What makes teams proactive?
The role of transformational leadership, psychological safety and felt responsibility for change

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THEORY
• Employee proactivity is increasingly important for organizations in order to adapt in uncertain and dynamically changing environments (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007).
• Despite considerable research about individual factors and contextual characteristics which foster proactive behavior, only few studies have focused on proactivity at the team level (Bindl & Parker, 2010).
• Team proactive behavior is defined as the extent to which teams engage in self-starting and future-focused action that aims to change the external situation or the team itself (Williams, Parker, & Turner, 2010).
• Examples of team proactive behavior include the team developing new and more efficient work methods, making innovative suggestions to enhance cooperation with other teams, identifying opportunities to improve organizational effectiveness as well as taking initiative to prevent problems for the organization (Hyatt & Ruddy, 1997).
• Transformational leadership has been shown to predict team proactive behavior. However, until now only favorable interpersonal norms have been examined as a mediator of this relationship at the team level (Williams et al., 2010).
• Transformational leaders encourage and intellectually stimulate followers to challenge the status quo, question assumptions, take risks, suggest new ways of doing things and become innovative problem solvers (Bass, 1995). By enhancing identification and commitment they implement a sense of ownership and responsibility for constructive change and, as a consequence, should be able to induce proactive behavior in teams.
• Leaders are a critical influence on psychological safety, i.e. the shared belief that a team is safe for taking interpersonal risks (Edmondson, 2002). Specifically, via intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration transformational leaders create a psychologically safe team climate, where people are open to diverse ideas by valuing team members’ divergent views, create open exchanges of information, and resolve conflicts effectively (Bass & Riggio, 2006). A psychologically safe climate has been shown to be a necessary precondition for proactive behavior (Kark & Cameli, 2009).

METHOD
Sample: 189 teams from a German non-profit organization (1336 individuals). Average response rate per team = 64.2%.

Measures:
• Transformational leadership (20 items; Bass & Avolio, 1995, \( r_{\text{wg}} = .83 \))
• Felt responsibility for constructive change (2 items; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; \( r_{\text{wg}} = .71 \))
• Psychological safety (7 items; Edmondson, 1999; \( r_{\text{wg}} = .85 \))
• Team proactive behavior (6 items; based on Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007 and Morrison & Phelps, 1999; \( r_{\text{wg}} = .86 \))

Analytical strategy: Multiple mediation analysis via bootstrapping (5000 bootstrap samples, Preacher & Hayes, 2008)

RESULTS

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<th>2.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>(.99)</td>
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<td>2. Felt Responsibility for Change</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
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<td>3. Psychological Safety</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td>(.40)</td>
<td>(.92)</td>
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<td>4. Proactive Behavior</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
<td>(.51)</td>
<td>(.75)</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
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Note. \( N_{\text{grand}} = 189 \) (\( N_{\text{individual}} = 1336 \)). Figures in parentheses represent a-reliabilities.

\( * p < .05; ** p < .01 \) (two-tailed). \( r = .54. \)

DISCUSSION
• Transformational leadership is strongly related to team proactive behavior. This effect is partially mediated by the mean level of felt responsibility for change within the team and the team’s climate of psychological safety.
• Transformational leaders foster team proactive behavior via effects on team members (i.e. mean level of felt responsibility for change) as well as on team-level emergent states (i.e. psychological safety).
• This complements research showing that specific team-level variables (e.g. cohesion, potency and reflexivity) mediate the effects of transformational leadership on group effectiveness (Schippers et al. 2008).

Limitations:
• Cross-sectional design study prevents causal interpretation.

Future research:
• Validating results using supervisor rating or objective measures of team proactive performance.
• Another avenue for future research would be the inclusion of potential moderators for the effects of transformational leadership to proactive behavior (e.g. need for change) and exploring multi-level and cross-level effects of transformational leadership.