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Not All Roads Lead to Rome: The Moderating Role of CSE in the Effects of Newcomer Proactivity on LMX and Supervisor Mentoring

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Not All Roads Lead to Rome: The Moderating Role of CSE in the Effects of Newcomer Proactivity on LMX and Supervisor Mentoring

Abstract

Although proactive behaviors, such as relationship building and sensemaking are widely promoted as key to newcomers' successful organizational adjustment and socialization, our research challenges the prevailing one-size-fits-all view that broadly prescribes each proactive behavior as universally effective, irrespective of individual differences. Integrating the resource-based and interactionist perspectives on newcomer socialization, we propose a research model to examine the role of newcomers' core self-evaluation (CSE) as a qualifier of the effects of newcomers' proactive relationship building and proactive sensemaking behaviors on their leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships, with a subsequent implication for the career mentoring that these newcomers receive from their supervisors. We tested this model using data collected at four time points (before entry, two to four weeks post-entry, three months post-entry, and six months post-entry) from a sample of 195 newcomers engaged in training and work doing blue collar jobs in France. Our results largely support our hypotheses, but also reveal unexpected findings that highlight the detrimental effect of proactive relationship building for low-CSE newcomers and the negative effect of proactive sensemaking for higher-CSE newcomers. LMX relates positively to career mentoring that newcomers receive from their supervisor. Our research offers unique and timely theoretical and practical insights into the newcomer proactivity, LMX, and career mentoring literatures.

Keywords

Newcomer socialization, newcomer proactive behaviors, leader-member exchange (LMX), core self-evaluation (CSE), resource-based and interactionist perspectives

According to one estimate, the average person holds 12.7 jobs over the course of their lives (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), indicating that organizational socialization is a process adults go through multiple times throughout their working lives. A rich body of literature has thus examined newcomers' socialization experiences, which refers to the process through which they transition from being organizational outsiders to organizational insiders (Allen et al., 2017; Bauer et al., 2006, 2025). Early research in this domain has primarily focused on organizational tactics that aid in facilitating an effective onboarding process (e.g., Jones, 1986).

More recent studies have positioned newcomers as active rather than passive participants of their own socialization (Ashford & Black, 1996), recognizing that they engage in proactive behaviors to facilitate their socialization (Cai et al., 2025). The proactive behaviors most frequently examined include relationship building (i.e., socializing within the work unit) and sensemaking (i.e., seeking feedback and information; Zhao et al., 2023), and meta analyses show that newcomers' proactivity explains incremental variance in socialization outcomes beyond organizational socialization tactics (Pang et al., 2026; Zhao et al., 2023).

While prior studies have primarily focused on newcomers' building personal resources (e.g., task mastery, role clarity) through proactive behaviors, emerging research has extended the focus to their building of social resources, where leader-member exchange (LMX, or one's exchange relationship with their supervisor; Liden et al., 1997) has been used a common proxy (Song et al., 2017; Yin et al., 2024). As organizational novices, a high-quality LMX relationship is important for securing key resources (e.g., strategic information, high-stake tasks, and developmental opportunities) from their supervisors, the most accessible authority figures (Bauer et al., 2006; Bauer & Erdogan, 2016), to mitigate sense of uncertainty and facilitate adjustment outcomes (Song et al., 2017). Research reveals that newcomer proactivity tends to benefit

newcomers' LMX relationships (Bauer et al., 2025). However, we do not know whether different proactive behaviors are equally beneficial for everyone, specifically whether some newcomers benefit by engaging in one type of proactive behavior, while others benefit from the other types.

To address this question, we developed the model shown in Figure 1, which aligns with resource-based and interactionist perspectives (Bauer et al., 2025) to conceptualize proactive behaviors as actions through which newcomers engage with their new environment, particularly their supervisors, to build organizational resources (e.g., high-quality relationships). Guided by person–environment (P–E) fit theory (van Vianen, 2018), a representative interactionist framework, we propose that proactive behaviors are beneficial to the extent that they help newcomers demonstrate or secure personal resources that supervisors desire or value in the development of exchange relationships (Law-Penrose et al., 2016; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001).

Yet, newcomers enter organizations with varying levels of "personal resources," as reflected in their personal traits. One of these traits is core self-evaluation (CSE; Lee & Duffy, 2019, p. 1086), defined as the "fundamental premises that individuals hold about themselves and their functioning in the world" (Judge et al., 1998, p. 168). Integrating P-E fit theory with this resource-based consideration, we reason that for higher-CSE newcomers, who already possess the personal resources (e.g., efficacy, emotional stability) that supervisors typically value upon organizational entry, proactive relationship building (e.g., attending company gatherings) serves as a resource-capitalizing strategy, creating opportunities for these newcomers to naturally demonstrate and leverage these resources to facilitate high-quality LMX relationships. In contrast, for lower-CSE newcomers who enter the organization with fewer such resources, proactive sensemaking, which represents key forms of "resource seeking" (i.e., feedback and information seeking; Lim et al., 2020, p. 122), functions as a resource-compensating strategy,

enabling them to acquire task- and organization-related resources for building high-quality LMX relationships. In turn, the higher the newcomers' LMX is, the more supervisory career mentoring they receive (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994).

We tested our model with a sample of newcomers who were serving as apprentices in blue-collar jobs. These participants were not only new to the organization but also young with limited work experience, with most entering the workforce for the first time. This relative "blank slate" enhances the influence of proactive behaviors (Pang et al., 2026) and reduces the likelihood that potential confounds (e.g., prior work experience) contaminate our findings.

Our study makes three timely contributions. First, we challenge a widely held one-size-fits-all assumption that newcomer proactive behaviors are equally beneficial for facilitating adjustment and socialization outcomes, regardless of newcomer personal characteristics (Zhao et al., 2023). In the current investigation, we consider that newcomers enter organizations with differing levels of personal resources, as reflected in their CSE. We further integrate resource-based and interactionist perspectives to advance insights on how differences in CSE levels shape the relative benefits of proactive relationship building versus proactive sensemaking behaviors.

Second, we advance a diversity and equity lens approach to newcomer proactivity research, an area that has been largely overlooked. The workforce is comprised of diverse employees who differ in a wide range of attributes, including personal traits such as CSE. Yet extant research has tended to promote a binary view that portrays newcomers in either a positive or negative light. For example, studies have suggested that lower-CSE newcomers, due to the dispositional tendencies, tend to achieve significantly less desirable adjustment outcomes compared to their higher-CSE counterparts (e.g., Fang et al., 2011; Fang et al., 2017). While unintended, these insights may prime a judgmental view against lower-CSE newcomers. Instead,

we examine the contention that lower-CSE newcomers may not be as inherently disadvantaged, especially if they engage in the proactivity that best fits their levels of CSE.

Third, as noted by Bauer et al. (2025, p. 375), with few exceptions (e.g., Perrot et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2023), "much of the research on organizational socialization has focused on college graduates and knowledge workers." While research often assumes the benefits of proactive behaviors for newcomers are broadly generalizable, we echo Bauer et al.'s (2025) call to "continue to examine newcomer socialization in a variety of sample settings and contexts around the world" (p. 370). Our examination of a sample of blue-collar newcomers, a working population projected to grow due to increased labor demands (Wells, 2024), adds to the still limited evidence regarding effects of proactive behaviors in underrepresented contexts.

Theory and Hypotheses Development

Although the literatures on LMX, organizational socialization, and CSE have different theoretical roots and distinct development trajectories, they intersect at a resource-based perspective that informs theorizing across these domains. Resources can be broadly defined as "anything perceived by individuals as helping them to attain their goals" (Lim et al., 2020, p. 123). For example, within a supervisor-follower dyad, due to their position power supervisors are viewed as valuable resources that followers can draw upon; likewise, followers may have certain traits that supervisors view as resources to help them facilitate leadership and team effectiveness.

The LMX literature has highlighted a resource-based perspective since its very early development. As Law-Penrose et al. (2016, p. 55) noted, "from early on, leader-member exchange (LMX) research has discussed the resources that leaders and employees exchange within their working relationship." The literature has thus conceptualized the development and maintenance of supervisor-follower relationships as exchanges where supervisors and followers

offer each other resources valued by the other party of the dyad (Wilson et al., 2010). In this conceptualization, the following points have been well-established: (a) followers are strongly motivated to develop quality relationships with their supervisors (e.g., Bartel et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2019) due to the supervisors' possession of a variety of "positional resources, such as the assignment of interesting tasks, the distribution of valuable information, and opportunities to speak favorably about subordinates to others in the organization" (Wilson et al., 2010, p. 358); (b) Supervisors, as the other side of the dyad, differentiate the quality of relationships with their followers, and prefer to develop quality relationships with those who have sufficient resources to contribute to the relationships (e.g., Liden et al., 2006; Yu et al., 2018).

In the context of newcomer socialization, the development of an LMX relationship is regarded as a process in which newcomers try to build their organizational social resources, and the quality of this relationship reflects the success (high LMX) or failure (low LMX) of this process. The above insights align with the resource-based perspective of newcomer organizational socialization, which notes that "newcomers are sensitive to resource availability, that resources enable effective adaptation to uncertain or stressful contexts, and that having resources enables one to capitalize on and build additional resources leading to enhanced well-being and effectiveness" (Bauer et al., 2025, p. 347). In this view, proactive behaviors represent an important means of newcomers' "resource building" (Bauer et al., 2025, p. 348) during the socialization period. For example, multiple proactive behaviors, such as information seeking and feedback seeking, have been highlighted as helpful in reducing uncertainty and building important resources (Bauer et al., 2025). Paralleling this inquiry, recent research reveals that once supervisors form favorable initial evaluations of newcomer proactivity, they tend to invest additional resources, such as increased support, in those newcomers (Dufour et al., 2021; Ellis et

al., 2017). It was also found that proactivity helps newcomers build relational resources, as manifested in their development of high-quality LMX relationships (e.g., Song et al., 2017).

Rather than social resources themselves (such as LMX) or means to build social resources (such as proactive behaviors), CSE has been conceptualized as an individual personal resource (Lee & Duffy, 2019) that can help followers to achieve important individual and relational goals. CSE is composed of four interrelated traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control (Judge et al., 2003). Meta-analytic reviews have shown that several characteristics featuring high CSE (e.g., high self-confidence, internal locus of control, and emotional stability) in followers are desired and valued by supervisors in building relationships with followers; in contrast, individuals with low levels of CSE tend to be relatively lacking in these resources (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

Although prior research noted that newcomers with low levels of individual characteristics (i.e., CSEs) that are desired by the supervisor are at a disadvantage when attempting to build high-quality LMX relationships, we propose that low CSE newcomers can overcome this disadvantage by engaging in the proactive behaviors best suited to them. Specifically, we submit that both low- and high-CSE newcomers can build high quality-LMX relationships if they engage in proactive behaviors best fitting their CSE level. Despite decades of development in the literatures on newcomer socialization, LMX, and CSE, little direct attention has been paid to the implications of CSE variability regarding socialization outcomes, such as the quality of relationship built with the immediate supervisor. We thus explore the forms of proactive behaviors that are relatively more beneficial for newcomers with lower or higher CSE in building relational resources. This also advances a more equitable understanding

of socialization, as it may clarify whether newcomers with fewer personal resources can compensate through specific forms of proactivity, rather than being structurally disadvantaged.

Integrating a Resource-based Lens into the Interactionist Perspective

We address the issue of variability in newcomer CSE levels by integrating the resource-based lens into the interactionist-based perspective, which provides "a foundational theoretical lens to understand how newcomers influence and are influenced by their new environment" (Bauer et al., 2025, p. 347). Within this P-E fit perspective, newcomers are understood through their personal characteristics, such as their proactivity, while organizational insiders such as supervisors are conceptualized as part of the environment in which newcomers build interpersonal connections, with the LMX relationship being critical. In our case, although newcomers enter the organization with different levels of CSE (i.e., carrying differing amounts of personal resources), whether they can ultimately build high-quality LMX relationships also depends on the way in which they interact with their supervisors.

Our core idea is that newcomers must tailor the forms of proactive behavior they enact considering their CSE level to build high-quality LMX relationships. As such, P-E fit theory (van Vianen et al., 2018), is an important framework within the interactionist perspective focusing on understanding how compatibility between individuals and their environment can be achieved. P-E fit theory also aligns well with the resource-based perspective to address our research questions that are illustrated in our model shown in Figure 1. While fit theory is a broad framework in understanding the interactions between individuals and their environments, we build our model development upon two of its basic theoretical tenets: 1) "people have an innate need to fit their environments" and 2) "outcomes are most optimal when personal attributes (e.g.,

needs, abilities, values) and environmental attributes (e.g., supplies, demands, values) are compatible" (van Vianen et al., 2018, p. 76, p. 77).

In our conceptualization, newcomers represent the "person" seeking to achieve fit with their supervisors which is an indispensable component of their adjustment and socialization environment. Fit is achieved when newcomers can meet what supervisors value in employees with whom they desire to develop good working relationships (i.e., employees with resources to contribute to the exchange relationships) and is ultimately manifested in the quality of supervisor–newcomer LMX (Zhang et al., 2012). Achieving such fit is associated with positive outcomes for newcomers, among which we highlight supervisor career mentoring, which speaks to supervisors' sponsorship of instrumental resources critical to newcomers' socialization and long-term career success (Erdogan et al., 2025). As these core tenets provide a high-level conceptual foundation to guide our model, we next integrate established perspectives and emerging insights from the research on newcomer proactivity, LMX, and CSE to flesh out the theoretical logic underlying our hypotheses.

The Moderation Effect of Proactive Relationship Building and CSE on LMX

Proactive relationship building involves activities such as attending social events or company gatherings and maximizing time spent with the supervisor (Ashford & Black, 1996). These activities enhance the visibility of newcomers and offer newcomers opportunities to favorably promote themselves within their organization, particularly to their supervisor. Although newcomers can impress their leaders by demonstrating their positive attributes through task performance and other work contributions (e.g., Liden et al., 1997), proactive relationship building helps enhance their image in the eyes of their supervisors (Wang et al., 2025; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). As compared to other newcomer proactive behaviors (e.g., sensemaking),

proactive relationship building is less task-oriented and instead focuses on creating social connections. In such interactions, individuals seek to gain deeper personal insight into their interaction partners beyond work-related roles. Although research on newcomer socialization tends to highlight its benefits for newcomer adjustment (Bauer et al., 2025; Cai et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2023), we suggest that these benefits may not accrue uniformly across individuals.

Accumulated evidence implies that the success or failure of proactive relationship building in enhancing relational outcomes largely depends on whether individuals possess personal resources that they can leverage to manage the interpersonal demands of interaction episodes and in turn to place themselves at an advantageous position during these interactions. For example, research has noted that individuals with low-esteem, one indicator of low CSE, tend not to reap the benefits of social networking behaviors, because they prioritize self-protection over relationship promotion and may inadvertently display anxiety or negativity during interactions (Forest & Wood, 2012). Reinforcing the view behind these insights, Portor and Woo (2015) noted that at the initial stage of social networking where "networking partners have limited knowledge of one another on a personal level" (p. 10), conveying information about "potential resources that they could exchange" (p. 11) (e.g., one's knowledge, skills, abilities) are important for relationship growth. In sum, proactive relationship building involves one's capitalizing on their currently existing resources to signal value as an effective exchange partner.

Because supervisors desire to build quality relationships with individuals who possess resources that contribute to the exchange relationships, we contend that newcomers with sufficient personal resources can utilize proactive relationship building to facilitate their signaling of their possession of these resources to their supervisors. In this view, we argue that higher-CSE newcomers are more likely than lower-CSE newcomers to benefit from proactive

relationship building in developing high-quality LMX relationships. In proactive relationship building (e.g., attending company gatherings), higher-CSE newcomers are provided with a conducive social platform to naturally showcase their desirable attributes to their supervisor. Such proactivity provides higher-CSE newcomers with opportunities to showcase qualities such as self-confidence, internal locus of control, and emotional stability, which are traits shown to contribute to high-quality LMX development (Dulebohn et al., 2012). This tendency aligns with motives to verify their positive self-views regarding their worth and competence and affirm and validate these self-perceptions during social interactions.

In contrast, newcomers with lower CSE are more likely to hold negative views about their self-worth and competencies. This often manifests as a lack of confidence in social interactions, making it difficult for them to present themselves positively in both formal and informal settings, such as work meetings or social gatherings (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). As a result, lower-CSE newcomers are inclined to adopt a self-protection approach. For example, when engaging in proactive relationship-building behaviors, such as initiating a one-on-one coffee chat with a supervisor, a lower-CSE newcomer may appear overly self-conscious, struggle to sustain conversation, or become overly cautious and reserved rather than conveying enthusiasm, warmth, or confidence, which can inadvertently hinder the development of a positive interpersonal impression. Taken together, we argue that proactive relationship building increases exposure of lower-CSE newcomers' personal weaknesses and heighten the likelihood that supervisors perceive them as lacking confidence, social ease, or interpersonal competence, which are qualities often valued in desirable exchange partners during networking opportunities. As a result, proactive relationship building is less helpful to the development of high-quality LMX relationships for lower-CSE newcomers.

In summary, we expect an amplifying effect of proactive relationship building in helping higher-CSE newcomers in meeting what the supervisor values in quality exchange relationships with followers. Accordingly, we suggest a moderation effect wherein higher CSE levels strengthen, and lower CSE levels weaken, the positive effects of proactive relationship building on newcomer LMX relationships with their supervisors.

> ***Hypothesis 1.*** CSE moderates the positive relation between newcomers' proactive relationship building and LMX such that the relation is stronger at higher levels of CSE, but weaker at lower levels of CSE.

The Moderation Effect of Proactive Sensemaking and CSE on LMX

Proactive sensemaking, another proactive behavior commonly used by newcomers during socialization, involves newcomers asking their supervisors for guidance, and feedback on their work and assignments (Ashford & Black, 1996). Newcomers can also seek information about the organization, such as its cultural norms and policies, as well as the roles and responsibilities of different departments and individuals. These behaviors help newcomers clarify supervisory expectations and organizational requirements, acquire organization and task-relevant knowledge, and align their actions with their supervisors' guidelines and the organization's norms, thereby reducing the likelihood of deviation from expected performance during socialization.

Lim et al. (2020) noted that employees may solicit a variety of workplace resources, including information that helps them understand their work environment and how to succeed within it, as well as feedback regarding their strengths and areas for improvement. Accordingly, from a resource-based perspective, information seeking and feedback seeking have been conceptualized as two important forms of "resource seeking" behavior (Lim et al., 2020, p. 122). This view is grounded in earlier foundational works on information and feedback seeking. For

example, Ashford and Cummings (1983) posited that feedback about one's performance is a valuable personal resource for accomplishing both performance-related and nonperformance goals, and thus employees are often motivated to seek it proactively.

Although supervisors tend to develop quality relationships with employees who possess abundant personal resources that can contribute to the exchange relationship, lower-CSE newcomers typically enter the organization with fewer such resources. We suggest that proactive sensemaking behaviors, including feedback seeking and information seeking, can serve as resource-compensating strategies that help these newcomers acquire critical task- and organization-related resources valued by supervisors in desirable exchange partners, thereby facilitating the development of high-quality LMX relationships with supervisors.

Specifically, lower-CSE newcomers tend to perceive themselves as less capable of navigating uncertain or ambiguous situations effectively, which can lead to heightened self-doubt and increased vigilance toward potential threats. These newcomers are thus particularly motivated to minimize ambiguity in areas critical to their success, such as task performance and adaptation to new organizational norms. By seeking feedback and clarification, and by gathering information about organizational expectations and norms, lower-CSE newcomers can gain more clarity and avoid potential missteps. For example, newcomers may seek information about why they performed a task incorrectly to better understand proper procedures and avoid repeating mistakes. They may also ask their supervisor to watch them complete the task and demonstrate the correct technique. Seeking such information and feedback may help lower-CSE newcomers not only compensate for deficits in personal resources critical to their success at the organization but also cultivate favorable impressions from supervisors. As Ashford and Tsui (1991, p. 255) note, seeking negative feedback "may convey an image of the seekers as eager to perform well

and interested in improving their behavior, thereby enhancing the favorableness of others' overall opinions." This view has received further support from Lam et al. (2007) in the leader-follower context. Taken together, information seeking and feedback seeking provide lower-CSE newcomers with a legitimate pathway to be comfortable with discussing their personal weaknesses and acquire personal resources from important sources (e.g., organization policies, senior coworkers, supervisors) necessary for developing high-quality LMX relationships. We thus argue that lower-CSE newcomers can leverage proactive sensemaking as a resource-compensating strategy to promote the development of high-quality LMX relationships.

In contrast, higher-CSE newcomers are expected to benefit comparatively less from proactive sensemaking behaviors for LMX development. Importantly, our argument concerns the benefits newcomers derive from proactive sensemaking when they engage in it, rather than their propensity to engage in such behavior. Indeed, given their greater sense of agency and confidence in their ability to shape their environments, higher-CSE newcomers may be more inclined than lower-CSE newcomers to behave proactively (e.g., Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). Yet, the resources obtained through proactive sensemaking, such as information and feedback, should have less incremental value for higher-CSE newcomers because they already possess substantial personal resources, including self-confidence, perceived competence, and a sense of control, that help them navigate unfamiliar environments.

We do not deny the possibility that higher-CSE newcomers may acquire more valuable resources from the supervisor when engaging in proactive sensemaking, as compared to their lower-CSE newcomers. Nevertheless, consistent with the notion of diminishing returns or a ceiling effect (Kubanek, 2017; Lam et al., 2017), we reason that these additional resources contribute comparatively less to higher-CSE newcomers' development of high-quality LMX

relationships as they add to an already substantial pool of personal resources for meeting supervisors' expectations. In contrast, for lower-CSE newcomers, resources acquired through proactive sensemaking compensate for their more limited personal resources and thus make a more consequential difference in their ability to cultivate high-quality LMX relationships.

In sum, in contrast to proactive relationship building, through which higher-CSE newcomers *capitalize on* their existing personal resources to cultivate LMX, we contend that proactive sensemaking serves a *resource-compensating* function by supplying the personal resources that are particularly valuable when newcomers initially lack them. Accordingly, we propose a moderation effect wherein lower CSE strengthens, while higher CSE weakens, the positive effects of proactive sensemaking on newcomer LMX.

> ***Hypothesis 2.*** CSE moderates the positive relation between newcomers' proactive sensemaking and LMX such that the positive relation is stronger at lower levels of CSE, but weaker at higher levels of CSE.

Effects on Supervisor Career Mentoring

A resource-based perspective suggests that "initial resource gains can propel future resource gains" (Lim et al., 2020, p. 145). This means that building an LMX relationship, which is a social resource itself, helps newcomers to secure valuable resources from the supervisors and organizations. Indeed, this reasoning aligns with the resource-based perspective of LMX, which posits that high-quality LMX relationships provide access to important instrumental resources that support employees' advancement (Wilson et al., 2010).

In particular, we argue that when newcomers build a high-quality LMX relationship, supervisors are more likely to provide career mentoring to help newcomers secure good adjustment outcomes and facilitate their future success in the organization (Allen et al., 2017;

Graen & Scandura, 1987; Green & Bauer, 1995; Nahrgang & Seo, 2016). Career mentoring involves the provision of guidance, support, and feedback by supervisors to their subordinates with the aim of fostering the development of crucial skills, knowledge, behaviors, and relationships that facilitate career advancement (Blickle et al., 2009; Noe, 1988; Ragins et al., 2024; Wayne et al., 1999). Career mentoring is important for employees because it can provide them with a roadmap for their career development within the organization. By identifying their strengths and weaknesses and setting career goals, employees can acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve those goals (Wayne et al., 1999). Also, supervisors' career mentoring provides employees with exposure to senior leaders, enabling them to establish a network of contacts within the organization. As supervisors perceive newcomers with whom they develop stronger LMX relationships as part of their "inner circle" (Graen, 1976; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Xu et al., 2024), a resource-investment perspective (e.g., Dufour et al., 2021) suggests that supervisors devote time, energy, and other resources to mentoring these newcomers.

Integrating the above reasoning with our previous hypotheses, we propose a model in which the indirect effects of supervisors' career mentoring, mediated by LMX, are moderated by newcomers' CSE. That is, both higher- and lower-CSE newcomers are likely to build high-quality LMX relationships and in turn receive career mentoring from supervisors when they respectively engage in proactive relationship building and proactive sensemaking.

> ***Hypothesis 3a.*** CSE moderates the positive indirect relation of newcomers' proactive relationship building with supervisors' career mentoring via LMX such that, the positive indirect relation is stronger at higher levels of CSE, but weaker at lower levels of CSE.

Hypothesis 3b. CSE moderates the positive indirect relation of newcomers' proactive sensemaking with supervisors' career mentoring via LMX such that, the positive indirect relation is stronger at lower levels of CSE, but weaker at higher levels of CSE.

Methods

Sample and Procedures

Research participants were new apprentices in France learning trades (e.g., carpentry, metal working, plumbing). Apprenticeships represent programs begun in medieval times to develop labor needed for the construction of castles and cathedrals (the program has been continuously operating to present day France). None of the apprentices surveyed had previous full-time work experience. Surveys were administered by trainers during the classroom training portion of the apprenticeship program. The apprenticeship program was delivered using twelve 8-week sequences over two years, with 2 weeks in a training center and 6 weeks of full-time work within one company. Our study focuses on the apprentices' work experiences in their company, such as their interactions with their formal supervisor during their hands on working portion of their program and their adjustment to the new organization where they were apprenticing. The formal supervisors have the duties of supervising apprentices' daily work and taking charge of the company's relationship and communications with the training center.

Executives of the apprenticeship organization who manage the apprenticeship program across 40 training centers in France were asked to participate in our study. We randomly selected 15 training centers representing half of the total potential population of apprentices. Apprentices completed the first wave of questionnaires prior to entry in the training program and the company (T0). The second wave of questionnaires (T1) was completed during the second to fourth week after organizational entry. The third wave of questionnaires (T2) was administered

during the third month following entry, which was during classroom training immediately following the first 6-week rotation in their respective organizations. The fourth wave (T3) data collection was conducted during the sixth month post-entry. At T0, we distributed our survey to 371 apprentices, asking them to report their CSE. A total of 225 apprentices completed the survey. Of these apprentices, 195 returned a completed T1 survey, where they reported their proactive socialization activities of proactive relationship building and proactive sensemaking, perception of interactional justice during the interaction with their supervisor, and the baseline level of career mentoring received from the supervisor. In turn, 151 apprentices completed a matched T2 survey, reporting their quality of LMX relationship, and the baseline level of task mastery and social integration. We measured LMX at this time point because evidence has indicated that the role taking and role making processes of LMX development typically happen within the first twelve weeks (i.e., the first three months after the job entry) and that the quality of LMX tends to mature within three months after organizational entry (Bauer & Green, 1996). At T3, the apprentices who completed the T2 survey were asked to report their current level of career mentoring received from the supervisor. In the end, there were 139 apprentices who completed the T3 survey. As described in more detail later, we followed the recommendations by Newman (2014) to utilize full information maximum likelihood (FIML) in *Mplus*, rather than list-wise deletion, to handle missing data. Thus, the sample for our analyses consisted of 195 newcomers who completed the T1 survey and provided data on our focal proactive socialization behaviors (response rate = 52.6%), with FIML allowing us to retain these participants despite missing data at subsequent waves (e.g., Rodell et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2026).

Apprentice job titles for our sample included carpenter (24.3 %), plumber (21%), boilermaker (8.4%), metalworker (8.1%), mason (6.4%), mechanic (6.4 %), and others (25.3%).

All participants were men from regions throughout France as they began their apprenticeships and they had an average age of 18 (ranging between 16 and 24). The size of companies where the apprentices worked averaged 53 employees, with only 8% of companies having more than 50 employees. Overall, 82% of the companies were in the private sector.

Measures

All study scales were translated from English to French using the back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1970). Unless otherwise stated, all variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

CSE (T0). Newcomers reported their CSE using Judge et al.'s (2003) 12-item measure. A sample item is ''I am capable of coping with most of my problems" (α = .75).

Proactive relationship building and proactive sensemaking (T1). Because LMX relationships between newcomers and supervisors tend to form within the few weeks after organizational entry and subsequently remain relatively stable over the following months (Liden et al., 1993), newcomers' proactive behaviors during this early period can meaningfully influence the quality of their LMX relationships. In line with prior research (Cai et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2024), newcomers reported their proactive relationship building using three dimensions from Ashford and Black's (1996) proactive socialization tactics scale (1 = to no extent to 5 = to a great extent; α = .76). These three dimensions are comprised of a total of 9 items: general socializing (3 items; e.g., "I attended company social gathering."), building relationship with the supervisor (3 items; e.g., "I tried to spend as much time as I could with my supervisor."), and out-group networking (3 items; e.g., "I tried to socialize with people who are not in my department.").

At the same time, newcomers also reported their proactive sensemaking using two dimensions from Ashford and Black's (1996) proactive socialization scale (1 = to no extent to 5 = to a great extent; $\alpha = .80$). These two dimensions are comprised of 8 items: feedback seeking (4 items; e.g., "I asked for my supervisor's opinions of my work.") and information seeking (4 items; e.g., "I tried to learn the important policies and procedures in the organization.").

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) where proactive relationship building was modeled as the higher-order latent variable and the three dimensions modeled as the lower-order variable provide empirical support for our approach to conceptualizing this construct ($\chi^2_{(89)} = 175.56$, RMSEA =.08, CFI = .91, SRMR = .05). Likewise, CFAs where proactive sensemaking was modeled as the higher-order latent variable and the two dimensions modeled as the lower-order variable provide empirical support for our approach to conceptualizing this construct ($\chi^2_{(18)} = 21.39$, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .99, SRMR = .04).

LMX (T2). Consistent with prior studies (e.g., Bauer et al., 2006; Liden et al., 1993; Song et al., 2017; Yin et al., 2024), we assessed the quality of exchange relationship between newcomers and their supervisors by asking the newcomers to complete an LMX scale. We used the 12-item multidimensional measure developed by Liden and Maslyn (1998). A sample item of this LMX scale is "I like my supervisor very much as a person" ($\alpha = .74$). Prior research supports the scale's strong psychometric properties (e.g., Schriesheim et al., 1999) and its reliable use as a single-factor measure of overall LMX quality (e.g., Bauer et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 2018; Eisenberger et al., 2010; Liden et al., 2006). This scale includes four dimensions: affect, professional respect, contribution, and loyalty, and is typically treated as a global construct. Supporting this, higher-order confirmatory factor analyses have consistently demonstrated that the four dimensions are independent yet all load on the global higher order

factor that represents global LMX (Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Joseph et al., 2011; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Likewise, in the current research, the higher-order global LMX construct encompassing the four lower-order dimensions show adequate fit to our data ($\chi^2(50) = 129.648$, RMSEA = .103, CFI = .926, SRMR = .056) and all lower-order dimensions loaded significantly onto the higher-order construct, with the loadings ranging from .80 to .93.

Supervisors' career mentoring (T3). We asked the newcomers to report the career mentoring received from their supervisor with 4 items from Noe (1988) to measure supervisor sponsorship to the newcomers (Wayne et al., 1999). We modified the items to fit our sample of blue collar workers. A sample item is "My supervisor has given me assignments or tasks that prepare me for future position in the company" ($\alpha = .84$).

Control variables. When estimating the effects on LMX (T2), we controlled interactional justice (T1), as this has been demonstrated to be an important supervisor factor that impacts LMX during the early relationship development period (Erdogan et al., 2006; Park et al., 2015). We measured interactional justice with the 9-item scale developed by Colquitt (2001). A sample item is "has your supervisor treated you in a polite manner" (1 = to a small extent to 5 = to a large extent; $\alpha = .90$). When estimating the effects of LMX on supervisors' career mentoring (T3), we controlled the baseline level of career mentoring, measured at T1 using the same scale mentioned earlier ($\alpha = .81$). Controlling the baseline level of career mentoring tests whether LMX quality relates to career mentoring beyond initial levels.

We conducted analyses with and without the control variables (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016; Sturman et al., 2022), with both yielding consistent results. Following common practices established by prior research (e.g., Bolino et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2025), we reported the results with the controls included for a conservative test of our hypotheses.

Analytical Strategy

We did not see significant differences between the respondents and non-respondents across different time points in terms of the substantive variables in our model (i.e., proactive behaviors, CSE, LMX, and career mentoring). Given these results, we followed the recommendation by Newman (2014) and prior studies (Koopman et al., 2020; Little & Masterson, 2023; Rodell et al., 2020) to use full information maximum likelihood (FIML) in *Mplus* to handle missing data. The FIML method enables the use of all available data, while also generating unbiased results according to the simulations by Newman (2014).

We modeled all relationships from our model in Figure 1 simultaneously (e.g., Keeler et al., 2025; Koopman et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2026) with *Mplus* (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Following established practices (e.g., Baer et al., 2018; Rodell & Lynch, 2016), we employed the reliability-corrected single-indicator latent moderated structural equation (RCSLMS) method to test our research model. This analytical approach is "especially useful when testing more complicated theoretical models that include both mediated and moderated relationships" (Cortina et al., 2001, p. 358). Moreover, Cheung and Lau (2017, p. 750) noted that this method is particularly suitable for "studies with small sample size." Similar to conventional structural equation modeling (SEM), RCSLMS accounts for measurement error when estimating path parameters, allowing for more accurate effect estimates than those produced by commonly used regression or path analysis techniques. In addition, it addresses challenges often encountered in conventional SEM when analyzing moderated mediation models with relatively small samples, such as inadequate overall model fit, and model non-convergence. Following recommended procedures (Cheung & Lau, 2017; Su et al., 2019), we first calculated the scale scores for all variables involved in the analyses. We then used scale scores as single indicators of the latent

variable and modelled each latent variable with the factor loading fixed to 1 and the unique variance fixed to (1-reliability) × scale score variance. We followed Su et al. (2019) to use the command "XWITH" in *Mplus* to construct the latent interaction terms involved in our model (i.e., proactive relationship building × CSE, proactive sensemaking × CSE).

Based on the estimates from RCSLMS, we followed the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991) to test the two-way moderation effects theorized in Hypotheses 1 and 2. We plotted simple slopes at higher (+1 *SD*) and lower (-1 *SD*) levels of the moderators when a two-way interaction effect was significant. To examine the moderated mediation effects, we calculated the index of moderated mediation recommended by Hayes (2015). To test the significance of the moderated mediation effects, we followed recent studies (e.g., Han et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Song et al., 2020), and conducted a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications. This method provides an estimate of the confidence interval (CI) for each indirect effect (Selig & Preacher, 2008). An indirect effect or the index of moderated mediation is significant if the 95% CI does not include zero.

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all the variables included when testing our model. Relationship building showed a moderate positive correlation with proactive sensemaking ($r = .56$, $p < .01$), indicating there was only 31% in shared variance.

Next, we performed confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to examine the discriminant validity of our study variables in the model (i.e., CSE, proactive relationship building, proactive sensemaking, LMX, and career mentoring). Among these variables, CSE, proactive relationship, proactive sensemaking, and LMX are multidimensional constructs. Prior research has typically treated these constructs as global rather than examining them at the dimensional level (e.g.,

Ashford & Black, 1996; Judge et al., 2003; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Accordingly, modeling these constructs as higher-order factors, with their respective dimensions specified as lower-order constructs, is more appropriate than treating each dimension as a separate variable in the analyses (Williams et al., 2026). However, because these constructs are measured with a relatively large number of items, assessing the measurement model at the item level may introduce issues such as reduced reliability, increased model complexity, and lower statistical power. Item parceling has been suggested as an effective approach to address these concerns (Little et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2026). While there have been debates on whether item parceling should be used (e.g., Hall et al., 1999; Little et al., 2002; Marsh et al., 2013; Weijters & Baumgartner, 2022), scholars do recognize both pros and cons of doing so. As Little et al. (2013, p. 285) noted, "no absolute pro or con stance is warranted. Parcels are an analytical tool like any other. There are circumstances in which parceling is useful and those when it is not." In this regard, prior research agrees that parceling is appropriate when the structure of the variable is already well-established (Little et al., 2013; Williams & O'Boyle, 2008).

For multidimensional constructs with established structures, scholars adopt one of two parceling strategies: (a) homogeneous parceling, in which items belonging to the same lower-order dimension are combined to form a parcel; and (b) heterogeneous parceling, in which items from different lower-order dimensions are combined to form a parcel (Williams & O'Boyle, 2008). Research noted that "heterogeneous parcels should often be given priority over homogeneous parcels," as it "provides a good way to improve the measurement of the latent variable by including meaningful specific variance in the assessment of the MDC [multidimensional construct]" (Williams et al., 2026, p. 1353) (Cole et al., 2016; Williams et al.,

2008). Following this recommendation, we adopted the heterogeneous parceling approach[1]. Using the random assignment procedure (Williams et al., 2026), items from each subdimension were distributed across parcels such that each parcel captured all the facets of a multidimensional construct. This approach resulted in three parcels for proactive relationship building, four parcels for proactive sensemaking, three parcels for LMX, and three parcels for CSE. Our results show that our 5-factor model had an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{(109)} = 176.135$, RMSEA = .056, CFI = .957, SRMR = .059), and fit better than alternative models such as a 3-factor model that combined the variables at the front-end of the model (relationship building, sensemaking, CSE) into one factor ($\chi^2_{(116)} = 432.661$, RMSEA = .118, CFI = .797, SRMR = .113; $\Delta\chi^2_{(7)} = 256.526$, $p < .01$), a 4-factor model that combined the variables (LMX, career mentoring) at the back-end of the model into one factor ($\chi^2_{(113)} = 294.192$, RMSEA = .091, CFI = .884, SRMR = .075; $\Delta\chi^2_{(4)} = 118.057$, $p < .01$), a 2-factor model that combined the variables at the front-end of the model into one factor, and the variables at the back-end into the other factor ($\chi^2_{(118)} = 543.901$, RMSEA = .136, CFI = .727, SRMR = .121; $\Delta\chi^2_{(9)} = 367.766$, $p < .01$), and a single-factor model with all variables loading on the same factor ($\chi^2_{(119)} = 1021.586$, RMSEA = .197, CFI = .422, SRMR = .209; $\Delta\chi^2_{(10)} = 845.451$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that our variables are empirically distinct.

Hypotheses Testing

[1] For robustness check, we also followed the other approach—that is, homogeneous parceling strategy—to create three parcels for proactive relationship building, two parcels for proactive sensemaking, four parcels for LMX, and four parcels for CSE. Our results show that our 5-factor model had an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{(109)} = 204.723$, RMSEA = .067, CFI = .901, SRMR = .069), and fit better than alternative models such as a 3-factor model that combined the variables at the front-end of the model (i.e., relationship building, sensemaking, CSE) into one factor ($\chi^2_{(116)} = 309.362$, RMSEA = .092, CFI = .801, SRMR = .108; $\Delta\chi^2_{(7)} = 104.639$, $p < .01$), a 4-factor model that combined the variables (i.e., LMX, career mentoring) at the back-end of the model into one factor ($\chi^2_{(113)} = 282.843$, RMSEA = .088, CFI = .825, SRMR = .075; $\Delta\chi^2_{(4)} = 78.12$, $p < .01$), a 2-factor model that combined the variables at the front-end of the model into one factor, and the variables at the back-end into the other factor ($\chi^2_{(118)} = 384.748$, RMSEA = .108, CFI = .725, SRMR = .111; $\Delta\chi^2_{(9)} = 180.025$, $p < .01$), and a single-factor model with all variables loading on the same factor ($\chi^2_{(119)} = 544.075$, RMSEA = .135, CFI = .562, SRMR = .127; $\Delta\chi^2_{(10)} = 339.352$, $p < .01$). Similarly, these results also support the distinctiveness of our constructs.

Table 2 provides the effect estimates. The interaction between proactive relationship building and CSE was significantly related to LMX (b = 1.69, *S.E.* = .37, p < .001). Figure 2 further shows that the association between proactive relationship building and LMX is positive when CSE is higher (b = .86, *S.E.* = .22, p < .001), but negative when CSE is lower (b = -.97, *S.E.* = .32, p = .002). The effect for higher CSE is consistent with the hypothesis, but for lower CSE, we predicted a weaker positive effect when the actual results showed a significant negative slope. As such, Hypothesis 1 received partial support.

Table 2 also shows that the interaction between proactive sensemaking and CSE is significantly related to LMX (b = -1.52, *S.E.* = .45, p = .001). Figure 3 shows that the relation between proactive sensemaking and LMX is positive when CSE was lower (b = .86, *S.E.* = .36, p = .017), but negative when CSE is higher (b = -.78, *S.E.* = .21, p < .001). Thus, Hypothesis 2 received partial support because we had hypothesized that for higher CSE, the slope would be positive, but weaker than for lower CSE newcomers. The negative slope for higher CSE newcomers was not anticipated.

In turn, as shown in Table 2, after controlling the baseline level of supervisor's career mentoring at T1, LMX has a positive association with supervisors' career mentoring at T2 (b = .92, *S.E.* = .09, p < .001). Further, our results show that the indirect relation of proactive relationship building with supervisors' career mentoring via LMX is positive when CSE is higher (*estimate* = .79, 95% CI: [.367, 1.247]), but negative when CSE is lower (*estimate* = -.89, 95% CI: [-1.497, -.304]). The index of moderated mediation (*estimate* = 1.55, 95% CI: [.858, 2.303]) indicates that the difference between these two indirect effects is significant. Hypothesis 3a was partially supported.

Finally, the indirect relation of proactive sensemaking with supervisors' career mentoring via LMX is positive when CSE is lower (*estimate* = .79, 95% CI: [.143, 1.470]), but negative when CSE is higher (*estimate* = -.72, 95% CI: [-1.126, -.323]). The index of moderated mediation (*estimate* = -1.40, 95% CI: [-2.247, -.594]) suggests that the difference between these two indirect effects is significant. Hypothesis 3b was partially supported.

Supplementary Analyses

Aligned with our conceptual focus and prior research (e.g., Bauer et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 2018; Eisenberger et al., 2010; Liden et al., 2006), we examined LMX as a holistic relational construct. Yet, as this measure includes four dimensions (i.e., affect, contribution, loyalty, professional respect), we also re-ran our analyses by modeling each dimension separately. The results are similar across all four dimensions and largely consistent with the results reported in the prior section for global LMX (see our supplemental document for details). These results suggest that our main results are robust across the individual dimensions of LMX and further support the appropriateness of treating LMX as a holistic construct in our analyses.

Discussion

Integrating resource-based and interactionist perspectives on newcomer socialization, we proposed that different proactive behaviors are effective in developing high LMX relationships and subsequent career mentoring received depending on the CSE level of the newcomer. Specifically, proactive relationship building is more effective for higher CSE newcomers, while proactive sensemaking is more beneficial for lower CSE newcomers. Our analyses of time-lagged data collected at four time points from a sample of 195 blue-collar newcomers largely supports our research model.

Theoretical Implications

First, we challenge the widely held "one-size-fits-all" prescription that encourages newcomers to engage broadly and indiscriminately in proactive behaviors to facilitate adjustment and socialization outcomes, regardless of individual differences (Cai et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2023). Rather than assuming that more proactivity is universally beneficial, we argue that newcomers may differentially benefit from different types of proactive behaviors they enact, because they enter organizations with differing levels of personal resources, as reflected in their CSE. Integrating a resource-based view into an interactionist (P-E fit) perspective, our theorizing indicates that proactive relationship building functions as a resource-capitalizing strategy that is beneficial for higher-CSE newcomers, enabling them to signal their availability of personal resources to supervisors and thereby foster high-quality LMX relationships. In contrast, proactive sensemaking operates as a resource-compensating strategy that disproportionately benefits lower-CSE newcomers by helping them secure resources (e.g., clarity, guidelines) needed to facilitate an effective working relationship. Consistent with these theoretical insights, our results demonstrate that the effectiveness of proactivity depends not simply on whether newcomers are proactive, but on whether their behaviors align with their personal resource availability. By conceptualizing proactivity as a process of resource alignment through which individuals either leverage their availability of, or compensate for lack of, personal resources, our study advances a more nuanced understanding of newcomer proactivity. Our results suggest that the undifferentiated views of proactivity as being effective for all newcomers be revised by recognizing different proactivity pathways based on newcomer personal resources in the development of positive working relationships with leaders.

Second, we introduce a diversity and equity lens to the study of newcomer proactivity, an area that has received relatively limited attention in prior research. Contemporary organizations

are comprised of employees who differ substantially in dispositional characteristics and personal resources, yet socialization research has often implicitly reflected a deficit-oriented perspective that casts some newcomers as naturally advantaged and others as inherently disadvantaged. For example, prior work consistently shows that individuals lower in CSE tend to experience less favorable adjustment outcomes than their higher-CSE counterparts (Bauer et al., 2025; Fang et al., 2011; Fang et al., 2017). Although these findings are largely descriptive, they may unintentionally reinforce negative assumptions about the capabilities and developmental potential of lower-CSE employees. In contrast, our framework challenges the notion that such newcomers are intrinsically less capable of successful socialization. We argue that disadvantages associated with lower personal resources can be mitigated through proactive behavioral choices. We identify pathways through which lower-CSE newcomers can compensate for resource limitations by engaging proactivity that better aligns with their constraints, thereby enabling them to cultivate high-quality LMX relationships. More broadly, our findings demonstrate that newcomers with different personalities can attain similarly positive relational outcomes through different behavioral routes, rather than through a single optimal strategy. By shifting the focus from who newcomers are to how they act in context, our study offers a more inclusive view of newcomer effectiveness that recognizes heterogeneity in pathways to success and reduces the risk of stigmatizing employees who do not possess traditionally valued dispositional traits.

Our focus on blue-collar workers responds to longstanding calls for greater attention to such samples in the socialization literature (Bauer & Taylor, 2001; Bauer et al., 2025). Although research on LMX among blue-collar employees remains limited, existing evidence suggests that these workers are no less motivated than white-collar employees to develop high-quality relationships with their supervisors. For example, Vidyarthi et al. (2010) found that steel

workers' LMX relative to their coworkers predicted higher performance and citizenship behavior, and Xu et al. (2019) reported that hotel employees, working primarily in housekeeping, food, and beverage roles and engaged more in proactive behaviors developed stronger LMX relationships. Particularly scarce, however, is research examining how blue-collar newcomers use proactivity to build high-quality LMX during the socialization period. Most prior studies on LMX development have relied on white-collar samples (e.g., Bauer & Green, 1996; Dansereau et al., 1975; Liden et al., 1993) or student samples (Nahrgang et al., 2009), leaving the applicability of these insights to blue-collar contexts uncertain. By examining how proactive behaviors shape the adjustment experiences of blue-collar newcomers, the present study addresses this gap and extends the external validity of newcomer socialization theory. Although substantial evidence demonstrates the benefits of newcomer proactivity (Bauer et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2023), our findings indicate that blue-collar newcomers likewise derive positive relational outcomes, provided they engage in forms of proactivity that align with their personal resources. In this way, our study shows that the importance of proactive socialization behaviors is not confined to knowledge-intensive jobs but extends to blue-collar settings, while also underscoring that their effectiveness depends on the type of behavior enacted rather than proactivity per se.

We also discovered some unexpected findings, which indicate opportunities to reflect on our prior arguments and are "helpful to continued theoretical development" (Geletkanycz & Tepper, 2012, p. 258) to further advance the literature on newcomer socialization and employee proactivity. Contrary to our hypothesis, we found a negative association between proactive relationship building and LMX for lower-CSE newcomers. It appears that proactive relationship building may serve as a "magnifying lens" that makes the attributes of lower-CSE newcomers more salient. For example, as lower-CSE newcomers tend to appear less confident, more

anxious, less socially skilled, or less self-assured, proactive relationship building may unintentionally draw more attention to those qualities. Rather than helping them create better relationships and accumulate social capital at work, their attempts to network or connect may amplify the very traits that make it harder to develop high-quality LMX. The failure for proactive relationship building to result in a higher quality LMX relationship was linked with less supervisor career mentoring. In addition to struggling to convey a positive image and secure necessary social capital, lower-CSE newcomers may encounter difficulties navigating the complex social dynamics of the organization, such as dealing with cliques, office politics, and conflicting values (Ellis et al., 2015). These challenges can be particularly overwhelming for newcomers who lack confidence in their ability to handle them. Consequently, these employees may experience unnecessary stress and withdraw from their working relationships.

Another unexpected finding relates to the negative association between proactive sensemaking and LMX for higher-CSE newcomers, which is accompanied by decreases in supervisor career mentoring. It has been found that supervisors respond negatively to self-focused impression management tactics used by followers (Wayne & Liden, 1995). Higher-CSE newcomers, who possess strong self-confidence and positive self-views, may inadvertently harm the quality of the LMX relationship by frequently seeking feedback and information. Indeed, higher CSE newcomers are likely to see feedback seeking as an opportunity to validate their positive self-views, for instance, by emphasizing past accomplishments. These self-promoting behaviors, though appropriate in contexts such as networking activities, are especially likely to be perceived by supervisors as manipulative, giving the impression that they are fishing for compliments to manage their supervisor's impression of them (Lam et al., 2007; Morrison & Bies, 1991), which can in turn be detrimental to LMX relationships (Lam et al., 2007).

The unexpected findings discussed above highlight the potential downsides of newcomer proactivity. While prior studies have mainly emphasized the positive effects of employee proactive behaviors, recent research suggests that these behaviors may also entail personal, social, and performance costs, such as increased stress, poor public image, and resource depletion (Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012). For example, Sun et al. (2021) found that being proactive is associated with higher task performance and LMX quality, which can trigger envy from coworkers when the proactive employees are perceived as having lower prosocial motivation. Considering these unintended consequences, Bolino and colleagues (2010) cautioned against encouraging all employees to engage in proactive behaviors. Our unexpected results and post-hoc explanations contribute to this growing body of research on the dark sides of proactivity (Bolino et al., 2010; Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012; Parker et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2021). Our findings suggest that certain proactive behaviors can be beneficial to some newcomers, while being simultaneously detrimental to other newcomers.

Finally, although these observations are preliminary, it is worth considering where higher- and lower-CSE newcomers stand in terms of LMX quality when they engage in relatively low levels of proactive relationship building or proactive sensemaking. As shown in Figure 2, when proactive relationship building is low (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean), lower-CSE newcomers appear to report higher-quality LMX relationships than their higher-CSE counterparts. One plausible explanation is that supervisors may perceive higher-CSE newcomers, who tend to exhibit greater competence and confidence, as more threatening when these newcomers show relatively little interest in building relationships with their supervisors or other organizational members. In contrast, Figure 3 shows that when proactive sensemaking is low, higher-CSE newcomers appear to report higher-quality LMX relationships than their lower-CSE

counterparts. This is consistent with our resource compensation theoretical logic. When newcomers engage in little proactive sensemaking, lower-CSE newcomers have fewer opportunities to obtain the information, feedback, and guidance that can compensate for their relatively limited personal resources and help them meet supervisors' expectations, thereby placing them at a disadvantage in developing high-quality LMX relationships.

Practical Implications

Our findings have important practical implications. We challenge the common managerial practice of encouraging all newcomers to "be proactive" in the same way. Instead, managers should recognize that the effectiveness of proactive behaviors depends on alignment between the behavior enacted and the newcomer's personal resources. In practice, this means moving from a quantity-focused approach ("be more proactive") to a fit-focused approach ("be proactive in ways that suit you"). Managers can incorporate this perspective into onboarding programs by providing guidance on different forms of proactivity, such as relationship building versus sensemaking, and helping newcomers assess which strategies are likely to be most effective given their personal strengths and weaknesses given their traits (e.g., CSE).

Organizations can support managers in this process. For example, organizations can administer tools that assess newcomers' levels of CSE, and with newcomers' consent, share these insights with direct supervisors. At the same time, organizations should recognize that such disclosure may have both benefits and risks. For instance, identifying a newcomer as having relatively low CSE could introduce stigma, which potentially undermines the benefits that proactive sensemaking might otherwise provide. Conversely, greater awareness of newcomers' CSE may foster supervisor empathy and understanding, particularly when interpreting newcomers' efforts to build relationships. To help managers navigate these possibilities,

organizations should provide targeted training on interpreting CSE-related information and integrating it into socialization practices without labeling newcomers or constraining their opportunities. For example, managers could be trained to treat CSE information as a cue for tailoring support rather than as a basis for judging newcomers' potential. When working with lower-CSE newcomers, managers might normalize and encourage information and feedback seeking, respond constructively to their sensemaking efforts, and avoid interpreting frequent questions as evidence of incompetence. When working with higher-CSE newcomers, managers might provide greater opportunities for social networking and demonstrate their strengths. These practices can help managers use CSE information to facilitate newcomer–environment fit while reducing the risk that CSE assessments become self-fulfilling labels (Eden, 1992).

The unexpected findings in our study also offer cautionary lessons. Encouraging the "wrong" type of proactivity for a given individual may not merely be ineffective but actively harmful. Lower-CSE newcomers who attempt intensive relationship building without sufficient confidence or social capital may experience stress, social missteps, or withdrawal, ultimately damaging their relationships with supervisors. Conversely, higher-CSE newcomers who engage excessively in feedback and information seeking may be perceived as manipulative or overly self-focused, undermining trust. These patterns suggest that organizations should not only encourage appropriate forms of proactivity but also monitor for signs of strain, misinterpretation, or negative reactions. Training programs for supervisors can help them recognize when proactive efforts are backfiring and intervene constructively, for example, by clarifying expectations, offering reassurance, or redirecting newcomers toward more suitable behaviors.

Potential Limitations and Future Directions

Although our study has a number of strengths, including the collection of data prior to entry, at entry, 3 months post entry and 6 months after entry, it also has some potential limitations. First, our sample size of 195 apprentices is relatively small, due to the time-lagged research design and the lengthy time span of our surveys. Yet, the support we found for the relationships of our model suggests that the sample size may not be a significant concern. Our post-hoc power analyses also suggest that the statistical power to detect significant relationships exceeded .80 across all modeled paths, which again suggests that the relatively small sample size may not be a major concern to the validity of our findings (Cohen, 1992). In fact, the small sample size may suggest that our results are conservative, and we expect that a larger sample size would further increase our likelihood of detecting these significant relationships.

Second, consistent with established practices in management studies (e.g., Baer et al., 2015; Barnes et al., 2015; Cooper et al., 2018; Leigh & Melwani, 2022; Liden et al., 2014; Tröster & Van Quaquebeke, 2021), we rely on theory and time-separated data (4 time points) to test our moderated mediation relationships. Overall, our research design helps to reduce common methods bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). That said, our model could be further strengthened through the use of a panel design, measuring all variables across multiple time periods, to bolster causal inferences, and methods such as latent growth or latent change score modeling to test temporal changes. Such an approach would allow us to track how changes in proactive relationship building or proactive sensemaking predict changes in LMX and, subsequently, supervisor career mentoring over time. Yet, practical constraints, such as organizational reluctance and restrictions on survey length, make panel designs rare in studies of newcomers.

We acknowledge that another potential limitation of our research may be that we were not able to collect data from supervisors and thus could not directly assess the degree of fit

achieved between newcomers and their supervisors. Despite these limitations, we contend that the research design of the current investigation is valid for the following reasons (a) Rather than interpret fit as a static end state, we align with prior research to conceptualize fit as a navigation and emergent process (e.g., Yu & Davis, 2016) reflected in relational outcomes, most notably the development of high-quality exchange relationships (e.g., Zhang et al., 2012); (b) LMX captures the extent of mutual trust, support, and obligation in the supervisor-newcomer relationship, and high-quality LMX, in particular, has been widely regarded as evidence that supervisors perceive the employee as a valuable exchange partner and that the employee has successfully adapted to supervisory desires (Liden et al., 1993). It is thus reasonable to use LMX as a meaningful indicator that alignment between the supervisor and follower has been achieved; and (c) the development of our research model is guided by two widely accepted tenets in P-E fit theory (van Vianen et al., 2018), with details in theoretical logics substantiated by well-established perspectives, insights, and empirical findings from the research on newcomer socialization, LMX and CSE. Although some assumptions were not directly tested in our study (e.g., that supervisors prefer followers who can contribute valuable resources to the exchange relationship), these assumptions are strongly grounded in prior theory and evidence (e.g., Wilson et al., 2010), rather than being speculative claims, which thus provide a reasonable foundation for our theorizing. Taken together, our model development has benefited greatly from the core tenets of P-E fit and is firmly anchored in well-established scholarship across related research domains.

Another potential direction in which our P–E fit perspective can be extended is to more fully capture the bidirectional nature of fit. Our theorizing focuses primarily on the newcomer side of the fit process, that is, how newcomers' proactive behaviors, in conjunction with their CSE, may help them contribute resources valued by supervisors and thus develop high-quality

LMX relationships. Yet fit also depends on the extent to which the work environment supplies resources that meet individuals' needs. This suggests that supervisors also shape the fit between them and their supervisor. Indeed, although not conducted in the context of newcomer socialization, emerging research has applied the P-E fit perspective to emphasize the importance of supervisor's aligning their display of leadership behaviors with the need or desire of their followers in facilitating followers' individual effectiveness at work (e.g., Lambert et al., 2012; Lennard et al., 2022; Tepper et al, 2018). Consistent with these prior studies, we focused on one party of the supervisor–follower dyad, rather than both, as a deliberate choice to maintain theoretical parsimony in developing our novel contributions. Indeed, research on LMX agreement has shown considerable variability (Yuan et al., 2023), with some leaders and followers highly agreeing on whether they have a high or low quality LMX, in other dyads either the leader or follower perceive a high quality LMX while the other party views it as low quality. Such lack of agreement has implications for future research on fit as it relates to the newcomer socialization process. That said, we have considered an important supervisory factor in the development of LMX relationships (i.e., supervisory interactional justice; Erdogan et al., 2006) and controlled it when testing our model.

Finally, because the average age of our sample of blue-collar apprentice newcomers was only 18, and most had never held a full-time job before, concerns about the generalizability of our research findings may arise due to the sample's unique characteristics. However, neither our theoretical arguments nor their underlying assumptions are population- or context-specific. Indeed, there seems to be a consensus among the seminal work (Ashford & Black, 1996) and recent meta-analytic reviews (e.g., Bauer et al., 2025; Zhao et al, 2023) that proactive socialization behaviors are important and can be beneficial for newcomers across organizations

and occupations. Further, although we argue that proactive socialization behaviors are particularly likely to reflect responses to leaders' expectations given the uniqueness of our blue-collar newcomer sample, we do not believe that such an expectation is restricted to our sample, as extant research has suggested that leaders in other industries also value proactive behaviors when developing LMX relationships (Song et al., 2017; Yin et al., 2024). In fact, as the implications of engaging in proactive behaviors are relatively well-established for newcomers in non–blue-collar positions, our study extends these insights to a new population. Also, because the participants in the research had little or no previous job experience, their responses to our survey questions were not influenced by their experience in prior jobs. So, rather than offering insights with limited generalizability, our study enhances the generalizability of existing research on proactive socialization behaviors by showing their relevance in a blue-collar context.

Conclusions

Integrating the resource-based and interactionist perspectives on newcomer socialization, we examine why proactive relationship building and proactive sensemaking are more effective for newcomers with higher and lower levels of CSE, respectively, for enhancing LMX quality and receiving career mentoring from supervisors. Our findings reveal that whereas relationship building is beneficial for higher-CSE newcomers, it can have detrimental effects for lower-CSE newcomers. In contrast, proactive sensemaking is beneficial for lower-CSE newcomers but detrimental for higher-CSE newcomers. Our research can encourage further theory development and testing related to the divergent effects of proactive behaviors on newcomers.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables

		M	***SD***	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Supervisor interactional justice (T1*, control*)	4.06	.75	(.90)						
2	Supervisor career mentoring (T1, *control*)	3.68	.84	.63**	(.81)					
3	CSE (T0)	3.38	.54	-.00	.01	(.75)				
4	Proactive relationship building (T1)	3.27	.68	.37**	.46**	.05	(.76)			
5	Proactive sensemaking (T1)	3.31	.76	.20**	.39**	.07	.56**	(.80)		
6	LMX (T2)	3.62	.71	.02	-.02	.20*	-.02	-.02	(.74)	
7	Supervisor career mentoring (T3)	3.60	.79	.03	-.01	.23**	-.08	.07	.66**	(.84)

Notes. ***N*** = 139-195; N_{T0} and N_{T1} = 195; N_{T2} = 151; N_{T3} = 139. CSE = Core self-evaluations; LMX = Leader-member exchange. T0 = Pre-entry; T1 = within 2-4 weeks post entry; T2 = 3 months post entry; T3 = 6 months post entry. The Cronbach alpha estimates of the included variables are presented in parentheses along the diagonal line of the table.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Results of Hypotheses Testing

	LMX (T2)		**Supervisor career mentoring (T3)**	
	b	*S.E.*	*b*	*S.E.*
Control variables				
Supervisor interactional justice (T1)	.07	.09		
Supervisor career mentoring (T1)			.04	.09
Independent variables				
Proactive relationship building (T1)	-.06	.19	-.35*	.17
Proactive sensemaking (T1)	.04	.17	.25*	.12
Moderator				
CSE (T0)	.35**	.14	.17	.14
Interaction terms				
Proactive relationship building × CSE	1.69**	.37		
Proactive sensemaking × CSE	-1.52**	.45		
Mediator				
LMX (T2)			.92**	.09
R-square	.42**		.72**	

Notes. *N* = 195. CSE = Core self-evaluations; LMX = Leader-member exchange. T0 = Pre-entry; T1 = within 2-4 weeks post entry; T2 = 3 months post entry; T3 = 6 months post entry.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$.

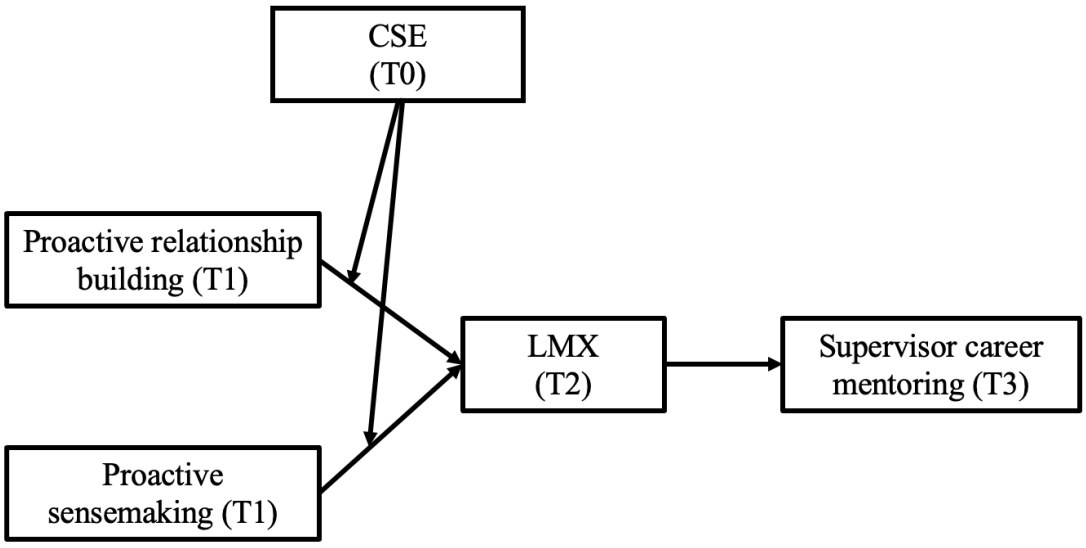


Figure 1. Research model.
Note. CSE = Core self-evaluations; LMX = Leader-member exchange. T0 = Pre-entry; T1 = within 2-4 weeks post entry; T2 = 3 months post entry; T3 = 6 months post entry.

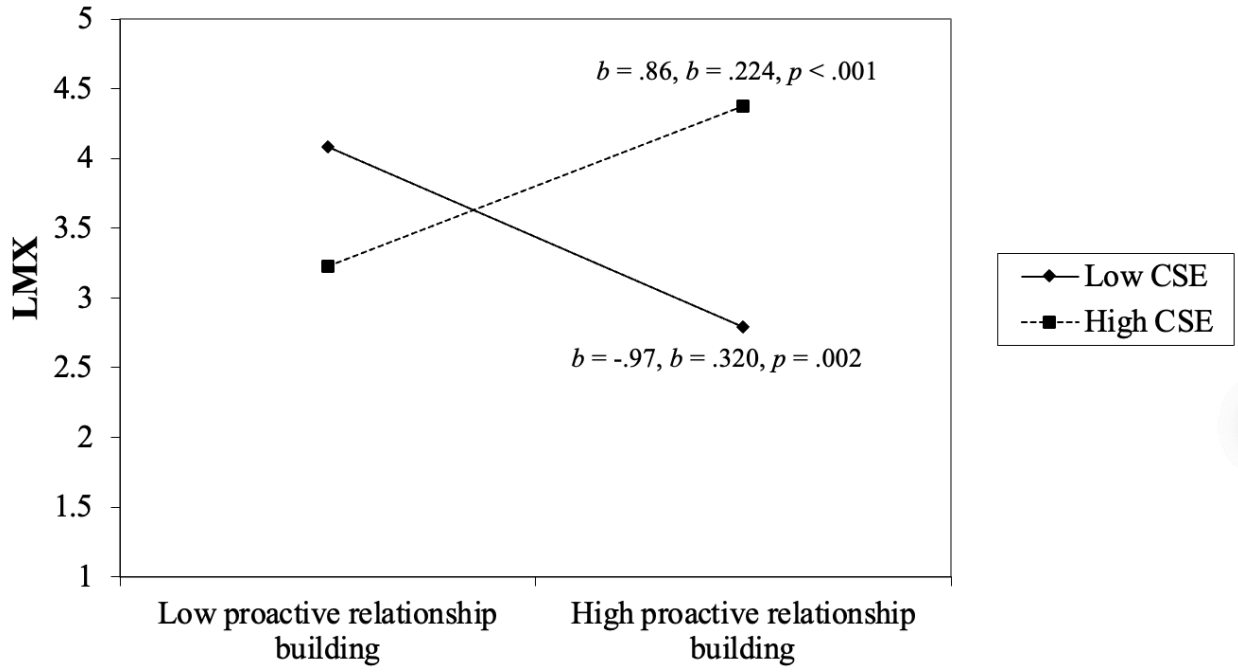


Figure 2. The interaction effect of proactive relationship building and CSE on LMX.

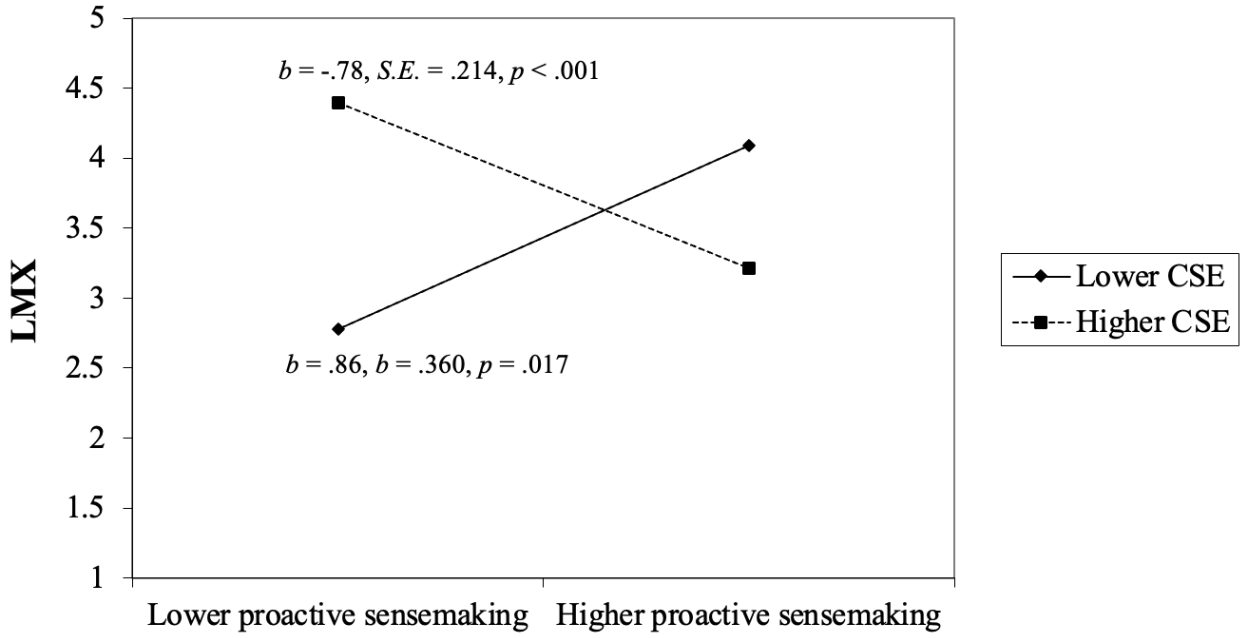


Figure 3. The interaction effect of proactive sensemaking and CSE on LMX.