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## Employee incremental and radical creativity

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**CHAPTER 4**

**SEEKING HELP FROM YOUR LEADER OR RELYING ON YOURSELF: HOW  
SELF-CONSTRUALS RELATE TO INCREMENTAL AND RADICAL  
CREATIVITY**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to differentiate two employee creative behavioral strategies within the context of leader-employee relationships, namely, seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement, and to examine different antecedents and consequences of these strategies. Using a sample of 301 employees and their immediate leaders from multiple Chinese organizations, we found that: (1) seeking creative help from the leader is related to incremental creativity and that independent creative process engagement is related to radical creativity; (2) employees with an interdependent self-construal tend to seek creative help from their leader, especially when they have established a high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship; and (3) employees with an independent self-construal prefer independent creative process engagement, especially when they have an empowering leader. The implications of these findings for theory and practice are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

*“That’s why I’m a proponent of collaboration. It’s not because working together feels good. If it felt good and the results were mediocre, then collaboration wouldn’t be worth the effort. Collaboration is valuable because it helps us transcend our individual limits and create something greater than ourselves.”* (Bob Sullo, 2007: 104-105)

*“Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence, grappling with hard work.”* (Adrienne Rich, 1977: 233)

Creativity, the generation of novel and potentially useful ideas for problem solutions, is critically needed for employees to adaptively respond to emerging problems or irregular situations at work (Janssen et al., 2004; Zhou & George, 2003). Generating creative ideas is never easy and evolves through a trial-and-error process, and consequently employees often find it difficult to sustain their motivational and cognitive efforts to persistently search for new and better ways of doing things (Metcalf & Wiebe, 1987). To mitigate the difficulty and disfluency that inherently involved in the creative process (Lucas & Nordgren, 2015), employees may contemplate turning to others for assistance, support, information, and input. Empirical studies have shown that seeking help from colleagues during creative problem solving is associated with increased creativity at both the individual level (Mueller & Kamdar, 2011) and the group level (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Taggar, 2002), albeit that seeking help from closely interacted relationships can be costly because of the reciprocity and conformity pressure involved (Mueller & Kamdar, 2011; Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).

Most of the creativity literature on help seeking has focused on the role of colleagues and has left the leaders as targets of help seeking out of consideration. This is problematic because leaders, as power holders or gatekeepers in a specific work domain, play a vital role in supporting employee creativity (e.g., Mainemelis et al., 2015; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Zhou & George, 2003). They can provide valuable resources (e.g., information, time, materials, backing, support) that employees may need to enact creative activities and to anticipate whether their creative ideas can be effective to improve suboptimal work situations. Therefore, some employees may tend to seek their leaders' help in the creative process and thus bring their leaders' input or perspectives to bear on the problem at hand.

However, as the two quotes at the beginning of the paper demonstrate, not all employees may appreciate requesting direct help from their leaders when dealing with new and complex problems that require creativity. Some employees may prefer leaders who empower them to capitalize on their own capacities as much as possible to dig into work-related problems. They may circumvent their leaders as direct helpers and enlarge the pool of informational sources by recruiting different perspectives from multiple channels (e.g., personal memories, experiences from diverse others, documentation, Internet, etc.). By observing that employees may or may not solicit their leaders for help when trying to generate creative ideas for problem solutions, we draw attention to the context of leader-employee dyads in which employees, as primary creators, and leaders, as helpers or empowers, interact in the creative process.

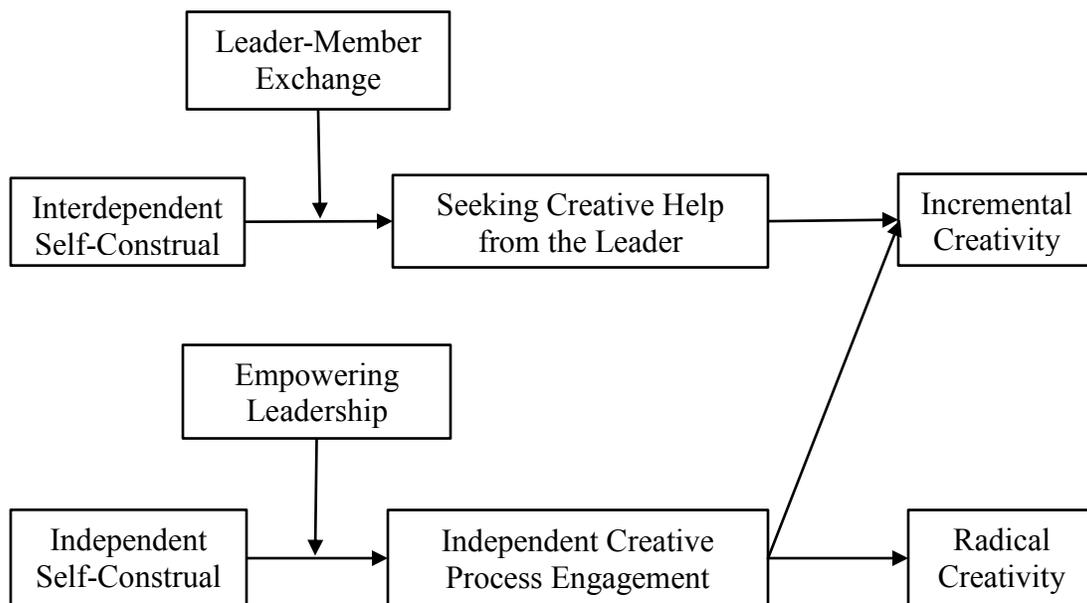
We propose that within the context of leader-employee dyads, employees can either seek help from their leader to perform creatively (i.e., seeking creative help from

the leader) or engage in the creative process in a self-reliant manner (i.e., independent creative process engagement). On the one hand, help-seeking behavior allows employees to access and integrate their leader's information and perspectives on a given problem (Mueller & Kamdar, 2011). On the other hand, independent creative process engagement provides ample process freedom for employees to explore the full spectrum of problem space, think divergently, and deviate from established ways of doing things (e.g., Bechtoldt et al., 2012; Goncalo & Staw, 2006; Janssen & Huang, 2008). While previous research has implied that both strategies can be important routes to creativity, no studies have examined the possibility that these two different strategies may lead to different forms of creativity. In this paper, building on earlier creativity research (e.g., Gilson et al., 2012; Gilson & Madjar, 2011; Madjar et al., 2011), we argue that seeking help from the leader is likely to facilitate the generation of incremental creative solutions that go with the status quo, because employees who rely on their leader in the creative process tend to conform to the leader's perspectives, opinions, and norms. Independent creative process engagement, however, is likely to elicit not only incremental creativity but also radical creativity that challenges the status quo, because employees who rely on themselves in the creative process are less susceptible to conformity pressure (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

Further, we aim to identify personal and situational antecedents that influence specific behavioral strategies that employees use to achieve creativity. Building on self-construal theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000), we theoretically argue and empirically assess a conceptual model (see Figure 4.1) that explains how, why, and when interdependent and

independent self-construals are activated that drive employees to either seek out their leader for assistance or rely on their own capacities to generate creative ideas for problem solutions. More specifically, we propose that an interdependent self-construal is activated when employees perceive a high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX, Liden & Graen, 1980; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) relationship with their leader, and that this activation leads employees to seek the leader's creative help, thereby resulting in incremental creativity. Conversely, we propose that an independent self-construal is activated when employees feel empowered by their leader (Ahearne et al., 2005; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), and that this activation leads employees to independently engage in the creative process, thereby resulting in both incremental and radical creativity.

**Figure 4.1 Overview of the hypothesized model**



In this study, we aim to empirically test the above-proposed model. By doing so, the major contributions of this study are twofold. First, we provide a more refined and nuanced perspective on behavioral strategies used to generate creative ideas for problem solutions in the context of leader-employee dyads and highlight different consequences of

seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement. This represents an important extension of existing research because previous work primarily focused on colleagues as targets of requesting creativity-related assistance and has not compared its effectiveness with an independent, self-reliant strategy for engaging in creative courses of action. Second, by examining personal and situational antecedents of strategy use during the creative process, this study should help to advance our understanding of why employees differ in the strategies they use to persist through the creative process and what organizational leaders can do to encourage and support their employees' creative endeavors. Overall, we explicate how self-construals interact with leadership styles to influence the occurrence of incremental and radical creativity through different behavioral strategies.

## **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **Behavioral strategies and incremental and radical creativity**

The creative process is often fraught with ambiguity, uncertainty, and difficulty, as failed attempts are extremely common before truly creative ideas emerge. When confronted with setbacks or obstacles in the creative process, employees can use different types of coping strategies to keep the process going. In the context of leader-employee dyadic relationships, employees can directly involve their leader to participate in their creative efforts via help-seeking or maintain independence on how to construct problems and arrive at creative solutions. Both seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement could potentially contribute to the generation of creative ideas, but the level of creativity in the ideas generated might be very different (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988).

Research has acknowledged a nuanced conceptualization of creativity that contrasts incremental and radical creativity. Incremental creativity involves small changes in existing frameworks that offer minor modifications to what is currently offered, done, or known, whereas radical creativity refers to ideas that substantially deviate from the status quo (Audia & Goncalo, 2007; Mumford & Gustafson, 1988). Different cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes have been found to underlie the generation of incremental and radical ideas (Gilson et al., 2012; Gilson & Madjar, 2011; Madjar et al., 2011), with radical ideas being particularly censored and inhibited as a result of social pressure (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). This may suggest that the help-seeking strategy that directly invites the leader to develop creative ideas together with employees is less likely to produce radical ideas than an independent strategy that is free of the group leader's involvement. We argue that seeking creative help from the leader is more likely to lead to incremental improvements and that independent creative process engagement will be associated with the development of both incremental and radical creativity.

***Seeking creative help from the leader.*** We define seeking creative help from the leader as the act of soliciting the immediate leader for information, perspectives, assistance, and other input to form creative ideas in response to new and ill-defined work problems (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Mueller & Kamdar, 2011). As the recipient of requests for help, the leader is cued to provide different perspectives that may help employees to reframe the problem, and to contribute new information that he/she expects employees might not know (Mueller & Kamdar, 2011; Unsworth, 2001), thereby stimulating the generation of alternatives that are unlikely to be considered without the

leader's input. As such, help-seeking provides an important mechanism to harness the leader's creative resources, which facilitates employees to identify previously unconsidered ideas.

However, the help-seeking strategy toward creativity is structured and not free of constraints. As power holders, or gatekeepers of the status quo, leaders may tend to maintain and support the proven framework of thoughts, practices, and routines that has been established in their leadership domain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Hence, leaders are likely to provide creative help that keep relying on their past knowledge and experience (Audia & Goncalo, 2007). Such leader help should confine the space for divergent thinking, narrow the scope of problem construction, and increase the likelihood of producing incrementally creative solutions that consolidate the existing framework within organizations.

Moreover, once employees have received creative contributions from their leader, they will feel indebted to reciprocate with similar ideas that favor rather than deviate from the leader's advices and suggestions (cf. Gouldner, 1960). As the hierarchical relation puts employees in a state of asymmetrical dependence on their leader, employees are likely to avoid controversy or appearing insensitive, and thus they may intentionally choose to withhold their most creative ideas and instead voice relatively conventional ideas (i.e. incremental creativity) that will be more acceptable and less disruptive to the leader. Based on the above reasoning, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Seeking creative help from the leader is positively related to incremental creativity.*

***Independent creative process engagement.*** Independent creative process engagement is defined as a self-reliant way to achieve creativity in which employees draw on their own individual abilities, qualities, and attributes to engage in a set of cognitive and behavioral activities associated with creativity. Self-reliance does not imply that individuals solve problems in isolation from others without taking others' perspectives into account. Independent creative process engagement may well include searching information from multiple sources, considering different perspectives from a variety of social contacts, and looking for connections in seemingly unrelated areas. Independence refers to engaging in the creative process in a self-reliant manner using independent thinking. The effect of independent creative process engagement on creativity is grounded in the freedom to follow one's individualistic, unique mindset and allow as many cognitive associations as possible to influence creative thought (Liu, Chen, & Yao, 2011; Sagiv et al., 2010). Such a self-reliant strategy protects original ideas from the social pressure to conform to established practices, routines, and conventions (Madjar et al., 2011; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Thus, the self-reliant approach to engage in the creative process is expected to increase the accessibility of a full spectrum of ideas, including both incremental and radical ideas.

Creative thinking is an associative and iterative process that generally includes three core activities: problem construction, information searching, and idea generation (Amabile, 1983; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). Independent creative process engagement ensures that employees have sufficient autonomy to represent problems to be solved based on their idiosyncratic and unique perspectives (Liu et al., 2011). Such independent mindsets may lead them to question any assumption behind a problem, explore the entire

problem space, and formulate extensive problem representations (Janssen & Huang, 2008; Kim et al., 2013). The more problem frames available to employees, the greater the likelihood that substantive information and knowledge from different sources (e.g., personal memories, others' experiences, documentation, Internet) will be gathered (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). Finally, such an independent engagement in the associative variation process facilitates divergent thinking, enabling employees to search for creative solutions in any possible direction and develop a wide range of ideas and alternatives (Sagiv et al., 2010).

Research on the cognitive processes that underlie creative idea generation has shown that the more cognitive efforts an individual invests in creative tasks, the more original the generated ideas are likely to be (Lucas & Nordgren, 2015; Rietzschel, Nijstad, & Stroebe, 2007). This implies that the initial engagement in the creative process will often lead to obvious and immediately accessible solutions reflecting minor improvements, refinements, or extensions to the existing framework. In addition to incremental creativity, we contend that independent creative process engagement also elicits radical creativity because the independent exploration of alternatives may boost divergent thinking. Once incremental ideas have been exhausted, continued engagement in the creative process may increase the likelihood of breaking with the status quo and diverging from existing thoughts and actions. As such, when employees continuously drive themselves to search for more unusual and far-reaching ideas, they are likely to suggest radically novel solutions that otherwise would not have arisen. In sum, maintain independent thinking in creative actions ensures that employees have process freedom to

generate incremental adaptation as well as radical breakthrough ideas. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2a: Independent creative process engagement is positively related to incremental creativity.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Independent creative process engagement is positively related to radical creativity.*

### **Self-construals and behavioral strategies in the creative process**

Following the above discussion on their consequences, we now turn to discussing potential antecedents of seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement by considering self-construals. Self-construals reflect how individuals view the self in relation to others. In Markus and Kitayama's (1991) conceptualization, individuals with an interdependent self-construal view the self as fundamentally interconnected with others and embedded in social relationships, whereas those with an independent self-construal view the self as fundamentally individual and separate from others. Self-construal theory suggests that individual differences in self-construals will influence how individuals perceive and react to creative tasks or problems that invite creative thought (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2010). An interdependent self-construal is associated with the motivation to engage in actions that foster their relatedness or connection to others. This motivation induces a preference for seeking relevant others' help in response to new and ill-structured work problems that need to be solved creatively. In contrast, an independent self-construal is linked with the motivation to engage in actions that allow them to express their unique

inner attributes and withstand social pressure. Thus, this type of self-construal drives employees to undertake creative activities in a self-reliant manner whenever possible.

*Interdependent self-construal and seeking creative help from the leader.* The interdependent self is constructed in terms of connections and role relationships with significant others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In such an interdependent view of self, the basis of individuality is to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships by attending closely and responding sensitively to close others' preferences, values, and needs. Such attentiveness and responsiveness to others results in a social context-dependent cognition and a relationship-promoting motivation.

We expect an interdependent self-construal to be positively related to seeking creative help from the leader for two reasons. First, employees with an interdependent self-construal tend to form cognitive representation of a focal problem that incorporates the social context in which the self and close others are embedded (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Guided by the view that their own way of representing the problem is incomplete or inadequate, these employees tend to involve their leaders as joint creators. Since leaders typically have greater experience of what has historically constituted the current states of affairs, employees with an interdependent self-construal are likely to see their leader as a valuable source of domain expertise that may offer a great deal of practical assistance to solve the problem creatively.

Furthermore, because the self-worth of an interdependent self is primarily driven by fitting into appropriate social roles (Lapierre, Naidoo, & Bonaccio, 2012), employees with an interdependent self-construal are likely to perceive help-seeking from the leader as appropriate role behavior in relation to their leader. These employees feel obliged to

live up to their leader's expectations, leading them to seek information, help, and assistance from the leader when confronted with work-related problems. By taking their leader's perspectives into account, employees show their respect to and concern for the leader's goals, needs, and preferences. In addition, given leaders' high-power positions, they are expected to possess superior competence and take on extra responsibilities to successfully tackle new and ill-defined work problems. Accordingly, it is acceptable for employees to depend on their leader for information, suggestions, and input to solve problems creatively (Nadler, 2002). Thus, employees who perceive that they are interdependent with their leader are more likely to reach out to their leader for creativity-related help. This leads to our third hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3: An interdependent self-construal is positively related to seeking creative help from the leader.*

***Independent self-construal and independent creative process engagement.*** We expect that employees who construe themselves as independent tend to adopt an independent, self-reliant strategy to engage in creative actions. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that individuals with an independent self-construal, when faced with a problem, primarily focus on the problem in and of itself, resulting in a social context-independent problem representation. Employees with an independent self-construal, through this decontextualized way of representing work problems they encounter, view such problems as controllable through their own actions and perceive themselves to be autonomously responsible for them. As such, they are more likely to infuse their independent thinking into a set of complex cognitive processing activities involved in the creative process.

Moreover, because employees with an independent self-concept derive a sense of self-worth from engaging in self-reliant behavior directed at advancing their individual distinctiveness, they are more likely to see independent creative process engagement as an effective means to stand out (Janssen & Huang, 2008; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). Creativity, by definition, is unique and distinct in the sense that creative ideas or solutions are rare, novel, and statistically infrequent (Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016). Further, creativity is commonly seen as valuable and desirable by both the individual and society. Due to the uniqueness inherently associated with creativity and the perceived value placed upon it, employees with an independent self-construal may perceive independent creative process engagement as a means to establish and demonstrate their distinctiveness (Rios et al., 2014). As a result, in the face of work problems that need to be addressed creatively, they are likely to deploy their own idiosyncratic qualities, capacities, and attributes to delve into these problems and develop creative solutions in a self-reliant manner. This leads to our fourth hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4: An independent self-construal is positively related to independent creative process engagement.*

#### **Activation of self-construal through leadership**

Although individuals are intrinsically motivated to act upon the underlying needs and drives that are central to their personality (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000), trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000) posits that individuals will not do so unless they are presented with trait-relevant situational cues. The prime tenet of trait activation theory is that individuals will only act in line with their central needs and values when they anticipate that the situation *allows* them to do so. In this study, we posit

that leadership, as a salient motivational component of the work environment (Yukl, 2010), may assist in activating self-construals. In the following paragraphs, we first theorize how a high-quality LMX relationship activates an interdependent self-construal, and how empowering leadership activates an independent self-construal. We then argue that an activated interdependent self-construal fosters only incremental creativity through seeking creative help from the leader, while an activated independent self-construal fosters both incremental and radical creativity through independent creative process engagement.

***Leader-member exchange.*** LMX theory suggests that leaders form unique relationships with each of their employees that range from high-quality socio-emotional relationships characterized by affect, contribution, respect, and loyalty to low-quality transactional relationships in which such feelings are lacking (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Having high-quality LMX relationships implies being incorporated into the leader's trusted contacts, which should allow greater ease and comfort to depend on the leader. In contrast, the contractual nature of low-LMX relationships offers few opportunities to approach the leader. Thus, LMX shapes the conditions in which employees interpret whether they can count on their leader for support and important resources.

Drawing on LMX theory, we propose that a high-quality exchange relationship with the leader creates a relational context that triggers employees with an interdependent self-construal to seek creative help from their leader. A high-quality LMX relationship involves an employee's liking of, contribution to, and professional respect of the leader and the leader's loyalty toward the employee (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Such a high-quality LMX relationship facilitates helping as an exchange resource, assuring that help

will be provided to the employee in times of need (Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013). Thus, when employees with an interdependent self-construal establish a high-quality LMX relationship, they will find it easier and more comfortable to solicit help and assistance from their immediate leader in the creative process. Moreover, employees in a high-quality LMX relationship have more frequent interactions and better communication channels with their leader (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997), which afford them more opportunities to request creativity-related assistance. Thus, a high-quality LMX relationship may serve as a favorable social cue that allows an employee's interdependent self-construal to find expression in the form of seeking creative help from the leader. This leads to our fifth hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 5: Leader-member exchange moderates the relationship between an interdependent self-construal and seeking creative help from the leader, such that this relationship is stronger when leader-member exchange is high rather than low.*

**Empowering leadership.** Empowering leadership involves delegating power, autonomy, and responsibilities to employees with the intention of enhancing their motivation and involvement at work (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). We posit that empowering leadership creates an independence-supporting context that facilitates employees with an independent self-construal to adopt a self-reliant strategy to develop creative ideas for problem solutions. Because empowering leaders encourage employees to decide how to carry out work themselves, such leadership behavior signals that independent creative process engagement is a desirable way to address work problems creatively. More specifically, first, with autonomy and self-direction provided by

empowering leadership, employees with an independent self-construal feel able to freely pursue their internal desires for independence by dealing with problems in a self-reliant manner. Second, empowering leaders, who offer employees channels and opportunities to participate in decision-making, communicate to these employees that their unique ideas, opinions, and viewpoints are highly valued and appreciated. Such self-relevant stimuli fit well with the distinctiveness-seeking tendencies of the independent self, thereby triggering independent creative process engagement. Third, empowering leadership provides the informational resources necessary for the independent self to decide, plan, and organize creative activities on their own. Fourth, empowering leaders express their confidence in an employee's competence to achieve high performance, which bolsters the construal of the self as an autonomous entity and enables the expression of its unique inner attributes. For these reasons, we propose in our next hypothesis that empowering leadership is likely to serve as a favorable social cue that allows an employee's independent self-construal to find expression in the form of independent creative process engagement in response to problems requiring creativity.

*Hypothesis 6: Empowering leadership moderates the positive relationship between an independent self-construal and independent creative process engagement such that this relationship is stronger when empowering leadership is high rather than low.*

### **Integrated models for self-construals and creativity**

Earlier, we argued that seeking creative help from the leader is likely to lead to incremental creativity (Hypothesis 1). In addition, we have provided argumentation as to why an interdependent self-construal may manifest itself in seeking creative help from

the leader when it is activated by high-quality leader-member exchanges (Hypothesis 5). By implication, this combination suggests that LMX may serve as a first-stage moderator in an indirect relationship between an interdependent self-construal and employee incremental creativity through seeking creative help from the leader. On this basis, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 7: Leader-member exchange moderates the indirect relationship between an interdependent self-construal and incremental creativity, through seeking creative help from the leader, such that this indirect relationship is stronger when the quality of the leader-member exchange is high rather than low.*

Furthermore, we have posited that independent creative process engagement will be positively related to both incremental creativity (Hypothesis 2a) and radical creativity (Hypothesis 2b). We have further argued that employees with an independent self-construal are more likely to use an independent, self-reliant strategy to tackle work problems that require creativity when there is a high level of empowering leadership (Hypothesis 6). Together, these hypotheses suggest first-stage moderated mediation models in which the indirect relationship between an independent self-construal and both incremental and radical employee creativity, through independent creative process engagement, are contingent on empowering leadership. Therefore, we further hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 8a: Empowering leadership moderates the indirect relationship between an independent self-construal and incremental creativity through independent creative process engagement, such that this indirect relationship is stronger when empowering leadership is high rather than low.*

*Hypothesis 8b: Empowering leadership moderates the indirect relationship between an independent self-construal and radical creativity through independent creative process engagement, such that this indirect relationship is stronger when empowering leadership is high rather than low.*

## METHOD

### Participants and procedure

We collected survey data from six Chinese companies operating in service and industrial sectors. From the 412 individual-level invitations distributed, 301 employees nested under 51 leaders completed surveys, resulting a response rate of 73.06%. Forty of these employees produced missing data on any of the questionnaire variables. We used the multiple imputation method in dealing with the missing data to make use of the full information available in the sample.

Of the 301 employees, there were 141 were male, 147 female, and 13 did not specify their gender, with a mean age of 32.26 years ( $SD = 7.45$ ), and average job tenure of 8.57 years ( $SD = 7.65$ ). Our participants were highly educated, 83.45% of them had a bachelor's degree or higher.

### Measures

Surveys were prepared in English and then translated into Chinese following Brislin et al.'s (1980) back-translation procedure. Unless otherwise indicated, all measures were assessed on a seven-point Likert scale.

***Interdependent and independent self-construals.*** The Self-Construal Scale (SCS) developed by Singelis (1994) was used to capture the strength of interdependent and independent self, and each is captured through twelve items. A sample item for the

interdependent self-construal scale is “My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me” ( $\alpha = .83$ ). A sample item for the independent self-construal scale is “My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me” ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

***Seeking creative help from the leader.*** Following Mueller and Kamdar (2011) who based their scale of help-seeking from colleagues on Anderson and Williams’ (1996) help-seeking behavior scale, we adapted Anderson and Williams’ (1996) scale to focus on the act of reaching out to the leader for assistance in dealing with tasks and problems that require creativity. Employees were asked to rate the frequency with which they sought help or assistance from their leader when solving problems creatively. The response options ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (always). Example items were: “I approach my leader for advice when I do not understand how to solve a problem”, “I ask my leader for assistance in creative problem-solving”, and “I consult my leader for information required to complete a task creatively” ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

***Independent creative process engagement.*** To capture the extent to which employees drive themselves towards creative activities, we used and slightly adapted Zhang and Bartol’s (2010) creative process engagement scale to meet the needs of this particular study. In a preamble to the scale items, employees were asked to rate their independent engagement in the creative process that did not rely on others when faced with problems. Example items were: “I independently spend considerable time trying to understand the nature of the problem”, “I independently search for information from multiple sources (e.g., personal memories, others’ experience, documentation, Internet, etc.)”, and “I independently look for connections with solutions used in seemingly diverse areas” ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

***Leader-member exchange.*** We measured LMX from the employees' perspective using Liden and Maslyn's (1998) eleven-item LMX scale. The member version of the LMX scale captures four dimensions of the global LMX construct, reflecting affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect. Example items include: "I like my leader very much as a person", "My leader would come to my defense if I were 'attacked' by others", and "I respect my leader's knowledge of and competence in the job" ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

***Empowering leadership.*** Empowering leadership was assessed using Ahearne et al.'s (2005) twelve-item scale that addressed four dimensions: fostering participation in decision making, enhancing the meaningfulness of work, expressing confidence in high performance, and providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints. Example items were: "My leader solicits my opinion on decisions that may affect me", "My leader believes that I can handle demanding tasks", and "My leader allows me to do my job in my own way" ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

***Employee incremental and radical creativity.*** Supervisory ratings of incremental and radical creativity were based on measures taken from Madjar et al. (2011). Each item started with "This employee suggests", and the three items for incremental creativity were: "small ideas for incremental improvements", "small adaptations to the existing ways of doing things", and "minor modifications to current procedures, work processes, products, or service lines" ( $\alpha=.92$ ). The three items for radical creativity were: "highly creative ideas", "really original solutions to problems", and "radically new ways of doing things" ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

***Control variables.*** We controlled for gender (Baer & Kaufman, 2008), age (Lehman, 1960), educational level (1 = high school diploma, 2 = college degree, 3 =

bachelor's degree, 4 = master's degree, 5 = doctoral degree), job tenure (Schoen, 2015), as these have been shown to be important determinants of our study variables. In addition, we involved seeking creative help from colleagues as a control variable in predicting incremental and radical creativity because previous research has demonstrated its predictive validity on a general form of creativity (Mueller & Kamdar, 2011). We again adapted Anderson and Williams's (1996) measure of help-seeking behavior to focus on colleagues as targets. The coefficient alpha was .90.

### **Analytical strategy**

Given the nested structure of the data in the present study and the substantial leader-level variances in employee incremental ( $ICC_1 = .23, p < .01$ ) and radical ( $ICC_1 = .33, p < .001$ , creativity, we used a random intercept model in Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) to take the leader-level effect into account (cf. Edwards & Lambert, 2007). We implemented a Monte Carlo procedure to construct confidence intervals for assessing the significance of conditional indirect effects (Selig & Preacher, 2008). All predictors were standardized in our analyses.

## **RESULTS**

### **Confirmatory factor analyses**

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses in Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) to check the discriminant validity of the eight key study variables. To improve the ratio of the sample size to the number of parameter estimates and to facilitate model convergence (Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013), we created 'parcels' for empowering leadership and for LMX by combining items into subdimensions and used the resulting parcels as indicators of their corresponding

constructs. For all the other constructs in our model, the original items were used to represent their corresponding constructs. As shown in Table 4.1, the expected eight-factor model achieved a reasonable fit with the data ( $\chi^2 [1402] = 2678.13$ , CFI = .86, TLI=.85, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .07) and was a significantly better fit than all the alternative nested models. These results indicate that the discriminant validity of these constructs is acceptable and that it is safe to proceed with further investigation.

### **Descriptive statistics and correlations**

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability coefficients of the study variables are displayed in Table 4.2. Among the control variables, age ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ) and job tenure ( $r = .14, p < .05$ ) were negatively related to seeking creative help from the leader. Educational level was positively related to independent creative process engagement ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ). Gender was not correlated with any of the outcome variables in our model. We therefore excluded it from our analyses to avoid biased parameter estimates (Becker, 2005). As a check, we repeated the analysis when also including gender as a covariate and this did not change the findings on the substantive relationships in our model.

### **Hypotheses testing**

Using the integrated approach suggested by Edwards and Lambert (2007), the complete model was estimated in a multilevel analysis. In the Level-1 model, we specified the hypothesized mediation model including all the proposed relationships; in the Level-2 model, we controlled for the between-group variance of leader-rated incremental and radical creativity. Table 4.3 shows the unstandardized results of these analyses.

**Table 4.1 Model fit results for confirmatory factor analyses**

Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Model 1: Eight-factor model	2678.13	1402		.86	.85	.06	.07
Model 2: Seven-factor model	2847.60	1409	$\chi^2(7)=169.47^{***}$	.84	.83	.06	.07
Model 3: Seven-factor model	3953.10	1409	$\chi^2(7)=1247.97^{***}$	.72	.71	.08	.09
Model 4: Six-factor model	4122.78	1415	$\chi^2(13)=1444.65^{***}$	.70	.69	.08	.10
Model 5: Five-factor model	4224.49	1420	$\chi^2(18)=1546.36^{***}$	.69	.68	.08	.10
Model 6: Four-factor model	4551.35	1424	$\chi^2(22)=1873.22^{***}$	.66	.64	.09	.10
Model 7: Three-factor model	5467.89	1427	$\chi^2(25)=2789.76^{***}$	.56	.54	.10	.12
Model 8: Two-factor model	6719.80	1429	$\chi^2(27)=4041.67^{***}$	.42	.40	.11	.12
Model 9: One-factor model	7939.97	1430	$\chi^2(28)=5261.84^{***}$	.28	.26	.12	.14

*Note.*  $N = 301$ . All the alternative models were compared with the hypothesized eight-factor model. All  $\Delta\chi^2$  are significant at  $p < .001$ . Model 1: hypothesized eight-factor model; Model 2: independent and interdependent self-construal on one factor; Model 3: seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement on one factor; Model 4: independent and interdependent self-construal on one factor, seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement on one factor; Model 5: independent and interdependent self-construal on one factor, seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement on one factor, empowering leadership and LMX on one factor; Model 6: independent and interdependent self-construal on one factor, seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement on one factor, empowering leadership and LMX on one factor, incremental and radical creativity on one factor; Model 7: independent and interdependent self-construal, seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement and on one factor, empowering leadership and LMX on one factor, and incremental and radical creativity on one factor; Model 8: employee-rated variables on one factor, leader-rated variables on one factor; Model 9: all variables on one factor.

**Table 4.2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations**

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age (in years)	32.26	7.45												
2. Education	3.26	0.86	-.04											
3. Job tenure (in years)	8.57	7.65	.92**	-.23**										
4. Seeking creative help from colleagues	4.19	1.03	-.03	-.01	.01	(.90)								
5. Interdependent self-construal	5.51	0.72	-.02	-.00	-.02	.21**	(.83)							
6. Independent self-construal	4.92	0.64	-.00	-.00	.01	.05	.31**	(.70)						
7. LMX	5.36	1.10	-.32**	-.06	-.29**	.13*	.37**	.15**	(.96)					
8. Empowering leadership	5.07	0.99	-.23**	-.06	-.18**	.15*	.41**	.28**	.78**	(.93)				
9. Seeking creative help from the leader	4.16	1.15	-.17**	.11†	-.14*	.63**	.24**	.15*	.33**	.29**	(.91)			
10. Independent creative process engagement	4.95	0.96	-.11	.19**	-.10	.27**	.18**	.25**	.21**	.29**	.28**	(.93)		
11. Incremental creativity	4.81	1.15	-.03	.10†	-.05	.04	.01	-.03	.00	.02	.14*	.11†	(.92)	
12. Radical creativity	4.13	1.30	.02	.11†	.02	.06	-.04	-.03	-.02	.05	.08	.16**	.68**	(.92)

*Note.* *N* = 301. Values in parentheses are Cronbach's alpha coefficients. For gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; For education, 1 = high school diploma, 2 = college degree; 3 = bachelor's degree, 4 = master's degree, 5 = doctoral degree.

†  $p < .1$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 4.3 Results of moderated mediation analyses**

Predictor	Seeking creative help from the leader		Independent creative process engagement		Employee incremental creativity		Employee radical creativity	
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>
Age (in years)	-.10	.20	-.13	.19	.15	.15	-.06	.13
Education	.14*	.07	.25***	.07	.02	.08	.18*	.09
Job tenure (in years)	.02	.21	.10	.19	-.14	.15	.12	.13
Seeking creative help from colleagues					-.11	.08	.03	.08
Interdependent self-construal	.14*	.06	.03	.07	.03	.08	-.08	.09
Independent self-construal	.06	.06	.16**	.06	-.07	.07	-.10	.06
LMX	.22*	.09	-.03	.11				
Empowering leadership	.04	.07	.27*	.10				
Interdependent self-construal × LMX	.09 <sup>†</sup>	.05						
Independent self-construal × Empowering leadership			.10 <sup>†</sup>	.05				
Seeking creative help from the leader					.21*	.09	.07	.09
Independent creative process engagement					.06	.07	.18*	.09

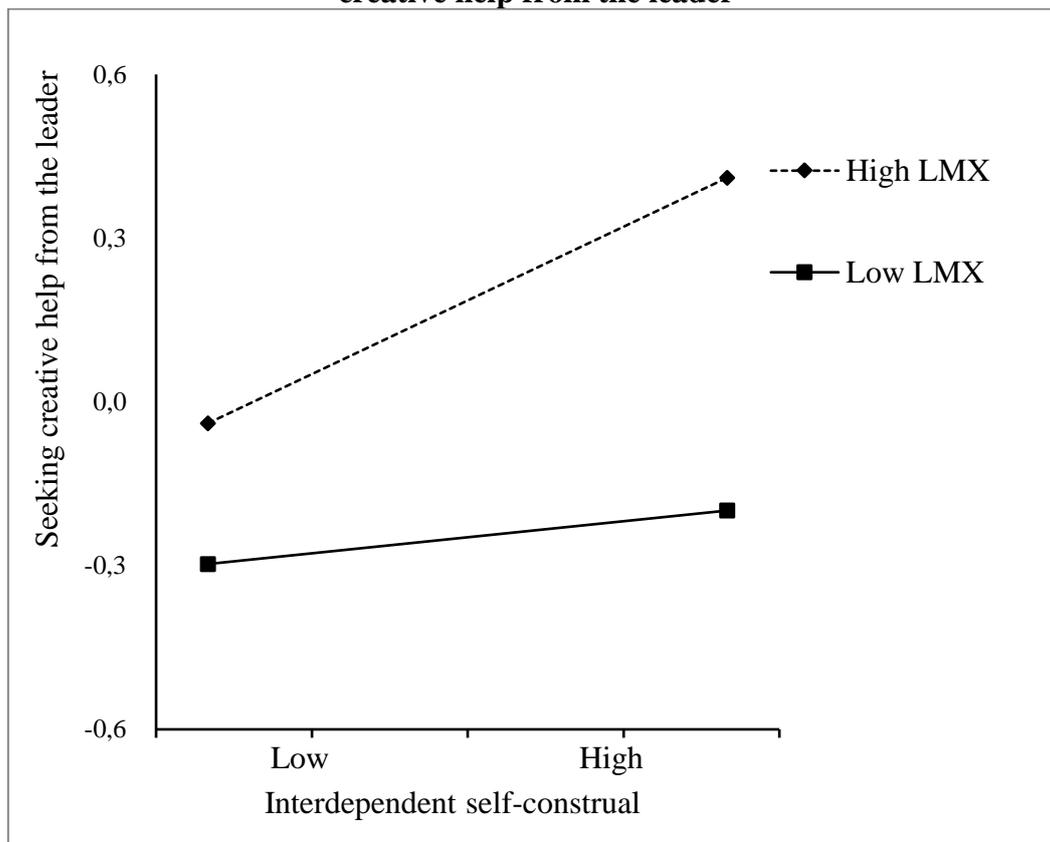
Note.  $N = 301$ . <sup>†</sup>  $p < .1$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

As expected, seeking creative help from the leader had a significant positive relationship with incremental creativity ( $\gamma = .21, p < .05$ ), thereby confirming Hypothesis 1. Independent creative process engagement has a significant positive relationship with radical creativity ( $\gamma = .18, p < .05$ ), but a nonsignificant relationship with incremental creativity ( $\gamma = .06, ns$ ). As such, support was found for Hypothesis 2b, but not for Hypothesis 2a.

As expected, an interdependent self-construal was found to be positively related to seeking creative help from the leader ( $\gamma = .14, p < .05$ ) after controlling for the effect of an independent self-construal. An independent self-construal was positively related to independent creative process engagement ( $\gamma = .16, p < .01$ ) after controlling for the effect of an interdependent self-construal. These findings support both Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4.

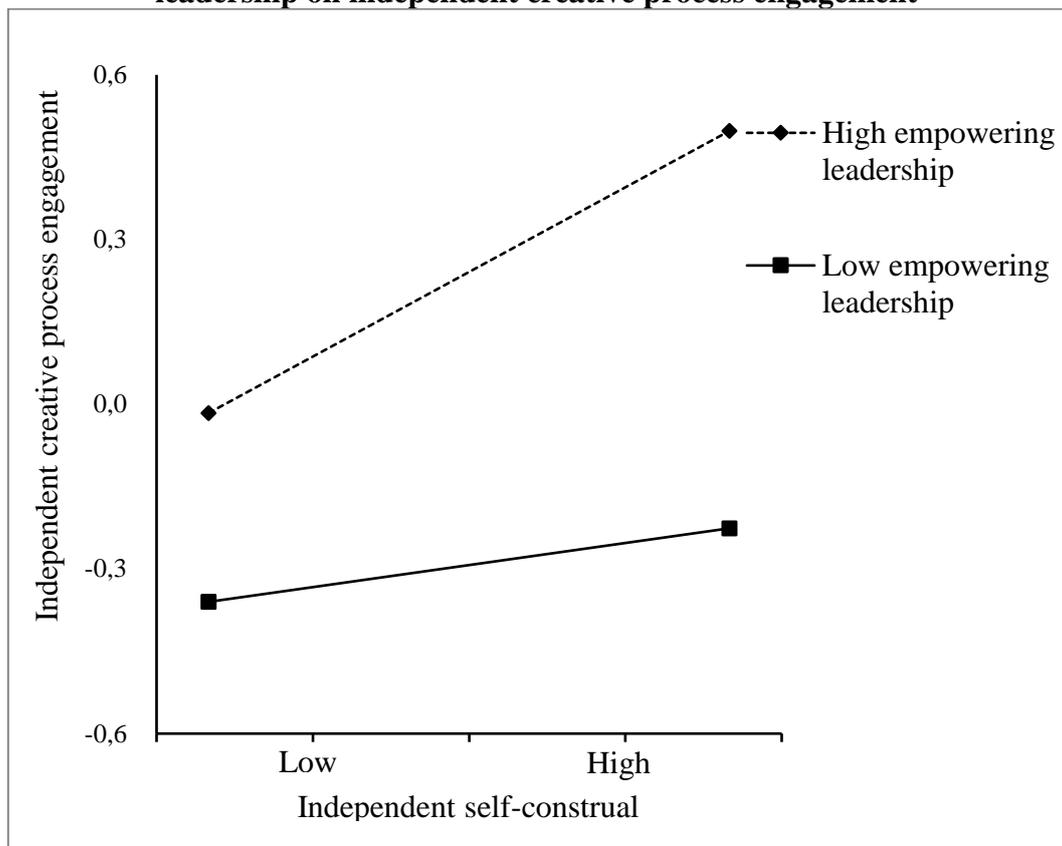
As predicted in Hypothesis 5, we observed a marginally significant interaction effect between an interdependent self-construal and LMX in predicting seeking creative help from the leader ( $\gamma = .09, p < .10$ ); however, as the moderation hypothesis is virtually directional, it justifies a one-tailed test producing a statistically significant result with a p-value below .05. To illustrate the nature of the interaction, simple slopes were plotted in Figure 4.2. As shown, the relationship between an interdependent self-construal and seeking creative help from the leader was positive and significant at higher levels of LMX ( $\gamma = .23, p < .01$ , two-tailed), but non-significant at lower levels of LMX ( $\gamma = .05, ns$ ). Such pattern of results lent support for Hypothesis 5.

**Figure 4.2** The interaction effect of interdependent self-construal and LMX on seeking creative help from the leader



In support of Hypothesis 6, the interaction term between an independent self-construal and empowering leadership was marginally significantly related to independent creative process engagement ( $\gamma = .10, p < .10$ ); however, again, as the moderation hypothesis is directional, a one-tailed test is justified and produced a statistically significant result with a p-value below .05. The nature of this interaction was illustrated in Figure 4.3 reflecting that an independent self-construal only had a significant effect on independent creative process engagement when empowering leadership was relatively high (+1 SD;  $\gamma = .26, p < .001$ , two-tailed). When empowering leadership is lower (-1 SD), this relationship was not significant ( $\gamma = .07, ns$ ).

**Figure 4.3** The interaction effect of independent self-construal and empowering leadership on independent creative process engagement



To test Hypothesis 7, we examined whether the indirect effect of an interdependent self-construal on incremental creativity through seeking creative help from the leader differed at high (+1 SD) and low (−1 SD) levels of LMX. The results of the Monte Carlo test indicated that this indirect relationship was significant at high levels of LMX (indirect effect = .05; CI = [.003, .109]), but not when LMX was low (indirect effect = .01; CI = [−.020 to .050]), thus supporting Hypothesis 7.

Although independent creative process engagement was not related to incremental creativity, we also directly tested the conditional indirect effects predicted in Hypothesis 8a. The results showed that the indirect effect of an independent self-construal on incremental creativity was not significant at any level of empowering leadership. As such, Hypothesis 8a was rejected. Next, we found that the indirect effect of an independent self-construal on radical creativity was positive and significant when empowering leadership was high (indirect

effect = .05; CI = [.004, .105]), whereas this indirect effect was not significant when empowering leadership was low (indirect effect = .01; CI = [-.024 to .050]), thereby providing support for Hypothesis 8b.

## DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have developed a more refined perspective on strategies that employees may adopt to generate creative ideas for problem solutions by distinguishing seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement within the context of employee-leader dyads. The main goal of this study was to examine the antecedents and consequences of these two creative behavioral strategies. Results show that seeking creative help from the leader is more effective in delivering incremental creativity, whereas independent creative process engagement is more likely to result in the generation of radical ideas. Building on self-construal theory and trait activation theory, we found that high LMX acts as a relevant cue that allows the interdependent self-construal to manifest itself in the form of seeking creative help from the leader, and that empowering leadership activates the expression of an independent self-construal in the form of independent creative process engagement. Finally, we tested an integrated model that showed that employees with an interdependent self-construal prefer seeking creative help from the leader and show incremental creativity when having a high-quality LMX relationship with their leader. Those with an independent self-construal prefer independent creative process engagement and show radical creativity when they have an empowering leader.

### **Theoretical implications**

By explicating the antecedents and consequences of strategy use during the creative process, our theorizing and empirical results contribute to the literature in several ways. First, by differentiating between seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement, we refine the understanding of the behavioral strategies used in the

creative process. This represents an important extension to existing research because, although organizational scholars have suggested that leaders can facilitate the effortful cognitive processes underlying creativity among their employees (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004), they have not empirically examined the leader's role as a contributing party by offering creativity-related help when such help is solicited. It is also worth noting that seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement are positively related. This finding is not altogether surprising since the use of a self-reliant strategy does not preclude seeking creative help from the leader or vice versa.

Second, the present study also adds to creativity research by examining behavioral strategies used in the creative process as antecedents of incremental and radical creativity. Recent empirical studies have begun to identify personal and contextual factors that differentially influence the production of incremental and/or radical creative outcomes (e.g., Gilson & Madjar, 2011; Madjar et al., 2011; Venkataramani et al., 2014). We contribute to this emerging line of research by focusing on how different behavioral strategies relate to incremental and radical creativity. Our results suggest that seeking creative help from the leader is more likely to elicit incremental creativity because, the leader, as the power holder and gatekeeper of the status quo, tend to guide employees toward converging with the established framework rather than diverging from it. Thus, although the help received facilitates employees to identify previously unconsidered ideas, such creativity-related help from the leader may inadvertently squash novelty and uniqueness (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Conversely, independent creative process engagement is especially beneficial for radical creativity because it frees employees from being anchored at how things are currently done, or what is currently offered, and thus enables them to question the problems' premises and break with accepted modes of thought (Gilson & Madjar, 2011; Mumford & Gustafson,

1988). By taking advantage of divergent thinking, employees are more likely to realize their capacities to generate radical breakthrough ideas.

Contrary to expectations, we did not find evidence for the relationship between independent creative process engagement and incremental creativity. It thus seems that incremental adaptations or refinements are more likely to be achieved through the strategy of seeking creative help from the leader, and that an independent, self-reliant strategy is not very effective in this regard. One possibility is that independent creative process engagement does not necessarily hinder the generation of incremental creative ideas, but that it does hinder the expression of such ideas toward the leader. That is, through independent creative process engagement, employees might also internally generate incremental, easily accommodated ideas but they choose to speak up radical breakthroughs instead of incremental ideas. They may decide to do so because radical ideas are deemed more promising, fresh, and valuable, which serves as a better way of differentiating one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors from those of others especially for employees with an independent self-construal. Thus, it may be necessary to take account of a self-selection process in which employees systematically evaluate the potentials of many different creative ideas generated in their minds and select only the most promising ones to share with their leader.

Third, we have developed a self-construal explanation for why employees differ in behavioral strategies they used to engage in the creative process and the resulting ideas they generate for problem solutions. Specifically, a preference for seeking creative help from the leader that results in incremental creativity, is motivated by the desire to maintain and bolster an interdependent construal of self. A reason for choosing an independent way of engaging in the creative process and suggesting radical creativity is to express the independent self. These findings suggest that employees with different types of self-construal tend to exhibit different types of creative strategies and outcomes to express their personal conceptions of

individuality, rather than for instrumental reasons. Earlier research has also shown that people characterized by an interdependent self-construal prefer to seek dependency-oriented help in the face of challenges and problems, whereas those with an independent self-construal tend to cope on their own as much as possible (Cross et al., 2010; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). Thus, demonstrating dependency on others does not always mean being helpless, powerless, or without control; it also implies that one is willing to be responsive to relevant others and to keep interdependence with them. In contrast, the desire for independence inhibits one's willingness to ask for help as relying on others is seen as a threat to the self.

Fourth, we have applied an interactionist approach to theorize the joint effects of self-construals and leadership styles in shaping creative strategies and outcomes. In line with this interactionist perspective, the results show that leadership styles enables employees to use self-construal-consistent creative strategies to generate incremental and/or radical creative ideas for problem solutions. Specifically, we showed that LMX is an influential relational context that brings out the effects of an interdependent self-construal on seeking creative help from the leader and incremental creativity; and that empowering leadership is a trait activator that allows independent self-construal to manifest as independent creative process engagement and radical creativity. As such, our results are consistent with the main principle of trait activation theory that traits influence behavior in trait-relevant situations. Moreover, these findings also have important implications for the literature on leadership and employee creativity. By identifying LMX and empowering leadership as social-level cues that activate the creative self-expression process, we have responded to the call for more research examining leadership behavior as a motivating, enabling, and interpretive force for employee creativity (Tierney, 2008). Here, the present study goes beyond the direct and/or indirect effects of leadership styles to investigate their moderating effects in the relationship between self-construals, creative behavioral strategies, and incremental and radical creativity.

### **Practical implications**

The findings of the current study have practical implications in three key aspects. First, knowing how different creative strategies contribute to incremental and radical creativity may help managers to promote the desired form of creative behavior (i.e., incremental or radical). Given today's dynamic business environment, it is important for managers to be sensitive to the degree of idea newness needed by the project or task at hand. Organizations relying on incremental creativity to innovate should encourage employees to seek help from their immediate leader. However, to stimulate radical creativity, managers need to cultivate employees' capacities to delve into problems on their own. Moreover, because seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement are not necessarily mutually exclusive, combining both strategies could enable employees to harness their leader's creative input while simultaneously retaining their own differentiation mindset. By doing so, employees may be more effective in generating creative solutions to new and ill-defined work problems.

Second, our findings suggest that managers can facilitate employees' creative efforts and the resulting creative outcomes by supporting the expressions of self-construals. Managers are typically tasked with leading a work team or group that includes both independent and interdependent self-construal members. Assessing employees' self-construals would provide managers with the information required to understand which type of leadership style each employee needs to trigger creative self-expression. When working with employees with interdependent self-construals, an important and realistic option for a leader is to develop high-quality LMX relationships such that employees feel comfortable to reach out to the leader for creativity-related assistance. On the other hand, an empowering leadership style is favorable for an independent self-construal to play out and exert its effects on independent creative process engagement. In sum, managers should assess each employee's

way of constructing the self and then individualize their leadership behavior accordingly.

Organizations could roll out leadership selection and development programs to ensure that leadership behavior is tailored and aligned with each employee's construal of the self.

Third, the theory and findings presented here also provide guidance to employees who seek to enhance their creativity. Training programs could help employees become aware of the impact that interdependent and independent self-construals have on the cognitive and behavioral tendencies involved in the creative process. Moreover, although self-construals have their roots in cultural affordance (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), individuals may be able to flexibly define themselves as relatively more independent or interdependent depending on specific situations (Cross et al., 2010; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999). This flexible responsiveness to situational factors allows for the application of activating interventions that make alternative ways of self-construal more accessible. As a result, employees may be able to meet creativity challenges by engaging in self-reliant creative actions as well as by soliciting assistance from leaders when they need it.

### **Limitations and future directions**

Certain limitations should be noted when interpreting our results. Given that we used a cross-sectional design and a single population, several typical caveats apply. First, although we assumed self-construal to be relatively stable over time (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), it may be susceptible to influences from self-validation experiences in the workplace and further cultivated by those experiences. As such, although the causal setup of our conceptual model, in which self-construals influence creative outcomes through behavioral strategies, is logical, there is the potential for a causal feedback loop where strategy use in the creative process and the resulting level of creativity influence construal of the self.

Second, our statistical model may suffer from common method bias because our independent, mediating, and moderating variables are derived a single source of employee

ratings (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). However, this is unlikely to be a serious issue because the trait-activation logic that we used hinges strongly on an interaction between traits (i.e., independent and interdependent self-construal) and situations (i.e., LMX and empowering leadership) that are not prone to common method variance (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010), and because the relationships between our behavioral strategies (i.e., seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement) and creative outcomes (i.e., incremental and radical creativity) are derived from different sources (i.e., employees and leaders).

Third, the data in our study were gathered only from Chinese organizations, and this limits the generalizability of our findings. Given their collectivistic cultural values, Chinese employees may be more susceptible to leader behavior than employees from other cultures (e.g., Farh & Cheng, 2000), probably making them more conducive to seeking creative help from their leaders and less conducive to engaging in creative processes in a self-reliant manner.

Future research could take a longitudinal perspective to alleviate these issues concerning causality and common method bias. Further, our research opens up several important research areas for future investigation. First, we limited our examination of creative strategies to the context of leader-employee dyads. Although we focused on the group leader as one source of help and controlled our results for help-seeking from colleagues, employees could also seek creative input from other contacts in their social network, and resources exchanged from different social contacts may provide other types of support needed to generate creative ideas (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). For instance, feedback and support from non-work sources (family and friends) that have some level of relevant expertise can also have spillover effects on creativity at work (Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002). Thus, future

research could explore other interpersonal strategies through which creativity might be boosted.

Additionally, our survey assessed employees' general preferences between seeking instrumental help and retaining independent thinking when generating creative ideas but did not examine how these two creative strategies might influence subsequent development and implementation of creative ideas. It is possible that leaders, in their role of gatekeepers and decision makers, are more likely to give green lights to those ideas in which they are directly involved in the generative process (Berg, 2016). In contrast, when leaders only enter the creative process at the idea evaluation stage, they are likely to make their creativity judgments based on conventional models of success, resulting in bias against novel ideas (Mueller et al., 2018). Therefore, a valuable step that future research could take would be to employ a more comprehensive approach to study the typology of behavioral strategies that might help employees to navigate various phases of creativity and innovation encompassing idea generation, idea development, idea champion and idea implementation (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

Future research could also explore boundary conditions that may qualify the effects of seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement on idea creativity. On the one hand, whether ideas generated through seeking creative help from the leader are incremental or radical may depend on the leader's characteristics, such as his or her knowledge structure and creativity-relevant skills (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). On the other hand, the effectiveness of independent creative process engagement may depend on the focal creator's personal characteristics and other social contacts beyond the leader (Grosser, Venkataramani, & Labianca, 2017).

## **Conclusions**

Within the context of leader-employee dyads, there are two qualitatively different ways to generate creative ideas for problem solutions: seeking creative help from the leader and independent creative process engagement. Our results demonstrate that seeking creative help from the leader is mostly associated with the generation of incremental ideas and that independent creative process engagement is more conducive to the development of radical ideas. Further, we delved into the self-construal roots of employees' preferences for seeking creative help from the leader or independent creative process engagement, and investigated how self-construals and leadership styles jointly shape employees' creative strategies and, through them, the resulting creative outcomes. By taking an interactionist perspective, we identified LMX as a relevant social cue for the expression of an interdependent self-construal, which induces seeking creative help from the leader and incremental creativity, and empowering leadership as a trait activator of an independent self-construal, which is expressed as independent creative process engagement and radical creativity. To conclude, we hope that the study reported here sparks continued research interest in strategy use in the creative process and leads to more future research examining the antecedents and consequences of various creative behavioral strategies.