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How field office leaders drive learning and creativity in humanitarian aid: Exploring the role of boundary-spanning leadership for expatriate and local aid worker collaboration

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Summary

Many humanitarian aid workers receive training prior to being dispatched into the field, but they often encounter challenges that require additional learning and creativity. Consequently, aid organizations formally support collaboration among the expatriate and local workers in a field office. At best, those aid workers would not only exploit their joint knowledge but also explore novel ways of managing the challenges at hand. Yet differences between expatriate and local groups (e.g., in ethnicity, religion, education, and salary) often thwart intergroup collaboration in field offices and, by extension, any joint learning or creativity. In response to this issue, we study the role of field office leaders—specifically, how their boundary-spanning behavior may inspire collaboration between the two groups and therefore facilitate joint learning and creativity. We propose that a leader's in-group prototypicality additionally catalyzes this process—that is, a leader's behavior has more impact if s/he is seen as representing his/her group. We tested and found support for our hypothesized moderated mediation model in a field sample of 137 aid workers from 59 humanitarian organizations. Thus, our study generally highlights the pivotal role that field office leaders play for crucial outcomes in humanitarian aid operations. Furthermore, we offer concrete steps for field office leaders who want to inspire better collaboration between the expatriate and local aid workers they lead.

KEYWORDS

boundary spanning, creativity, expatriates, exploitation, exploration, field offices, humanitarian aid, intergroup, leadership, learning, locals, prototypicality

1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent disasters in the Middle East, East Asia, and Africa have strained the humanitarian sector's workforce and funding to a breaking point. In 2017 alone, the sector estimates that an unprecedented 128.6 million people will need disaster response and development aid (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2017). Likewise, the cost of delivering aid has risen to a record US$28 billion—more than triple the amount since the 2004 tsunami (Malerba et al., 2016). Yet evaluations of most humanitarian responses reveal that many beneficiaries' need still go unfulfilled (for a recent evaluation, see Stoddard, Harmer, Haver, Taylor, & Harvey, 2015). This has led many donors to base their funding on aid programs' operational performance (Humanitarian Financing Task Team, 2016). Additionally, with extant resources being spread thinner and thinner between largely steady provision and increasing demand (Malerba et al., 2016), there is also an internal need and motivation to work more efficiently to reach more beneficiaries with the same budget. Often, aid workers do so via way of learning best practices during disaster responses (e.g., Breslin, 2014) and via improvising creatively in the face of new challenges (e.g., Denby, 2013). Indeed, across a collection of humanitarian field reports, Ramalingam and Bound (2016) suggested that aid workers can produce a higher-impact, more efficient humanitarian response if empowered to learn best practices and, when necessary, create new ways of delivering aid. However, outside of a handful of post hoc references in some anecdotal case studies, learning and creativity do not receive sufficient support in field office work nor sufficient theorizing in humanitarian aid research. In this light and in pursuit of engaged

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scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007), we believe that learning and creativity in the field merit a more serious examination.

Reviews of case studies (e.g., Beck & Borton, 2004; Bessant et al., 2014; Thomson, 2007) suggest that aid workers can effectively improve their learning and creativity by consulting each other. Indeed, when internationally recruited aid workers (i.e., expatriates) are required to go on field missions, however, technically competent they may be, they may possess little practical knowledge about the disaster-stricken region's geography, infrastructural conditions, culture, and people; moreover, they have limited time to explore these facets on their own (Ramalingam, Gray, & Cerruti, 2013). In these contexts, aid workers need a certain degree of collaboration—that is, purposefully and jointly working with each other toward a shared goal (Bedwell et al., 2012)—in order to spur learning and creativity. It is through such collaboration that expatriate aid staff may, for instance, learn tacit cultural issues and social dynamics from local colleagues, who in turn may acquire technical know-how from their expatriate peers beyond what can be found in textbooks and manuals (Beck & Borton, 2004).

With that said, various humanitarian aid studies report that locals and expatriates do not always collaborate beyond the minimum workplace requirement. For example, in his review of humanitarian learning in Sri Lanka, Thomson (2007) posited "limited mechanisms for sharing lessons" (p. 2) as a recurring challenge that impedes field learning. In the same vein, another report from Sri Lanka highlighted the lack of collaboration as a serious constraint for developing new, creative ways to work with the local community and address emerging problems in the affected region (Tsunami Global Lessons Learned Project, 2009). Some field studies, such as those by Shevchenko and Fox (2008) in Russia and Da Costa (2012) in South Sudan, associate the problem of lacking collaboration with the tendency of local and expatriate staff to operate independently within the salient boundaries of their respective groups. For example, while discussing his field experience in South Sudan, a senior expatriate from an international aid organization stated, "Because we don't want anything eating into our time, if we haven't seen their [local actors'] work, it probably means it isn't that good, and we see no need to work with them" (Alcayna & Al-Murani, 2016, p. 23). Similarly, an experienced local aid worker from a Sri Lanka-based NGO explained that local workers' knowledge and contributions are usually not recognized as much as those of comparable expatriate colleagues; as such, there is little motivation to engage meaningfully with expatriates in the field office (Brown, 2011). Such us-versus-them thinking is compounded by local aid workers not always having advanced technical expertise, good English or French language skills, or access to professional development opportunities (Alcayna & Al-Murani, 2016; Jayawickrama, 2011; Nightingale, 2012). These disparities are often further reinforced by differences in ethnicity, religion, other demographical aspects, or lifestyle differences (e.g., consumption of alcohol in Jachens, Houdmont, & Thomas, 2016). On top of that, expatriate aid workers are the most likely to hold leadership positions in field offices, usually supervising local staff who are older than they are, with more experience than they have, and with greater knowledge of the local situation (e.g., Fassin, 2007; Shutt, 2006). From this perspective, intergroup perceptions can sometimes evolve into "discriminatory assumptions and even prejudice about the priorities, experience and abilities of national staff" (Smith & Scriven, 2011, p. 49). Correspondingly, such tense relations can seriously impede collaboration between locals and expatriates, which may translate into negative consequences for learning and creativity in field offices. Although the humanitarian aid literature provides anecdotes for this challenge, it has stopped short of offering substantive solutions.

The present study aims to address this shortcoming. To do so, we seriously consider an insight from practice—that the field office leader is a key figure in the dynamic between local and expatriate groups (e.g., Knox-Clarke, 2014; People in Aid, 2010). Although field office leaders may issue various operational measures to instigate collaboration, the above-reported experiences suggest that these measures may not be enough. With the present paper, we seek to shift the focus and explore how a field office leader's actual behavior may—not only as a role model but also as a direct instigator of positive intergroup relations—support collaboration between local and expatriate aid workers. To this end, we particularly focus on boundary spanning, which is defined as a leadership approach "that creates direction, alignment, and commitment across boundaries in service of a higher goal" (Cross, Ernst, & Pasmore, 2013, p. 81). By engaging in boundary spanning, so we argue, leaders create a collaborative space at work because they are perceived as role models of collaboration across organizational groups (Ernst & Yip, 2009; Johnson & Duxbury, 2010). Moreover, in line with social identity models of leadership (e.g., Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003), such role modeling is presumably more effective when group members—who may be expatriates or locals—perceive the leader as in-group prototypical (i.e., representative of their respective group). It is then that the leader's actions speak louder to the group, and that the leader gains the leeway to shift the group into new patterns, such as increasing intergroup collaboration (Giessner, van Knippenberg, & Sleebos, 2009).

By connecting the literature on topics such as leadership, collaboration, learning, and creativity, we aim to make three contributions. First and most importantly, we deviate from the tradition of managing humanitarian aid operations via systems and processes (e.g., Ramalingam, 2011; Tsunami Global Lessons Learned Project, 2009). Instead, we highlight the pivotal role that leaders (and their behavior) play in orchestrating collaboration—and, by extension, learning, and creativity—among local and expatriate aid workers. Second, although practitioner reports frequently highlight that behavioral dynamics may be the root of many humanitarian field problems (e.g., Featherstone, 2010; Smith & Scriven, 2011), there is little empirical research to substantiate this pool of largely anecdotal evidence. Our study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to investigate the empirical relevance of the aforementioned behavioral elements; as such, it responds to calls for more first-hand field data instead of anecdotes or simulations (Starr & Van Wassenhove, 2014). Lastly, although we primarily work to expand the perspective on effective leadership in humanitarian aid, our study may also inform the mainstream organizational behavior domain. Granted, there are some unique aspects of the humanitarian aid context—such as differences in demographical and cultural backgrounds (Fassin, 2007; Smith & Scriven, 2011), as well as organizational disparities between local and expatriate aid workers, such as highly inequitable salary levels and protection policies (Carr, McWha, Maclachlan, & Furnham, 2010). Nonetheless, we expect that

some of our study's insights will be applicable to research and practice in other contexts, such as commercial enterprises where collaboration suffers because of rivaling departments, product divisions, or regions.

2 | LEARNING AND CREATIVITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID

In order to best respond to all forms of disaster, aid organizations typically establish field offices in areas that need or are likely to need humanitarian aid. Field offices manage a variety of programs with specific mandates, for example, World Food Programme for food, Doctors without Borders for health, and Oxfam for the alleviation of global poverty (Cozzolino, 2012). Successfully implementing such programs heavily depends on effective and efficient humanitarian logistics (Tatham & Christopher, 2014; World Food Programme Logistics, 2013), which range from the deployment of human and material resources in the affected regions to the last-mile delivery of mandated goods and services such as shelter, food, and healthcare (Ford & Schmidt, 2000; Lu, Goh, & De Souza, 2013). For their staff to work effectively and efficiently, aid organizations often strive to identify best practices via after-action evaluations, which can later be taught in formal trainings (see field reports, e.g., Frerks & Hilhorst, 2002; Smith & Telford, 2007). Humanitarian innovation begins with implementing these new ideas within the organization, which typically follows a formal top-down process. For instance, the headquarters of an aid organization might partner with the private sector to train its staff in new technologies, for example, 3D printing and drones (Ramalingam, Scriven, & Foley, 2009; Tatham, Ball, Wu, & Diplas, 2017; Tatham, Loy, & Peretti, 2015).

Yet a growing body of reports suggests that many such formalized processes may run the risk of being irrelevant to field-level problems: Indeed, "learning exercises repeatedly highlight the same problems and shortcomings, and tell us nothing new" (Ramalingam et al., 2009, p. 2). In contrast, a recent sector-wide review has argued that a core part of humanitarian aid innovation is driven by more informal learning and creative problem-solving at the field-level (Obrecht & Warner, 2016). A case in point is cash-based assistance, which entails providing beneficiaries with cash or vouchers to generate local market activity. This solution emerged when local and expatriate aid workers were jointly aiming to assist beneficiaries in a more dignified and cost-efficient mechanism (Heaslip, Haavisto, & Kovács, 2016). Indeed, as Tomasini and Van Wassenhove (2009) suggest, there appears to be a lot of potential in field-level learning and creativity: Each time aid workers conduct any operational process like procurement, transportation, last-mile delivery of aid supplies, or otherwise serve their program mandates, they accumulate valuable experiences and learn to solve unforeseen problems. As such, many field reports highlight that locals and expatriates' nonredundant knowledge and experience can be used to rethink operational tasks in light of novel disaster contexts (Obrecht, 2016; Sida & Darcy, 2012; Wiles & Sida, 2006). Yet amidst high field workloads and staff turnover (Heaslip, Sharif, & Althonayan, 2012; also see Loquercio, Hammersley, & Emmens, 2006; Van Wassenhove, 2006), it would be naïve to assume that all of these lessons can be captured in formal trainings or manuals. The question, then, is how aid organizations can improve learning and creativity beyond more formal processes such as manuals and workshops.

To this end, we draw on the organizational behavior literature to examine insights about on-the-job learning and creativity. This literature suggests that the essence of learning and creativity lies with employees and not within manuals and procedures (Dochy, Segers, & Van Den Bossche, 2011; Edmondson, 2012). Particularly in changing contexts (e.g., those of humanitarian aid field offices), employees are more likely to learn while performing tasks to achieve organizational objectives (Eraut & Hirsh, 2007; Huyse, 2011). For example, studies of multinational commercial firms have shown that organizational processes can evolve successfully alongside changes in technology and operational competencies by encouraging employees to collaborate and learn the best knowledge obtainable from their day-to-day work (Edmondson, 2008; Roloff, Woolley, & Edmondson, 2011). This kind of informal on-the-job learning may happen, for example, when group members raise questions to each other and share information on how to best perform tasks (Wilson, Goodman, & Cronin, 2007). As such, Argote, Gruenfeld, and Naquin (2001) defined learning in terms of group interactions that let "individuals acquire, share and combine knowledge through experience with one another" (p. 370). This readily translates to humanitarian aid: In his posttsunami report, for instance, Thomson (2007) recounted several examples of local and expatriate aid workers improving their knowledge about immediate operational priorities through group interactions, such as conversations with colleagues.

Additionally, recent field evidence by Denby (2013) and Ramalingam and Bound (2016) indicates that creativity in solving operational problems is essential for successfully implementing aid programs. For example, when an International Rescue Committee's field office facilitated collaboration between the local staff and expatriate nutrition specialists, it was able to develop "a new way of helping community health workers diagnose malnutrition [in Africa]" (Ramalingam & Bound, 2016, p. 100). Organizational research also supports the effectiveness of such unique (re)combinations of knowledge (Edmondson, 2013; Paulus & Nijstad, 2009; Taggar, 2002), seeing creativity as "generation of ideas, problem solutions, or insights that are novel and [context] appropriate" (Bechtoldt, De-Dreu, Nijstad, & Cho, 2010, p. 624). A longstanding finding suggests that creativity is more likely to occur at work when all groups of employees work together (Amabile, 1988; Amabile & Khaire, 2008). From this perspective, researchers contend that intergroup interactions greatly influence the process of creative problem-solving (Stasser & Birchmeier, 2003). Aid organizations need such field-level creativity to implement their innovation agenda because "no innovation is possible without the creative processes that mark the front end of the process: identifying important problems and opportunities, gathering information, generating new ideas, and exploring the validity of those ideas" (McLean, 2005, p. 227; see also Van de Ven & Angle, 1989).

Despite the known value of learning and creativity, both are rarely present in many field offices. Indeed, reports on learning by field-level workers (Beck & Borton, 2004; Binder, 2009) and some sector-wide evaluations (Clarke & Ramalingam, 2008; Telford, Cosgrave, & Houghton, 2007; Van Brabant, 1997) suggest that aid organizations appear much better at identifying key lessons than implementing them.

Similarly, Ramalingam (2016) noted in a special report on humanitarian innovation that creative problem solving has only marginally suffused field offices' daily operations.

In short, it appears that field-level learning and creativity are nurtured by joint reflections and collaboration (e.g., Thomson, 2007; Tsunami Global Lessons Learned Project, 2009). However, the field insufficiently practices both—and a key culprit for this situation may lie in the schisms between local and expatriate aid workers (Lu et al., 2013).

3 | COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL AND EXPATRIATE STAFF IN HUMANITARIAN AID FIELD OFFICES

In the organizational literature, Decuyper, Dochy, and Van den Bossche (2010), Amabile and Pratt (2016), and Edmondson and Harvey (2017) emphasize that employees' on-the-job learning and creativity hinge on the exchange of knowledge across groups of coworkers. This may necessitate a degree of intergroup collaboration, defined as "an evolving process whereby two or more social entities actively and reciprocally engage in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one shared goal" (Bedwell et al., 2012, p. 130). However, clear demarcation lines between local and expatriate aid workers may exacerbate the challenges of intergroup collaboration.

In this respect, the literature on expatriate relations in commercial contexts has uncovered some factors that generally impede local-expatriate collaboration. For example, Rankis and Beebe (1982) identified differences in managerial style as a major challenge for expatriates' collaboration with local group members. A well-established body of literature also positions cultural barriers as a key factor that separates expatriates from locals in international business assignments (Johnson & Duxbury, 2010). In this vein, Selmer (2000) showed that Swedish (expatriate) bosses in Hong Kong could recognize only one third of locals' contributions to their respective workgroups. As several humanitarian field reports highlight (Alcayna & Al-Murani, 2016; Bjerneld, Lindmark, Garrett, & Diskett, 2004; Da Costa, 2012; McWha, 2011; Shevchenko & Fox, 2008; Vaughan-Smith, 2012), these problems may emerge even more acutely in the aid context due to the various differences between expatriate and local aid workers. As a result, they may be less willing to collaborate.

A major source of friction between locals and expatriates is professional competence, judged based on an aid worker's education and experience. For instance, a report by Bjerneld et al. (2004) about Africa-based humanitarian organizations revealed that many expatriates view their local colleagues as unreliable or unqualified. In this light, the reasoning of one expatriate group member is emblematic: "Our job is to save lives. We do not have time to sit with partners […] to do local capacity-building" (Cohen & Gingerich, 2015, p. 32). This quote speaks to a larger expatriate mindset—that it may actually be more efficient to lead operations independently of locals' perspectives (e.g., Alcayna & Al-Murani, 2016). Case in point: in a Doctors without Borders field office, expatriate leaders never invited locals to biweekly meetings where operational plans were discussed and updated (Shevchenko & Fox, 2008). In turn, locals may retaliate by withholding information that could help expedite critical processes, such as needs assessment or procurement (Obrecht, 2016; Sanderson & Ramalingam, 2015).

Research involving social identity theory (e.g., see Abrams & Hogg, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) makes clear that these unhealthy and negative dynamics—compounded by other surface markers such as ethnicity or religion—encourage aid workers to gradually associate their self-concept with either the local or expatriate groups. The resulting in- versus out-group boundaries—the intangible but salient lines separating one group from another (Decuyper et al., 2010)—can thwart collaboration regarding knowledge and experience sharing (e.g., see Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012).

4 | BOUNDARY-SPANNING LEADERSHIP

The problems posed by group boundaries become even more poignant when animosity and conflict join the mix, as may sometimes be the case between locals and expatriates in humanitarian aid (e.g., Hunt, 2009). However, organizational studies highlight that leadership may help facilitate interaction and information exchange across and amidst group boundaries (Harvey & Edmondson, 2016; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004; Yukl, 2009). This "bridge" function often derives squarely from the leader's job, which is to "lead two or more groups working toward a shared goal, regardless of any animosity that might exist between the groups" (Hogg et al., 2012, p. 242). Indeed, leaders are in a unique position to engage in boundary spanning—a set of behavioral activities that aim at bringing together two otherwise unconnected groups (Oh, Chung, & Labianca, 2004)—in order to exemplify the bridge they seek to build between the groups and thereby enable collaborative intergroup relations.

Generally, boundary spanning necessitates that leaders equally interact and share information with members of both groups (Marrone, 2010). In their conceptual study, Johnson and Duxbury (2010) identified effective boundary-spanning behaviors for expatriate leaders: namely, building relationship with in- and out-group members (i.e., relationship building), delivering information resources in response to all group members' demands (i.e., delivering), and brokering introductions and referrals between them (i.e., intermediary). Though modeling collaboration with members of all groups, leaders can actually create a space for individuals to "seek or give information, views, and ideas through interaction with other individuals" (Decuyper et al., 2010, p. 118). By building such linkages through their own behavior, leaders facilitated collaboration in a variety of nonprofit (e.g., Miller, 2008) and commercial (e.g., Rosenkopf & Nerkar, 2001) environments (for a full review of boundary-spanning behaviors, see Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Marrone, Tesluk, & Carson, 2007; Marrone, 2010).

With this background in mind, we suggest that boundary-spanning behaviors may also enable field office leaders to bridge the divide between local and expatriate groups, both of which have comparatively deep-seated group boundaries and largely depend on effective collaboration for learning and creativity. Thus, we hypothesize:

> **Hypothesis 1.** *The more a humanitarian aid field office leader engages in boundary-spanning behavior, the more intergroup collaboration between the local and expatriate*

groups in field offices is enabled, which in turn leads to increased learning and creativity in humanitarian aid field offices.

5 | LEADERS' IN-GROUP PROTOTYPICALITY

The literature on intergroup relations has shown that dynamics associated with leaders' group membership affect the context in which leaders and followers interact. For example, leaders are usually perceived by fellow group members as pursuing their group's best interests when they strongly represent the respective group prototype, which comprises "the fuzzy sets of characteristics that in a given context define the group" (van Knippenberg, 2011, p. 1079). From this perspective, in-group-prototypical leaders have some leeway in engaging with members of other groups without being perceived as deviants by fellow group members (e.g., see Steffens, Haslam, Ryan, & Kessler, 2013). Additionally, and importantly for the present context, in-group prototypicality has been shown to amplify the impact of leaders' behavior and, by extension, help change their group's norms (e.g., Platow, van Knippenberg, Haslam, van Knippenberg, & Spears, 2006; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003).

In light of these findings, leaders who are perceived as in-group prototypical—and who then make tangible behavioral efforts in pursuing collaboration (e.g., between locals and expatriates)—may be more effective at persuading their in-group members to adopt collaborative behaviors. Stated differently, we posit that perceived leader in-group prototypicality can be a powerful amplifier for aid workers' interpretation of boundary-spanning behavior, especially in field offices where collaboration is not typically the group's norm or even welcomed (e.g., Hunt, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2003; Shevchenko & Fox, 2008). As such, when group members (either locals or expatriates) perceive the leader as prototypical of their respective in-group, his/her displayed boundary-spanning behavior may be more readily accepted as a (new) norm and thus emulated through intergroup collaboration. From this, we derive our second hypothesis and our complete moderated mediation model (illustrated in Figure 1):

Hypothesis 2. *The more in-group prototypical that a field office leader is perceived to be, the more his/her boundary-spanning behavior informs local and expatriate intergroup collaboration, which in turn leads to increased learning and creativity in humanitarian aid field offices.*

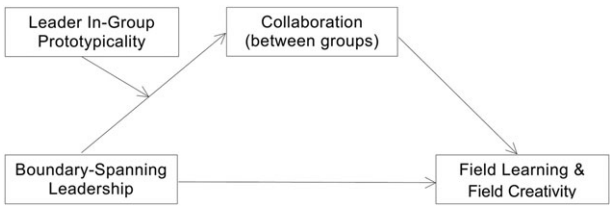


FIGURE 1 Hypothesized moderated mediation model in Hayes (2013) and Preacher et al. (2007). The model tests field learning and field creativity as two separate outcome variables

6 | METHOD

6.1 | Sample

Our sample consisted of 137 humanitarian aid workers who voluntarily participated in an anonymous online survey. We initially identified respondents through contact lists that were made available by the Afghanistan-based offices of the United Nations Children's Fund and the United States Agency for International Development. We identified other aid workers through annual events such as the Health and Humanitarian Logistics Conference and Fleet Forum. Furthermore, the Kühne Foundation's Humanitarian and Emergency Logistics Platform disseminated the survey to its affiliated field offices across the globe. We thought it necessary to recruit through contacts who are well-connected to the humanitarian aid field, as participants who are capable and motivated to provide accurate answers are less likely to be susceptible to common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). In total, 542 personalized email invitations were distributed. Beyond linking to the survey, the email invitations offered a concise introduction section, which appealed to participants' altruistic motives to support the research project (Fazekas, Wall, & Krouwel, 2014), as well as a brief concept note. The email invitation and the survey's initial page informed the participants about the theme of the research and the time needed to complete the survey. In order to incentivize respondents to complete the survey, we offered a donation of $5 to a humanitarian aid organization of their choosing. The process of data collection lasted for 78 days.

To filter out the aid workers whose field offices consisted of only local or expatriate workforce, the survey presented a filtering question ("Are there local and expatriate employees working in your field office?") at the outset. The negative answer would direct the respondents to the survey's last page. Of the initial sample, which consisted of 200 responses, 33 people were dropped because they did not work in mixed-staff field offices. To verify that participants responded according to the best of their knowledge, we placed the following honesty check at the end of the survey: "Please note that having honest data is pivotal to our research. Without your honest answers, our recommendations to humanitarian organizations may be faulty. Against this background: Can we trust your answers and can we use them for our research?" We excluded one more participant who provided a negative answer to the honesty check. To further enhance the reliability of the dataset, we also included an instructional manipulation check (IMC) in the survey (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). Specifically, we inserted the phrase "To assure your attention, please click on option seven" in between other scales to check whether participants diligently read the instructions and items. Approaching our data very conservatively, we excluded 29 responses due to a failed IMC, thus reducing the final sample size to 137 responses.

In the final sample, 36% of participants were local humanitarian aid workers, whereas 64% belonged to the expatriate group. Female respondents constituted 31% of the sample, with a mean age of 38 years old (SD = 10.63), whereas men constituted 69%, with a mean age of 40 years (SD = 10.99). Respondents collectively worked in 59 aid organizations, including United Nations agencies and international humanitarian NGOs. Thirty-nine respondents did not mention their

organization's name. In terms of geographic spread, 26% of the respondents were located in Afghanistan, 31% were located elsewhere in Asia, 31% were in Africa, 4% were in Europe, 4% were in the Americas, and 1% were in Oceania. Two respondents (3%) did not specify their field office's location. The respondents' nationalities were also quite diverse: 34% Asians (of whom 19% were Afghan), 36% Europeans, 12% Africans, 13% North and South Americans, and 3% Australians. One respondent did not mention citizenship.

In terms of education, 88 respondents had master degrees (64%), 36 had bachelor degrees (26%), seven had doctoral degrees, and six had a high school education. Of all those with higher education, 62% were expatriate aid workers. This difference in education between local and expatriates in our data clearly corresponds with the sources of friction identified by prior humanitarian case studies (e.g., Jayawickrama, 2011; Knox-Clarke, 2014; Smith & Scriven, 2011). In terms of work focus, 29% of respondents were exclusively committed to ongoing workgroups that focused on development activities, whereas 26% were engaged in short-term disaster response (relief) projects. A notable 22% of respondents were simultaneously active in relief and development programs. Another 14% labeled their humanitarian work focus as education, health, or security, whereas the remaining 9% were engaged in other activities. Moreover, 42% of respondents operated in an armed conflict setting, and the majority of these belonged to Afghanistan-based field offices. Compared with other humanitarian studies featuring samples—such as 141 former Nepalese child soldiers versus nonsoldiers (Kohrt et al., 2008), 132 aid workers across 22 countries (Moshtari, 2013), or 152 NGO leaders (Mitchell, 2012)—our sample is comparable in size and sufficiently diverse. As such, it provides a rather robust test of our hypotheses (see Schupbach, 2016).

6.2 | Measures

Two humanitarian aid practitioners reviewed the online survey in advance and helped us adjust the language of the measurement items so that they unambiguously fit the humanitarian operations context. Moreover, because this survey went out to participants in the field who do not always have good Internet and technical equipment, we needed to keep scale lengths to a minimum.

At the beginning of the survey, we presented a question ("Are you part of the local or the expatriate team in your field office?") in order to tailor the remaining questions based on respondents' group membership and related dynamics (i.e., group prototypicality or collaboration). For example, an expatriate would receive the item: "The collaboration with the local employees is a successful one", whereas a local would receive: "The collaboration with the expatriate employees is a successful one."

We measured *boundary-spanning leadership* using a three-item scale adopted from the Intergroup Rhetoric Scale by Rast (2013). We separately asked expatriate and local respondents to describe whether their field office manager (1) "*interacts frequently with both local and expatriate employees*", (2) "*is equally available for the local and expatriate employees during office hours*", and (3) "*puts a lot of effort in strengthening the relationship between the local and expatriate group*". Participants completed this measure via a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), with high scores indicating stronger perceptions that the field office manager engages in boundary spanning. Factor loadings for each item were .83, .83, and .79, respectively, with a Cronbach's alpha of .86.

To measure *leader in-group prototypicality*, we utilized a three-item scale adopted from van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg (2005). The scale separately asked the expatriate and local respondents about how well their field office leader represented their respective in-group. The scale items included whether the field office manager (1) "*is a good example of the kind of people that are members of my group*", whether he or she (2) "*has very much in common with the members of my group*", and whether the field manager (3) "*represents what is characteristic for my group*". Participants completed the measure via a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), with high scores indicating stronger perceptions that the field office manager is highly in-group prototypical for the respondent's group. Factor loadings for each item were .76, .89, and .88, respectively, with a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

We then measured the perceived effectiveness of *collaboration* using a three-item scale adopted from Jap (2001). We separately asked expatriates and locals about their perspective on whether (1) "*The collaboration with the expatriate (local) employees is a successful one*", (2) "*The collaboration with the expatriate (local) employees has more than fulfilled our expectations*", and (3) "*We are satisfied with the outcomes from this collaboration*". Participants completed this measure via a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), with high scores indicating a high degree of perceived collaboration between groups. Factor loadings for each item were .84, .82, and .95, respectively, with a Cronbach's alpha of .90.

Because of the limited space in the questionnaire and the lack of empirical studies (to the best of our knowledge) that have measured field-level learning and creativity, we developed two single-item measures for these variables. Research supports the use of concise and focused measurement instruments featuring one item, which can minimize the demands on participants' time at work and thereby increase response rates in hard-to-reach contexts such as humanitarian aid field offices (Dollinger & Malmquist, 2009; Fisher, Matthews, & Gibbons, 2016; Stanton, Sinar, Balzer, & Smith, 2002). For these reasons and following the research on learning (e.g., Ainley & Patrick, 2006; Atroszko, 2014; Atroszko, Andreassen, Griffiths, & Pallesen, 2015; Hong, Snell, & Rowley, 2017; McCaughey, DelliFraine, & Erwin, 2015; Sahinidis & Bouris, 2008) and creativity (e.g., Cheng & Li, 2001; Randel, Jaussi, & Wu, 2011; Scott & Bruce, 1994; Tierney & Farmer, 2004; Yong, 2012), we constructed single-item measures so as to elicit comparable responses across different field offices. We developed an item for field learning based on reports from the field-level learning and organizational learning literatures (e.g., Ahmad & Schroeder, 2003; Fugate, Stank, & Mentzer, 2009). Namely, we asked: (1) "*In comparison to other comparable field offices, how would you judge the operational learning of your field office (i.e., learning between programs, expatriates, and local employees)?*" Likewise, we used the team creativity literature and humanitarian case studies (e.g., Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Ramalingam et al., 2009) to construct a single-item scale for field creativity. We asked: (1) "*In comparison to other comparable field offices, how would you judge the operational creativity of your field office (i.e., finding*

solutions to difficult problems)?" We added the parenthetical information so that respondents would have a simple and concrete understanding of learning and creativity that aligned with our study. Research finds that such single-item measures can be effective when the aim is to measure a (dimension of a) construct that is unambiguous and concrete (e.g., Bergkvist, 2015; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Gardner, Cummings, Dunham, & Pierce, 1988; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983; Schubert & Otten, 2002; Van Quaquebeke, van Knippenberg, & Brodbeck, 2011; Wanous & Hudy, 2001; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Participants completed both items via a 7-point Likert scale ranging from −3 = *far worse* (1) to +3 = *far better* (7), with high scores suggesting a high level of perceived learning or creativity.

In the next step, we added a number of potentially relevant control variables to the model. Bernerth and Aguinis (2016) caution that only theoretically and/or statistically meaningful variables should be included as controls. In this vein, we included group membership, in-group size, out-group size, leader's and aid workers' age and gender, and armed conflict setting. Previous organizational studies, including recent ones by Matschke, Moskaliuk, and Kimmerle (2013) and Horwitz and Horwitz (2007), suggest a relationship between group membership and employees' learning performance. These insights highlight that group membership affects how people share, assess, and integrate information across groups. Moreover, researchers generally associate group size with a variety of work-related outcomes (Berger & Cummings, 1979) and thus often control for the effects of size-related phenomena, especially in leadership studies (e.g., see O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, Lapiz, & Self, 2010). Regarding age and gender, we expected that field-level operational settings entail a diverse humanitarian workforce with varying cultural and religious norms, which encourage different relationships and behaviors between people of different genders (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and ages (e.g., Kunze & Menges, 2016; for instance, sensitivity to younger or female leaders in some cultures). Ultimately, we included armed conflict as a control variable because, in the highly insecure context of man-made disasters (e.g., Aid Worker Security Database, 2016), intergroup relations between aid workers may involve higher distrust and tension at the workplace (Apte, Gonçalves, & Yoho, 2016; Holguín-Veras et al., 2016). Of all our control variables, group membership, in-group size, out-group size, leader age, and follower gender showed significant correlations with some of the main constructs (as shown in Table 1).

7 | RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, intercorrelations of variables, and Cronbach's α-value. As can be gathered from Table 1, all scales showed at least satisfactory, if not good, internal consistencies. The independent variable boundary-spanning leadership showed a statistically significant and positive correlation with the mediator *collaboration* (r = .67, p < .001). Similarly, boundary-spanning leadership correlated with both outcome variables field learning (r = .42, p < .001) and field creativity (r = .47, p < .001). This holds true for *collaboration's* correlation with field learning (r = .36, p < .001) and field creativity (r = .44, p < .001). Additionally, the moderator *leader in-group prototypicality* correlated with boundary-spanning leadership (r = .37, p < .001) and *collaboration* (r = .29, p < .001). Both field learning and field creativity significantly correlated with each other (r = .57, p < .001). In support of our earlier theoretical discussions, the correlations provide a first indication that the extent to which leaders engage in boundary spanning is positively associated with more intergroup collaboration and, by extension, higher field learning and creativity.

TABLE 1 Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), intercorrelations, and Cronbach's alpha

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Boundary-spanning leadership	5.19	1.51	(.86)												
2 Collaboration	4.85	1.35	.67**	(.90)											
3 Leader in-group prototypicality	4.96	1.64	.37**	.29**	(.88)										
4 Field learning	4.54	1.49	.42**	.36**	.17*	(—)									
5 Field creativity	4.89	1.47	.47**	.44**	.12	.57**	(—)								
Control variables															
6 Group membership	1.64	0.48	.07	.10	.30**	−.16*	−.03	(—)							
7 In-group size	36	95	−.18*	−.20*	−.05	.12	−.08	−.26*	(—)						
8 Out-group size	51	101	−.11	−.10	.23*	.08	.04	.31**	.08	(—)					
9 Leader gender	1.67	0.47	−.09	−.09	−.12	−.00	−.05	−.19*	.10	−.08	(—)				
10 Leader age	46	11	−.26**	−.17*	−.14	−.20*	−.14	−.04	.07	.04	.00	(—)			
11 Follower gender	1.68	0.46	.23*	.24*	.15	.06	.06	−.01	.03	−.17*	.26**	−.09	(—)		
12 Follower age	40	11	.02	−.01	.09	.06	.05	.06	−.05	.10	.14	.07	.09	(—)	
13 Armed conflict setting	0.42	0.49	−.04	−.09	.02	.01	.10	−.14	−.06	.08	.12	−.00	.12	.00	(—)

Note. N = 137. Cronbach's Alphas are provided in parentheses where applicable. Group membership was coded 0 = local and 1 = expatriate.

Gender was coded 1 = male and 2 = female. Armed conflict setting was coded 1 = responses from Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Kenya, Congo, and Pakistan and 0 = responses from other field locations.

*p < .05. **p < .001.

TABLE 2 Measurement properties of constructs

	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Range of factor loading
Boundary-spanning leadership	.862	.677	.79–.83
Collaboration	.907	.767	.82–.95
Leader in-group prototypicality	.886	.722	.76–.88

Before progressing to the main analyses, we first checked the soundness of the measurement model. To that end, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on boundary-spanning leadership (independent variable), leader in-group prototypicality (moderator), and collaboration (mediator); this ensured that our scales reflect related yet distinct constructs. We considered items with factor loadings ≥.40 as strongly related to the underlying factor (Santor et al., 2011). In our confirmatory factor analysis results, all factor loadings ranged above .75, as shown in Table 2. Additionally, we found that the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) for boundary-spanning leadership (AVE = .677, CR = .862), leader in-group prototypicality (AVE = .722, CR = .886), and collaboration (AVE = .767, CR = .907) which showed sufficiently high construct validity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2006). These correlated (latent) factors also displayed an acceptable goodness-of-fit measure, including a comparative fit index value of 0.986, a standardized root mean square residual value of 0.037, and a Tucker-Lewis index value of 0.979 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The root mean square error of approximation was 0.059 (Maccallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996).

Additionally, we conducted the most commonly used post hoc test in organizational studies to detect common method variance: Harman's one-factor test (Craighead, Ketchen, Dunn, & Hult, 2011; Fuller, Simmering, Atinc, Atinc, & Babin, 2016). This test involves running an unrotated, single-factor constrained factor analysis. In our case, 46.8% of the variance was explained by a single factor, which falls below the 50% cut-off point (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Thus, common method variance is not a major concern here (and does not need to be separately controlled for via, e.g., marker factors). Overall, the results suggest that we can proceed with the main analyses.

7.1 | Moderated mediation analysis

We applied a moderated mediation analysis based on structural equation modeling (Hayes, 2013; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) to compute the conditional indirect effect of boundary-spanning leadership on field learning and field creativity. Table 3 presents the moderated mediation model's coefficients along with the *p*-values for the variables and the predictor–moderator interaction. In order to make the interpretation of the interaction and involved coefficients more straightforward (Aiken & West, 1991; Dawson, 2014), we z-standardized all variables, except for the mediator and the two outcome variables field learning and field creativity, prior to running the moderated mediation. As shown in Table 3, three control variables (i.e., group membership, in-group, and out-group sizes) came out as statistically significant when we ran the moderated mediation test with field learning as the outcome variable (see Table 3). However, only one variable (out-group size) was significant when we ran the same analysis with field creativity as the outcome variable (see Table 3). Although other control variables did not emerge as significant in the model with learning and creativity, there is sufficient theory and previous research to merit their inclusion (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kunze & Menges, 2016; O'Reilly et al., 2010).

TABLE 3 Coefficients of moderated mediation model for field learning and field creativity as outcome variables

	Collaboration (mediator)				Field learning (outcome)				Field creativity (outcome)			
	Coeff	*SE*	*p*	[95% CI]	*Coeff*	*SE*	*p*	[95% CI]	*Coeff*	*SE*	*p*	[95% CI]
Group membership	.062	.200	.755	−.332 .458	−.700	.258	.007*	−1.20 -.191	−.254	.258	.325	−.760 .252
In-group size	−.001	.000	.090	−.003 .000	.002	.001	.013*	.000 .005	.000	.001	.907	−.002 .002
Out-group size	.000	.000	.842	−.001 .002	.002	.001	.040*	.001 .004	.002	.001	.063*	−.000 .004
Leader gender	−.024	.190	.901	−.405 .357	−.054	.248	.828	−.541 .433	−.002	.249	.992	−.490 .485
Leader age	.003	.007	.703	−.012 .018	−.017	.009	.082	−.035 .002	−.004	.009	.680	−.023 .015
Gender	.290	.200	.174	−.101 .680	−.212	.257	.410	−.716 .292	−.290	.257	.261	−.794 .215
Age	−.006	.007	.399	−.020 .008	.011	.009	.247	−.008 .030	.006	.009	.507	−.012 .026
Armed conflict setting	−.240	.173	.170	−.575 .102	.335	.222	.131	−.100 .771	.408	.222	.067	−.028 .845
Boundary-spanning leadership (BSL)	.937	.108	.000**	.725 1.15	.515	.172	.003**	.074 .502	.624	.172	.000**	.289 .962
Leader in-group prototypicality (LIP)	.130	.109	.232	−.084 .345	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
BSL × LIP	.245	.107	.022*	.034 .455	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Collaboration	—	—	—	—	.288	.109	.008*	.073 .502	.296	.109	.007*	.081 .510
	R^2 = .50				R^2 = .34				R^2 = .30			
	F = 11.48, P < .001**				F = 6.38, P < .001**				F = 5.48, P < .001**			

Note. CI = confidence interval.

N = 137.

*p < .05. **p < .001.

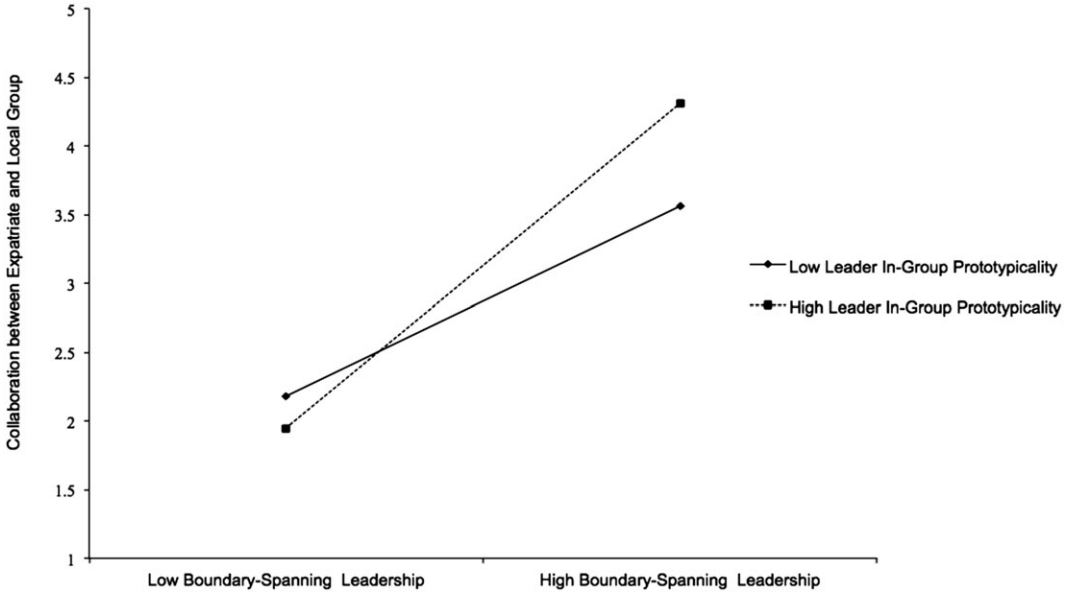


FIGURE 2 Simple slopes at −/+1 standard deviation of the mean: Boundary-spanning behaviors of field office leaders become more impactful for collaboration between groups when leaders are perceived to be highly in-group prototypical

The moderated mediation model provided support for our hypotheses. First, the interaction between the independent variable boundary-spanning leadership and the moderator *leader in-group prototypicality* was significant and showed a positive coefficient (*coeff* = .245, *SE* = .107, *p* = .022); thus, we can confirm that in-group prototypicality exerts a moderating effect on the relationships in the model. Although we found that boundary-spanning leadership enable some degree of *collaboration*, in-group-prototypical leaders who engaged in boundary spanning were more effective in facilitating intergroup collaboration. Figure 2 provides a graphical illustration of the interaction result in the form of simple slopes at +1 and −1 standard deviations of the mean.

Next, we calculated the conditional indirect effect on field learning and field creativity using bootstrap bias-corrected confidence intervals. The bootstrapping approach helps to calculate standard errors and the bias-corrected confidence intervals, which together provide a better reflection of the sampling distribution of conditional indirect effects (Hayes, 2013; Preacher et al., 2007). The conditional indirect effect is considered significant when the bias-corrected confidence intervals do not contain zero (Preacher et al., 2007). Table 4 presents the conditional indirect effects with 10,000 bootstrapped samples for low (mean − 1 standard deviation), medium (mean), and high (mean + 1 standard deviation) levels of the moderator *leader in-group prototypicality*. Consistent with the second hypothesis, the conditional indirect effect on field learning and field creativity increased as the value of *leader in-group prototypicality* increased.

When evaluating the above results, it is of note that, although the 137 responses are nested in 59 surveyed field offices, 53% of the sample belongs to field offices that provided fewer than five respondents each, with 45% containing only one respondent per field office. Research suggests that the presence of many singleton units reduces the likelihood of nestedness impacting the model results (Bell, Ferron, & Kromrey, 2008; Maas & Hox, 2005; Schunck, 2016). However, we still checked how much (if any) of our model results' total variance might stem from the nested properties of the data. For this reason, we calculated the intraclass coefficient (ICC[1]) for those responses where two or more aid workers participated per field office (i.e., 55% of the sample). Specifically, we calculated the ICC(1), which measures the extent to which individual-level responses of aid workers are driven by and depend on their membership in their respective field offices (i.e., the amount of variance between versus within field offices; Castro, 2002; Hayes, 2006; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Given the uneven number of observations per each field office (which ranged from two to nine, excluding the singleton field offices), we followed

TABLE 4 Indirect effect analyses for field learning and field creativity as outcome variables

	Field learning				Field creativity			
Moderator Leader in-group prototypicality	Observed coeff	Bias	Bootstrap std. error	[95% CI]	Observed Coeff	Bias	Bootstrap std. error	[95% CI]
Low, −1 standard deviation	.206	−.012	.119	.022 .506	.211	−.004	.111	.036 .489
Mean	.269	−.014	.142	.018 .591	.277	−.003	.132	.031 .565
High, +1 standard deviation	.333	−.016	.180	.022 .747	.342	−.001	.171	.036 .724

Note. Observed coeff is significant when CI contains no zero. CI = confidence interval.

N = 137. Number of bootstraps = 10,000.

Bliese and Halverson's (1999) recommendation to use the arithmetic mean of the group sizes to estimate ICC(1). For both field learning (*coeff* = .00, *SE* = .09, confidence interval, *CI* [.00, .18]) and field creativity (*coeff* = .06, *SE* = .10, *CI* [.00, .27]), the ICC(1) coefficients showed, at most, a very small nestedness effect (cf. Bell et al., 2008; Snijders, 2011). As a result, there is no need to account for additional systematic influence via additional multilevel modeling (Bosker & Snijders, 2004; Murphy & Myors, 1998).

Lastly, we computed our score for the newly created index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015), which tests the equality of moderators' conditional indirect effect. Given our directional hypothesis for the moderation effect, we followed recommendations for one-sided testing (Cho & Abe, 2013). Accordingly, the index was significant for *field learning* (*coeff* = .051, *SE* = .046, *CI* [.006, .148]) and *field creativity* (*coeff* = .059, *SE* = .044, *CI* [.005, 0.156]) at the 90% *CI*.

8 | DISCUSSION

To summarize, this study introduced and developed a behavioral leadership approach that could help foster field-level learning and creativity in humanitarian operations. We explained that groups of local and expatriate aid workers are frequently reported as not always having the collaborative space to "acquire, create and transfer valuable knowledge" (Oddou, Osland, & Blakeney, 2009, p. 182). Given this problem, our study shows that leaders' ability to span group boundaries is key to facilitating learning and creativity. By having frequent and equal interactions with locals and expatriates, the leaders seemed to foster better collaborative relations between two groups in general. This, in turn, allowed aid workers to partake in each other's nonredundant knowledge and experience, thus facilitating the translation of experiential lessons into operations.

Moreover, we built on previous theorizing from organizational studies and social psychology (van Knippenberg, 2011; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003) to argue for the importance of leaders' in-group prototypicality. Indeed, we empirically showed that local and expatriate respondents emphasized the norm-inducing effect of leadership insofar as they perceived their respective leader as being in-group prototypical. Notably, it is not necessary that aid workers perceive a field office leader as being highly group prototypical for both groups (locals and expatriates). What matters is that the leader models boundary-spanning behaviors for his/her respective in-group (mainly for the expatriate group, in our case), which may then incline group members to mimic the behavior and take steps toward collaboration with members of other groups.

8.1 | Theoretical implications

Humanitarian operations will likely encounter recurring problems in delivering aid if aid workers cannot translate their experiences into learning and creativity. It is surprising, then, that humanitarian aid research has paid little attention to learning and creativity in field offices. For instance, Beck and Borton conducted the last comprehensive review of field learning in 2004, whereas creativity at the field level has yet to be systematically investigated. In attempting to surmount this shortcoming, this study makes three theoretical contributions to humanitarian aid research.

First, the reviews of many humanitarian reports (e.g., Alcayna & Al-Murani, 2016; Beck & Borton, 2004; Saavedra & Knox-Clarke, 2015) underline the need for collaboration in order to galvanize learning and creativity processes in the field. However, these studies primarily offer anecdotal examples of how collaboration, or its lack thereof, affected these two constructs. For this reason, our research could well be considered one of the first responses to calls for more theory-driven studies based on first-hand field data (e.g., Starr & Van Wassenhove, 2014). We shed light on intraorganizational dynamics between local and expatriate groups that help produce collaboration inside a field office. In doing so, we extend the extant literature on humanitarian aid by offering new theoretical insights into the positive impact of leadership on intergroup collaboration and, by extension, joint learning and creativity. Relatedly, previous humanitarian studies have largely focused on after-action evaluation reporting of lessons and cases (e.g., Beck, 2006; Crawford & Bryce, 2003; Smith & Telford, 2007). By contrast, we combined streams of organizational research pertaining to leadership, group learning, and team creativity into a new research model—one that empirically supports the proposition that leaders' behaviors (i.e., through role modeling and direct instigation) help facilitate on-the-job learning and creativity in humanitarian aid.

Second, our study indicates that behavioral research in humanitarian aid can be a promising and complementary research perspective on the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, which is mainly conducted in the context of operations management research (e.g., Balcik, Beamon, Krejci, Muramatsu, & Ramirez, 2010; Besiou, Pedraza-Martinez, & Van Wassenhove, 2014). The operational perspective assumes that collaboration hinges heavily on systems and processes that need to be optimally designed. Our study extends this perspective by highlighting that behavioral aspects—such as humanitarian leaders' role modeling in local–expatriate group relations—constitute another critical antecedent to collaboration in humanitarian aid field offices.

Lastly, our study holds value for traditional organizational behavior research due to its novel but meaningful combination of established leadership dynamics with a more "extreme" environment. Indeed, the present study can be considered a first validation of the many propositions from past research on leader boundary spanning and intergroup leadership that have yet to be empirically investigated (see Hogg et al., 2012; Johnson & Duxbury, 2010; Richter, West, van Dick, & Dawson, 2006). On the theoretical end, we united the boundary-spanning theorizing with social identity theorizing thereby opening future research avenues. Granted, the present study's environment differs from the regular commercial settings (e.g., consulting, product development, and banking) of previous investigations (Marrone et al., 2007). All of these environments can feature intergroup animosity but rarely to the extent reported in humanitarian aid case studies (Bjerneld et al., 2004; Hunt, 2009; Shevchenko & Fox, 2008), where aid workers may often find themselves driven apart by various lines of conflict, demographic differences (Alcayna & Al-Murani, 2016; Carr et al., 2013), and little long-term interdependence (Korff, Balbo, Mills, Heyse, & Wittek, 2015). Thus, although our empirical findings may help extend the boundary-spanning literature in general, they may be

particularly useful to research endeavors in similarly "extreme" environments (cf. project collaboration among competitors; government-coordinated, multi-stakeholder workshops; industry-wide best practice forums, etc.).

8.2 | Practical implications

Our study generally implies that humanitarian aid field offices, and particularly their leaders, might benefit from adopting a behavioral approach to learning and creativity. Technical expertise is important to humanitarian programs, of course, but field offices still need to address the fact that much of learning, and all of creativity, takes place between the people involved. As Jemilah Mahmood, Chief of the World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, already stated, people involved in the field need more than just workshops; "they want experienced INGO staff to be working alongside them as mentors and coaches" (as cited in Cohen & Gingerich, 2015, p. 40).

Based on our results, we recommend that field office leaders equally interact with locals and expatriates in a variety of forms, such as asking questions, giving feedback, and discussing errors (Au & Fukuda, 2002). Such leader boundary spanning can motivate collaboration between local and expatriate aid workers and ultimately create the space for learning and creativity. The 2006 Lebanon conflict is a case in point, where leadership support in a cluster of aid organizations facilitated a successful collaboration between local and expatriate colleagues. This led to significant learning and, in some cases, creative improvement in operational processes—for instance, "in trying to avoid useless equipment or food redundancies in one place when a few miles further, both are sorely lacking" (Charles, Lauras, & Tomasini, 2010, p. 159). As the groups become more inclined to collaborate, leaders may need to actively coordinate specific peer-to-peer interactions in case of a position handover to newcomers, or when an expatriate has a learning need that can be fulfilled by a local aid worker and vice versa (e.g., Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Sluss, Ashforth, & Gibson, 2012).

Additionally, our study shows that boundary spanning will be more impactful if leaders are perceived as in-group prototypical; this is especially true for expatriates. This aligns with African field reports from Da Costa (2012), which showed that, regardless of national or demographic differences, expatriates generally tend to share certain group norms and symbols that range from wearing certain attire, to using certain jargon, and to having after-work drinks at regular hangouts. Thus, field office leaders may need to actively embody these group-defining expatriate features. Obviously, given the stark differences between expatriates and locals (in ethnicity, religion, education, salary level, etc.), a leader cannot superficially embody the defining features of both groups at the same time (an issue we will revisit in our limitations section). However, this does not imply that leaders cannot embody the more fundamental goals that both locals and expatriates embrace, such as promoting equality, saving lives, and alleviating the suffering of people in need (Cohen & Gingerich, 2015; Van Wassenhove, 2006). In this regard, the group prototypicality literature argues that in-group prototypicality may transcend surface-level features to cover larger issues like general values, belief systems, and ways of interaction—in short, the ideals an organization strives for (e.g., Goldman & Hogg, 2016; Steinel et al., 2010; Van Quaquebeke, Graf, & Eckloff, 2014). Thus, leaders may be able to somewhat relate to all organizational groups to the extent that they can emphasize with and embody these deeper-level attributes. This can set the stage for even more impactful boundary spanning.

9 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Obviously, obtaining empirical data from the field is the best way to elucidate how certain dynamics in humanitarian aid work (Starr & Van Wassenhove, 2014). However, because aid workers are busy with delivering aid, they are not an easily accessed population. Thus, a sample of 137 field workers is a good starting point. That said, our study features some limitations that leave room for refinements and other research avenues.

First, our sample size affords us limited statistical power. Granted, the size is on par with similar humanitarian research (e.g., Kohrt et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2012; Moshtari, 2013), as well as with traditional organizational behavior studies that examined constructs such as relations between leaders and followers (Loi, Lai, & Lam, 2012), coworkers' relations (Harris, Harvey, & Kacmar, 2011), and the moderating role of leaders' group representativeness (Koivisto, Lipponen, & Platow, 2013). In fact, according to Iacobucci's (2010) methodological guidelines for behavioral researchers, our structural equation modeling-based moderated mediation can perform well with the current sample size. Moreover, because data encompassed 59 field offices across various countries and operations, the present sample was sufficiently diverse to support a rather robust test of the hypotheses (see Schupbach, 2016). Nonetheless, an increase in the sample size could enable potentially valuable subsample analyses that the current sample size did not reliably permit.

Researchers seem also well advised to recruit larger samples for another purpose: namely, acquiring data for individual field office leaders and the local and expatriate groups that they oversee. Unfortunately, our sample involved many singleton responses (i.e., one response from one field office) and few aid workers from the same field offices; as such, it is difficult to reliably modeling shared perceptions. Obtaining bigger nested samples would be valuable for insights such as whether (a) perceptions such as in-group prototypicality converge across members of a group; (b) these perceptions also align across groups; and (c) a leader can be perceived as group prototypical for both groups at the same time. On this latter point, we want to highlight that our in-group prototypicality measurement derives from top publications in the organizational field (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Nonetheless, future studies may want to employ a more fine-grained measure of group prototypicality. This would help us clarify, for instance, whether leaders can achieve cross-group prototypicality through deep-level attributes such as shared values and visions.

It is worth noting some limitations regarding our measures. It is true that single-item measures, such as our outcomes measures (learning and creativity), are used in research (e.g., Ainley & Patrick, 2006; Atroszko, 2014; Atroszko et al., 2015; Cheng & Li, 2001; Christophel,

1990; McCaughey et al., 2015; Randel et al., 2011; Sahinidis & Bouris, 2008; Scott & Bruce, 1994; ter Hedde & De Waal, 2015; Tierney & Farmer, 2004; Yong, 2012), especially when a high degree of item clarity is ensured (Bergkvist, 2015; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Nevertheless, it would be interesting to adopt more multifaceted scales (e.g., Bunderson & Boumgarden, 2010; Edmondson, 1999; Gilson & Shalley, 2004; Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013; Zhang & Bartol, 2010) to better understand how the phenomena of learning and creativity unfold in the field. Likewise, it would be valuable to see whether our study's results about learning and creativity materialize on certain objective behaviors. These might include improvements in knowledge, skills, and abilities among aid workers before and after a program; the number of new recommendations sent back to the national office from a field office or assessments of these constructs by the field office leader him/herself (i.e., multisource design).

We recognize the concern over common source bias that might have arisen from measuring the predictor and response constructs with the same respondents. In fairness, we integrated a number of procedural remedies to alleviate some of this concern (Podsakoff et al., 2012). For example, we only invited motivated respondents, we screened out careless responses through IMCs and an honesty check, and we separated the measures for the predictor and response variables more than six web pages apart in the online questionnaire. Studies by Tourangeau, Singer, and Presser (2003) and Weijters, Geuens, and Schillewaert (2009) suggest that such minor alterations can help constrain the impact of common source bias. As such, we found that correlations were mostly only medium high, with the highest being .67 (i.e., shared variance ca. 45%) between boundary-spanning behavior and collaboration. Clearly, both are conceptually distinct, but they are also strongly related, as we hypothesized. Importantly, the Harman's one-factor test indicated no major issues with common method variance. In general, common source or method variance cannot explain the significant interactions in the data (such as our moderation via in-group prototypicality). As Podsakoff et al. (2012) stated, "if a study is designed to test hypotheses about quadratic or interaction effects, rather than main effects, then method bias would not be able to account for any statistically significant effects observed" (p. 565). In fact, such biases actually work against finding moderation rationales (Evans, 1985; McClelland & Judd, 1993). Moreover, in our analysis, the mediator could not explain a substantial part of the variance, which is to say that a significant direct effect remained. It would be highly uncommon to find such results in the presence of common source variance. Thus, although main effects sizes may be overstated due to common source variance, we do not currently see why said variance would negate the value of the model. Nevertheless, we recognize that multisource data—as suggested above—would undoubtedly add further confidence to our findings and allow researchers to shed light on new issues.

One point that merits further examination is the direct effect of leaders' boundary spanning on the outcomes we investigated—a relationship that could not be fully explained by collaboration. There may be other potential mediators at play beyond collaboration, but at present, we can only speculate about what these could be. Drawing on the work of Boland and Tenkasi (1995), Faraj and Yan (2009), and Maaninen-Olsson, Wismén, and Carlsson (2006), one could, for instance, argue that perspective-taking and psychological safety constitute additional factors. In a related step, future research may also investigate potential antecedents that spur boundary-spanning leadership in field offices. Based on insights from adult learning theories (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), for example, one could argue that field leaders can gain practical knowledge about boundary-spanning behaviors from formal trainings that adopt participatory, problem-solving approaches while considering learners' organizational context (e.g., local–expatriate intergroup dynamics). However, these speculations await empirical confirmation.

Finally, we must note that the present study cannot address causality concerns, even though our model implied a certain causality. Even if the implied direction of effects can be delineated from previous literature, and the reverse direction with regard to a moderation effect is highly unlikely, we still cannot rule out the existence of some reverse causality. Although future longitudinal studies may address some of these concerns, the best way to resolve causality in this particular context would be through a field experiment. Yet here it will likely be challenging to gain access at a broader scale.

10 | CONCLUSION

Given the ongoing disasters in our world, there is an obvious need to deliver humanitarian aid efficiently and effectively. Although this field has traditionally been looked at from an operational angle (e.g., Besiou et al., 2014; Kovács & Spens, 2007; Tomasini & Van Wassenhove, 2009; Van Wassenhove, 2006), we think the behavioral angle offers valuable insights that can help this field mature—to the benefit of those who work in it and those whose lives are assisted by it.

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