

LEADER PERFECTIONISM—FRIEND OR FOE OF EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY? LOCUS OF CONTROL AS A KEY CONTINGENCY

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This research aims to explain whether leader perfectionism toward employees fosters or hinders employee creativity. From a self-regulation perspective, we theorize that depending on employees' locus of control, leader perfectionism can influence two regulatory states of employees (i.e., engagement and emotional exhaustion) linearly or curvilinearly, which in turn affect their creativity in opposite directions. In a lab experiment and a multisource, multiwave field study, we found that for internals, leader perfectionism had a curvilinear effect on their engagement (but no effect on emotional exhaustion) and subsequent creativity such that the effect was positive but became weaker when leader perfectionism was extreme. By contrast, we found partial support across the two studies that for externals, leader perfectionism had a positive effect on their emotional exhaustion (but no effect on engagement), which undermined their creativity. We discuss the theoretical contributions of this research and its practical implications for organizations.

Steve Jobs . . . built the world's most creative company. And he was able to infuse into its DNA the design sensibilities, perfectionism, and imagination that make it likely to be, even decades from now, the

company that thrives best at the intersection of art-
istry and technology.

(Isaacson, 2011)

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Given the fierce competition in today's business environment, managers tend to require their subordinates to create novel and useful ideas, products, and services (i.e., creativity; Zhou & George, 2001), to go beyond customers' expectations, and to achieve standards that are insurmountable for competitors. Therefore, leaders tend to demonstrate a perfectionistic tendency toward employees (leader perfectionism) by establishing exceptionally high standards for them, demanding that they meet these standards, and expecting them to deliver the best possible outcomes without errors or defects (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Stoeber & Corr, 2015). Researchers have argued that

“perfectionism is becoming increasingly legitimized in today’s workplaces” (Ocampo, Wang, Kiazad, Restubog, & Ashkanasy, 2020: 145). Famous examples of perfectionistic leaders include Steve Jobs (Isaacson, 2011) and Elon Musk (Vance, 2015), and leaders in the East, such as Kazuo Inamori, Jun Lei, and Mingzhu Dong. Mingzhu Dong, the chair of Gree Electric Appliances Inc., the world’s largest residential air conditioner manufacturer, stated that “the pursuit of perfection is endless as a one percent chance of making mistakes can lead to a hundred percent chance of harm to our customers” (Xinhuanet.com, 2019).

Leaders, especially those in rapidly evolving industries, often exhibit a perfectionistic tendency toward their employees to foster their creativity (Isaacson, 2011; Vance, 2015) because the defining features of leader perfectionism make it particularly relevant for employees’ regulation of their efforts and behavior toward creativity. Inherent in leaders’ perfectionistic requirements are their dissatisfaction with the status quo and pursuit of superior outcomes. To meet these requirements, employees need to move away from existing solutions and try different alternatives—that is, to be creative. Research provides indirect evidence that one’s pursuit of perfection enhances engagement (Childs & Stoeber, 2010), active problem-focused coping (Prud’homme, Dunkley, Bernier, Berg, Ghelerter, & Starrs, 2017), and innovative behavior (Chang, Chou, Liou, & Tu, 2016), all of which can promote creativity (Bakker, Petrou, Op den Kamp, & Tims, 2020; Li, Chen, & Lai, 2018). Therefore, perfectionism shown by leaders has the potential to foster employee creativity.

Nevertheless, leader perfectionism could also harm employees’ creativity. Given that the standards of perfectionistic leaders are exceptionally high, employees may find such requirements overwhelming and feel depleted (De Jonge, Bosma, Peter, & Siegrist, 2000), which could increase the difficulty of self-regulation needed for generating novel ideas (Kim, Kim, & Yun, 2017). Perfectionism research also provides indirect evidence that one’s pursuit of perfection increases stress (Chang et al., 2016; Schwenke, Ashby, & Gnilka, 2014) and emotional exhaustion (Flaxman, Ménard, Bond, & Kinman, 2012), which can inhibit creativity (Han, Harms, & Bai, 2017; Herrmann & Felfe, 2014). Accordingly, employees’ creativity could be potentially inhibited when their leader imposes perfectionistic requirements.

These arguments and evidence suggest that whether leader perfectionism can boost or undermine employees’ creativity is inconclusive. We adopt a self-regulation perspective to examine why (influence mechanisms), to whom (an employee’s characteristic

as a moderator), and to what degree (the curvilinear effects) leader perfectionism can affect employee creativity.

First, we identify both positive and negative self-regulatory mechanisms through which leader perfectionism can impact creativity. Self-regulation theory contends that self-regulation starts from a perceived discrepancy between the current and desired states that drives individuals to work toward the desired goal (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Klein, 1989). We argue that leader perfectionism creates such a discrepancy, which triggers the need for employees’ self-regulation to fulfill perfectionistic requirements. However, doing so also consumes personal resources, hence potentially making employees feel depleted (Baumeister, 1998). Therefore, we simultaneously consider the driving and depleting states of self-regulation to explain the effect of leader perfectionism on creativity. Following previous research, we use engagement and emotional exhaustion to capture these two states (e.g., Mitchell, Greenbaum, Vogel, Mawritz, & Keating, 2019; Parke, Weinhardt, Brodsky, Tangirala, & DeVoe, 2018). While engagement reflects a state of “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles” (Kahn, 1990: 694) that can promote creativity (Bakker et al., 2020; Eldor & Harpaz, 2016), emotional exhaustion represents an overall state of being worn out (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) that can undermine creativity (Han et al., 2017; Hur, Moon, & Jun, 2016).

Second, previous research has shown that people’s experiences of these regulatory states vary, thereby highlighting the importance of examining moderating factors (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010). Given that “self-regulation is a controlled process” (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996: 2), a key moderator is a person’s belief in his/her control over what happens in life (i.e., locus of control; Rotter, 1966). Self-regulation theory posits that people with high dispositional self-control have “greater motivation to allocate . . . resources” to self-regulation, and the belief in self-control “serve[s] to insulate a person from the depleting effects of self-control tasks and moderate the ego-depletion effect” (Hagger et al., 2010: 500). Following this logic, we propose that employees who believe they have control over events (i.e., internals) are motivated to engage themselves to pursue perfectionistic goals while being less vulnerable to resource depletion in response to their leaders’ perfectionism. By contrast, those who believe that the events in their lives are determined by external forces (i.e., externals) are less engaged in fulfilling their leaders’ perfectionistic requirements and feel more exhausted.

Finally, we take the level of leader perfectionism into account. Although we predict that internals will be more engaged and less exhausted than externals and ultimately demonstrate higher creativity in reaction to leader perfectionism, a threshold may exist. Self-regulation theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Klein, 1989) indicates that a difficult goal creating a large discrepancy can dampen individuals' expectations of achieving the goal. Accordingly, when perceiving extreme leader perfectionism, internals may feel less motivated and more depleted, which points to the curvilinear effects of leader perfectionism on engagement and emotional exhaustion.

Our conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1. We tested this model in two studies in China given the popularity of perfectionism in Asian countries (Curran & Hill, 2019) and the increasing emphasis on creativity and innovation in Chinese firms (Abrami, Kirby, & McFarlan, 2014).

Our research makes important contributions to the literature. First, this research reconciles the conflicting predictions about and reveals the intricacies inherent in the relationship between leader perfectionism and employee creativity. Building on a self-regulation perspective, our research shows that leader perfectionism can have either positive or negative effects on employee creativity by shaping two regulatory states (i.e., engagement and emotional exhaustion) linearly or curvilinearly contingent on employees' locus of control. We also highlight the importance of adopting a nuanced approach to investigate leaders' impact on employee creativity beyond the uniformly positive or negative and linear effect. Second, research on workplace perfectionism has predominantly focused on individuals' perfectionism toward themselves (Harari, Swider, Steed, & Breidenthal, 2018). We extend this research by examining how leader perfectionism toward employees can affect their experiences and outcomes, thus

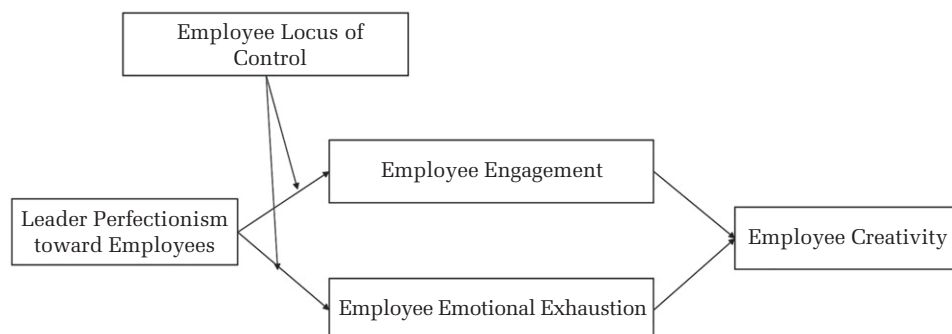
responding to Ocampo et al.'s (2020: 158) assertion that "an interpersonal approach to perfectionism could offer new insights into the impact of perfectionism in supervisor-subordinate dynamics." Third, our study adds to the locus of control literature by showing that internals and externals differ in their self-regulation experiences and creativity outcomes when faced with leader perfectionism, hence demonstrating the motivational limit of internal locus of control.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Conceptualization of Leader Perfectionism

Perfectionism refers to a person's innate desire for perfection and flawlessness (Harari et al., 2018) manifested in similar perfectionistic behaviors toward oneself (self-oriented perfectionism) and others (other-oriented perfectionism) (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). We focus on leader perfectionism toward employees, a form of other-oriented perfectionism, because this concept captures the "interpersonal personality component" of perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991: 456) and can have significant interpersonal implications for employees. According to the extant literature (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Stoeber & Corr, 2015), we define leader perfectionism toward employees as the leader's desire for perfection from employees, which is characterized by leaders' setting exceptionally high standards for employees, persistently demanding they meet those standards, and expecting them to deliver the best possible outcomes without errors or defects. Similar to other leader characteristics (e.g., leaders' narcissism, humility, and humor) (Cooper, Kong, & Crossley, 2018; Resick, Whitman, Weingarden, & Hiller, 2009; Zhang, Ou, Tsui, & Wang, 2017), leader perfectionism is manifested in specific

FIGURE 1
Theoretical Model



behavior toward employees, and employees' individual perceptions of such behavior shape their experiences (Pincus & Ansell, 2003).

Leader perfectionism toward employees is distinct from related leadership styles. While setting high standards is admittedly the "most prominent" aspect of perfectionism (Frost et al., 1990: 450), perfectionism emphasizes excessiveness, which has been used in the literature to suggest that perfectionistic standards are "harsh" (Shoss, Callison, & Witt, 2015: 236) and "difficult to satisfy" (Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham, 2004: 202). Perfectionistic leaders are intolerant of flaws, but this is not necessarily the case for leaders who only set high standards. Leader perfectionism differs from transformational leadership. Transformational leaders encourage employees to transcend personal interests to work for the collective good (Bass, 1985), whereas perfectionistic leaders focus less on collective goals and do not share the core characteristics of transformational leaders, such as conveying a shared vision and giving individualized attention to followers' development. Leader perfectionism also differs from directive leadership. A directive leader "provides followers with specific guidance regarding goals, means of achieving goals, and performance standards" (Martin, Liao, & Campbell, 2013: 1374), whereas a perfectionistic leader may not provide directive instructions or monitor subordinates. Finally, leader perfectionism differs from abusive supervision, which refers to "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors" (Tepper, 2000: 178). Although perfectionistic leaders may blame subordinates for not meeting expectations, they do not perpetrate sustained hostility toward subordinates.

Leader Perfectionism and Employee Creativity: The Dual Self-Regulatory Process

We employ a self-regulation perspective to understand whether leader perfectionism affects employee creativity positively or negatively. Self-regulation theory is a meta-theory that explains the motivational process through which individuals strive for goals or standards (Baumeister, 1998; Carver & Scheier, 1981; Klein, 1989). A central tenet of this theory is that individuals are motivated to reduce the discrepancy between the current state and desired state (goal). However, while their endeavor to reduce the discrepancy can drive individuals to devote themselves to goal achievement, it may require much effort and deplete their energy and other personal resources (Baumeister, 1998). Self-regulation theory further

posits that the extent to which individuals will feel motivated and depleted depends on whether they believe they can control the happenings in their lives (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Hagger et al., 2010).

Drawing on this view, we argue that because leader perfectionism heightens the discrepancy between the current and ideal work outcomes, it can trigger employees' self-regulation of their physical, cognitive, and affective states. Specifically, employees may experience two regulatory states, namely engagement and emotional exhaustion. Engagement is a positive and fulfilling state in which employees bring in their personal selves when performing work roles, invest their energy, and experience connection with their work (Kahn, 1990). Perfectionistic leaders' high demand and emphasis on flawlessness make the discrepancy between the current and desired states salient and pose a challenge for superior outcomes, which could enhance employees' engagement by investing their personal resources comprehensively and intensively into their work (Mitchell et al., 2019; Parke et al., 2018). Emotional exhaustion is an overall state of being worn out, in which people feel physically fatigued, emotionally frustrated, and a loss of cognitive focus (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Perfectionistic leaders' persistent emphasis on superiority and aversion to defects can create performance pressures and lead to employees' emotional exhaustion (Flaxman et al., 2012; Mahmoodi-Shahrehabaki, 2017).

Engagement and emotional exhaustion, in turn, influence employees' creativity in different directions. When engaged, employees demonstrate broad cognitive processes (Parker & Griffin, 2011), allocate extra resources to their work (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016), and are receptive to novel thoughts (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014), which are conducive to creativity (Huang, Krasikova, & Liu, 2016). However, when emotionally exhausted, employees are less likely to think creatively and flexibly and tend to lose enthusiasm for searching for novel solutions to problems (Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002), and hence they exhibit low creativity (Han et al., 2017).

In sum, self-regulation theory and the above arguments indicate that employees' engagement and emotional exhaustion are two regulatory states that can potentially translate the impact of leader perfectionism on employee creativity but in divergent directions. However, whether leader perfectionism eventually affects employee creativity positively or negatively will be determined by the extent to which employees experience these two regulatory states, which is contingent upon their locus of control and the level of leader perfectionism.

The Moderating Effect of Locus of Control and Curvilinear Effect of Leader Perfectionism

Individuals differ in their locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Specifically, individuals with an internal locus of control (i.e., internals) believe that they are causal agents of behaviors and outcomes and are capable of mastering their fate and controlling their external environment. By contrast, individuals with an external locus of control (i.e., externals) believe that their behaviors and outcomes are dominated by external forces, such as fate, luck, and powerful others, and that they are less capable of altering their external environment. Internals and externals differ in their perception of the environment, motivation, tendency to exert effort, and coping strategies, resulting in different work and life experiences and outcomes (for reviews, see Galvin, Randel, Collins, & Johnson, 2018; Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006; Wang, Bowling, & Eschleman, 2010).

The moderating effect on engagement. We predict that leader perfectionism will have a curvilinear effect on engagement for internals but a linear effect for externals. Internals may show greater work engagement in reaction to a perfectionistic leader versus a non-perfectionistic leader, but their engagement tends to decrease when the leader is extremely perfectionistic. By contrast, the more perfectionistic the leader is, the more strongly externals may feel threatened rather than motivated, and this trend is unlikely to stop or reverse.

Specifically, leader perfectionism can increase internals' engagement because they tend to be motivated by the perfectionistic challenges. First, owing to their belief in their control over the environment, internals perceive work situations positively, such as seeing more opportunities than difficulties (Ganster & Fusilier, 1989; Lefcourt, 1976) and evaluating work roles as governed more by themselves than by others (Spreitzer, 1995). Thus, they tend to view their leader's emphasis on perfectionism as an opportunity for learning and feel enthusiastic. Second, because internals believe in their ability to control life events, they are inclined to challenge themselves (Wang et al., 2010). Perfectionistic leaders' high standards fit their desire to take on challenges. Lastly, internals are optimistic about the efforts–outcomes link (i.e., expectancy; Ng et al., 2006), which is the foundation of work motivation and effort investment (Klein, 1989; Vroom, 1964). As a result, internals working with perfectionistic leaders tend to show increased engagement by persistently regulating themselves toward achieving the desired outcomes.

Nevertheless, leader perfectionism may not further enhance and could even harm internals' engagement when it is too high. First, extremely perfectionistic leaders' paramount emphasis on flawlessness may create a huge discrepancy between the desired level of performance and the level that internals have confidence to achieve. The considerable discrepancy, in combination with the insufficient personal resources to achieve the seemingly unobtainable status, will prevent internals from continually increasing their engagement or even make them disengage. In line with this stance, research has shown that employees are hardly motivated when a goal exceeds their capacity (Latham & Locke, 2006), and unobtainable goals can increase individuals' disengagement (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Wright, 2004). Second, extremely perfectionistic leaders are too rigid and obsessed with superiority, which will attenuate internals' expectancy of the efforts–outcomes link and deprive their sense of achievement, thereby reducing their engagement. Third, when work stressors, such as those from perfectionistic leaders, induce too much pressure, employees feel less engaged (Baer & Oldham, 2006). Overall, during their self-regulation in response to perfectionistic leaders, internals tend to increasingly experience a state of engagement, but this positive impact will invert and their engagement will decrease when leader perfectionism is too high.

Conversely, externals by nature are not excited about or motivated by the discrepancy created by leader perfectionism but view it as an obstacle, threat, and stressor. Therefore, we do not predict a curvilinear pattern for externals but expect their engagement to decrease linearly along with increasing leader perfectionism. First, externals are predisposed to "perceive themselves in a passive role with regard to the external environment" (Ng et al., 2006: 1057) and attribute personal outcomes to external causes, such as luck or other people. Hence, they tend to attribute performance difficulties to their perfectionistic leaders' unreasonable and fastidious requirements rather than to their lack of effort and thus react passively by showing low engagement. Second, because their sense of lacking control makes difficult goals less exciting and manageable but threatening (Hollenbeck, Williams, & Klein, 1989), externals are demotivated to commit their "hands, head, and heart" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995: 110). Third, externals do not believe in the efforts–outcomes link, which precludes them from engaging themselves to satisfy the leader's demanding requirements.

Hypothesis 1. The effect of leader perfectionism on employee engagement is moderated by employees'

locus of control, such that (a) for internals, it shows an inverted U-shape (curvilinear), and (b) for externals, it is negative (linear).

The moderating effect on emotional exhaustion.

We predict that leader perfectionism will have a curvilinear effect on emotional exhaustion for internals but a linear effect for externals. We expect that internals will not experience emotional exhaustion in reaction to a perfectionistic leader versus a non-perfectionistic leader. However, if the leader is extremely perfectionistic, they will feel exhausted. By contrast, the more perfectionistic the leader is, the more strongly externals may feel emotionally exhausted.

Leader perfectionism is unlikely to be depleting for internals because internals' belief in personal control can buffer the draining experience. First, given that belief in control over outcomes can make a person psychologically healthy and strong (Ganster & Fusilier, 1989), internals are not easily worn out by the demands from perfectionistic leaders. For example, having a sense of personal control can help individuals buffer negative emotional states due to work-related stressors (Wang et al., 2010). Second, because internals can use their psychological power to regulate physical, affective, and cognitive strains, they are able to handle the potentially exhausting experiences brought about by leader perfectionism (Ng et al., 2006). Third, internals exert actual control effectively, apply a problem-focused coping strategy (Gianakos, 2002), and develop plans to manage unfavorable situations (Turnipseed & Bacon, 2009). The positive perception, psychological power, and active regulation tendency may shield internals from emotional exhaustion associated with leader perfectionism, at least when the perfectionistic requirements are not perceived as extreme.

However, when the leader is extremely perfectionistic, internals may become exhausted. Internals' positive perception and proactive coping are based on their confidence in their ability to control the environment and in the efforts-outcomes link. Extremely high leader perfectionism highlights the difficulty of controlling the outcomes, which they may find frustrating and overwhelming. Under such circumstances, even internals will experience despondence (Bandura, 1988). Additionally, when employees perceive that their leaders' requirements are extremely high and exceed their personal resources, they will have trouble dealing with the increased resource depletion and distress (Ng et al., 2006). Therefore, although internals tend to have the confidence and ability to

handle leader perfectionism well, extremely high perfectionism can exceed their abilities and overwhelm their resources, thereby leading to a feeling of exhaustion.

By contrast, externals are vulnerable to challenges, such as reducing the discrepancy induced by leader perfectionism, and perceive them as stressful. Therefore, we do not propose a curvilinear pattern for externals but expect their emotional exhaustion to escalate linearly along with leader perfectionism. Specifically, because externals lack confidence in their control over the environment and attribute outcomes to external forces, they will perceive their perfectionistic leaders' demanding requirements and high standards as stressful. Second, given that externals lack the psychological power to control and effectively respond to the environment (Ng et al., 2006), the perfectionistic goals imposed by leaders can make the regulation process highly draining. Finally, externals tend to react passively to problems, such as avoiding difficulties or wishing that a situation would resolve itself (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Therefore, they will feel frustrated and exhausted from perfectionistic leaders' critical reaction to their mistakes and intolerance of their flaws.

Hypothesis 2. The effect of leader perfectionism on employee emotional exhaustion is moderated by employees' locus of control, such that (a) for internals, it is nonsignificant but becomes positive when leader perfectionism is too high (curvilinear), and (b) for externals, it is positive (linear).

An integrated model. As previously discussed, engagement and emotional exhaustion may serve as potential mechanisms explaining the relationship between leader perfectionism and employee creativity. We propose that by altering the extent to which leader perfectionism affects these two self-regulatory states, employees' locus of control can moderate the indirect effect of leader perfectionism on employee creativity via engagement and emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 3. The indirect effect of leader perfectionism on employee creativity via engagement is moderated by employees' locus of control, such that (a) for internals, it shows an inverted U-shape (curvilinear), and (b) for externals, it is negative (linear).

Hypothesis 4. The indirect effect of leader perfectionism on employee creativity via emotional exhaustion is moderated by employees' locus of control, such that (a) for internals, it is nonsignificant and then becomes negative when leader perfectionism is too high (curvilinear), and (b) for externals, it is negative (linear).

STUDY 1

Participants and Design

We conducted an experiment employing a one-way between-subjects design. We recruited 191 undergraduates ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.72$, $SD = 2.64$; 65.40% female) from a major university in Northern China. They were randomly assigned to one of three manipulation conditions, namely no perfectionism ($n = 63$), perfectionism ($n = 64$), and extreme perfectionism ($n = 64$).

Procedure. In all three conditions, we first measured participants' locus of control. Next, participants received a message from a "leader" who described an idea generation task and explained the requirements, which served as the leader perfectionism manipulation. Participants then worked on the task, based on which we measured creativity. Upon completing the task, participants reported their engagement and emotional exhaustion by recalling their experiences during the task. Finally, we performed a manipulation check and debriefed the participants.

Leader perfectionism manipulation. Participants were seated in front of computers separated by partitions and welcomed to this study about "employees' experience and performance when completing a task assigned by a leader." To enhance authenticity, we told them that the task came from an actual firm and that they would work on the task remotely with one of six leaders who were employees of the firm with intensive experience. However, none of these leaders actually existed, and the leader's message was prewritten by the researchers. While they were waiting to be paired with a leader, we measured their locus of control. Then they received the following message from their "leader" with a common Chinese last name, "Yang:"

Hi [the last name that the participant entered previously], I'm happy to work with you and supervise you on an issue that our company is facing. Recently, an office space in our building, which used to be a café, was reopened to us as the lease to the café had ended. Our company decided to use this space to increase employees' work motivation and satisfaction and is calling for proposals for the space design from all employees. The company asked employees to contribute ideas as creative as possible and consider both novelty and usefulness in their design. So, your task is to propose a design for the use of the space.

In the no perfectionism condition, the message continued as follows:

Personally, I tend not to pursue perfectionism, but I have some standards. Hence, I encourage you to

design the space in your own way, and while I don't set very high expectations, I still expect you to meet the basic standards. Your design should have acceptable quality. I know mistakes are inevitable, so I won't expect zero mistakes in your proposal (e.g., wording, formatting, etc.), but I hope you can try to avoid them. I will not ask for modifications if it is in good shape. Please try to finish this work nicely. Thank you. Yang.

In the perfectionism condition, the message continued as follows:

Personally, I tend to pursue perfectionism in most things but avoid being unnecessarily overcritical. Hence, though I encourage you to design the space in your own way, I have high expectations and will evaluate your proposal with high standards. Your design should have high quality. Although mistakes are inevitable, I hope you can try to avoid mistakes in your proposal (e.g., wording, formatting, etc.). I will ask you to modify your work, if needed. Please try to prepare as good a proposal as possible. Thank you. Yang.

In the extreme perfectionism condition, the message continued as follows:

Personally, I tend to pursue perfectionism in all aspects. Hence, though I encourage you to design the space in your own way, I have very high expectations and will evaluate your proposal with the highest standards. Your design should have supreme quality, and I expect you to avoid any mistakes in your proposal (e.g., wording, formatting, etc.). I will ask you to modify your work wherever further improvements can be made. Please try your best to prepare a perfect proposal. Thank you. Yang.

Creativity task. The creativity task required participants to develop an idea for the use of an office space, which was adapted from a similar task used by Goncalo, Chatman, Duguid, and Kennedy (2015) and Goncalo and Duguid (2012). To highlight the work context, we changed the campus restaurant used in these studies to an office building space. To ensure that participants spent sufficient time on the task, we allowed them to submit their proposals after two minutes and to use as much time as they needed, which "usually takes 10–15 minutes." This was the time observed in similar tasks in previous studies (e.g., Goncalo et al., 2015; Goncalo & Duguid, 2012), as well as the time our assistants used to design a comprehensive proposal.

Measures

All scales were originally written in English. We followed Brislin's (1986) translation-back translation

procedure to ensure equivalence in meaning. Unless indicated otherwise, all variables were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Locus of control. We measured locus of control using Valecha and Ostrom's (1974) 11-item scale, which is a shortened version of Rotter's (1966) I-E control scale. Participants made binary choices about 11 pairs of options, with one indicating an internal locus of control and the other indicating an external locus of control. This scale has been shown to be effective in avoiding social desirability (Ashkanasy, 1985; Hjelle, 1971) and in allowing individuals to respond quickly with low stress when revealing their personal beliefs (Dolnicar & Grün, 2007). A sample pair of options was "What happens to me is my own doing" (internal), and "Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking" (external). We assigned one point for each selected option on internal locus of control; therefore, high scores indicated high levels of internal locus of control. The Cronbach's α of the scale was .65, which is comparable to those reported in classic research (e.g., .65 in Rotter, 1966; .62 in Valecha & Ostrom, 1974) and recent studies (e.g., .68 in Bacharach, Bamberger, & Doveh, 2008).

Engagement. We measured engagement using Rich, LePine, and Crawford's (2010) 18-item scale, which consists of three subfactors: physical engagement (e.g., "I exerted my full effort to the task"), cognitive engagement (e.g., "My mind was focused on the task"), and emotional engagement (e.g., "I was enthusiastic in the task"). These three subfactors showed high correlations, with strong loadings on a higher-order global factor (Rich et al., 2010). The correlations between the subfactors, which ranged from .62 to .69 ($p < .01$), were comparable to those reported in previous studies (e.g., .63–.74 in Rich et al., 2010). Therefore, we averaged all items to obtain an overall score of engagement ($\alpha = .96$).

Emotional exhaustion. We measured emotional exhaustion using the 9-item scale in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). A sample item was "I felt used up at the end of the task" ($\alpha = .91$). The order in which emotional exhaustion and engagement were measured was counterbalanced.

Creativity. We assessed the proposal's creativity using the consensual assessment technique (Amabile, 1982), which is commonly employed in creativity studies (e.g., Herrmann & Felfe, 2014; Shalley & Perry-Smith, 2001). Participants' responses were evaluated by three judges, who were professionals at an architectural design firm and were unaware of the research purpose (Montag, Maertz, & Baer, 2012).

We informed them that a creative proposal is both novel and useful in addressing the issue at hand. They rated each proposal's creativity independently on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all creative*) to 7 (*extremely creative*). Given the acceptable interrater reliability ($r_{wg} = .78$) and agreement ($ICC_2 = .50$, $p < .001$) (Bliese, 2000), we averaged their ratings into an overall creativity score for each participant.

Manipulation check. Although we validated the manipulation in a pilot study,¹ we checked the manipulation in the main study using Hewitt and Flett's (1991) 15-item scale on other-oriented perfectionism. We modified the wording slightly to refer to the leader. A sample item was "My leader indicated

¹ We conducted a pilot study to test the effectiveness of the manipulation with a different sample of 113 college students ($M_{age} = 20.65$, $SD = 1.38$; 42.5% female) who were randomly assigned to the no perfectionism ($n = 36$), perfectionism ($n = 38$), and extreme perfectionism ($n = 39$) conditions. We used a modified version of Hewitt and Flett's (1991) 15-item scale on other-oriented perfectionism as the manipulation check. Results of a one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 110) = 30.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$. Pairwise comparisons showed increasingly high perceptions of leader perfectionism from the no perfectionism condition ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .76$) to the perfectionism condition ($M = 4.95$, $SD = .83$) and the extreme perfectionism condition ($M = 5.32$, $SD = .70$), which differed significantly from one another ($p < .05$ for all pairwise comparisons). To check whether our manipulation may have created unwanted between-condition differences, we measured perceptions of leader conscientiousness with Saucier's (1994) 8-item scale, abusive supervision with Tepper's (2000) five-item scale, authoritarian leadership with Cheng, Chou, and Farh's (2000) 5-item scale, directive leadership with Li, Liu, and Luo's (2018) 4-item scale, liking for the leader with Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell's (1993) 2-item scale, transformational leadership with MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Rich's (2001) 14-item scale, positive/negative activating/deactivating moods with De Dreu, Baas, and Nijstad's (2008) 8-item scale, perceived workload with Bolino and Turnley's (2005) 3-item scale, and satisfaction with the leader and overall positive–negative feeling about the leader with a single item, respectively. The effect of condition on the confounding variables was not significant, except for liking for the leader, $F(2, 110) = 6.48$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. The leader in the extreme perfectionism condition ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.55$) was significantly less liked than those in the perfectionism ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.12$; $p < .001$) and no perfectionism conditions ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.27$; $p < .05$). Thus, we measured liking for the leader in the main study. Results with and without liking included (either as a control variable or an additional mediator) remained virtually identical.

that the task I do must be of top-notch quality” ($\alpha = .96$).

Analytical Strategy

We tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 in three steps. First, we used a general linear model (GLM) to examine the interaction effect between leader perfectionism condition and locus of control. Second, we tested the curvilinear trend among the conditions. We followed the orthogonal polynomial contrast procedure (Kirk, 1995) to create one coefficient code, $X_1 = (-1, 0, 1)$, to indicate the linear contrast and another coefficient code, $X_2 = (-1, 2, -1)$, to indicate the quadratic contrast among the three perfectionism conditions. The two codes are orthogonal (i.e., the sum of their products is zero) and thus allowed us to partition the linear and quadratic effects. Then we used locus of control, X_1 , X_2 , and the two interaction terms (i.e., locus of control $\times X_1$ and locus of control $\times X_2$) to predict engagement and emotional exhaustion. Based on the results, we estimated the conditional linear and quadratic effects of perfectionism for internals (1 *SD* above the mean) and externals (1 *SD* below the mean). Third, we performed simple effect tests to check for differences among the three leader perfectionism conditions for internals and externals.

For Hypotheses 3 and 4, we used Preacher and Hayes's (2008) PROCESS macro in SPSS, which enables users to test the conditional indirect effect of *X* on *Y* via multiple mediators when *X* is a multicategorical variable (Hayes & Montoya, 2017). The test treated the three perfectionism conditions as two dummy variables and estimated the conditional indirect effect of leader perfectionism as it varied from the no perfectionism to the perfectionism condition and the indirect effect as it varied from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and bivariate correlations.

Manipulation check. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed a significant effect of leader perfectionism condition, $F(2, 188) = 236.87, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .72$. Pairwise comparisons showed that the perception of leader perfectionism was significantly higher in the extreme perfectionism condition ($M = 6.01, SD = .51$) than in the perfectionism ($M = 5.51, SD = .63, p < .001$) and no perfectionism conditions ($M = 3.26, SD = 1.03, p < .001$). The perfectionism and no perfectionism conditions also differed from each other ($p < .001$). These results demonstrated the effectiveness of our manipulation of leader perfectionism.

Hypothesis testing. Hypothesis 1 predicts that the effect of leader perfectionism on engagement has an inverted U-shape for internals (Hypothesis 1a) and is linear and negative for externals (Hypothesis 1b). The GLM analysis found a significant interaction between perfectionism condition and locus of control on engagement, $F(2, 185) = 3.49, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$. The trend analysis found that locus of control interacted with quadratic leader perfectionism ($B = .05, p < .05$) but not with leader perfectionism ($B = .04, p > .05$), suggesting the existence of a curvilinear moderation effect. Specifically, for internals, the conditional quadratic effect of leader perfectionism was significant ($B = .13, p < .05$), but the conditional linear effect was not ($B = .13, p > .05$), as predicted. Figure 2(a) and simple effect tests showed that internals' engagement increased from the no perfectionism condition ($M = 5.16, SE = .16$) to the perfectionism condition ($M = 5.68, SE = .16$), $slope = .52, t = 2.27, p < .05$, as predicted, but it did not show the predicted decrease from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($M = 5.42, SE = .17$), $slope = -.26$,

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations (Study 1)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Leader perfectionism condition ^a	—	—				
2. Employee locus of control ^b	5.54	2.33	-.02	(.65)		
3. Employee engagement	5.29	.94	.03	.14	(.96)	
4. Employee emotional exhaustion	3.11	1.09	.30***	-.19*	-.37***	(.91)
5. Employee creativity	3.84	.54	-.10	.17*	.30***	-.36***

Notes: $n = 191$; values on the diagonal in parentheses are Cronbach's alphas; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

^a 1 = no perfectionism, 2 = perfectionism, 3 = extreme perfectionism.

^b Higher scores indicate higher levels of internal locus of control.

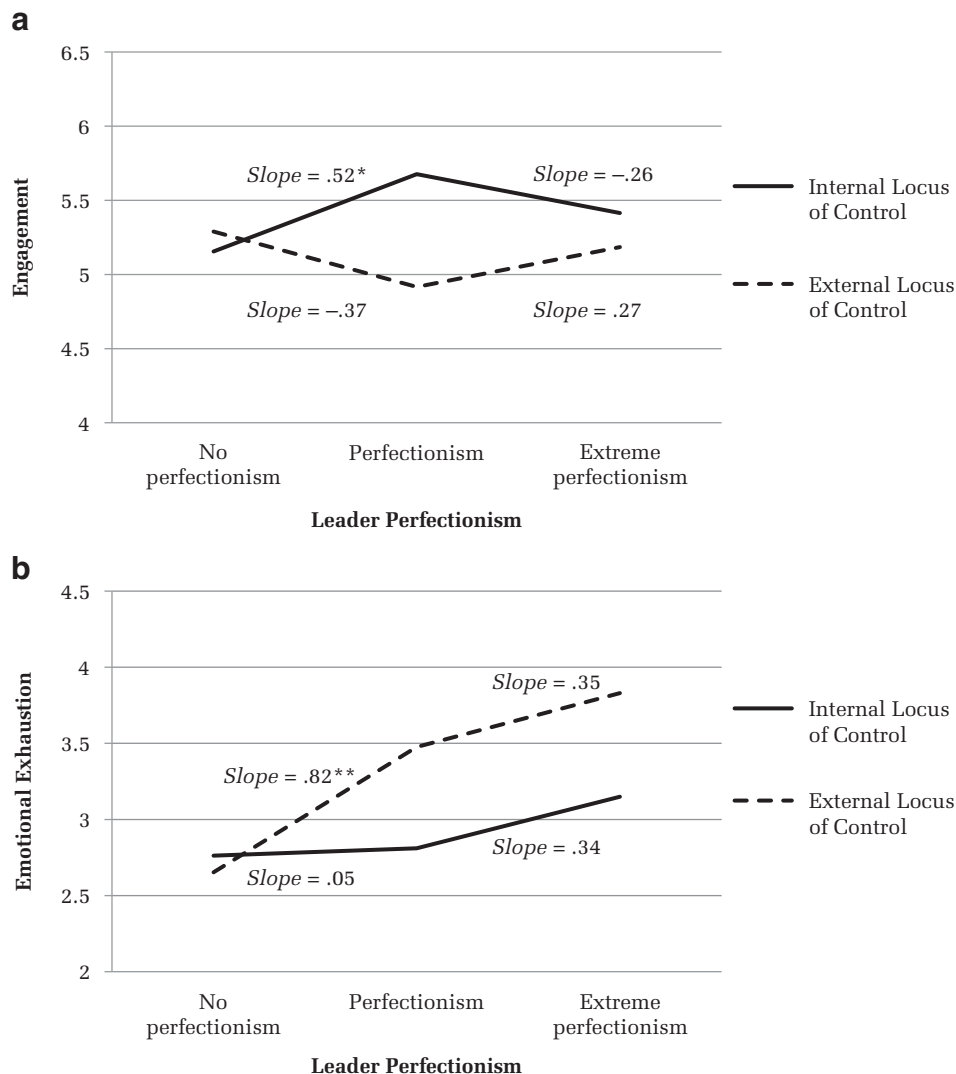
* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$

$t = -1.13$, $p > .05$. Thus, Hypothesis 1a was partially supported. For externals, neither the conditional quadratic effect ($B = -.11$, $p > .05$) nor the conditional linear effect ($B = -.05$, $p > .05$) was significant. Figure 2(a) and simple effect tests also failed to find a decrease in externals' engagement from the no perfectionism condition ($M = 5.29$, $SE = .16$) to the perfectionism condition ($M = 4.92$, $SE = .18$), $slope = -.37$, $t = -1.54$, $p > .05$, or from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($M = 5.19$, $SE = .15$), $slope = .27$, $t = 1.12$, $p > .05$. Thus, Hypothesis 1b was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the effect of leader perfectionism on emotional exhaustion is moderated by employees' locus of control such that internals' emotional exhaustion is not affected by leader perfectionism but increases as leader perfectionism becomes extreme (Hypothesis 2a), whereas externals' exhaustion increases linearly (Hypothesis 2b). The GLM analysis showed a significant interaction between perfectionism condition and locus of control, $F(2, 185) = 3.18$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. The trend analysis found that locus of control did not interact with quadratic leader perfectionism ($B = -.03$, $p > .05$) but

FIGURE 2
Interaction Effect Between Leader Perfectionism and Employee Locus of Control on Engagement and Emotional Exhaustion (Study 1) (a) Engagement (b) Emotional Exhaustion



* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

interacted with leader perfectionism ($B = -.09, p < .05$). Specifically, for internals, neither the conditional quadratic effect ($B = -.05, p > .05$) nor the conditional linear effect ($B = .19, p > .05$) of leader perfectionism was significant. Figure 2(b) and simple effect tests showed that although internals' emotional exhaustion did not differ between the no perfectionism condition ($M = 2.76, SE = .18$) and the perfectionism condition ($M = 2.81, SE = .18$), $slope = .05, t = .19, p > .05$, as predicted, it did not increase from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($M = 3.15, SE = .19$), $slope = .34, t = 1.32, p > .05$, which was inconsistent with the predicted curvilinear effect. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. For externals, the conditional quadratic effect ($B = .08, p > .05$) was not significant, but the conditional linear effect ($B = .59, p < .05$) was. Figure 2(b) and simple effect tests showed that externals' emotional exhaustion increased from the no perfectionism condition ($M = 2.65, SE = .18$) to the perfectionism condition ($M = 3.48, SE = .20$), $slope = .82, t = 3.06, p < .01$, as predicted but did not further increase from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($M = 3.83, SE = .17$), $slope = .35, t = 1.34, p > .05$. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was partially supported.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predict that locus of control moderates the indirect effect of leader perfectionism on creativity via engagement (Hypothesis 3) and emotional exhaustion (Hypothesis 4). As shown in Table 2, for internals, the indirect effect via engagement was positive when leader perfectionism varied from the no perfectionism to the perfectionism condition ($effect = .060, 95\% CI = [.004, .133]$) and nonsignificant from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($effect = -.030, 95\% CI = [-.092, .015]$). The two effects differed

($difference = .089, 95\% CI = [.005, .174]$), suggesting that leader perfectionism had a curvilinear indirect effect on internals' creativity via engagement, although it did not become negative when perfectionism was extreme. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was partially supported. For externals, inconsistent with the predicted negative relationship, the indirect effect was not significant when leader perfectionism varied from the no perfectionism to the perfectionism condition ($effect = -.043, 95\% CI = [-.121, .011]$) or from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($effect = .031, 95\% CI = [-.013, .096]$), and they did not differ ($difference = .073, 95\% CI = [-.013, .159]$). Thus, Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

As shown in Table 2, for internals, the indirect effect via emotional exhaustion was not significant when leader perfectionism varied from the no perfectionism to the perfectionism condition ($effect = -.007, 95\% CI = [-.090, .070]$) or from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($effect = -.047, 95\% CI = [-.138, .030]$). The two effects did not differ ($difference = -.040, 95\% CI = [-.153, .073]$). These results were inconsistent with the predicted curvilinear indirect effect. Hypothesis 4a was not supported. For externals, the indirect effect was negative when leader perfectionism varied from the no perfectionism to the perfectionism condition ($effect = -.115, 95\% CI = [-.213, -.038]$) but was not significant from the perfectionism to the extreme perfectionism condition ($effect = -.049, 95\% CI = [-.131, .022]$). The two effects did not differ ($difference = .065, 95\% CI = [-.051, .182]$). These results suggested that perfectionism essentially had a linear indirect effect on externals' creativity via emotional exhaustion, although it became nonsignificant when leader perfectionism was extreme. Hypothesis 4b was partially supported.

TABLE 2
Summary of Direct and Conditional Indirect Effects (Study 1)

Moderator	Direct Effect		LP → Engagement → Creativity		LP → Emotional Exhaustion → Creativity	
	LP: NP to P	LP: P to EP	LP: NP to P	LP: P to EP	LP: NP to P	LP: P to EP
	Estimate (SE) 95% CI	Estimate (SE) 95% CI	Estimate (SE) 95% CI	Estimate (SE) 95% CI	Estimate (SE) 95% CI	Estimate (SE) 95% CI
Internal locus of control (+1 SD)	-.075 (.091) [-.255, .105]	.044 (.090) [-.134, .222]	.060 ^a (.034) [.004, .133]	-.030 (.027) [-.092, .015]	-.007 (.039) [-.090, .070]	-.047 (.042) [-.138, .030]
External locus of control (-1 SD)	-.075 (.091) [-.255, .105]	.044 (.090) [-.134, .222]	-.043 (.034) [-.121, .011]	.031 (.028) [-.013, .096]	-.115 ^a (.045) [-.213, -.038]	-.049 (.039) [-.131, .022]

Note: LP = leader perfectionism condition; NP = no perfectionism; P = perfectionism; EP = extreme perfectionism.

^a The 95% CI did not include zero.

To cross-validate our results and improve the generalizability of our findings, we then conducted Study 2, a multisource, multiwave field study at actual firms.

STUDY 2

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from the research and development teams at four high-technology firms in Northern China. We chose this context because creativity has become important for Chinese firms as the nation transforms itself from a “world factory” to a provider of high-quality products and services (Abrami et al., 2014). Constant leader–subordinate interactions provide subordinates with sufficient exposure to their leaders’ perfectionism and allow leaders to observe their subordinates’ creativity. With the CEOs’ support, the human resources departments gave us a roster of team leaders from which we randomly sampled 120 leaders. These leaders provided the names of 718 subordinates. We administered paper-and-pencil surveys at two time points with a six-week interval, which was consistent with existing practice (Baer, Dhensa-Kahlon, Colquitt, Rodell, Outlaw, & Long, 2015; Wee, Liao, Liu, & Liu, 2017) and was the most feasible for the four firms. At Time 1, leaders reported demographic information, and subordinates reported their perception of leader perfectionism, their own locus of control, and demographic information. At Time 2, leaders evaluated their subordinates’ creativity, and subordinates reported their engagement, emotional exhaustion, leader–member exchange, and job complexity.

We received valid responses from 114 leaders and 644 subordinates at Time 1 and from 103 leaders and 540 subordinates at Time 2. After excluding incomplete or unmatchable responses, we obtained a final sample of 102 leaders ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.63$, $SD = 5.77$; 33.30% female) and 503 subordinates ($M_{\text{age}} = 30.95$, $SD = 6.30$; 45.10% female). The net response rates were 85.00% for leaders and 70.06% for subordinates.

Measures

Locus of control ($\alpha = .68$), engagement ($\alpha = .96$), and emotional exhaustion ($\alpha = .88$) were measured with the same scales employed in Study 1. Unless indicated otherwise, all variables were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Leader perfectionism. We measured employees’ perception of leader perfectionism using Hewitt and Flett’s (1991) 15-item scale on other-oriented

perfectionism. A sample item was “My leader indicated that the task I do must be of top-notch quality” ($\alpha = .73$). Because we focused on the interpersonal implications of leader perfectionism on employees and because researchers argued that “people actively *perceive* those environments and are influenced by their perceptions” (Spreitzer, 1996: 485; italics in original), using employees’ perception helps capture the perfectionistic behaviors of leaders in idiosyncratic leader–follower interactions. Therefore, we treated leader perfectionism as an individual-level variable based on employees’ perception.

Creativity. We measured creativity using Zhou and George’s (2001) 13-item scale. A sample item was “This employee often has new and innovative ideas” ($\alpha = .96$).

Control variables. We controlled individuals’ gender, organizational tenure, and education level in all analyses, as they can affect creativity (e.g., Hammond, Neff, Farr, Schwall, & Zhao, 2011; Purvanova & Muros, 2010). To rule out the effect of leader–subordinate relationship on the leader’s rating (e.g., Duarte, Goodson, & Klich, 1994; Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999), we controlled for the dyadic tenure of each subordinate with the leader (indicating relationship duration) and leader–member exchange (indicating relationship quality), which we measured using Graen and Uhl-Bien’s (1995) 5-item scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a great extent*). A sample item was “My working relationship with my supervisor is effective” ($\alpha = .89$).

Previous studies also suggested that a task’s characteristics, such as complexity, may affect creativity (Baer, Oldham, & Cummings, 2003). Therefore, we controlled for job complexity in all analyses. We measured it using Morgeson and Humphrey’s (2006) 4-item scale. A sample item was “The job involves performing relatively simple tasks” (reversed; $\alpha = .96$).

Analytical Strategy

Given the nested nature of our data, we ran multilevel path analyses using Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2016), which also allows users to test multiple indirect effects simultaneously. In our data, multiple subordinates were rated by the same supervisor, and supervisors were nested in four organizations. However, as methodologists have pointed out, the small number (fewer than 10) of highest-level clusters (i.e., the organizations in this study) may lead to biased estimates of the highest-level variance (e.g., Maas & Hox, 2004, 2005; McNeish & Wentzel, 2017). Therefore, we followed prior practice (e.g., McNeish

& Wentzel, 2017; Wang & Seibert, 2015) and controlled for organizational membership using three dummy-coded variables (for four organizations) in order to partial out the potential influences of organization-level factors.

We specified a two-level path model with leader perfectionism as the predictor, locus of control as the moderator, engagement and emotional exhaustion as the mediators, and creativity as the outcome. We specified leader perfectionism and locus of control at Level 1 and included controls for all endogenous variables (i.e., engagement, emotional exhaustion, and creativity) at this level. We used the random intercept model to partition the variance of the endogenous variables into “within” (Level 1) and “between” (Level 2) components (Lam, Huang, & Chan, 2015) for accurate estimates at the employee level (Preacher, Zhang, & Zychur, 2011).

We tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 in three steps following prior research that examined moderated curvilinear relationships (e.g., Haans, Pieters, & He, 2016; Sui, Wang, Kirkman, & Li, 2016). First, we examined the significance of the moderation effect (leader perfectionism \times locus of control) and curvilinear moderation effect (squared leader perfectionism \times locus of control) on engagement and emotional exhaustion. Second, we calculated the conditional linear (i.e., conditional coefficient of leader perfectionism) and conditional curvilinear effects (i.e., conditional coefficient of squared leader perfectionism) of leader perfectionism on engagement or emotional exhaustion for internals and externals. Third, we estimated simple slopes at the lower (from -1 SD to the mean) and higher levels (from the mean to $+1$ SD) of perfectionism for internals and externals. For Hypotheses 3 and 4, we estimated the conditional indirect effects from leader perfectionism to creativity via engagement and emotional exhaustion for internals and externals, respectively.

Results

Measurement model. First, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to examine the discriminant validity of all measures. The five-factor model (i.e., leader perfectionism, locus of control, engagement, emotional exhaustion, and creativity) fit the data adequately ($\chi^2_{[2069]} = 6858.21$, $p < .01$, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .90, SRMR = .08). This model showed a better fit to the data than a four-factor model combining the two mechanisms ($\chi^2_{[2073]} = 9533.36$, $p < .01$, RMSEA = .10, CFI = .84, SRMR = .09; $\Delta\chi^2_{[4]} = 2675.15$, $p < .001$) and a two-factor model combining

all subordinate-rated variables ($\chi^2_{[2078]} = 14646.45$, $p < .01$, RMSEA = .12, CFI = .73, SRMR = .12; $\Delta\chi^2_{[9]} = 7788.24$, $p < .001$). Results supported the distinctiveness of our variables.

Hypothesis testing. The descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 3. The unstandardized path estimates are presented in Table 4.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that the effect of leader perfectionism on engagement has an inverted U-shape for internals (Hypothesis 1a) and is linear and negative for externals (Hypothesis 1b). As shown in Table 4, the interaction term between squared leader perfectionism and locus of control was significant in predicting engagement ($\gamma = -.06$, $p < .001$), suggesting a curvilinear moderation effect. For internals, both the conditional curvilinear ($\gamma = -.09$, $SE = .04$, $p < .05$) and conditional linear effects ($\gamma = .19$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$) were significant. Figure 3(a) and simple slope tests showed that internals' engagement increased when leader perfectionism was lower ($slope = .22$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$), as predicted, but did not show the expected decrease when perfectionism was higher ($slope = .16$, $SE = .05$, $p < .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 1a was partially supported. For externals, the conditional curvilinear effect was significant ($\gamma = .17$, $SE = .07$, $p < .05$) but the conditional linear effect was not ($\gamma = -.01$, $SE = .07$, $p > .05$). However, Figure 3(a) and simple slope tests did not reveal the expected decrease in externals' engagement at the lower ($slope = -.07$, $SE = .08$, $p > .05$) or higher ($slope = .05$, $SE = .07$, $p > .05$) levels of perfectionism. Thus, Hypothesis 1b was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the effect of leader perfectionism on internals' emotional exhaustion is not affected by leader perfectionism but increases when leader perfectionism becomes too high (Hypothesis 2a), whereas externals' exhaustion increases linearly (Hypothesis 2b). As shown in Table 4, the interaction term between squared leader perfectionism and locus of control was not significant in predicting emotional exhaustion ($\gamma = -.00$, $p > .05$), but the interaction between leader perfectionism and locus of control was significant ($\gamma = -.06$, $p < .001$). For internals, neither the conditional curvilinear ($\gamma = -.02$, $SE = .03$, $p > .05$) nor the conditional linear effect ($\gamma = -.08$, $SE = .05$, $p > .05$) of leader perfectionism was significant. Furthermore, Figure 3(b) and simple slope tests show that the effect of leader perfectionism on internals' emotional exhaustion was not significant at the lower ($slope = -.07$, $SE = .05$, $p > .05$) or higher levels of perfectionism ($slope = -.09$, $SE = .04$, $p > .05$), which was inconsistent with

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations (Study 2)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Employee gender ^a	.45	.50														
2. Employee education ^b	2.45	.68	.00													
3. Employee organizational tenure	5.65	6.41	.02	-.15**												
4. Leader–employee tenure	3.72	3.44	.05	-.18***	.66***											
5. Leader–member exchange	3.85	.73	.06	-.06	.04	-.03	(.89)									
6. Job complexity	5.00	1.75	-.00	.24***	-.30***	-.11*	-.10*	(.96)								
7. Organization 1 (dummy)	.40	.49	-.10*	.25***	-.45***	-.46***	-.14***	.18***								
8. Organization 2 (dummy)	.08	.27	.14**	-.20***	-.11*	-.05	.33***	.20***	-.23***							
9. Organization 3 (dummy)	.23	.42	.05	.06	.13**	.28***	-.18***	.42***	-.45***	-.16***						
10. Leader perfectionism	4.65	.72	-.23***	.08†	-.03	-.05	.04	-.15***	.14**	-.30***	-.18***	(.73)				
11. Employee locus of control ^c	6.82	2.28	-.07	-.02	.06	.04	.09†	-.06	.13**	-.23***	-.06	.08†	(.68)			
12. Employee engagement	5.81	.79	.04	-.10*	-.04	-.05	.48***	.02	-.06	.30***	-.13**	.07	.15***	(.96)		
13. Employee emotional exhaustion ^d	2.28	.57	-.05	.09*	.03	.02	-.26***	-.04	.04	-.08†	-.07	.07	-.16***	-.28***	(.88)	
14. Employee creativity	5.48	.88	.08†	.05	-.09*	-.09*	.25***	.18***	-.15**	.32***	.00	-.06	-.05	.25***	-.25***	(.96)

Notes: $n = 503$; $M = \text{mean}$; $SD = \text{standard deviation}$. All variables are unstandardized; values on the diagonal in parentheses are Cronbach's alphas.

^a Male is 0 and female is 1.

^b College certificate degree and lower is 1, bachelor's degree is 2, and master's degree and higher is 3.

^c Higher scores indicate higher levels of internal locus of control; scores ranged from 0 to 11.

^d This measure was rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

† $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 4
Multilevel Path-Analytic Results of the Full Model (Study 2)

Variable	Engagement		Emotional Exhaustion		Creativity	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Level 1 Covariates						
Employee gender	.04	.06	-.05	.05	.02	.05
Employee education	-.05	.05	.05	.04	.15**	.05
Employee organizational tenure	-.00	.01	.00	.01	-.01	.01
Leader-employee tenure	-.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01
Leader-member exchange	.42***	.07	-.20***	.05	.04	.04
Job complexity	.03	.03	-.00	.03	.10*	.05
Organization 1 (dummy)	-.03	.10	-.01	.12	-.48*	.20
Organization 2 (dummy)	.53**	.18	-.03	.17	.48 [†]	.25
Organization 3 (dummy)	-.03	.12	-.17	.13	-.35	.24
Level 1 Main Effects						
Leader perfectionism (LP)	.09 [†]	.05	.05	.04	-.01	.04
Employee locus of control (LOC)	.08***	.02	-.05***	.01	.00	.01
Employee engagement					.10*	.04
Employee emotional exhaustion					-.12*	.06
Level 1 Quadratic and Interaction Effects						
LP ²	.04	.05	-.02	.03	-.01	.03
LP × LOC	.05**	.02	-.06***	.01	.01	.01
LP ² × LOC	-.06***	.01	-.00	.01	.01	.01
Level 1 R-squared	.33***	.05	.20***	.04	.33***	.06
Level 2 Variance	.03	.02	.06***	.02	.35***	.06

Notes: LP = leader perfectionism; LOC = locus of control; SE = standard error. The findings were robust with and without all control variables in the equations. Although we theoretically did not expect leader perfectionism to have a curvilinear relationship with employee creativity, we reported the full model with all curvilinear terms controlled. All predicting variables were specified at Level 1 (employee level) based on our conceptual model, but due to the nested nature of our data, we accounted for the Level 2 (supervisor level) variance in all endogenous variables. The Level 1 R-squared and Level 2 variance that was not explained after we entered all predictors and control variables were reported in the last two rows.

[†] $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

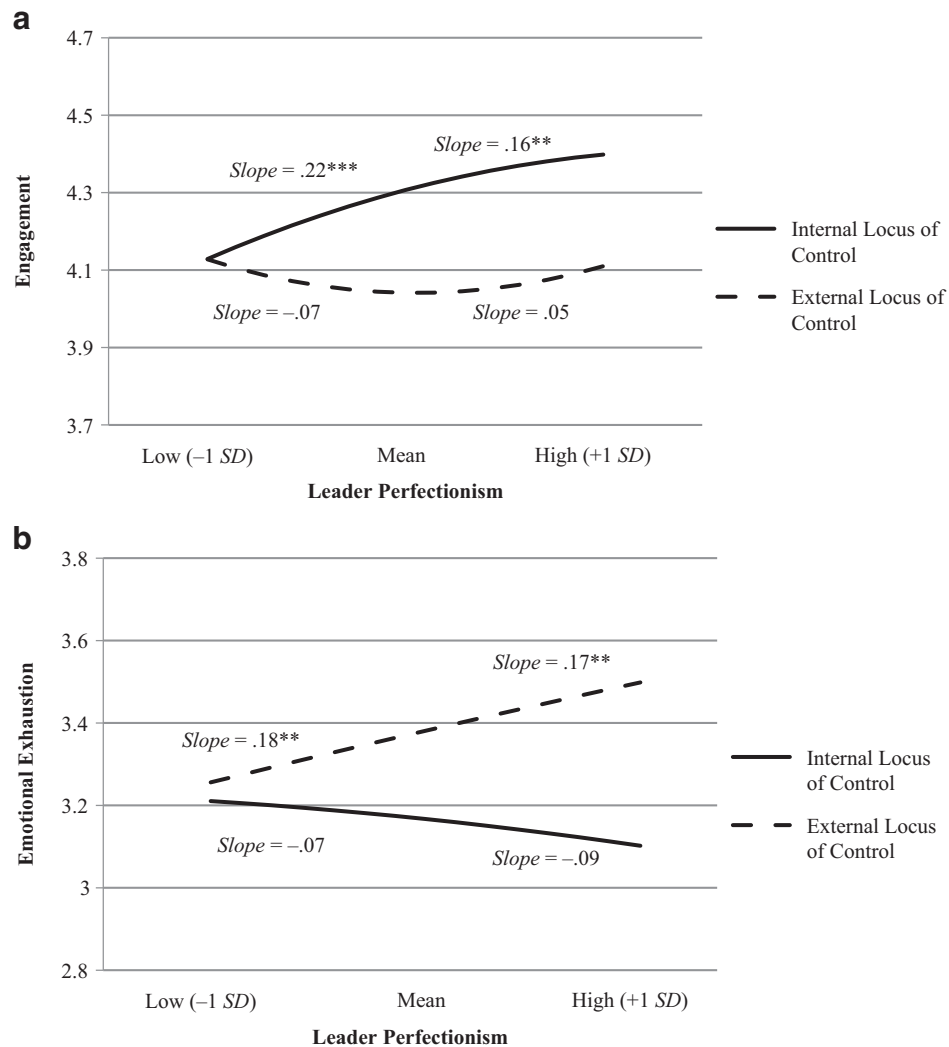
the predicted curvilinear relationship. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. For externals, the conditional curvilinear effect was not significant ($\gamma = -.01$, $SE = .04$, $p > .05$) but the conditional linear effect was ($\gamma = .18$, $SE = .05$, $p < .01$). Figure 3(b) and simple slope tests showed that the effect was positive at both the lower ($slope = .18$, $SE = .06$, $p < .01$) and higher ($slope = .17$, $SE = .06$, $p < .01$) levels of perfectionism, which was consistent with the predicted positive relationship. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predict that locus of control moderates the indirect effect of leader perfectionism on creativity via engagement (Hypothesis 3) and emotional exhaustion (Hypothesis 4). As shown in Table 5, for internals, the indirect effect via engagement was positive at the lower level of leader perfectionism ($effect = .023$, 95% CI = [.000, .045]) but was not significant at the higher level ($effect = .016$,

95% CI = [-.001, .033]). The two effects did not differ significantly ($difference = .007$, 95% CI = [-.002, .015]). These results were inconsistent with the predicted curvilinear indirect effect. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was not supported. For externals, this indirect effect was not significant at the lower ($effect = -.007$, 95% CI = [-.024, .010]) or higher ($effect = .005$, 95% CI = [-.010, .019]) perfectionism level. Their difference was not significant ($difference = -.012$, 95% CI = [-.025, .001]). These results were inconsistent with the predicted negative effect. Thus, Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

As shown in Table 5, for internals, the indirect effect via emotional exhaustion was not significant at the lower ($effect = .009$, 95% CI = [-.007, .025]) or the higher ($effect = .011$, 95% CI = [-.006, .027]) perfectionism level. The two effects did not differ ($difference = -.002$, 95% CI = [-.008, .004]). These results were inconsistent with the predicted

FIGURE 3
Interaction Effect Between Leader Perfectionism and Employee Locus of Control on Engagement and Emotional Exhaustion (Study 2) (a) Engagement (b) Emotional Exhaustion



** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

curvilinear effect. Thus, Hypothesis 4a was not supported. For externals, the indirect effect was not significant at the lower ($effect = -.022$, 95% CI = $[-.044, .000]$) or higher ($effect = -.021$, 95% CI = $[-.044, .001]$) perfectionism level, and the two effects did not differ ($difference = -.001$, 95% CI = $[-.008, .007]$).² These were inconsistent with

the predicted negative indirect effect. Thus, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

² However, we found that the 90% confidence interval for this indirect effect was $[-.041, -.003]$ when perfectionism was lower and $[-.040, -.002]$ when perfectionism was

higher, both excluding zero. Although we only considered an effect to be significant when $p < .05$, these findings indicated that the indirect effect of leader perfectionism on externals' creativity via emotional exhaustion was essentially linear and consistent with our hypothesis at the $p = .10$ level. For consistency, we have reported and marked all marginally significant results in this study in the tables and in Appendix A.

TABLE 5
Summary of Direct and Conditional Indirect Effects (Study 2)

Moderator	Direct Effect Estimate (SE) 95% CI	LP → Engagement → Creativity		LP → Emotional Exhaustion → Creativity	
		LP: L to M Estimate (SE) 95% CI	LP: M to H Estimate (SE) 95% CI	LP: L to M Estimate (SE) 95% CI	LP: M to H Estimate (SE) 95% CI
Internal Locus of Control (+1 <i>SD</i>)	-.012 (.041) [-.092, .067]	.023* (.011) [.000, .045]	.016 [†] (.009) [-.001, .033]	.009 (.008) [-.007, .025]	.011 (.008) [-.006, .027]
External Locus of Control (-1 <i>SD</i>)	-.012 (.041) [-.092, .067]	-.007 (.009) [-.024, .010]	.005 (.007) [-.010, .019]	-.022 [†] (.011) [-.044, .000]	-.021 [†] (.011) [-.044, .001]

Notes: LP = leader perfectionism; L = low level of LP (1 *SD* below the mean); M = mean level of LP; H = high level of LP (1 *SD* above the mean).

[†] The 90% CI did not include zero; * the 95% CI did not include zero.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

First, we found that the effects of leader perfectionism on engagement and subsequent creativity were contingent on employees' locus of control. For internals, we found curvilinear effects of leader perfectionism in the shape of a positive slope with diminishing returns (Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 3a). The absence of the predicted negative effects at the very high levels of leader perfectionism may be because the leader's perfectionism was not experienced to be as overwhelming as we had theorized, especially in the firms. Therefore, internals were still able to regulate themselves so as not to drastically disengage from their work. For externals, both studies found that leader perfectionism did not hurt their engagement or creativity via engagement (Hypothesis 1b and Hypothesis 3b). Despite their lack of excitement and motivation, perhaps externals realized that disengagement was unfavorable or impractical as it could lead to the trouble of making modifications in the experiment or blame from their leaders in the organizations.

We also found that the effects of leader perfectionism on emotional exhaustion and subsequent creativity were contingent on locus of control. For internals, both studies failed to find the proposed curvilinear effects (Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 4a), showing no difference in emotional exhaustion or creativity via it across various perfectionism levels. This again suggested that internals may not have experienced extreme perfectionism as being so draining in our contexts. For externals, Study 1 showed the predicted increase in emotional exhaustion and subsequent decrease in creativity only when perfectionism was not too high (Hypothesis 2b

and Hypothesis 4b). This could be because the one-shot lab task was less likely to exert enduring stress on employees and lead to a continuous increase in their emotional exhaustion. However, Study 2 revealed a significant increase in externals' emotional exhaustion, which in turn had a marginally significant indirect effect on their creativity.

In sum, our findings indicated that internals can benefit from leader perfectionism (with diminishing returns) due to enhanced engagement without experiencing the downsides of perfectionism, such as emotional exhaustion. In contrast, externals suffered from perfectionism due to increased emotional exhaustion without experiencing the upsides of perfectionism, such as engagement. We also present a graphic summary of the results in Appendix A.

Theoretical Implications

This research offers several important contributions. First, we adopted a self-regulation perspective to unpack the puzzling relationship between leader perfectionism and employee creativity. In two studies, we demonstrated that leader perfectionism could have either positive or negative effects on employee creativity by evoking two self-regulatory states depending on an employee's locus of control and the level of leader perfectionism. These results can help uncover the intricacies that may have masked the pattern of the leader perfectionism–employee creativity association. In line with Ocampo et al. (2020: 159), our research suggests that leader “perfectionism can have both positive and negative implications for individual functioning at work,” and its influence should be considered “under certain conditions or in combination with certain traits.”

By identifying leader perfectionism as an important predictor of employee creativity and unveiling

their nuanced relationship, we also contribute to research on leaders' influence on employee creativity. In their review of the leadership–employee creativity research, Hughes, Lee, Tian, Newman, and Legood (2018: 564) called for research that “move[s] beyond the current focus on leader styles to explore the effects of leader characteristics such as traits.” They also encouraged researchers to go beyond the paradigm “with ‘positive’ leader approaches correlated positively and ‘negative’ leader approaches correlated negatively with creativity” (Lee et al., 2018: 564). To address these issues, instead of assuming that an unexplored leader characteristic (i.e., leader perfectionism) has uniformly beneficial or detrimental effects, we comprehensively theorized and examined its double-edged sword effects. By examining two seemingly contradictory mechanisms, related boundary conditions, and curvilinear effects, we suggest that leader perfectionism can be a mixed blessing for creativity. Overall, our study highlights the value of utilizing a nuanced approach to investigate leaders' influence on employee creativity beyond the often-studied uniform and linear relationship.

Second, we contribute to the perfectionism literature by highlighting the importance of leader perfectionism toward employees. Research on workplace perfectionism has mainly focused on self-oriented perfectionism and its intrapersonal impact (Harari et al., 2018). Scholars have suggested that other-oriented perfectionism can have critical interpersonal implications (Shoss et al., 2015). Seeing that leader–subordinate interaction is among the most frequent and important forms of interpersonal dynamics at work (Ocampo et al., 2020), our research is the first to employ this interpersonal perspective to examine perfectionism as a leader's characteristic. By identifying employee creativity as an outcome of leader perfectionism, we also expand the nomological network of perfectionism. Our findings on the curvilinear effect of leader perfectionism on internals' creativity via engagement also respond to the call for research to “examine possible nonlinear effects between perfectionism and performance . . . and other variables” (Harari et al., 2018: 1139).

Third, we extend the locus of control literature to a new realm by indicating that internals are more effective than externals in self-regulation and can thus benefit from leader perfectionism and yield creative output, at least when leader perfectionism is not too high. More importantly, even though internals reacted positively to leader perfectionism, their reaction became less positive if the leader was too

perfectionistic. Emerging evidence has shown that internal locus of control is not always positively associated with motivation and behaviors because they may save energy based on their estimate of return (Galvin et al., 2018). Therefore, our findings provide additional evidence of the motivational limit of internals.

Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that to facilitate employees' creativity, leaders need to carefully manage their level of perfectionism to minimize its negative effect. First, leaders should be aware that perfectionism is a double-edged sword in terms of its effects on employee creativity. Even for internals, the favorable effect weakens or vanishes when perfectionism is extreme. Therefore, leaders need to avoid setting standards that are far beyond their employees' capabilities and should be tolerant of inevitable errors and failures during the creativity process.

Second, leaders should monitor their employees' states to ensure that they are not exhausted by perfectionistic demands, particularly for those with an external locus of control, and provide resources to enhance their ability to fulfill requirements. For instance, providing positive feedback in a timely manner can boost employees' confidence in producing superior outputs. Certain practices, such as relaxation, stress-recovery activities, and mood regulation (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), can help employees recover from stressful experiences and replenish their resources. By offering instrumental and socioemotional support, such as task-related information and encouragement in difficult times, leaders can help externals overcome the psychological burden associated with leader perfectionism and perform creatively.

Third, for perfectionism to function constructively, leaders need to realize that creativity not only emerges in one's pursuit of optimal solutions and flawless products but also evolves through processes of exploration, experimentation, and failure (van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005). Perfectionistic leaders should recognize the importance of tolerating errors, encourage trial and error, communicate negative feedback constructively, and make their employees feel enthusiastic and safe to cope with challenges in their journey to creativity.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has limitations that may open avenues for future research. First, given that locus of

control can vary across situations (Wang et al., 2010), manipulating it in future research can help enhance the rigor of causal inferences and identify interventions for modulating employees' sense of control and promoting their positive reactions to leader perfectionism.

Second, we asked leaders to rate the creativity of their subordinates in the field study, but leader perfectionism may bias these ratings. Although this approach is common in leadership research (e.g., Hu, Erdogan, Jiang, Bauer, & Liu, 2018), and we found that the correlation between leader perfectionism and leaders' creativity rating was not significant—thereby suggesting that this bias was unlikely in our data—we conducted an additional experiment to mitigate this concern (see Appendix B). We found that managers' perfectionism did not systematically affect their creativity rating. Therefore, leaders' persistent pursuit of perfection does not necessarily bias their evaluation of creativity, but they may be dissatisfied with the level of creativity achieved and keep asking employees to be more creative. Future research can complement our study by obtaining objective measures of creativity or ratings from coworkers or customers (e.g., Dong, Liao, Chuang, Zhou, & Campbell, 2015).

Third, although our research generally showed a double-edged sword effect of leader perfectionism, the findings in the two studies did not fully replicate each other. For instance, the extent to which leader perfectionism could indirectly impact externals' creativity via emotional exhaustion was not consistent across the two studies, and we offered some possible explanations. To address this inconsistency, future research can examine the role of temporary components and other related contextual factors, as well as the research setting, in shaping these relationships.

Fourth, the impact of leaders' self-oriented perfectionism on employees warrants further investigation. Previous research has shown that self-oriented perfectionism can lead to negative social interactions (e.g., Dunkley, Mandel, & Ma, 2014), which can hamper the leader-subordinate relationship and reduce subordinates' performance. Leaders' self-oriented perfectionism may also motivate employees to perform better through role modeling. Therefore, the impact of leader perfectionism toward the self is a promising direction for future research.

Finally, conducting our studies in China may raise concerns about the generalizability of our findings across cultures. China has a high power distance culture, in which deference to authority is legitimate (Hofstede, 2001) and people are tolerant of leaders' unfair treatment (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012).

Accordingly, employees in our samples may have willingly worked hard to meet their leaders' requirements, which may help explain why both internals and externals did not show a significant decrease in their engagement even when leader perfectionism was very high. We speculate that in low power distance cultures, where the norm of deference to authority is not prominent, employees may react more negatively when leader perfectionism is too high.

CONCLUSION

To improve employee creativity, organizations and leaders are keen to strive for perfection. We found it premature to conclude that leader perfectionism fosters or hinders employee creativity; instead, its influence depends on employees' locus of control and the extent of leader perfectionism. Our research can inspire future studies to advance the understanding of leader perfectionism and its effects on employee creativity and thereby help organizations achieve improved results amid fierce competition.

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APPENDIX A

HYPOTHESIZED AND FOUND PATTERNS OF RELATIONSHIPS

Hypotheses	Expected Pattern of Relationship	S1 Findings (Experiment)	S2 Findings (Field)	Summary of Findings
Hypothesis 1: LP × LOC → Engagement (See the overall interaction pattern in Figure 2a for S1 and Figure 3a for S2.)				
Hypothesis 1a: On engagement for internals Pattern: Curvilinear (inverted U-shape)		 Partial support	 Partial support	LP increased internals' engagement with a diminishing return (turned nonsignificant in S1 and weakened in S2).
Hypothesis 1b: On engagement for externals Pattern: Linear (negative)		 No support	 No support	
Hypothesis 2: LP × LOC → Emotional Exhaustion (See the overall interaction pattern in Figure 2b for S1 and Figure 3b for S2.)				
Hypothesis 2a: On emotional exhaustion for internals Pattern: Curvilinear (<i>n.s.</i> , positive)		 No support	 No support	LP did not affect internals' emotional exhaustion in both S1 and S2.
Hypothesis 2b: On emotional exhaustion for externals Pattern: Linear (positive)		 Partial support	 Support	
Hypotheses	Expected Pattern of Relationship	S1 Findings (Experiment)	S2 Findings (Field)	Summary of Findings
Hypothesis 3: LP × LOC → Engagement → Creativity (See the moderated indirect effect via <i>engagement</i> in Table 2 for S1 and Table 5 for S2.)				
Hypothesis 3a: Indirect effect via engagement for internals Pattern: Curvilinear (inverted U-shape)		 Partial support	 No support	LP increased internals' creativity via engagement with a diminishing return (turned nonsignificant in S1 and weakened in S2).
Hypothesis 3b: Indirect effect via engagement for externals Pattern: Linear (negative)		 No support	 No support	
Hypothesis 4: LP × LOC → Emotional Exhaustion → Creativity (See the moderated indirect effect via <i>exhaustion</i> in Table 2 for S1 and Table 5 for S2.)				
Hypothesis 4a: Indirect effect via emotional exhaustion for internals Pattern: Curvilinear (<i>n.s.</i> , negative)		 No support	 No support	LP did not affect internals' creativity via emotional exhaustion in both S1 and S2.
Hypothesis 4b: Indirect effect via emotional exhaustion for externals Pattern: Linear (negative)		 Partial support	 No support (but the 90% CI excluded zero)	

Notes: — Solid lines are for internals. - - - Dotted lines are for externals. S1 = Study 1; S2 = Study 2; LP = leader perfectionism; LOC = locus of control.

† $p < .10$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

APPENDIX B

SUPPLEMENTARY STUDY ON LEADER PERFECTIONISM AND CREATIVITY RATING BIAS

In the field study, we asked leaders to rate their subordinates' creativity. Although this practice is common in leadership research, we conducted a supplementary study to examine whether leader perfectionism may be associated with biased ratings of subordinate creativity.

Participants

We recruited 236 managers with the help of a professional online data collection company in China (similar to Qualtrics in the United States). From its subject pool, we asked the company to preselect participants who were holding managerial positions and had at least four subordinates. The participants were aged 35 years on average ($SD = 6.79$), 50.42% were female, and 92.80% held a bachelor's degree or higher.

Design and Measures

The experiment had a one-way within-subjects design. We described to the managers the idea development task we used in Study 1 and asked them to imagine that two of their subordinates had submitted their proposals. We selected these two proposals carefully from those submitted by participants in Study 1. The three expert judges in Study 1 had consistently rated the creativity of the two proposals as low (with an average rating of 3.60 out of 7, thus being labeled the "low-creativity" proposal) and high (with an average rating of 4.83 out of 7, thus being labeled the "high-creativity" proposal). We modified the two proposals to the same length (335 and 336 words in the low- and high-creativity proposals, respectively). Each participant was shown the two proposals in a random order and asked to rate the creativity of each proposal on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all creative*) to 5 (*extremely creative*). Subsequently, they reported their perfectionism using the same scale employed in Study 2 ($M = 3.65$ out of 5, $SD = .44$) and their demographic information.

Results and Discussion

Correlation.

The correlation analysis showed that the managers with various levels of perfectionism did not differ in their ratings for the "low-creativity" proposal ($r = .09$, $p > .05$) or the "high-creativity" proposal ($r = .03$, $p > .05$), which were previously regarded as low and high in creativity by the experts, respectively.

Rating bias.

We conducted a repeated-measures analysis with the proposal condition (low vs. high in creativity) as the within-subject variable, managers' perfectionism as the continuous independent variable, creativity rating as the dependent variable, and their demographics as the control variables. Results showed that the main effect of managers' perfectionism on their creativity rating was not significant, $F(1, 234) = 1.32$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, suggesting that the more perfectionistic managers were not significantly harsher than the less perfectionistic managers when evaluating subordinates' creativity. The main effect of the proposal condition on managers' creativity rating was significant, $F(1, 234) = 3.18$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, suggesting that the low-creativity proposal was rated significantly lower in terms of creativity than the high-creativity proposal.

More importantly, we found no significant interaction effect between leader perfectionism and the proposal condition on the creativity rating, $F(1, 234) = .52$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. Customized comparisons revealed that managers who were low (1 SD below the mean), moderate (mean), and high (1 SD above the mean) on perfectionism all rated the low-creativity proposal as significantly less creative than the high-creativity proposal (ratings of the low-creativity proposal and high-creativity proposal: $M_{low} = 3.11$, $M_{high} = 4.04$, $p < .001$, by the leaders with low perfectionism; $M_{low} = 3.19$, $M_{high} = 4.06$, $p < .001$, by the leaders with a mean level of perfectionism; $M_{low} = 3.46$, $M_{high} = 4.14$, $p < .05$, by the leaders with high perfectionism). The results are illustrated below.

Overall, perfectionistic managers did not demonstrate a tendency to rate creativity more harshly than less perfectionistic managers. These findings can help mitigate the concern that leaders' level of perfectionism can bias their ratings of employee creativity.

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