, 2004).

We draw on the discrepancy-enlarging process to explain the moderating effect of productivity climate on the customer orientation–corner-cutting relationship. As discussed, customer-oriented employees are more concerned about meeting customers' needs and are able to gain intrinsic enjoyment from doing so; thus, they are less likely to take shortcuts to meet minimal standards when serving customers. Productivity climate, a work climate that prioritizes efficiency over other organizational goals such as service, represents a value threat or an anti-goal for high customer-oriented employees. When the productivity climate is high, the anti-goal (i.e., production first) becomes salient and potentially threatening to highly customer-oriented employees who are subsequently more motivated to reduce corner-cutting behavior compared to when the productive climate is low. In doing so, employees are able to enlarge the discrepancy between their behavior and the behaviors that are conducive to meeting the anti-goal (i.e., cutting corners). To date, most empirical evidence has focused on the discrepancy-reducing loop (e.g., Iliescu et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2017; Zhou et al., 2019). However, empirical studies from the stress literature provide evidence on how work demands (e.g., high workload and time pressures) can arouse people to exert more effort to achieve their goals rather than minimize their effort (e.g., Crawford et al., 2010; Trépanier et al., 2020). For example, research has found that time pressures can motivate one's initiative to

improve work methods as a way to minimize the discrepancy between a desired and an actual situation (Fay & Sonnentag, 2002). As such, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 2: Productivity climate will moderate the impact of customer orientation on corner-cutting behaviors, such that a stronger customer orientation will lead to a decline in corner-cutting only under a stronger productivity climate.*

Considering Hypotheses 1 and 2, proactive employees are less likely to cut corners due to their higher customer orientation, especially when productivity climate is high. To examine the moderated mediation effect properly, we propose:

> *Hypothesis 3: The indirect relationship between proactive personality and corner-cutting via customer orientation is stronger when the productivity climate is higher than lower.*

3. Overview of studies

We employed a multi-wave design and two diverse samples to examine our moderated mediation model. In Study 1, we recruited participants via Prolific Academic (http://prolific.ac), a research crowdsourcing platform with participants mainly from the United Kingdom and the United States, to test our model in a Western context. In Study 2, we recruited employees working full-time or part-time in service organizations (i.e., restaurants) in China and whose daily work included direct interactions with customers. All variables were self-reported by participants in multiple waves to introduce a temporal lag, which is effective in reducing common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Together, the research design, using both an online panel and field data in different contexts (i.e., Western and Chinese contexts), strengthens the ecological and external validity of our conclusions.

4. Study 1

4.1. Sample and procedure

As noted above, we recruited participants through Prolific Academic. Data were collected at two time points with a three-week gap. To ensure the recruitment of a sample appropriate for our research questions, we set pre-screening questions to restrict participation to participants who work in the service industry with full-time or part-time jobs. At the time the study was published, 927 participants were shown to qualify and received the survey with questions regarding their proactive personality, customer orientation, demographics, and control variables. At Time 1, a total of 425 people participated, yielding a response rate of 45.8%. Among these responses, 291 were valid after removing 1) participants ($N = 71$) who failed to provide the correct response to any one of four attention checkers (questions worded as "this is an attention checker, please select with 'strongly disagree'" were embedded throughout the survey), and 2) participants ($N = 63$) who were not in a customer-facing role (e.g., information technology, office administrative officer, and accountant). At Time 2, participants who finished the Time 1 survey and provided their Prolific ID for matching ($N = 285$) received the second-round survey and reported their perceived productivity climate and corner-cutting behavior. Consistent with the procedures in Time 1, we removed 13 cases of careless responses. We also removed 14 cases in which the participants had a change in their employment status between Time 1 and Time 2 (e.g., becoming unemployed), and another three cases where we were unable to match their data across time (e.g., the Prolific ID was in the wrong format). A final sample of 191 valid responses was obtained.

Of the 191 participants, 66 were male, 122 were female, and 3 identified as other. The average age was 31.63 years (SD = 11.41), and the average tenure was 2.51 years (SD = 1.33). We conducted an independent group t-test on all study variables to examine if employees' responses versus non-responses influenced our results. Participants in Time 1 were divided into two groups: group 1 ($N = 191$), including participants who provided valid responses in Time 2; and group 2 ($N = 100$), including participants who did not. No

significant statistical differences between these two subgroups were found for any study variables, suggesting that our results were less likely affected by selection attrition.

4.2. Measures

All measures except for demographics used a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree."

4.2.1. Proactive personality

Proactive personality was measured using the four-item scale from Wu and Parker (2017). A sample item is "No matter what the odds, if I believe in something, I will make it happen." The Cronbach's α in this study was 0.83.

4.2.2. Customer orientation

Customer orientation was measured by adapting six items from Brown et al. (2002) to capture both "enjoyment" and "need" dimensions of customer orientation. A sample item is "I get satisfaction from making my customers happy." The Cronbach's α in this study was 0.88.

4.2.3. Productivity climate

Productivity climate was measured using the four-item scale from Jiang and Probst (2015). A sample item is "The main focus is on meeting production goals and schedules." The Cronbach's α in this study was 0.76.

4.2.4. Corner-cutting behavior

Corner-cutting behavior was measured using the three-item scale adapted from Jonason and O'Connor (2017). A sample item is "I try to minimize effort expended when doing work." The Cronbach's α in this study was 0.79.

4.2.5. Control variables

To address alternative explanations, we controlled for several variables. First, we controlled for five variables that might influence employee corner-cutting behaviors: time

pressure (α = .78), using a four-item scale developed by Matteson and Ivancevich (1987); service climate (α = .88), using a seven-item scale developed by Schneider et al. (1998); and Machiavellianism (α = .84), using a four-item subscale from Jonason and Webster's (2010) dark triad measure. In addition, demographic variables that have a significant relationship with corner-cutting were also controlled (i.e., tenure). Finally, given corner-cutting may be negatively valenced, we also controlled for social desirability (α = .70) (Pauhhus, 1991). We repeated the analyses without the control variables. The results are the same with and without control variables. Following the suggestions from prior studies (e.g., Carlson & Wu, 2012), we only report results without the control variables. Results of the analysis with control variables are available upon request.

4.3.   Results

4.3.1. Confirmatory factor analyses

To evaluate the distinctiveness of the study variables, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses using *Mplus* 8.0. The result revealed that a four-factor model with proactive personality, customer orientation, productivity climate, and corner-cutting behavior fit neatly to the data (χ^2 = 177.28, *df* = 113, comparative fit index [CFI] =.96, Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = .95, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .06), while the fit indices of the alternative models were unacceptable. The results supported the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

4.3.2. Hypotheses testing

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of our key study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Study 1: Means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistency estimates

		M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Age	31.63	11.41									
2	Tenure	2.51	1.33	.40**								
3	Proactive personality (T1)	4.81	1.10	0.10	.16*							
4	Customer orientation (T1)	5.78	0.93	.23**	.19*	.34**						
5	Productivity climate (T2)	4.59	1.10	0.08	0.04	.19**	0.11					
6	Time pressure (T1)	3.91	1.21	-0.12	0.09	0.02	-.18*	.18*				
7	Service climate (T1)	4.86	1.23	.21**	.19**	.31**	.39**	-0.02	-.15*			
8	Machiavellianism (T1)	2.91	1.36	-.22**	0.03	0.02	-.23**	-0.02	-0.01	-.16*		
9	Social desirability (T1)	3.77	1.06	-.22**	0.04	0.01	-.23**	0.00	0.04	-.15*	.65**	
10	Corner-cutting (T2)	3.08	1.32	-.26**	-.17*	-.30**	-.37**	-0.07	0.13	-.16*	.27**	.15*

Note. N = 191. T = time.

* *p* < .05. ** *p*< .01, two-tailed tests.

We examined the hypothesized model using the SPSS PROCESS macro code with a bootstrapping approach (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). Hypothesis 1 was tested using the simple mediation model. As shown in Table 2, proactive personality was positively related to customer orientation (β = .28, *SE* = .06, *t* = 4.90, *p* < .05) and negatively related to corner-cutting behavior (β = -.24, *SE* = .08, *t* = -2.87, *p* < .05), while customer orientation was negatively related to corner-cutting behavior (β = -.42, *SE* = .10, *t* = -4.24, *p* < .05). The indirect effect of proactive personality on corner-cutting behavior was significant via customer orientation (β = -.12, *SE* = .04, 95%CI [-.22, -.05]); the confidence interval did not include zero. Thus, taken together, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Table 2
Study 1: Mediation of customer orientation between proactive personality and corner-cutting behaviour

Variable	Customer orientation (T1) β (S.E)	Corner-cutting (T2) β (S.E)
Intercept	4.42 (.28)***	
Proactive personality (T1)	.28 (.06)***	-.24(.08)***
Customer orientation (T1)		-.42 (.10)***
Model R^2	.11(.77)***	.17(1.45)***
Indirect effect of customer orientation	-.12(95%CI [-.22, -.05])	

Note. *N* = 191. *T* = time. All tests are two-tailed. Coefficients are unstandardized.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01 ****p* < .001.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested using the moderated mediation model by entering productivity climate as a moderator that moderates the second stage of the mediation model described above. Hypothesis 2 predicted that productivity climate would moderate the relationship between customer orientation and corner-cutting behavior. As shown in Table 3, the interaction between customer orientation and productivity climate positively predicted corner-cutting behavior, supporting Hypothesis 2 (β = -.20, *SE* = .09, *t* = -2.21, *p* < .05). Following Dawson (2014), we plotted the interaction effect between customer orientation and productivity climate in Figure 2. It can be seen that customer orientation's inhibiting effect was stronger when employees also perceived a high productivity climate (b_{simple} = -.77, p < 0.001) than when they percieved a low productivity climate (b_{simple} = -.27, n.s.).

In relation to Hypothesis 3, Table 3 shows the conditional effects for both higher (1 SD above the mean) and lower levels (1 SD below the mean) of productivity climate. Bootstrapping (5,000 random samples) revealed that for corner-cutting behavior, the conditional indirect effect for proactive personality via customer orientation was significant at the higher level of productivity climate (CI [-.32, -.07]), but not at the lower level of productivity climate (CI [-.16, .02]); thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Table 3
Study 1: Moderation of productivity climate on the relationship between customer orientation and corner-cutting behaviour

Variable	Customer orientation (T1) β (S.E)	Corner-cutting (T2) β (S.E)
Intercept	-1.36(.28)***	4.15(.42)***
Proactive personality (T1)	.28(.06)***	-.22(.09)**
Customer orientation (T1)		-.43(.10)***
Productivity climate (T2)		.02(.08)
Customer orientation × Productivity climate		-.20(.09)*
Model R^2	.11(.77)***	.19(1.43)***
Indirect effect at low level of productivity climate	-.06(95%CI [-.16, .02])	
Indirect effect at high level of productivity climate	-.19(95%CI [-.32, -.07])	

Note. $N = 191$. T = time. All tests are two-tailed. Coefficients are unstandardized.
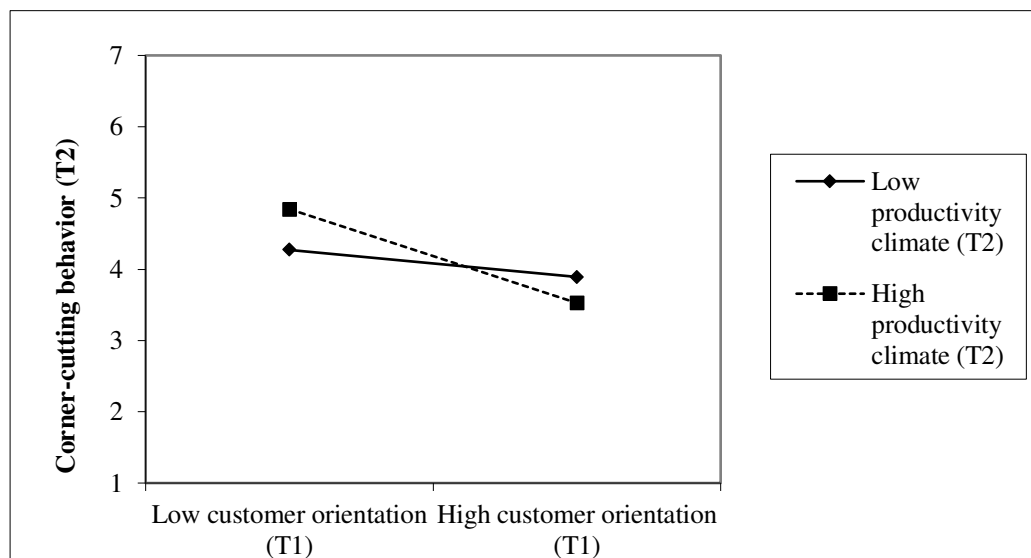* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ ***$p < .001$.

Fig. 2. Study 1: Interaction effect of customer orientation (T1) and productivity climate (T2) on corner-cutting behaviour (T2). Higher and lower productivity climate represent one standard deviation above and below the mean.

5. Study 2

5.1. Sample and participants

Study 2 was conducted to replicate the results of Study 1 using the same survey instrument but with a three-wave design. Specifically, Study 2 data were collected from full-time frontline service employees from hotels located in southeast China. This field study enables us to examine the robustness of our findings across different cultural contexts.

With the assistance of the human resource manager in each hotel, we randomly recruited 620 participants. The manager informed participants that the survey aimed to examine their customer service experience. Participants engaged in the survey voluntarily. Each participant returned the completed survey in a sealed envelope to a box in the human resources department. The final sample included 209 surveys, resulting in a response rate of 34%. The average age was 31.38 years (SD = 12.43); there were 76 males and 133 females, and the average tenure was 2.73 years (SD = 2.96).

In the first survey, we recruited 620 participants and 513 of them completed the survey. After removing 98 invalid surveys (e.g., over 50% of the questions were incomplete or careless responses), we collected 415 valid responses. In this round, participants were asked to provide information about their demographics (e.g., age, gender, and tenure) and proactive personality. Two months later, the 415 participants who provided valid responses for the Time 1 survey were invited to participate in the Time 2 survey with questions on customer orientation and productivity climate. In this round, 346 participants returned the survey, among which 286 provided valid responses. Finally, two months later, the 286 participants who provided valid responses for the Time 2 survey were invited for Time 3 survey, and 237 returned the survey with 209 valid responses. In this survey, we asked participants to provide information about corner-cutting. Similar to Study 1, this time-lagged survey offered the benefits of reducing common method effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

5.2. *Measures*

Proactive personality (α = .86), customer orientation (α = .93), productivity climate (α = .88), and corner-cutting (α = .88)were assessed using the same measures as in Study 1, with the only difference being that they were translated into Chinese by following the back-translation procedures recommended by Brislin (1980). The response format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) for all variables except for demographics.

5.3.   Results

5.3.1. Confirmatory factor analyses

The results of a series of confirmatory factor analyses revealed that the four-factor model with proactive personality, customer orientation, productivity climate, and corner-cutting behavior fit to the data (χ^2=232.63, *df*=113, CFI=.95, TLI=.94, RMSEA=.07). The fit indices of the alternative models were unacceptable; thus, the results supported the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

5.3.2. Hypotheses testing

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 4. As shown in Table 5, proactive personality has a positive relationship with customer orientation (*β*= .15, *SE* = .07, *t* = 2.35, *p* < .05), but does not have a significant correlation with corner-cutting behavior. Customer orientation is negatively related to corner-cutting behavior (*β* = -.64, *SE* = .09, *t* = -6.91, *p* < .05). For hypothesis testing, we used the same data analysis strategy as in Study 1. A significant indirect effect of proactive personality on corner-cutting behavior via customer orientation was found (*β* =-.10, *SE* = .04, 95%CI [-.18, -.02]); the confidence interval did not include zero. Thus, taken together, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Table 4

Study 2: Means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistency estimates

		M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1	Age	31.38	12.43					
2	Tenure	2.73	2.96	.54**				
3	Proactive personality (T1)	3.86	0.76	.16*	-0.02			
4	Customer orientation (T2)	4.05	0.72	.16*	-0.09	.16*		
5	Productivity climate (T2)	3.81	0.78	0.06	0.01	0.11	.52**	
6	Corner-cutting (T3)	2.59	1.06	-.21**	0.02	-.14*	-.45**	-.27**

Note. N = 209. *T* = time.

* *p* < .05. ** *p*< .01, two-tailed tests.

Table 5

Study 2: Mediation of customer orientation between proactive personality and corner-cutting behaviour

Variable	Customer orientation (T2) β (S.E)	Corner-cutting (T3) β (S.E)
Intercept	3.46 (.28)***	5.55(.47)***
Proactive personality (T1)	.15(.07)*	-.10(.09)
Customer orientation (T2)		-.64 (.09)***
Model R^2	.03(.51)*	.20(.90)***
Indirect effect of customer orientation	-.10(95%CI [-.18, -.02])	

Note. N = 209. *T* = time. All tests are two-tailed. Coefficients are unstandardized.

* *p* < .05. ** *p*< .01 ****p*< .001.

Table 6 presents results of the moderation and moderated mediation. The interaction term (Customer Orientation × Productivity Climate) was negatively related to corner-cutting behavior (β = -.39, *SE* = .16, *t* = -2.50, *p* < .05), supporting Hypothesis 2. Figure 3 shows that the negative relationship between customer orientation and corner-cutting behavior was stronger (b_{simple} = -1.00, *p* < 0.001) when proactivity climate was high (1 SD above the mean) than when proactivity climate was low (1 SD below the mean) (b_{simple} = -.38, *p* < 0.05).

As shown in Table 6, bootstrapping (5,000 random samples) revealed that the indirect effect of proactive personality on corner-cutting behavior via customer orientation was -.06 (95%CI [-.13, .00]) and -.16 (95%CI [-.32, -.02]) when productivity climate was low and high, respectively. Hypothesis 3 is, therefore, supported.

Table 6

Study 2: Moderation of productivity climate on the relationship between customer orientation and corner-cutting behaviour

Variable	Customer orientation (T2) β (S.E)	Corner-cutting (T3) β (S.E)
Intercept	-.59(.26)*	3.02(.34)***
Proactive personality (T1)	.15(.07)*	-.08(.09)
Customer orientation (T2)		-.68(.11)***
Productivity climate (T2)		.00(.10)
Customer orientation × Productivity climate		-.39(.16)**
Model R^2	.03(.51)*	.23(.87)***
Indirect effect at low level of productivity climate	-.06(95%CI [-.13, .00])	
Indirect effect at high level of productivity climate	-.16(95%CI [-.32, -.02])	

Note. $N = 209$. T = time. All tests are two-tailed. Coefficients are unstandardized.
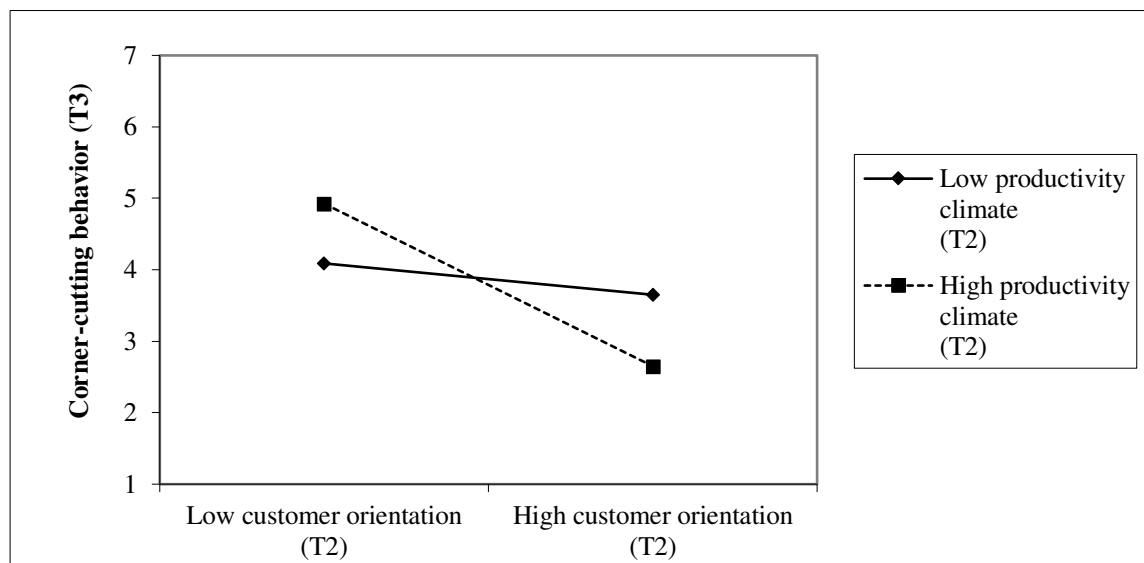* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Fig. 3. Study 2: Interaction effect of customer orientation (T2) and productivity climate (T2) on corner-cutting behaviour (T3). Higher and lower productivity climate represent one standard deviation above and below the mean.

6. Discussion

In this research, we seek to explain why those high in proactive personality are less likely to engage in corner-cutting behaviors, as well as to identify the boundary conditions. We tested the theoretical model across two studies using samples of full-time/part-time frontline service employees from an online panel based in the United Kingdom and the United States as well as service organizations in China, thus strengthening both the ecological and external validity of our conclusions. The results provide empirical evidence that proactive personality is negatively related to corner-cutting behaviors via customer orientation, and that a

productivity climate further enhances this negative effect. We discuss our theoretical and practical contributions below.

6.1.   Theoretical implications

Our study contributes to the literature in several ways. To begin with, we contribute to the emerging research field of corner-cutting behaviors (e.g., Beck et al., 2017). Although recent research on corner-cutting behaviors has shifted from an exclusive focus on situational predictors (e.g., Hannah & Robertson, 2015) to personality traits (e.g., proactive personality; Jonason & O'Connor, 2017), the underlying mechanism has not been investigated. Drawing on the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010), our study differs from prior studies in two major ways. First, we uncovered the underlying mechanisms by reconceptualizing customer orientation as a proactive motivational state that mediates the relationship between proactive personality and corner-cutting behavior in the service context. Second, by considering the victims of corner-cutting behaviors (in this case, customers), our research advocates a relational approach to understanding such behaviors. Past corner-cutting behavior research (e.g., Beck et al., 2017; Hannah & Robertson, 2015; Jonason & O'Connor, 2017; Sekerka & Zolin, 2007) has implicitly assumed employees work "in a vacuum," with little concern for their behavioral implications on external stakeholders (i.e., customers). In the service context, most corner-cutting behaviors involve minimizing the efforts expended during service encounters, which will have an impact on the experience of customers. Thus, it is not surprising that employees' cognitive and affective motivational states relating to meeting customers' needs will shape their behaviors. This relational approach also aligns with previous research on employees' deviant behaviors, which suggests that employees' attitudes toward potential victims could be a critical factor that shapes their workplace behaviors (Huang et al., 2019).

Second, our research contributes to the literature on proactive personality. Prior research on proactive personality traits has primarily focused on the positive behavioral outcomes, such as voice and proactive behaviors (for a meta-analytic review, see Fuller & Marler, 2009). However, proactive individuals not only take the initiative to improve the situation by engaging in positive behaviors, but they can also actively shape the environment by refraining from negative behaviors, such as cutting corners. Furthermore, prior research tends to examine the interaction between proactive individuals and inner-organization members (e.g., coworkers and supervisors) as the primary underlying mechanisms between proactive personality traits and employees' behaviors. For example, Li et al. (2010) examined leader-member exchange as the primary mediator between proactive personality and citizenship behavior, even though the research sample (i.e., individuals working in hotels) implies alternative mechanisms that relate to external parties (e.g., hotel guests). In the service industry, however, employees are not only involved in interactions with their coworkers and supervisors but also with customers (Cardador & Pratt, 2018). Therefore, we add novel insights to the proactive personality research by testing how this trait inhibits deviant behaviors of frontline employees whose jobs involve intensive interactions with customers.

Finally, we identified a critical boundary condition—how productivity climate interacts with customer orientation to affect corner-cutting behaviors. Prior research implies that organizational culture that prioritizes productivity and efficiency (e.g., productivity climate) may encourage corner-cutting behaviors because employees are willing to do "whatever it takes" to achieve their efficiency goals (Beck et al., 2017). However, our results suggest that productivity climate does not necessarily promote corner-cutting behaviors—a stronger productivity climate can, at times, lead to less corner-cutting among customer-oriented employees. In particular, this suggests that, for these employees, a stronger productivity climate can direct them to become more attentive to the discrepancy between productivity-

first and customer-first values; thus, counterintuitively, productivity climate helps to magnify the negative effect of customer orientation on corner-cutting behavior. As such, the present study provides an alternative view on productivity climate by suggesting that it is not inherently negative and, in some situations, can potentially be positive, depending on how people perceive and respond to it.

6.2.   Practical implications

Our study also has important implications for practice. First, our results suggest that proactive employees are more likely to place more significance on customer satisfaction and become more reluctant to engage in corner-cutting behaviors. Therefore, during the selection process, screening job applicants based on the proactive personality trait could be one potential way to mitigate the occurrence of corner-cutting behaviors. Second, in terms of the moderating role of productivity climate, following the findings in prior corner-cutting behavior research (Beck et al., 2017), it would be logical to suggest that organizations should suppress a productivity climate—which, in reality, is hard to implement due to the nature of the customer service industry (i.e., customers' increasing demand for fast service). Our work provides an alternative solution by suggesting that organizations and managers can reduce employees' engagement in corner-cutting behavior by focusing on enhancing employees' customer orientation. Specifically, organizations should ensure their reward systems, training programs, strategic goals, and service rules deliver a strong message to employees that customer satisfaction is essential. In this case, even though employees face competing demands and time pressures, they will be reluctant to compromise customers' interests by cutting corners.

6.3.   Limitations

Our research is not without limitations. Given our focus on organizations in the service industry, our examination is limited to corner-cutting behavior that may cause harm to

customers. In other industries where work involves little direct interaction with customers, such as white-collar workers (e.g., accountants and information technology programmers), customer orientation may simply not be as relevant. Thus, other underlying mechanisms that link to corner-cutting behaviors may need to be considered for employees in these occupational contexts. Second, we used the same-source data design to test our model, which may raise concerns about the common method variance (CMV). We chose self-reports because focal employees are the best source of measurement for most constructs in our model. Besides, scholars have concluded that CMV is less likely to be present when an interaction effect exists (Siemsen et al., 2010). Moreover, to mitigate the influence of CMV, we sought to collect data at multiple time points. Third, although we adopted spaced measurement across two studies (two waves in Study 1 and three waves in Study 2), our design did not allow us to capture the potential change over time.

6.4. *Suggestions for future research*

Our study conceptualized productivity climate as an individual psychological climate and examined it at the individual level. Future research could employ a multilevel approach (e.g., Chen et al., 2014; Ozduran & Tanova, 2017) to examine whether a shared perception of productivity climate at the group level might be a boundary condition of customer orientation and corner-cutting behavior at the individual level. Second, our study found that when productivity climate is high, customer-orientated employees are more likely to refrain from taking shortcuts. However, it is possible that when employees strive to provide quality customer services under a productivity climate, their customer orientation will also increase. To capture this cyclical relationship, future studies could employ a longitudinal design in which variables that vary over time will be measured at all time points (e.g., customer orientation and corner-cutting behaviors). In doing so, research may be able to capture how

changes in customer orientation over time lead to changes in other variables, which in turn

would offer a dynamic perspective of corner-cutting behaviors.

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