

FEELING MIXED, AMBIVALENT, AND IN FLUX: THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY FOR LEADERS

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We propose that the experience and expression of emotional complexity, including the simultaneous and sequential experience of emotional complexity, can be beneficial for leaders' ability to lead change. Using the social functions of emotions perspective, we suggest that the primary function of emotional complexity is to increase cognitive flexibility. Specifically, we present a model that explains how, when, and why emotional complexity is functional for leaders at the individual and interpersonal levels of analysis. At the individual level, leaders who experience emotional complexity are more cognitively flexible and, thus, make more adaptive decisions. We further propose that not all leaders will experience such benefits from emotional complexity; individual differences of neuroticism and openness to experience will moderate the leader emotional complexity–cognitive flexibility relationship. Extending our analysis to the interpersonal level, we propose that when followers observe leaders expressing emotional complexity, they will make positive inferences of cognitive flexibility and be empowered to act proactively. We explore a relational factor—the followers' shared vantage point with their leader—and a situational factor—competing demands as moderators of this relationship. We draw attention to the broader implications of our theorizing for research on leadership and emotions and its practical implications for management.

Traditional research on leadership and emotions supports what might be called a cult of positivity (Oettingen, 2014), emphasizing that positive affect is the key to effective leadership (Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010). Positive emotions facilitate a host of benefits, including follower prosocial behavior, cooperation, and perceptions of leader effectiveness (e.g., Bono & Ilies, 2006; George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Newcombe & Ashkanasy, 2002; Visser, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef, & Wisse, 2013). However, focusing on positive affect is also problematic insofar as the conflicting demands, goals, and requirements of leadership (e.g., Fong & Tiedens, 2002; Smith & Berg, 1987; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Wiesenfeld, Brockner, & Thibault, 2000) may force leaders to experience complex emotions, even in situations where they wish to display a positive front. Indeed, leaders describe their emotional experiences as particularly

complex, with emotional ups and downs, peaks and valleys, and ebbs and flows (Dotlich, Noel, & Walker, 2011). Leadership research therefore may benefit from moving from the study of univalent, steady-state affect to theories that consider the effects, both negative and potentially positive, of leaders' experiencing and expressing complex emotional reactions.

Although universally experienced, emotional complexity, which we define as the simultaneous or sequential experience of at least two different emotional states during the same emotional episode, has been considered a shortcoming, both historically and in modern leaders. Just as Queen Elizabeth I was disparaged as irresolute when she exhibited erratic emotions in response to foreign sovereigns (Loades, 2006), critics today denounce former President Barack Obama for feeling plagued by ambivalence about how to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Syria (Friedman, 2015). This criticism appears merited. While positive emotions are consistently linked to positive leadership outcomes, complex emotions have been shown to promote negative outcomes, including indecision (Sincoff, 1990), resistance to change (Piderit, 2000), and paralysis (Pratt &

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Doucet, 2000). Leaders expressing emotional complexity may also be perceived as less powerful (Rothman, 2011) and as poor decision makers (Marsh & Rothman, 2013). Even worse, emotional complexity is sometimes associated with mental illnesses, including borderline personality disorder (Stein, 1996), bipolar disorder (Knowles et al., 2007), schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Sincoff, 1992).

In this article we argue that while complex emotions may pose some of these challenges for leaders, they do so only among some individuals and in some contexts and do not actually reflect the typical trend. Indeed, one of our main arguments is that complex emotions also bestow substantial benefits, particularly with regard to people's ability to lead change. We argue that emotional complexity provides leaders with rich and varied information about their environment, facilitating their ability to make adaptable decisions. In addition, we suggest that leaders' expressions of emotional complexity will signal that they are flexible and open to their followers, empowering followers to proactively speak up and advance bottom-up change. Because these behaviors—leader adaptability and follower empowerment—are both signature components of the leadership role, these outcomes of emotional complexity may be even more important than prescribed performance-focused behaviors in dynamic environments (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). However, because research has yet to describe the full complexity of leaders' emotional experiences, our current understanding of how complex emotions operate in work settings, especially for leaders, remains incomplete. Indeed, emotional complexity may be an undervalued leadership state that has the ability to facilitate critical change-oriented leader outcomes.

We have three main goals in this article. First, we provide a new foundation for more coherent literature on emotional complexity in the workplace. While scholars agree that multifaceted emotions are pervasive in organizations (e.g., Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Bledow, Rosing, & Frese, 2013; Pratt & Rosa, 2003; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991; Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007), emotions researchers have characterized this phenomenon with a variety of constructs. The list includes mixed emotions (Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo, 2001), emotional ambivalence (Fong, 2006), poignancy (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000), affective transitions (Filipowicz, Barsade,

& Melwani, 2011), emotional inconsistency (Sinaceur, Adam, Van Kleef, & Galinsky, 2013), affective spin (Beal, Trougakos, Weiss, & Dalal, 2013), affective variability (Koval & Kuppens, 2012), affective synchrony (Rafaeli, Rogers, & Revelle, 2007), and emotional complexity (Lindquist & Barrett, 2008). Integrating across these perspectives, we define emotional complexity as the experience of at least two different emotional states during the same emotional episode. Specifically, we focus on its two primary manifestations: (1) simultaneous emotional complexity, the concurrent experience of opposing emotional states, and (2) sequential emotional complexity, the consecutive movement between two or more different emotional states. We also specify the underlying mechanism that these two forms of emotional complexity share and that drives their effects.

Second, we explore the consequences for leaders of experiencing and expressing emotional complexity. Applying insights from the social functions of emotions perspective (e.g., Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1992), we offer a functional theory of emotional complexity of leadership. Existing research on the negative effects of emotional complexity suggests that, at the individual level, experiencing emotional complexity may inhibit leaders' expedient behavior and action. We argue, however, that emotional complexity may also help leaders approach an issue, problem, or decision from multiple perspectives because emotional complexity increases leaders' cognitive flexibility, which we define as the ease with which individuals are able to broaden the scope of their attentional span to attend to divergent perspectives but also engage in a balanced consideration of those perspectives (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013; Nijstad, De Dreu, Rietzschel, & Baas, 2010). We maintain that this cognitive flexibility is integral for accounting for why emotional complexity may be functional at both the individual and interpersonal levels (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Specifically, we offer leader cognitive flexibility as the mechanism by which leader emotional complexity can increase change-oriented behaviors, including leader adaptability and follower proactivity.

Third, our theory offers a theoretical explanation for not only *why* emotional complexity should have these effects but also *when* they are more or less likely to occur. Specifically, we integrate our work with prior scholarship focusing on the

dysfunctional side of emotional complexity by offering critical contingencies for our proposed effects. We acknowledge that emotional complexity may lead to cognitive rigidity as well as perceptions of indecisiveness and vacillation. Factors at the individual level (leader neuroticism and openness), relational level (followers' shared perspective with the leader), and situational level (competing organizational demands) are likely to moderate these relationships. Thus, it is our belief that not all leaders will experience cognitive flexibility in response to their emotionally complex feelings, not all followers will respond with positive inferences of their leaders' cognitive flexibility, and, further, not all situations will be conducive to such beneficial effects. However, this emotional state can be beneficial, and we underline when this should be the case.

Figure 1 illustrates our multilevel theory of why, when, and how emotional complexity may be functional for leaders at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of analysis. In building our model, we integrate fragmented and disparate bodies of literature on emotional complexity, specify the mechanisms underlying both

intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of leader emotional complexity, offer critical contingencies that moderate the proposed effects, and derive propositions that set an agenda for future research.

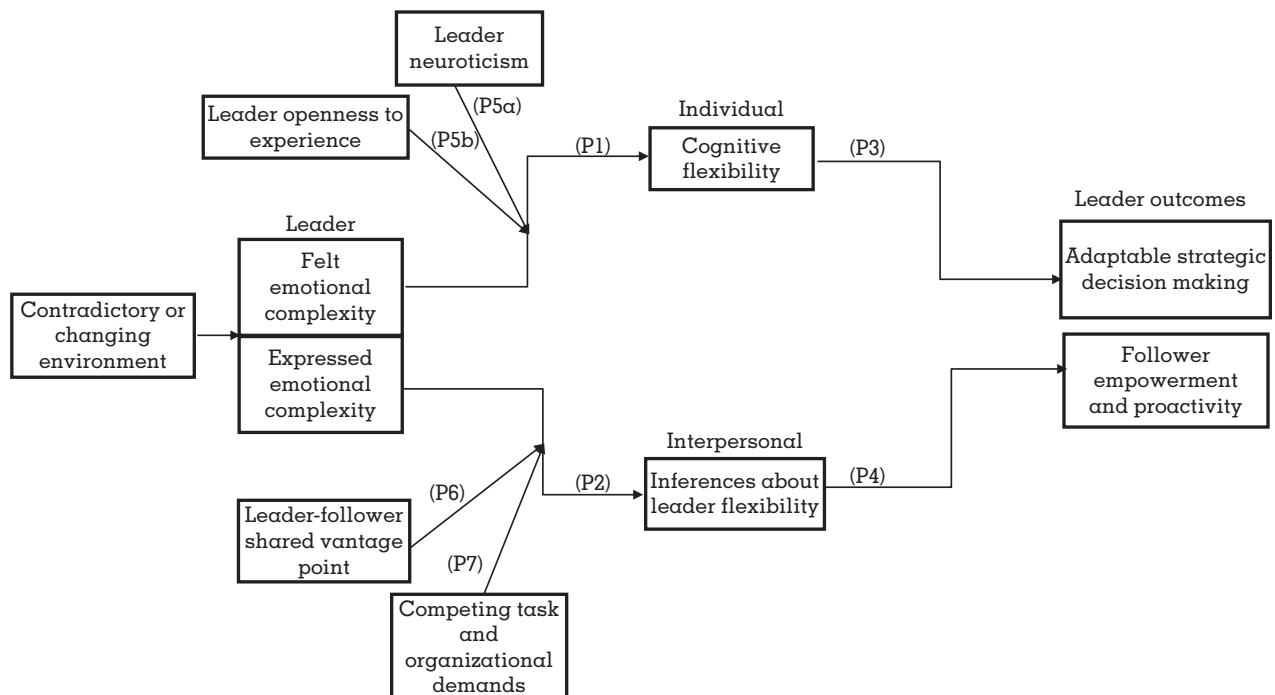
EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY: AN OVERVIEW

Conceptualizing Emotional Complexity

Emotional complexity is an affective state involving the simultaneous or sequential elicitation and experience of at least two different emotions during the same emotional episode. We focus on two primary manifestations of emotional complexity: sequential and simultaneous emotional complexity. A sequential or successive emotionally complex state is the rapid change or movement between two or more different emotional states such that one emotion appears first and is then replaced by a second emotion (Filipowicz et al., 2011; Sinaceur et al., 2013). In contrast, a simultaneous emotionally complex state involves experiencing two or more opposing emotions concurrently in response to a stimulus (Larsen et al., 2001).

By introducing these two broad forms of emotional complexity, we aim to classify the wide

FIGURE 1
Individual and Interpersonal Outcomes of Emotional Complexity for Leaders and Followers



range of terms associated with such complex affective experiences from both psychology and organizational behavior. Specifically, some of these constructs refer to simultaneous states, including mixed emotions (e.g., Larsen et al., 2001) and emotional ambivalence (e.g., Fong, 2006; Rees, Rothman, Lehavy, & Sanchez-Burks, 2013). Other constructs refer to sequential states, including

affective transitions (e.g., Filipowicz et al., 2011) and emotional inconsistencies (e.g., Sinaceur et al., 2013). Table 1 provides a sample of definitions and differentiates these states from trait constructs, such as affective spin (e.g., Beal et al., 2013), affective variability (e.g., Koval & Kuppens, 2012), affective synchrony (Rafaeli et al., 2007), and emotional complexity (Kang &

TABLE 1
Definitions of Constructs Pertaining to Emotional Complexity

Types of Emotional Complexity	State or Trait	Term	Source	Definition
Sequential emotional complexity	State	Affective transitions	Filipowicz, Barsade, & Melwani (2011)	The movement between two or more different affective or emotional states
	State	Emotional inconsistencies	Sinaceur, Adam, Van Kleef, & Galinsky (2013)	Oscillating or fluctuating between different psychological states over the course of a single encounter
	Trait	Emotional complexity	Kang & Shaver (2004)	A tendency to have well-differentiated, broad emotional experiences
	Trait	Affective spin	Beal, Trougakos, Weiss, & Dalal (2013)	A tendency for variability in core affective experiences—specifically, experiencing a variety of different states reflected in the affect circumplex over brief periods of time
	Trait	Affective variability	Koval & Kuppens (2012)	The within-person standard deviation of a feeling over time reflecting how much people's emotional experiences deviate from their average feelings
Simultaneous emotional complexity	State	Mixed emotions	Larsen & McGraw (2014)	The co-occurrence of positive and negative affects
	State	Emotional ambivalence	Fong (2006); Rees, Rothman, Lehavy, & Sanchez-Burks (2013)	The simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotions
	State	Poignancy	Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen (2008)	A mixture of happiness and sadness that occurs when one faces meaningful endings that signify the passage of time
	Trait	Emotional complexity	Kang & Shaver (2004)	A tendency to have well-differentiated, broad emotional experiences
	Trait	Trait ambivalence	Sincoff (1990)	Overlapping approach-avoidance tendencies, manifested behaviorally, cognitively, or affectively and directed toward a given person or experience
	Trait	Affective synchrony	Rafaeli, Rogers, & Revelle (2007)	The tendency to experience mixed emotions regularly

Shaver, 2004). Because we are interested in the function of emotional complexity, particularly how this emotion helps align leaders' cognitive processes to be in tune with their complex and changing circumstances, we exclusively focus on the *state* experience—and outcomes—of sequential and simultaneous emotional complexity.

Evident from the definitions in Table 1, the primary difference between these constructs is their time course. Whereas simultaneous emotional complexity refers to experiencing two opposing emotions at the same moment in time (Larsen & McGraw, 2011), sequential emotional complexity refers to experiencing a rapid change between two or more different emotional states (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). We propose that while simultaneous and sequential emotional complexity may have different nonverbal expressions because of their varying time course, these two forms of state emotional complexity will have the same function of flexibility and the same beneficial effects owing to their similar internal experience.

Specifically, these affective states are similar in that they are both forms of emotional complexity (Carrera & Oceja, 2007), are correlated with one another (Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010), are triggered by emotionally complex events (Larsen & McGraw, 2011), involve two or more different affective experiences (Filipowicz et al., 2011; Fong, 2006), and are therefore likely to be associated with a palpable sense of conflict within the individual experiencing them (e.g., Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). It is important to note that these emotions must be directly conflicting on at least one dimension (e.g., valence, action tendency, appraisal, levels of arousal). Indeed, in studying simultaneous emotions, researchers have used the term *ambivalent* synonymously with terms like *torn* and *conflicted* across anthropology (e.g., Boehm, 1989), clinical psychology (e.g., Sincoff, 1990), sociology (e.g., Smelser, 1998), and psychology (e.g., Priester & Petty, 1996). Furthermore, recent empirical research shows that because emotional ambivalence involves simultaneously experiencing positive and negative emotions, it is highly correlated with reports of how much participants feel conflicted (Aaker, Drolet, & Griffin, 2008) and tense, muddled, and divided (Oceja & Carrera, 2009); the correlations between felt conflict and happy emotions or sad emotions are significantly

lower. In addition, observers interpret expressions of being conflicted as expressions of ambivalence and can reliably distinguish these expressions from expressions of univalent emotions like happiness, sadness, and anger, as well as neutrality (Rothman, 2011).

Furthermore, research on emotional episodes informs our understanding of the internal conflict associated with sequential emotional complexity. This research suggests that because emotions activate physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions, they are likely to result in residual affect that will then linger even after the initial emotional experience has concluded (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). When individuals rapidly transition from one emotion to the next, they are unable to experience a refractory period in which one emotional episode has ended before the other one begins; this overlap of emotions will then create feelings of dissonance (Carrera & Oceja, 2007), especially when the residual emotion is dissimilar from the earlier emotion (Pe & Kuppens, 2012). Supporting this theorizing, a recent investigation of the effects of complex emotions shows that while sequential emotions induce less intense felt tension than simultaneous emotions, the tension they induce is significantly more than that elicited by happy or sad emotions alone (Carrera & Oceja, 2007).

The Dysfunctional Nature of Emotional Complexity

Traditionally, research on emotional complexity has primarily emphasized its dysfunctional outcomes. This work highlights that emotionally complex feelings are problematic because they make individuals disconnect from their environments. This occurs either because these individuals experience too much emotional complexity, and are therefore unable to accurately decipher the emotional tenor of their environment, or because they are so focused on reducing the feelings of tension associated with emotionally complex states, they are unable to derive benefits from it. Specifically, research using an individual-difference approach to emotional complexity indicates that people who show high levels of trait affective complexity (Eid & Diener, 1999), as well as those with low emotional inertia who experience rapidly changing emotions (Kuppens, Allen, & Sheeber, 2010), experience inferior outcomes because they have

an affective system that is hyperreactive to valenced stimuli (Beal & Ghandour, 2011) and therefore respond with dysregulated and environmentally discordant emotional responses. Unsurprisingly, then, research demonstrates that these individuals are more likely to experience indicators of poorer psychological well-being and adjustment (Koval & Kuppens, 2012), such as reduced self-esteem (Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Nezlek, Dossche, & Timmermans, 2007), increased neuroticism (Murray, Allen, & Trinder, 2002), and negative affect (Kuppens, Oravecz, & Tuerlinckx, 2010). Thus, individual differences in emotional complexity may be less functional for leaders to the extent that they experience too much variability and are thus overresponsive to environmental situations.

In addition, both research on the state experience of ambivalence and the attitudinal ambivalence literature have largely focused on the feelings of conflict that accompany these states and individuals' resulting preoccupation with trying to resolve this negative feeling (Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt, & Pradies, 2014; van Harreveld, van der Pligt, & de Liver, 2009). Because people dislike internal inconsistencies (Festinger, 1962) and feeling conflicted (Goetz, Spencer-Rodgers, & Peng, 2008), they are likely to strive to simplify their complex states and reduce the unpleasant feelings of conflict, tension, and discomfort that accompany them (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). There are many ways individuals reduce their complex reactions (for a review see Rothman, Pratt, Rees, & Vogus, 2017). For instance, individuals avoid and deny their feelings of conflict altogether by engaging in distracting activities. Individuals may also attempt to resolve and simplify their ambivalent attitudes by accentuating either their positive or negative attitudes, an action that then leads to a biased and simplistic view (Pratt & Doucet, 2000). Alternatively, individuals can put off dealing with their conflicting sentiments, vacillating between them (Sincoff, 1990) and thus becoming paralyzed and incapable of acting (Weigert & Franks, 1989) or making decisions (van Harreveld, Nohlen, & Schneider, 2015).

This research then implies that the state experience of emotional complexity may be dysfunctional for leaders to the extent that they become preoccupied with trying to avoid, resolve, or reduce this state and the discomfort it elicits. Such preoccupation may focus leaders on mitigating

their aversive reactions, rather than opening themselves up to the rich and complex information these contradictory emotions provide about their environment. They will thus be unable to reap the informational benefits of their complex emotional states.

To complement these negative perspectives, we suggest that adopting a functional view of emotional complexity may prove instrumental for understanding why and when emotional complexity may be beneficial. We propose that state emotional complexity is likely to be functional to the extent that this state is clearly triggered by environmental changes and therefore provides rich, complex, and useful information about how to respond to that environment.

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY: FLEXIBILITY

We build on the social functional theory of emotions to uncover the specific evolutionary function of emotional complexity. To start, the functionalist view emphasizes that emotions are efficient responses that aid and motivate individuals to solve specific problems of physical and social survival; accordingly, the antecedents of an emotion reflect the problem that the emotion was designed to solve (e.g., Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1992; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Evidence from psychological research indicates that emotional complexity commonly occurs in response to situations that involve contradiction and change. For instance, people usually report experiencing complex emotions in response to changing circumstances (Larsen & McGraw, 2011), including meaningful life transitions and endings (Ersner-Hersfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen, 2008), disappointing wins and relieving losses (Larsen, McGraw, Mellers, & Cacioppo, 2004), conflicting goals and roles such as being a high-status woman (Fong & Tiedens, 2002), bittersweet movies and advertisements (Larsen et al., 2001; Williams & Aaker, 2002), evocative pictures (Schimmack, 2001), stories with shifting perspectives (de Vega, Diaz, & León, 1997) and incompatible relationship goals (Laurenceau, Troy, & Carver, 2005). In the business world, leaders experience emotional complexity in the face of contradictions between stakeholders and demands (Kantrowitz, 2013). Because changing and contradictory circumstances are, by definition, uncertain (Baum & Wally, 2003) and, thus, difficult to predict, understand, and manage (Lipshitz &

Strauss, 1997), individuals need balanced and flexible thinking in order to understand both sides of the contradictions and cope with the changes. Hence, we suggest that emotional complexity developed as an affective mechanism to enable individuals to flexibly respond and adapt to complex and changing circumstances and should thus improve leaders' ability to lead change.

Specifically, we reveal how two interrelated components—the experience and expression of emotional complexity—serve a flexibility function for leaders at both the *individual* and *interpersonal* levels of analysis. As we describe, the pattern of experience, communication, physiology, and action that characterizes emotional complexity appears to be specifically “designed” to bring about greater flexibility at these two levels, which is unlikely to be an accidental consequence of this emotional state (Keltner & Gross, 1999). While we are not the first to suggest that emotional complexity may have benefits related to flexible thinking, there have been no prior attempts to integrate the extant research on the effects of emotional complexity by providing a functional evolutionary theory of why emotional complexity should facilitate leaders' cognitive flexibility and ability to lead change. We explicate this function below.

Individual Level

We draw on the affect as information model (Schwarz & Clore, 1983) to offer an explanation for why emotional complexity should be beneficial for individuals' cognitive flexibility, or the ease with which individuals are able to broaden the scope of their attentional span to attend to divergent perspectives, but also to engage in a balanced consideration of those perspectives (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013; Nijstad et al., 2010). Specifically, we offer two mechanisms: (1) a cognitive mechanism that explains why emotional complexity enables individuals to attend to diverse perspectives and (2) a motivational mechanism that explicates why it enables individuals to engage in balanced processing of information.

To develop the cognitive mechanism, we draw from cognitive appraisal theory, according to which each discrete, unblended emotional experience corresponds to a unique cognitive structure consisting of a particular pattern of preconscious appraisals (Frijda, 1989; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). By this logic, when individuals experience emotional

complexity—either simultaneous or sequential multiple emotions—they experience a combination of contradictory appraisals associated with those divergent emotions. For instance, a leader who is experiencing fear—a negative emotion characterized by appraisals of uncertainty and situational control—and happiness—a positive emotion characterized by appraisals of certainty and personal control (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985)—is likely to appraise the situation as both certain *and* uncertain, under situational *and* personal control, and to interpret the environment as both safe *and* problematic. In turn, because emotional complexity provides these contradictory and conflicting signals to leaders, it should alert them to the complex and contradictory elements in their environment and the effectiveness of their current thinking and behavior with regard to those elements. For instance, whereas negative emotions are associated with a narrow focus of attention (Schwarz, 2002) and positive emotions broaden individuals' focus (Fredrickson, 2001), emotional complexity signals that the environment is atypical (Fong, 2006), thus drawing individuals' attention to divergent perspectives. Exposure to these different perspectives will enable individuals to expand the categories they use, embrace atypical information, and draw associations between seemingly unrelated information and, by doing so, address the multiple and diverse demands of different stakeholders. Thus, whereas such contradictory appraisals may provide the leader with indeterminate behavioral guidance about how to react to change (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994), we argue that emotional complexity helps align the leader's cognitive processes to be in tune with their complex environment.

Compelling empirical evidence is consistent with the proposition that both simultaneous and sequential emotional complexity broaden an individual's attentional span. This research has demonstrated that experiencing emotional ambivalence (relative to singular emotions like happiness or sadness) expands attentional focus and increases the likelihood of making more distant associations, as indicated by enhanced performance on the Remote Associates Test, a conceptual insight task that asks participants to identify associations among words that are not normally connected (Fong, 2006). Similarly, researchers have also linked emotional shifts—a change in emotional states from negative to positive—with

increased originality and the ability to generate a broad set of ideas across multiple, isolated categories (Bledow et al., 2013).

While this cognitive mechanism provides a compelling account of why emotional complexity broadens the scope of attention, it does not explain why emotional complexity also motivates a *balanced consideration* of multiple different perspectives. According to the affect as information model (Schwarz & Clore, 1983), emotional complexity should not only direct leaders' attention to divergent perspectives but also motivate leaders to think in ways that help them adapt to the complex environment. Thus, we offer a second motivational mechanism and propose that *conflict* inherent in the state of emotional complexity is an integral link that helps to explain why emotional complexity enhances cognitive flexibility. Specifically, experiencing conflict that results from emotional complexity indicates to an individual that the situation is contradictory and changing (instead of "problematic" or "benign"; Schwarz, 2002), and this signal will motivate a balanced consideration of information to meet situational requirements.

We draw from disparate bodies of literature on contradictory states to support this view of the integral role of conflict. Research on mind-body dissonance (when bodily expressions contradict mental states; Huang & Galinsky, 2011), non-conscious goal conflicts (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013), biculturalism (where people equally identify with two cultures and, thus, feel sharper dissonance and internal conflict between the values of the two cultures; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009), and paradoxical frames (Miron-Spektor, Gino, & Argote, 2011) alludes to the fact that the inherent conflict in these states is the engine that motivates cognitive flexibility. For instance, nonconscious goal conflicts increase a broader and more balanced consideration of relevant information before making choices; specifically, in two separate but related papers utilizing experimental procedures, participants who experienced nonconscious goal conflict not only searched for more information by electing to see a larger number of boxes on an information display board (Savary, Kleiman, Hassin, & Dhar, 2015) but also sought and considered both confirmatory and disconfirmatory information in a trait hypothesis-testing task (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013). Internal conflict has also been suggested as a mechanism explaining why bicultural individuals who are equally identified with both cultures

and who experience greater conflict between their cultures are more integratively complex than individuals who show a clear preference for one culture over another and, thus, experience less conflict (Tadmor et al., 2009).

More pertinent to our article, nascent research has linked simultaneous emotional complexity to a balanced consideration of information. Specifically, in one experiment, emotionally ambivalent participants were more motivated to consider both positive and negative feedback about a potential job candidate, compared to happy participants, who were more motivated to seek positive than negative feedback (Rees et al., 2013). In a second experiment, emotionally ambivalent participants were more likely to seek, weigh, and incorporate alternative perspectives (others' advice) while they were making numerical estimations, relative to both happy and sad participants (Rees et al., 2013).

In summary, we suggest that cognitive flexibility is the common substrate that weaves together a dispersed body of research findings implying that emotional complexity broadens the scope of attentional span and motivates a balanced consideration of relevant information. Building on this extant research, we offer the following.

Proposition 1: Leader emotional complexity is positively related to cognitive flexibility.

Interpersonal Level

We draw from research on the communicative function of emotions (e.g., Keltner & Haidt, 1999) to make predictions concerning the influence of leaders' nonverbal and verbal expressions of emotional complexity at the interpersonal level—specifically, on followers' inferences of leader cognitive flexibility. Social functional theorists working at this dyadic level of analysis have argued that emotional expressions help individuals know others' intrapsychic feeling states (e.g., Morris & Keltner, 2000). Furthermore, they argue that because emotions are responses to situational events, perceivers use expressions of these emotions to infer how an expresser evaluates or appraises a situation (Hareli & Hess, 2010), and those inferences, in turn, are then used to infer aspects of the expresser's personality, character, competence, and behavioral intentions (Fridlund, 1994; Lewis, 2000; Tiedens, 2001).

When a leader experiences and then expresses emotional complexity in response to a changing and contradictory environment, followers will use the leader's nonverbal and verbal expressions to infer that the leader is experiencing emotional complexity. For instance, research has demonstrated that people who are experiencing ambivalence move from side to side more than people who are not experiencing ambivalence (Schneider et al., 2013), and other research has shown that people are able to identify nonverbal conflict on the face and in body movement as ambivalence (Rothman, 2011). Emotions are also communicated verbally: research on emotional sharing (Rimé, 1995) suggests that people who experience an emotional event are likely to tell other people about the event and their emotional reactions to it.

Once followers perceive and discern a leader's emotions, they will aim to understand the situation that elicited these emotions by "reverse engineering"—that is, reconstructing the relationship between the leader and the emotion-eliciting event based on the emotion expressed (Hareli & Hess, 2010). Complex emotional expressions, especially those that change, are especially informative (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Specifically, we have suggested that emotional complexity is characterized by the experience of contradictory cognitive appraisals (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) and action tendencies (Frijda et al., 1989; Lerner & Keltner, 2000). For instance, a leader experiencing happiness and fear will appraise the situation as certain *and* uncertain and will want to approach *and* avoid, and the leader will then be torn between these action tendencies and appraisals. In consequence, the leader's expression of emotional complexity will likely signal that the leader is irresolute about future action (Rothman, 2011) but also appraising and thinking about the environment in a nuanced way. Thus, on observing the leader display emotional complexity, followers will perceive the individual as someone who seeks divergent perspectives, such as both confirming and disconfirming information, before making strategic decisions, as well as someone who is receptive to a full range of evidence, both positive and negative, about problems at hand. Indirect supportive evidence for this claim comes from research demonstrating that the expression of emotional ambivalence in negotiations conveys greater deliberation, relative to expressions of single emotions like happiness or anger (Rothman, 2011). Thus, we suggest that

leaders' expressions of emotional complexity will increase followers' inferences of leaders' flexibility.

Proposition 2: Leaders' expressions of emotional complexity are positively related to followers' perceptions of leader cognitive flexibility.

EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY AND LEADER OUTCOMES

Cognitive flexibility from leaders' emotional complexity carries benefits that are inherently tied to its evolutionary function, particularly for the leaders' ability to lead change by making more adaptable decisions and empowering follower proactivity.

Leader Strategic Decision Making

Leader adaptability, a signature component of the leadership role (Griffin et al., 2007), is the degree to which leaders are able to modify their cognitions and actions to respond appropriately to changing, dynamic, and complex environmental situations and nonroutine tasks (Pulakos et al., 2000). While the leadership literature has long emphasized the importance of leader adaptability, highlighting that leaders are more effective if they are sensitive to social situations (Stogdill, 1948) and able to adapt or match their leadership style to fit the situation (Vroom & Yetton, 1973), this research has thus far focused on the influence of leader traits on adaptability. Leadership traits such as self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974), emotional and social intelligence (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000), leader self-complexity (Hannah, Balthazard, Waldman, Jennings, & Thatcher, 2013), and having an ambivert personality—falling in the middle of the extraversion spectrum (Grant, 2013)—have been found to increase adaptability. This work suggests that effective leaders possess a requisite level of self-complexity that allows them to accurately perceive and assess situational dynamics, thus enabling adaptive decisions and responses (Lord, Hannah, Jennings, 2011). We help advance that point by introducing emotional states as critical, dynamic, and "event-level" (Dinh et al., 2014) antecedents of leader adaptability and by suggesting cognitive flexibility as a mechanism for this relationship.

While leaders engage in many diverse behaviors, decision making is one of their most essential

duties (Mintzberg, 1973), and strategic decisions made by leaders directly impact group and organizational health and survival (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). Strategic decisions are also especially influenced by leaders' affective states (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008). We suggest that through its effects on cognitive flexibility, a leader's experience of emotional complexity may positively influence strategic decisions by deescalating commitment to an initial but unsuccessful decision in an attempt to turn the situation around (Staw, 1981). This is critical because owing to their intense job demands and social role expectations, leaders may be reluctant to admit they have made a mistake (Zhang & Baumeister, 2006) and to recognize other alternatives (Northcraft & Neale, 1987), and, thus, they are especially likely to fall victim to the escalation fallacy (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005).

Because emotional complexity not only inhibits leaders' rush to action but also increases their cognitive flexibility, they will be more likely to consider a broader and more balanced set of relevant alternatives and, in turn, will be less likely to escalate commitment to failed courses of action. For instance, they will seek information that both confirms and disconfirms their initial position, and they will be less likely to anchor on their initial commitments (Kleiman & Hassin, 2013; Rees et al., 2013). They may also be able to generate multiple alternative means or strategies to achieve their goals (Kruglanski et al., 2002) and to evaluate those alternative means or strategies in a balanced way, thus allowing them to decide whether persistence toward their original course of action is still warranted (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1990; Fishbach & Shah, 2006). Therefore, with more alternative options in mind, they will be able to disengage from or reduce the strength of their initial decision commitment to any one course of action. Emotional complexity should thus reduce the likelihood that leaders will become over-committed to a course of action because it increases their cognitive flexibility.

Proposition 3: Cognitive flexibility mediates the positive effect of leader emotional complexity on leader adaptive strategic decision making.

Empowerment of Followers

As organizational life has become more dynamic, uncertain, and unpredictable, it has

become increasingly difficult for leaders to succeed and lead change merely by developing and presenting their visions top-down to employees (Griffin et al., 2007). In this context leaders depend on their followers to adapt to changes in the workplace and to proactively advance bottom-up change by voicing constructive ideas (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) and taking charge to improve work methods (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Emerging scholarship has established that the leader matters, highlighting that greater follower proactivity is associated with leader-member exchange (Lam, Huang, & Snape, 2007), fit between the leader's and follower's personalities (Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011), and leader emotional regulation strategies (Fisk & Friesen, 2012). Leader emotional complexity may be an alternative, previously unexplored social factor that influences follower proactivity, which is the anticipatory actions taken to create change in how jobs, roles, and tasks are executed (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008).

We suggest that leaders' perceived flexibility provides an opportunity for, and even implicitly invites, followers to be empowered and engaged (McArthur & Baron, 1983; Mignon & Mollaret, 2002). Specifically, because the expression of emotional complexity is likely to signal leaders' cognitive flexibility and, thus, their openness to multiple perspectives, as we have suggested before, it stands to reason that this expression may actually empower followers to proactively speak up (Detert & Burris, 2007) and take charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Detert and Burris (2007) demonstrated that leader behaviors indicating openness to change and willingness to act on input from below are highly effective in stimulating voice from followers, even more so than transformational leadership behaviors. They showed in two studies that followers are more likely to honestly speak up when managers are open—that is, routinely demonstrate personal interest and listen carefully to their followers. Similarly, Edmondson (2003) reported that leaders who show managerial openness have followers who are more willing to contribute to team learning, despite the inherent risks of speaking up. And Morrison and Phelps (1999) demonstrated that when employees perceive top management as open, they are more motivated to take charge.

Thus, considering the importance of leader openness for stimulating follower voice and taking charge behavior, and considering our

previous arguments that leader emotional complexity should increase leader perceived cognitive flexibility and openness to divergent perspectives, it seems reasonable to expect that leader emotional complexity will increase followers' voice and taking charge behavior. Some suggestive evidence for this prediction comes from research on the expression of emotional ambivalence in negotiations, which has demonstrated that when negotiators observe their partner expressing emotional ambivalence, it can motivate them not only to step up and take charge of the discussion (Rothman, 2011) but also to proactively problem solve and generate integrative solutions that are good for all parties (Rothman & Northcraft, 2015).

Another explanation for why followers are more likely to act proactively is because they may use their leaders' cognitively flexible behavior as a point of reference that helps them define what kinds of behaviors and orientations are good to develop and emulate (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Thus, leaders' inferred flexibility will highlight the importance and appropriateness of thinking flexibly, increasing the likelihood that followers' will take a cognitively flexible approach to problems by seeking and considering divergent perspectives and therefore becoming more engaged and empowered.

Proposition 4: The positive relationship between leader expressions of emotional complexity and follower proactivity will be mediated by followers' inferences of leader cognitive flexibility.

EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY: BOON OR HINDRANCE?

Moderators of the Experienced Emotional Complexity–Cognitive Flexibility Relationship

While state emotional complexity can increase cognitive flexibility, not all leaders will necessarily become more cognitively flexible when they experience these complex emotions. Whereas one body of research suggests that state emotional complexity can lead to more cognitive flexibility (Fong, 2006), another suggests that emotional complexity can lead to more rigidity (Pratt & Doucet, 2000). What appears to differentiate these two paths is whether individuals become preoccupied with trying to cope with and reduce their feelings of conflict and contradiction or whether they stay

open to their contradictory feelings. This critical difference determines whether and the extent to which emotional complexity is able to provide rich, complex, and useful information to the leader about how to respond to that environment, thus boosting the leader's cognitive flexibility, or whether the informational value of emotional complexity is reduced, thus reducing the leader's cognitive flexibility (Schwarz, 2002).

To reconcile these divergent perspectives, we turn to an exploration of two individual personality factors that predispose leaders to be either particularly uncomfortable or particularly comfortable with their feelings of conflict and contradiction and, thus, less or more open and receptive to the rich and contradictory information these complex emotions provide them about the environment. Specifically, we highlight that the relationship between emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility may vary with two of the five-factor model personality differences—in particular, neuroticism and openness, respectively. These factors certainly do not represent an exhaustive set of factors worth considering—a point we revisit in the discussion section; however, they are noteworthy in that they share a common mechanism, which is individuals' likely tolerance for being torn and conflicted.

Leader neuroticism. We propose that the relationship between emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility may be contingent on leaders' levels of neuroticism. Neuroticism represents the tendency to exhibit poor emotional adjustment and to experience negative emotions, such as anxiety, insecurity, and hostility more frequently, more intensely, and for more enduring periods of time (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Individuals who are high in neuroticism respond poorly to stressors and are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult (Bolger & Schilling, 1991; Suls & Martin, 2005). Furthermore, when neurotic individuals try to cope with stressors, their coping efforts "often seem to backfire" (Robinson, Moeller, & Fetterman, 2010: 1490).

The reason neurotic individuals may be less successful in their coping attempts is because they are stuck in a mode of processing that seeks to minimize emotional distress rather than maximize adaptation to the environment (Robinson et al., 2010). So when problematic outcomes occur, individuals higher in neuroticism invest their resources in processing the self's aversive

reactions rather than investing them in mitigating similar outcomes in the future (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005). Excessive negative emotions, inability to detach from negative thoughts and feelings, and difficulty tolerating them deplete the coping resources of those high in neuroticism, taxing executive functioning that otherwise allows for the modification of thoughts and action (Gunthert, Cohen, & Armeli, 1999). Thus, because emotional complexity is a disharmonious state accompanied by unpleasant feelings of being torn and conflicted, as well as by a sense of contradiction (Larsen et al., 2001), we propose that it will deplete the coping resources of those high in neuroticism. When experiencing the state of emotional complexity, leaders high in neuroticism will be compelled to invest their coping resources in processing their feelings of being torn and conflicted, rather than investing them in understanding the rich information these complex emotions provide. As a result, highly neurotic leaders will engage in less flexible thinking about their environment than will leaders low in neuroticism. By contrast, we suggest that leaders who are low in neuroticism are likely to invest their resources in processing the rich and complex information their contradictory emotions provide about their environment, thus engaging in greater flexible thinking and reaping the informational benefits of their emotional complexity.

Proposition 5a: Neuroticism moderates the relationship between leader emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility. Leaders who are low in neuroticism will experience a positive relationship between emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility, and leaders high in neuroticism will experience a negative relationship between emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility.

Leader openness to experience. We also propose that leaders' levels of openness to experience can boost the cognitive flexibility benefits of emotional complexity. Openness to experience captures the extent to which individuals are broad-minded and curious (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Individuals who are high in openness to experience are more willing to explore and consider novel, varied, and intense experiences than are those on the low end of the openness spectrum, who instead seek to maintain familiar, traditional routines (McCrae & Costa,

1997). Research on this personality trait shows that the many facets of openness to experience cluster into two separate factors, reflecting the degree to which the person is open to external versus internal experience (Griffin & Hesketh, 2004). Three of these facets—ideas (e.g., being intellectually curious and broad-minded), actions (e.g., being adaptable and preferring novelty), and values (e.g., having flexible social, political, and religious beliefs)—describe areas external to the person, whereas two others—fantasy (e.g., having a vivid imagination) and feelings (e.g., being receptive to inner experiences)—are internal to the person.

Research on openness has focused mainly on the external facets of this trait, suggesting that because open individuals seek externally unfamiliar situations and, thus, gain access to a wide array of ideas and viewpoints, they are then able to make use of these disparate perspectives to enhance creativity (George & Zhou, 2007) and operate more successfully in diverse teams (Flynn, 2005). While less work has explored the role of openness to internal experience, we suggest that it has similar effects. That is, leaders who are open to experience will be more receptive to their conflicting emotional states, thus increasing the informational value of emotional complexity. These emotional states will attune them to the complex and contradictory elements in their environment that are in need of focused attention and will motivate them to engage in a balanced consideration of relevant information, thus boosting their cognitive flexibility.

In contrast, leaders who are low in openness may be less receptive to their multiple conflicting emotional states and less tolerant of feeling torn and conflicted. Because leaders low in openness may find their emotional complexity to be overwhelming (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008), they may be inclined to reduce their feelings of emotional contradiction (Goetz et al., 2008) and, thus, selectively focus on one side of the emotional state to the exclusion of the other (Aaker & Sengupta, 2000) in order to reduce their discomfort. This avoidance and suppression of complex emotional experiences and the resolution of the concomitant feelings of being torn and conflicted will prevent leaders who are less open from benefiting from the rich and contradictory information these complex emotions could have provided them about the environment; they will neither attend to complex and contradictory elements in the environment nor engage in balanced

consideration of relevant information. Thus, the informational value of emotional complexity will be reduced. Accordingly, we propose the following.

Proposition 5b: Openness to experience moderates the relationship between leader emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility. Leaders who are high in openness to experience will experience a positive relationship between emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility, and leaders low in openness to experience will experience a negative relationship between emotional complexity and cognitive flexibility.

Moderators of the Expressed Emotional Complexity–Perceived Flexibility Relationship

Despite the purported benefits of emotional complexity for leaders, we recognize that leaders' expressions of emotional complexity are not always received well by others and may even threaten their ability to lead. Research suggests that individuals expect high-status others to be highly agentic and judge high-status individuals based on the extent to which they conform to this expectation (Fragale, 2006). Research on leadership prototypes corroborates this perspective, highlighting that a prototypical leader is dominant and decisive in his or her followers' eyes (Lord, de Vader, & Alliger, 1986), and prototypical leader emotions convey this information as well (Melwani, Mueller, & Overbeck, 2012). Thus, because leaders' emotional complexity conveys low agency—specifically, submissiveness and indecision (Marsh & Rothman, 2013; Rothman, 2011)—this expression may result in negative judgments by followers.

We argue that the degree to which followers make positive versus negative inferences about their leaders varies based on the context, since contextual information about the circumstances the leader and organization are facing may disambiguate leaders' emotional expression by shaping their meaning (Johns, 2006). To reconcile whether leaders' expressions of emotional complexity will be viewed as dysfunctional or functional by followers, we propose two factors: (1) a relational factor, shared vantage point between leader and follower, and (2) a situational factor, the degree to which leaders are managing asymmetric goals and contradictory demands.

Both factors shape followers' perceptions of the relevance and appropriateness of leader emotional complexity for the particular context, thus reinforcing the perceived informational value of these emotions (Schwarz, 2002).

Shared vantage point between the leader and the follower. We suggest that followers may be especially likely to perceive emotionally complex leaders as more cognitively flexible when they both have a shared vantage point. A shared vantage point—that is, a shared perspective that arises because both individuals experience the same event or situation (Elfenbein, 2014)—could exist in a number of circumstances (e.g., when leaders are transparent about organizational issues and when followers have access to the same information about the environment as their leaders). We suggest that sharing the same vantage point with their leaders should cause followers to make positive judgments of the emotionally complex leaders, and this positive relationship occurs for two reasons. First, leaders and followers with a shared vantage point are more likely to appraise the environment similarly (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Because people tend to believe that their own perspective is right and appropriate (Moore & Healy, 2008), followers sharing their leaders' perspective will perceive their leaders' emotional complexity as an appropriate response to the shared context. Second, leaders and followers with a shared vantage point are also more likely to share emotional experiences, either through appraising the environment similarly (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) or through unconscious emotional contagion processes (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Because people tend to like others who share emotions with them (DeSteno, Petty, Rucker, Wegener, & Braverman, 2004), emotionally complex followers are more likely to make positive inferences of their emotionally complex leaders. Consequently, the leaders may appear to be in tune with the organization, their constituents, and their environment and will thus gain credibility with followers; they will be perceived as leaders who are feeling, appraising, and thinking in a flexible, balanced, and nuanced way and so able to provide meaning to followers about their situation.

By contrast, when leaders and followers do not share a vantage point, followers are more likely to judge emotionally complex leaders negatively. For instance, Carly Fiorina was an emotionally complex leader at Hewlett-Packard who avoided

employees and ultimately lost their support (Barbaro, 1995). Divergent vantage points between leaders and followers are relatively common since leaders, by virtue of their positions on the higher rungs of organizational hierarchy, often have access to more information about the internal and external organizational environment than do their followers. Followers, in contrast, are not always privy to the many issues leaders encounter, especially with low task interdependence between leaders and followers (Wageman, 1995), cultural and organizational norms of low openness (Jehn, 1997; West & Anderson, 1996), and little involvement of followers in decision making (Vroom & Jago, 2007). In situations where followers are unaware of leaders' demands, they are more likely to expect their leaders to think and make decisions independently, have confidence in their views, and be dominant (Fragale, 2006). Any indication that the leaders do not have these qualities—for instance, via expressions of emotional complexity—should make leaders appear less leader-like and more indecisive than flexible.

Proposition 6: The positive relationship between leader expressions of emotional complexity and follower inferences of leader flexibility will be moderated by the degree to which leaders and followers experience a shared vantage point. Followers who share a vantage point with their leader will judge the leader as more cognitively flexible relative to followers who do not share a vantage point with their leader.

Competing demands at the task and organizational level. We further suggest that followers may be especially likely to respond positively to emotionally complex leaders and to perceive them as more cognitively flexible when the leaders are grappling with competing demands at the task or organizational level. For instance, leaders are often faced with asymmetric goals (Edmondson, Roberto, & Watkins, 2003) when their followers have divergent and conflicting interests in a given situation, despite still having a shared objective (Pearsall & Venkataramani, 2015). In addition, the demands on leaders are also often contradictory and conflicting (Smith & Lewis, 2011); they have goals to explore and exploit (March 1991), they have to integrate globally and adapt locally (Marquis & Battilana, 2009), they have to maximize profit and improve social welfare

(Margolis & Walsh, 2003), and they have to manage the tensions that come from spanning boundaries of national culture (Molinsky, 2013). At other times the demands on leaders are more consistent and less contradictory and the goals more symmetric.

We argue that information about leaders' competing demands is useful for followers trying to interpret leaders' expressions of emotional complexity and to clarify the extent to which the leaders' emotions are appropriate for the given context. In contexts where competing demands are low and leaders' expected decisions appear relatively clear-cut to followers, there is relatively less need for cognitive flexibility and relatively greater need for decisive action. As such, leader emotional complexity is likely to be deemed inappropriate and interpreted as a sign of indecision. Consequently, the emotionally complex leader may appear out of touch and, thus, lose credibility with followers. In turn, followers may perceive the emotionally complex leader as less capable of effectively acting on input from below, reducing followers' likelihood of feeling empowered and voicing ideas to improve organizational functioning.

By contrast, in contexts where competing demands are high and leaders' constituents appear full of contradiction, such as situations of change (Smith & Lewis, 2011), there is relatively greater need for cognitive flexibility and relatively less need for decisive action. As such, a leader's displays of emotional complexity are likely to be deemed correct and appropriate for the situation (Huy, 2002) and in tune with the organization and the complex environment, thus indicating cognitive flexibility. Hence, when followers perceive competing demands to be high, leader emotional complexity is likely to be deemed appropriate and interpreted as a sign of more flexibility and less indecision. Consequently, the emotionally complex leader may appear in touch and, thus, gain credibility with followers. In turn, followers may perceive the emotionally complex leader as more capable of acting on input from below, increasing followers' likelihood of feeling empowered and voicing ideas for improvement. Following from this, we suggest that the level of competing demands that a leader is grappling with will moderate the effect of leader emotional complexity on perceptions of leader cognitive flexibility.

Proposition 7: Competing demands will moderate the positive effect of leader expressions of emotional complexity on

follower inferences of leader cognitive flexibility. When competing demands are perceived to be high, followers will judge the leader as more cognitively flexible. When competing demands are perceived to be low, followers will judge the leader as less cognitively flexible and more indecisive.

DISCUSSION

For centuries, emotional complexity was considered a shortcoming in leaders. In recent years, however, researchers have identified specific benefits of this emotional state. In this article we argue that while complex emotions pose challenges for leaders, they may, surprisingly, also bestow substantial benefits, particularly regarding leaders' ability to lead change. Our functional theory of emotional complexity of leadership explains when, why, and how emotional complexity may be beneficial for leaders. We reveal how two interrelated components—the experience and expression of emotional complexity—serve a flexibility function for leaders at both the individual and interpersonal levels of analysis. Although we are not the first to suggest that emotional complexity may have benefits related to flexible thinking, no prior attempts have been made to integrate the extant research on negative and positive effects of emotional complexity by providing a functional evolutionary theory of why emotional complexity should facilitate cognitive flexibility, leader adaptability, and follower proactivity. Our theory offers a theoretical explanation for not only *why* emotional complexity should have these effects but also *when* they are more or less likely to occur. As argued, leaders who are low in neuroticism and high in openness will be more likely to become cognitively flexible when experiencing emotional complexity. Followers having a shared vantage point with their leaders and who perceive their leaders as grappling with competing demands will be more likely to judge their leaders as cognitively flexible. These arguments carry novel implications for theory and research on emotions as well as leadership.

Contributions to Emotions and Leadership Theory

Emotions. By offering a framework that provides new insights into when, why, and how emotional complexity may facilitate flexibility, adaptability,

and proactivity in the workplace, our article specifically contributes to research on emotional complexity and more broadly to the social functions of emotions perspective. First, we synthesize the fragmented research on dynamic affective processes and provide a foundation for a more coherent body of literature on emotional complexity in the workplace. In this article we propose that even though simultaneous and sequential emotional complexity have been treated differently in prior work, they are also yoked together in terms of their similar internal experience and function. Highlighting these similarities serves the purpose of reversing construct proliferation, an issue of some concern given the multitude of emotions terms that describe simultaneous and sequential emotional complexity. This also serves as a launch pad for future empirical work that could explore additional similarities and differences across these two emotional states.

Second, our approach also fills critical gaps in existing knowledge about the mechanisms that explain the positive effects of emotional complexity and calls attention to key contingencies for these effects. Emotions scholars in management and psychology have yet to articulate a unifying theory of the positive consequences of these emotional states. By integrating prior findings on the outcomes of emotional complexity, we offer cognitive flexibility as the primary function of emotional complexity. In addition, even though we propose that emotional complexity evolved with the function of flexibility, we recognize that it will not always act in line with this function (Morris & Keltner, 2000). Therefore, we offer critical contingencies: not all leaders will become more flexible and adaptable when they experience emotional complexity, and not all followers will perceive emotionally complex leaders as flexible. In prior research on emotional complexity, scholars did not extensively examine moderators, and in only some work did they examine mediators. Our model thus takes a step toward enriching our comprehension of when, why, and how emotional complexity is functional, thus providing a new starting point for future scholarship on emotional complexity in organizations, particularly for leaders.

Leadership. Our work also contributes to leadership scholarship, particularly contingency theories, including research on leader flexibility and leader adaptability, as well as research on paradoxical leadership and implicit leadership theories. First, our model introduces emotional states

as dynamic and event-level (Dinh et al., 2014) antecedents of leader flexibility and adaptability. The leadership literature has long emphasized the importance of leader flexibility and adaptability such that leaders are more effective if they are sensitive to social situations (Stogdill, 1948) and then able to adapt or match their leadership style to fit the situation (House, 1971; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). While the extant leadership literature has linked leader traits with leader flexibility and adaptability, our model diverges from this trait approach by emphasizing that a leader's *emotional states* facilitate change-oriented outcomes. Consistent with recent suggestions that the factors that enable leadership flexibility are likely to change from one situation to the next (Dinh et al., 2014), we offer *state* emotional complexity as a dynamic enabler of flexibility and present an emotion-based explanation, one that has thus far been ignored by leadership research, to account for this effect. Putting emotional complexity firmly on the agenda is an important advancement for contingency theories.

Second, even beyond contingency scholarship, our model offers potentially exciting new directions for research on organizational paradox (e.g., Smith & Lewis, 2011). Paradoxical leadership behaviors refer to seemingly competing yet interrelated behaviors used to meet structural and follower demands simultaneously and over time (Zhang, Waldman, Han, & Li, 2015). Whereas prior research has thus far offered cognitive antecedents of paradoxical behavior, including holistic thinking and integrative complexity, our model intriguingly suggests that state emotional complexity may be another route. Furthermore, considering our proposition that emotional complexity should increase cognitive flexibility, and considering the importance of flexible and creative thinking skills for creative leadership (Mumford, Connelly, & Gaddis, 2003), an exciting and important opportunity for advancing the creative leadership literature may be to examine the role of leader emotional complexity in the creative leadership process of leading others toward the attainment of a creative outcome (Mainemelis, Kark, & Epitropaki, 2015). Our model suggests that not only may emotionally complex leaders become more creative themselves, allowing them to deal more effectively with the problems among their multiple constituencies (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000), but their expressions of emotional complexity may

also stimulate creative thinking in followers because it signals the leaders' openness and flexibility and, thus, leader support (Amabile, 1988; Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004).

Third, our framework further suggests the importance of examining variables that may hinder leader emergence but could simultaneously facilitate leader effectiveness. In making decisions about who appears leader-like, people use implicit assumptions about the traits, abilities, and even emotions characterizing their ideal business leaders (for a review see Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013); these implicit assumptions shape who emerges as leaders of groups. In contrast, leader effectiveness refers to a leader's performance in influencing and guiding the activities of a unit toward goal achievement (Judge et al., 2002). Unfortunately, although leader emergence and leader effectiveness are distinct concepts, they are often blurred because leadership effectiveness is often measured perceptually rather than objectively and, thus, appears similar to leader emergence (Lord et al., 1986). We maintain that the blurring of these criteria is a dilemma in the leadership literature since it may cause scholars to dismiss certain characteristics because they do not fit leadership prototypes. Indeed, it has been argued that some leaders are probably selected for the very characteristics that ultimately lead them to fail, while other leaders are probably not hired for the very characteristics that ultimately would lead them to succeed (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Emotional complexity should increase leader effectiveness in the ways we have proposed, but it is unlikely to elicit leader emergence in certain contexts, particularly where it is not perceived to be appropriate. In these contexts, expressions of emotional complexity convey submissiveness and indecisiveness (Rothman, 2011), which go against leadership prototypes of dominance and competence (Melwani et al., 2012). Thus, our model serves as an example for leadership scholarship to examine variables like emotional complexity that will prompt leader effectiveness, even though they may hinder leader emergence in some contexts.

Future Research Directions

This article opens up a number of exciting directions for future research about additional mediators and moderators, research on groups and teams, and research on conflict.

Mediators and moderators. First, we have asserted that cognitive flexibility is the primary function of emotional complexity at both the individual and interpersonal levels of analysis. But it is also reasonable to think that other forms of flexibility may matter as well. For instance, leaders' complex emotional reactions may signal their complex cognitive appraisal of the situation, which may, in turn, increase observers' perceptions of the leaders' flexible personality and their flexible future behavior.

In addition, beyond the moderators we have presented, a number of other contextual factors at the individual, dyadic, group, and cultural levels may also shape and constrain how emotional complexity functions in organizations. At the individual level, it may be important to consider whether the model we have developed operates similarly for those with high versus low levels of psychological power. Research consistently demonstrates that powerful individuals are both cognitively and motivationally oriented toward the self (Fiske & Dépret, 1996), tend to reject others' advice and opinions (Briñol, Petty, & Barden, 2007), and are less likely to take others' perspectives (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). Considering the ample evidence linking power and self-focus, psychological power may attenuate the positive effects of emotional complexity on leaders' cognitive flexibility, or the ease with which they broaden the scope of their attentional span to attend to divergent perspectives and engage in a balanced consideration of those perspectives. Emotional complexity may therefore be more functional for those individuals who are in a position to benefit from it—those who have not been corrupted by power.

At the dyadic level, power may also render leaders who express emotional complexity less open to others' perspectives in the eyes of followers, thus discouraging followers from speaking up and taking charge and attenuating the positive effect of leader emotional complexity on follower proactivity. Additional status characteristics like leader gender may also affect followers' reactions to expressions of emotional complexity: in settings where social role stereotypes or prejudices are pervasive and women carry lower status to begin with, their expressions of emotional complexity may be strongly perceived as submissive and indecisive, thus significantly reducing their credibility with followers.

At the group level, group norms (Perlow & Weeks, 2002) may also play a role in shaping followers'

reactions to leaders' emotional complexity. For example, a group that values innovation should embrace flexibility because it facilitates innovative idea generation (West & Richter, 2008). Hence, in this group culture, emotional complexity, as a signal of flexibility, may be deemed correct for the situation and so beneficial for generating creative ideas and group participation.

Last, local culture may play a role. Cultures high in dialecticism, which is tolerance of contradictory beliefs (Peng & Nisbett, 1999), are likely to encourage and even demand leaders to embrace their complex emotions. Leaders in highly dialectical cultures may be more likely to experience and express their emotional complexity, and followers may be particularly receptive to these expressions.

Groups and teams. Consistent with the thrust of the psychological study of leadership, we have focused on how leaders influence individual followers. However, leaders also influence collective phenomena, such as group dynamics and climate (Hackman & Walton, 1986; Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989), and we believe that our framework can also be extended to address these group-level outcomes. Like their behaviors and decisions, leaders' emotions are symbolic expressions of their "values, motives and worldview, and these are what create climate" (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008: 105).

Whether they intend to or not, leaders serve to "model emotions" (Pescosolido, 2002: 593); their expressed affect influences the affective experiences of followers (e.g., Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011) and also provides information to followers about their values, attitudes, and intentions as a leader (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2010). In this way the values of the leader come to shape group behavior and interaction patterns, including the norms, climate, and culture that develop within the group (Schneider, 1987). Thus, leaders' emotional complexity may also shape a group's or organization's climate. Because emotional complexity should increase perceived cognitive flexibility, expressions of this state may facilitate a number of salutary group outcomes, such as group norms of openness (Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007), increased information sharing between groups (Plambeck & Weber, 2009), support for experimentation and innovation (Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003), and mindful organizing, which is a collective behavioral capability to detect and correct errors and adapt to unexpected events (Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe, & Weick, 2014; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

Conflict. In addition, we believe our framework may be fruitfully extended to research on conflict in groups, which tends to view conflict as disruptive (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). While we explore an alternative form of internal conflict, the functional effects of emotional complexity may enable us to understand the conditions under which other forms of conflict may be constructive in dyads and groups. For instance, in addition to high levels of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), norms of openness (Jehn, 1997) and high within-team trust (Simons & Peterson, 2000), perhaps having a shared vantage point and making salient the contradictory demands and asymmetric goals confronting group members may shift other forms of conflict from a destructive to a constructive course? Indeed, our model might offer a fresh perspective on the conditions under which conflict can be functional. In light of the growing interest in emotions and leadership as a multilevel phenomenon (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Ashkanasy & Jordan, 2008), unpacking how leader emotional complexity ties in with group-level outcomes might yield valuable theoretical contributions to this line of research.

Practical Implications

Because the organizational dynamics associated with emotional complexity are ever present, we suggest that management might want to focus on developing the conditions that facilitate its constructive course. We believe that the ability to acknowledge one's complex emotions and accepting the tension and discomfort they create are likely to be healthy developmental achievements and critical for establishing a fuller and more developed response to one's environment. Indeed, individuals who cannot acknowledge their complex emotions or accept the internal conflict they create (for a review see Ashforth et al., 2014) may be denied a significant trigger of flexibility. Thus, it may be important for organizations, especially those situated in turbulent industry environments or those undergoing organizational change, to consider how developing an organizational culture or climate that highlights how emotional complexity is normal and expected rather than destructive and dysfunctional might help organizational members, including leaders, learn to be comfortable with such complexity.

CONCLUSION

Our theory of the function of emotional complexity is premised on the understanding that emotional complexity is a normal reaction to complex events and an "inherent characteristic of all human beings" (Sincoff, 1990: 60). We suggest that emotional complexity represents a fuller and more developed response to one's environment than emotional simplicity (e.g., the lack of emotional reaction or singular emotional reactions [pure positivity]) and may actually be adaptive and integral to human functioning. Indeed, we interpret the converging evidence as suggesting that the primary function of emotional complexity is to increase flexibility and that, in turn, emotional complexity should be functional for leaders' adaptability and followers' proactivity. Considering implicit leadership theories suggesting that the experience and expression of emotional complexity might hinder leadership emergence, it is understandable that the benefits of emotional complexity for leadership have been overlooked. Our propositions offer an alternative perspective and perhaps a new starting point for future inquiry.

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