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*Champions and rebels in the workplace*

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**EMPLOYEE  
PROACTIVITY  
CHAMPIONS  
AND REBELS IN  
THE WORKPLACE**

Hella Sylva



# Employee proactivity

Champions and rebels in the workplace

Hella Sylva

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# Employee Proactivity: Champions and rebels in the workplace

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

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# CHAPTER 1

## **Introduction**

The studies presented in this dissertation explore how employee proactivity, defined either in terms of personality or in terms of a specific set of behaviors (Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2017; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2017), relates to critical individual-level work outcomes. Specifically, these studies look into the role of proactivity in relation to work performance constructs and career success. With the aim of contributing to the extant literature on work and organizational psychology, and in particular the work on proactivity, the studies focus on two themes within this research domain that warrant more attention. The first line of research focuses on a particular set of proactive behaviors, encapsulated in the career initiative construct. Career initiative describes a set of proactive behaviors aimed to promote one's career and addresses how this form of proactive behavior may help individuals achieve (and maintain) congruence with their work setting. This congruence, or fit, is in turn considered an important driver of performance and career satisfaction (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Two studies are presented that look at the relationship between proactivity and such congruence. The second line of research is premised on the idea that proactivity at work is unlikely to be an unmitigated benefit (Campbell, 2000) and seeks to arrive at a more balanced investigation by taking both positive as well as potential negative outcomes of proactivity into account. Exploring this theme, two studies are presented that examine if individuals who, due to their proactive personality, are inclined to behave proactively, produce both desirable (therewith corroborating the extant proactivity literature) and undesirable outcomes. Specifically, the studies explore if and under which conditions proactive individuals may be perceived to perform well, while at the same time being perceived as inciting conflict and behaving counterproductively.

The following paragraphs draw the background against which the research in this dissertation is conducted and introduce employee proactivity as a topic of practical relevance

and theoretical importance. A general overview of the concept (as a behavioral repertoire and personality trait) is provided and related theoretical work is presented. Zooming in on the two lines of work covered in this dissertation I identify gaps in the literature and briefly highlight how the following chapters aim to address these issues.

### **The contemporary work environment**

The way in which work is organized has changed profoundly in recent decades (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Parker, 2009; Griffin, Neal & Parker, 2007; Oldham & Hackman, 2010). While in traditional manufacturing environments jobs were designed to provide stability and control in order to adhere to efficient processes, many organizations nowadays seek to promote agility and innovation as they operate in highly volatile markets. Globalization and the fast pace of technological advancement has fueled the need for organizations to continuously adapt and innovate in order to thrive in the global knowledge- and service-based economy. Consequently, many jobs are increasingly characterized by work roles that continuously evolve in response to changing demands, instead of in terms of a set of narrowly defined tasks that are fully laid out and orchestrated by management (Griffin et al., 2007; Wall, Cordery, & Clegg, 2002). Hence, many contemporary organizations tend to rely on increasingly flexible forms of organizing in order to deal with greater levels of uncertainty and change in their volatile environment (Liu, Tangirala, Lee, & Parker, 2019).

In response to this need for flexibility and innovation, organizations generally have become flatter, and a variety of management styles have become prevalent such as employee empowerment, participative decision making, project-based work, and self-managed teams (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001). In line with these managerial styles, new work processes and procedures have been introduced that typically specify the desired ends but not the necessary means. This provides employees, or the teams within which they work, with greater discretion and responsibility (Grant & Parker, 2009; Griffin et al, 2007).

Organizations thereby rely strongly on employees to take initiative and show judgement (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Parker, 2009). As such a ‘new view’ on employees and outstanding performance has emerged (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Griffin et al., 2007). Within this view, employees are not just thought of as people who proficiently execute assigned tasks, but instead as people who take initiative, who speak up when they signal problems or ways to improve things, and who engage in self-directed anticipatory actions to seize opportunities and create meaningful change in themselves or their work environment (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Campbell, 2000; Liu et al., 2019). Hence, many organizations that operate in contemporary market dynamics do not only allow for more self-directed actions by their employees, they in fact count on such behaviors to drive innovation, foster adaptability, and ensure a sustained contribution to the organization (Griffin et al., 2007; Farrell & Strauss 2014; Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001). With these developments, many companies have expanded the employee role and have raised new expectations in terms of employee initiative (Bindl & Parker, 2017; Frese, 2008; Bolino, Valcea & Harvey, 2010).

The increasing importance for employees to show initiative and adopt an agentic approach (Frese, 2008; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010) is also evident in the contemporary labor market as the career domain and employment relationships have significantly altered (Capelli, 1999; De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, in press). The number of flexible contracts has increased substantially and people are more often assigned to time limited projects instead of (semi-)permanent jobs (Arnold & Jackson, 1997; Frese & Fay, 2001). For example, in the Netherlands, the proportion of people who work on the basis of flexible employment contracts has grown from 21% in 2003 to 35% in 2017, a relative increase of almost 67% (CBS, 2018). Also, in a recent report (2017) Eurostat highlights that labor relations in the EU “are increasingly characterized by the transfer of risk from employers to the workforce” (Eurostat, 2017, p.16). This report shows that the percentage of jobs that lack

security has substantially grown in a time lag of merely 8 years (2008-2016) and that the amount of ‘involuntary’ temporary work has expanded.

In contrast to traditional careers, which are characterized by lifelong employment within a limited set of organizations, contemporary careers tend to be more fragmented and discontinuous (Arnold & Jackson, 1997; Hall & Moss, 1998; Frese & Fay, 2001; Strauss, Griffin & Parker, 2012; De Vos & Soens, 2008). Upward progression along an organization’s career ladder, together with prescribed career paths, are rapidly becoming the exception rather than the norm. Indeed, many careers nowadays are characterized by a greater variety of work roles and work environments than before. As a consequence, responsibility with regard to one’s professional development and career is shifting from the employing organization towards the employee (Arnold & Jackson, 1997; Strauss et al., 2012). In other words, the onus is firmly on the employee to (pro)actively manage his or her own career so as to ensure sustained employability.

In terms of the career landscape some (Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994) have even argued that the ‘old covenant’ between employer and employee is becoming void, meaning that proficiently executing assigned tasks and expressing loyalty is no longer reciprocated with (permanent) employment by the organization. Instead of employment, the concept of employability, that is the ability to find work within or beyond the boundaries of the current organization (Forrier & Sels, 2003), has become the currency of the modern labor market. Hence, job security is now construed differently than before (Forrier & Sels, 2003; De Vos et al., in press) and is primarily driven by the individual as opposed to being automatically granted by the employing organization. From this perspective, it is the employee’s responsibility to ensure employability and the organization’s responsibility to provide the employee an open environment with the necessary support and means to attain and sustain employability, regardless of how long the employee remains with the

organization (Waterman et al., 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Rather than a ‘traditional’ model of long term attachment, a ‘new deal’ (Capelli, 1999) or ‘new career contract’ (Hall & Mirvis, 1995) has thus become dominant. This new career contract requires individual agency that needs to be complemented by a mutual commitment, from employer and employee, to facilitate and fulfill each other’s changing needs (Capelli, 1999). Although this new paradigm may not apply to all industries and is likely to be more prevalent in some professions than in others (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh & Roper, 2012; King, 2004), there is little doubt that the ‘traditional’ career is on the decline, and that taking initiative and engaging in anticipatory, self-directed actions regarding one’s career is becoming increasingly critical for a growing number of employees to hold their ground in the contemporary labor market (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

With the increased flexibility in the employment setting, employee expectations are also changing (Grant & Parker, 2009; Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). With roles becoming more flexible, opportunities arise regarding tailor-made jobs (Rousseau et al., 2006; Grant & Parker, 2009). Through proactive behaviors such as job crafting (e.g. Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Lazazzara, Tims, & de Gennaro, 2019) and role adjustment (e.g. Clegg & Spencer, 2007) employees are starting to capitalize on these opportunities by redesigning, or redefining their work to make it more compatible with their individual skills, abilities and interests. In a similar vein, the negotiation of idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau et al., 2006), which are targeted at personalizing employment arrangements, is becoming more mainstream and prevalent in contemporary employment relationships (Lawler & Finegold, 2000; Grant & Parker, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006). Although it is not suggested here that employees can reconfigure their entire job, it is argued that most jobs, particularly those in decentralized and less predictable work settings, have some latitude that will allow employees to at least revise the margins of their job description or role in the organization, if

not larger parts of their job (Roberts et al., 2005; Inkson et al., 2012). This means that people can revise, or at least challenge, their position and shape characteristics of their job within certain boundaries that are set either by the context (such as the labor market and the organization) or by their personal abilities. In sum, to an increasing extent employees not only actively manage their career to ‘survive’ in the labor market, but also to accomplish work arrangements that make their jobs more personally meaningful and provide them with opportunities that allow them to better play to their strengths (Grant & Parker, 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Roberts et al., 2005).

Against the backdrop of these developments, the agentic component of employee behavior (including proactive behaviors) has garnered considerable research attention in the academic field. Since the introduction of active performance concepts in the 90s (see Frese, 2008, for a brief overview) scholars have set out to capture the agentic component of employee behavior. In contrast (and complementary) to the somewhat more (implicitly) passive, or reactive frameworks that can be found in (earlier) Organizational Behavior (OB) research, scholars thus introduced the concept of proactivity along with that of personal initiative to capture this sense of individual agency (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Grant & Parker, 2009; Frese & Fay, 2001; Griffin et al., 2007; Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010). These constructs depart from earlier work in the psychology and management research domains by accentuating the anticipatory and deliberate ways in which individuals can influence and appreciably alter work characteristics, social networks, and the self (Grant & Ashford; Frese 2008; Frese 2001; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010). Below, before turning to the specific studies presented in this dissertation, I provide a brief overview of the developments in the OB literature pertaining to proactivity and related constructs. In this, I discuss the defining elements of the construct and the proliferation of various proactive behaviors portrayed in the literature as well as the proactive personality construct.

## **Research on proactivity**

Traditionally, work and organizational psychology and OB has predominantly emphasized the reactive and sometimes even passive nature of employee behavior (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010). Though “no scientist would argue explicitly in favor of a nonactive performance concept”, as Frese and Fay (2001, p.134) put it, early performance concepts typically assumed that a task or goal is given to employees who subsequently take ownership of it (Locke & Latham, 2002). Performance is then identified in terms of goal achievement or the extent to which tasks are being performed proficiently (c.f. Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993). This line of thinking depicts employees as relatively passive recipients of assigned tasks, rather than as active agents who (re)define what it is that they perceive to be their task. The introduction of various motivational theories in the 1960s spurred new perspectives which took into account the psychological processes that shape individual reactions and behaviors in response to environmental stimuli (see Grant & Ashford, 2008, for a brief summary). These theoretical perspectives opened the door to gaining a deeper understanding of the important role of personality, intentions, and motives in driving employee behavior. At the same time many of these theories still tended to emphasize the reactive aspects of behavior rather than the active and initiating aspects (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Specifically, these theories often portrayed work characteristics and objectives as extraneous variables to which employees react as opposed to stressing the creative and deliberate ways in which individuals can influence and appreciably alter characteristics of themselves or features of their work environment (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Frese 2007; Frese 2001).

With the introduction of the concept of proactive behavior, and proactive personality as important driver of these behaviors (discussed in more detail below), scholars have started to capture the agentic component of employee work behavior which can be described as

“anticipatory actions that employees take to impact themselves or their environments” (Grant & Ashford, 2008, p.4). The behavioral construct refers to future opportunities and anticipated problems (Crant, 2000) and can be defined as conduct that entails a “self-initiated and future-oriented action that aims to change and improve the situation or oneself” (Parker et al., 2006, p.636). Proactive behaviors are thereby defined by three core attributes that jointly define actions as proactive, in that it is i) self-starting (i.e. taking initiative), ii) anticipatory (i.e. acting in advance), and iii) change-oriented (i.e. challenging the status quo, or actively carrying change forward) (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Bindl, 2017).

Proactive behavior is extremely varied as it refers to a broad behavioral repertoire. This is reflected in the wide variety of more specific proactive behaviors that have been discussed in the field, such as voice (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), selling issues, taking charge, creating and implementing new ideas (Scott & Bruce, 1994), building social networks, scanning for opportunities, revising tasks (Staw & Boettger, 1990; Ashford & Black, 1996), job crafting or job redesign, and career initiative (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Tornau & Frese, 2013; Parker & Collins, 2010). The many different concepts that have been introduced in the growing literature on employee proactivity have been brought together in several schemes among which are Parker and Collins’s (2010) framework which identifies three higher order categories (proactive work behavior, proactive person-environment fit behavior, and proactive strategic behavior), and a framework based on the intended target (or focus) of impact (pro-organizational, pro-social, and pro-self focused proactive behavior) (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; 2017).

In defining proactivity in terms of its three core attributes (self-starting, future focused, and change-oriented), the maturing literature has started to qualify proactivity as a ‘mode’ or way of behaving (Grant and Ashford, 2008; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Parker et al, 2010; Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker & Wang 2015). This implies that, adding

to the (sets of) specific behaviors that have been identified as proactive in the literature, any type of work behavior can be carried out more or less proactively (Bateman, 2017; Griffin et al., 2007 ; Parker & Collins, 2010). Through this lens the construct should thus be considered as a continuous variable, or what Bateman (2017) referred to as ‘gradated dimensionality’, instead of an either/or dichotomy. The extent of intended change can vary, and the distinction between self-initiated versus environment driven behavior, as well as anticipating a future or reacting to the past describes a continuum (Bateman, 2017). In this regard, actions can be qualified as being ‘more’ or ‘less’ proactive.

Also, even though the construct highlights the agentic role individuals can adopt to effect environmental change by behaving proactively, it is not suggested here that such behavior occurs in pure isolation (Frese, Garst & Fay, 2007). In line with Bandura’s interactionist perspective, that people are both producers and products of their environment (Bandura, 1997), it is argued that a proactive approach towards work can in fact be driven by other factors (Frese et al., 2007). For example, Wu and Parker (2017) show in their study that support from supervisors cultivates employee self-efficacy which in turn enhances proactive behaviors, as employees see more opportunities for agency and an increased likelihood of success (Wu & Parker, 2017; Morrisson & Phelps, 1999). In a similar vein, Frese et al. (2007) found that work characteristics such as the level of job control and complexity affect perceived opportunities for control and self-efficacy, which support agentic and proactive behaviors in the work setting. This effect is considered to be reciprocal in that supervisors may be more inclined to delegate tasks and provide employees with a greater amount of control, when individuals create the impression of competence by acting proactively (Bauer & Green, 1996; Frese et al., 2007). Thus, even though proactive behavior is considered to be self-initiated and highlights the way in which individuals effect environmental change or achieve change by affecting themselves, employee proactive behavior does not occur in

isolation and can be enhanced (or discouraged) by other factors in the work environment such as job design and leadership (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012, 2017; Frese, Kring, Soos & Zempel, 1996; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Ohly, Sonnentag, & Pluntke, 2006; Parker et al., 2006).

Perhaps because by definition proactive behavior highlights the self-starting nature, scholars (Bateman & Crant, 1993) looked into dispositional factors shaping proactive behaviors. In search for commonalities across the behavioral repertoire, they identified proactive personality as a trait that shapes individuals' engagement of proactive behaviors across multiple contexts and time frames (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Fuller & Marler, 2009). With the introduction of proactive personality to the field Bateman and Crant (1993) described the individual with a proactive personality as someone "who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces and who effects environmental change. Proactive personalities identify opportunities and act on them; they show initiative, take action, and persevere until they bring about meaningful change" (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p. 103). Proactive personality thus refers to a fairly consistent disposition and implies that people can be generally more or less inclined to act in proactive ways (Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2017). That is, this disposition entails a behavioral tendency towards enacting, or changing, one's circumstances or environment. Proactive personality has been found to be meaningfully distinct from other personality dimensions (Crant, 1995; Fuller & Marler, 2009; Spitzmuller, et al., 2015). Furthermore, several studies have provided support for its positive association with a broad set of proactive behaviors (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Torneau & Frese, 2013; Thompson, 2005) as well as more distal outcomes at both the individual and organizational level (Crant, 1995; Spitzmuller et al., 2015; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Thomas et al., 2010).

The personality dimension and the broad set of proactive behaviors identified in the literature illustrate that proactivity is not restricted to a particular level in the organization or to a particular work domain (Frese, Garst & Fay, 2007; Parker et al., 2010). Accordingly, both trait and behavioral proactivity have been found to relate to a variety of beneficial outcomes including performance in the workplace and career success (Seibert et al., 2001; Kanfer, Wanberg & Kantrowitz, 2001; Sonnentag, 2017; Torneau & Frese, 2013; Thomas et al., 2010; Parker & Bindl, 2017). Yet, despite the overwhelming empirical support for the positive association of proactive personality and proactive behaviors with desirable outcomes, it is less well understood *how* employees achieve these outcomes through their proactive actions (Liu et al., 2019; Wihler et al., 2017; Seibert et al., 2001). Drawing from the person-environment fit literature (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Edwards, 2008) the first line of research presented in this dissertation (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) aims to further our understanding of the mechanism underlying the impact of proactive behaviors on desirable outcomes. Specifically, the studies presented in these chapters focus on the construct of career initiative, a form of proactive behavior, and its indirect impact job performance and career satisfaction, through person-job fit. The second line of research presented in this dissertation (Chapter 4) focuses on how proactive personality relates to both positive and negative outcomes in the workplace.

### **Proactive career behavior and person-job fit**

The first theme addressed in this dissertation pertains to proactive career behavior, specifically career initiative, in relation to the individual's congruence with his or her work environment. In considering the person's fit with the environment as mediator in the relationship between career initiative and performance outcomes as well as career success, I aim to address a specific process in place (Bindl & Parker, 2017; Liu et al., 2019). Drawing from the work on proactivity and person-environment fit (PE fit) theory the studies in

Chapter 2 and 3 set out to contribute to both of these research domains and suggest that the PE fit literature may serve as a useful starting point to enhance our understanding of the effects of proactive behaviors on desirable, but more distal, outcomes such as job performance and career success.

The ‘fit’ between a person and his or her work environment, and more specifically the fit an employee experiences with his or her job, represents the degree to which the individual’s skills, knowledge and abilities as well as the individual’s needs and preferences are congruent with the characteristics of the job in terms of job requirements and the supplies provided by the job (for instance salary, autonomy, and meaning) (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Edwards, 1991). Person-job fit thereby encompasses two dimensions, namely demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Edwards, 1991). Theoretically, and supported by empirical work, it has been argued that when each entity (the individual and the environment) provides what the other needs, yielding a high degree of ‘fit’ or congruence, this should result in positive work behaviors (such as performance) and attitudinal outcomes (such as satisfaction and commitment) (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Alternatively, low fit has been found to result in strain and withdrawal behaviors (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Although theoretically, the concept of PE fit is not necessarily static, on the contrary even (Edwards, 2008), studies have usually examined and operationalized it as such (Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). Studies that have addressed the drivers of fit, have been primarily focused on organizational entry (selection and assessment) and early socialization tactics (e.g. Cable & Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004). However, the conceptualization of proactive behaviors, and in particular the higher order category of proactive person-environment fit behavior (Parker & Collins, 2010), imply that people can, and do, at least to some extent, meaningfully impact their circumstances by

changing the self or the environment (Parker & Collins, 2010) and may do so accordingly within the confines of their job. Specifically, this implies that individuals who behave proactively vis-à-vis their career by taking career initiative can forge a better person-job fit by affecting characteristics of the job, the self, or both. Subsequently, by improving their fit, individuals engaging in such behaviors should attain higher performance levels and greater career satisfaction. The studies in Chapter 2 and 3 are grounded on this idea and aim to provide preliminary empirical support for this tenet as studies in the proactivity and PE fit literature have hardly empirically examined these suggested links.

Chapter 2 intends to contribute to the research domain by testing whether demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit mediate the relation between career initiative on work related outcomes, and more specifically, its differential effects on performance and career satisfaction, in a multisource study. Yet, due to the cross-sectional data in this study, the dynamics that are grounded in this notion could not be identified. To start to overcome this limitation, a two-wave study is presented in Chapter 3 which addresses these issues more specifically by investigating fit dynamics in relation to career initiative. By integrating the concept of proactive behaviors with person-environment fit research, these studies aim to contribute to the extant literature on proactivity and person-environment fit and posit that “the people make the place” in more ways than Schneider’s attraction selection attrition (ASA) framework (Schneider, 1987) originally suggested.

### **Redressing the balance**

The second line of research covered in this dissertation is also designed to gain a better understanding of proactivity and the outcomes that are associated with the concept. However, instead of focusing on a specific type of proactive behavior, the two studies presented in Chapter 4 focus on the individual’s propensity to act in a more or less proactive manner, in other words proactive personality as a trait (Bateman & Crant, 1993). As noted, research,

including several meta-analyses (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Spitzmuller et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2010), has shown that this trait relates to a broad set of proactive behaviors and a number of advantageous outcomes for both the individual and organization. Proactive personality is thereby generally considered as a desirable trait that ultimately contributes to the functioning of organizations. Yet, at the same time, some scholars (see e.g., Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Bolino et al., 2010; Crant et al., 2017; Morrison & Phelps, 1999) have cautioned that employee proactivity may not always be desirable and is unlikely to be an unmitigated benefit (Campbell, 2000). In fact, as proactive individuals challenge the status quo they may give rise to conflict (Grant, 2013; Crant et al., 2017) and their actions may result in (unanticipated) negative consequences for the organization, coworkers, or the self (Bolino et al., 2010). In spite of repeated calls in the literature (Bolino, Turnley, & Anderson, 2017; Grant, 2013; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010) for a more balanced approach that not only accounts for the positive outcomes of proactivity but also, and simultaneously, addresses the potential negative consequences (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Belschak, Den Hartog, & Fay, 2010; Bolino et al., 2010), very few studies have looked into the potential (unintended) negative consequences of proactivity. The studies presented in Chapter 4 aim to redress this balance and examine the mixed effects that proactive employees may bring about.

Despite the limited research attention it has been receiving, there are clear indications that proactivity may also have its downsides. For example, proactive behavior involves effortful actions that potentially deplete personal resources and may result in job strain when pursuing change in the face of obstacles and resistance (Bolino & Turnley, 2015; Strauss, Parker, & O'Shea, 2017; Janssen, Van de Vliert, & West, 2004). An issue, that lies at the very heart of the concept, is that proactivity implies change that is generated by an employee's initiative and relies on personal judgment as it goes beyond prescribed tasks (Parker, Wang,

& Liao, 2019). This challenging of the status quo and pushing new ideas is likely to create friction, as is found in research on organizational change (Janssen et al., 2004). When employees act proactively, managers and organizations often face a dilemma as they may generally wish to encourage such employee initiative while at the same time they seek to reduce risks and prevent misguided or inappropriate actions (Glaser et al., 2016; Chan, 2006). This is referred to as the ‘initiative paradox’ (Campbell, 2000). This paradox implies that self-initiated actions of employees may only be deemed appropriate and desirable by their supervisors when they mirror management’s own diagnostics and actions (Seibert et al., 2001). In a similar vein, Morrison and Phelps (1999) stated that ‘taking charge’ by employees is in itself not sufficient to contribute to the effectiveness of an organization, as such attempts by individuals may fall short and various stakeholders may view the implications of specific actions differently (Bolino et al., 2017). Hence, for proactive actions to be effective they require effective judgement (Chan, 2006; Parker et al., 2019). Yet, whether actions are deemed appropriate will likely depend on the perspective taken, and is likely also to be influenced by contextual variables (Campbell, 2000; Bolino et al., 2017). In this view, proactivity meant as a form of constructive nonconformity (even with the best intentions) may not always be regarded as constructive by others (Bolino et al., 2010). As they “rock the boat” (Grant, 2008), employees who act proactively may well find themselves engaging in a risky endeavor that is more likely to yield mixed effects than consistently positive outcomes (Bolino et al., 2017).

The extant literature on proactivity has so far only marginally answered the repeated calls for a more balanced approach that not only accounts for the positive outcomes of proactivity but also, and simultaneously, addresses the potential negative consequences (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Belschak et al., 2010; Bolino et al., 2010). In order to shed some light on this issue, Chapter 4 presents two studies in which the combined effects (positive as

well as adverse ones) of proactivity are examined. Specifically, the studies examine whether employees who act proactively on the job do not only achieve higher performance levels, but also simultaneously elicit negative returns as a result of their proactive behavior. In particular, we propose that downsides might be that proactive employees are more likely to fuel employee-supervisor conflict (study 1) and to be perceived as behaving counterproductively (study 2).

Along with the potential effects on negatively framed outcomes, the two studies set out to fill the previously discussed gap in the extant literature by exploring whether excessive levels of proactivity may become dysfunctional in terms of performance. That is, by testing for non-monotonic relations between proactive personality and performance, I examined whether highly proactive people start to generate diminished returns after a tipping point. Hence, I address the question whether there can be ‘too much of a good thing’ when it comes to proactive personality (Le et al., 2011; Pierce, & Aguinis, 2013). This notion is empirically examined in two studies that were designed to complement one another. The first study explores relevant work outcomes at a more general level, in particular overall job performance and employee-supervisor conflict. The second study explores work criteria in greater detail by focusing on specific dimensions of performance (Fay & Sonnentag, 2010), namely task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and counterproductive work behavior. Hence, the second study serves as a conceptual replication and elaboration of the first study. In other words, rather than striving for a direct replication, the second study was conducted to test the rigor of the underlying hypothesis (cf. Makel, Plucker, & Hegarty, 2012).

In conclusion the theoretical implications for both themes covered in this dissertation are discussed in Chapter 5. Limitations of the presented studies are addressed and future avenues for research as well as implications for practice are highlighted.



# CHAPTER 2

## **Proactively fitting the job:**

### **How career initiative relates to career satisfaction and job performance through needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit respectively**

Earlier versions of this manuscript were presented as:

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## **Abstract**

The current study integrates the extant literatures on person-environment fit, proactivity and work outcomes. Specifically, this study develops and tests the hypothesis that employees who proactively shape their own careers will experience higher levels of person-job fit, and are therefore more likely to attain greater career satisfaction and job performance. A partially mediated model in which needs-supplies fit mediates the relationship of career initiative with career satisfaction, and in which demands-abilities fit mediates the relationship of career initiative with job performance, was supported by multisource data. These results imply that employees who show career initiative are more likely to have higher levels of career satisfaction and job performance by generating a better match between themselves and their work environment.

## Introduction

In today's fast-changing environments and flattening organizational hierarchies, organizations need employees who are willing to go beyond narrow task requirements and to show initiative at work (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001). Employees are encouraged and expected to be self-reliant and to proactively manage their work situation to promote organizational performance in a transient work environment (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Going beyond proficiently executing a series of fixed tasks prescribed by management, employee proactive behaviors refer to self-initiated, anticipatory, and change-oriented actions (e.g., Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010) and are argued to promote individual as well as organizational effectiveness (Tornau & Frese, 2013). In line with this, proactive behaviors relate positively to various outcomes such as career satisfaction, perceived employability (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; De Vos, Clippeler & Dewilde, 2009), and performance (e.g., Thomas, Whitman & Viswesvaran, 2010).

An important area in the literature in which the significance of employee proactivity has been emphasized is that of careers (Seibert et al., 2001; Frese & Fay, 2001; De Vos & Soens, 2008). Employment settings have changed and traditional careers are making place for careers that are increasingly dynamic. Instead of lifelong employment within a limited set of organizations, contemporary careers are thought to be characterized by greater mobility, multiple employers, and the ongoing development of a variety of competencies (e.g., Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; De Vos, Van der Heijden & Akkermans, in press; Frese & Fay, 2001; Hall, 1996). From a career management perspective, these developments imply a shift in responsibility for employees' careers from the employing organization towards the individual. As work experiences over the life course are unlikely to be restricted to upward progression along an organization's career ladder or predetermined career path, the onus to attain and sustain

employability is increasingly on the employee (Sonnentag, 2017). Simply proficiently executing tasks and ‘waiting’ for career opportunities to arise in return is unlikely to be enough in the current labor market (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). To attain a successful career, both in terms of advancement and in terms of being satisfied, individuals are increasingly expected to take charge of their own career as opposed to relying on their organization to guide them through this process (e.g. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Frese & Fay, 2001).

Also, in light of continuously and rapidly evolving job demands that are to a great extent generated by technological advancements (Frey & Osborne, 2013; Grant & Parker, 2009), it is critical for employees to proactively manage their skills and needs in relation to their job situation in order to ensure they keep performance up to standards and keep adding value to the employing organization. Hence employees are not only expected to take initiative in managing their career to achieve career success, but also need to do so in order to meet the ever changing demands being placed on them and to be able to secure and sustain employability either within, or outside, the boundaries of the organization (Frese & Fay, 2001; Forrier & Sels, 2003). Developments in the employment setting also offer new opportunities for employees. With roles becoming more flexible, opportunities arise to tailor characteristics of the job that better meet personal needs and strengths. For example, work on idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006) shows that employees can take initiative in their career and, for example, bargain for personalized employment arrangements and developmental opportunities that better meet their personal needs.

Individuals’ proactive career behaviors are encapsulated in the career initiative construct and are considered to be important drivers of career-related outcomes and career satisfaction (e.g. De Vos, Dewettinck & Buyens, 2009; Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert et al, 2001). Specifically, proactive individuals are expected to select and create favorable work environments that foster the attainment of promotions and salary, as well as feelings of

accomplishment and career satisfaction (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Seibert et al., 1999). By means of agentic and anticipatory actions, such as proactive feedback seeking, engaging in career planning, seeking a mentor, and skill development in anticipation of future opportunities (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Parker & Collins, 2010; Seibert et al., 2001), the work on career initiative accentuates how individuals impact themselves and/or the work environment to make it conducive to effective performance and success. Although by and large research suggests a positive impact of career initiative on career-related outcomes, the underlying mechanisms are less clear (Liu, Tangirala, Lee, & Parker, 2019; Wihler, Blickle, Ellen, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2017; Sonnentag, 2017). The current study seeks to ameliorate this state of affairs by examining whether specific manifestations of person-job fit (namely demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit) mediate the relationship of career initiative with performance and career satisfaction

In their taxonomy of employee proactive behaviors, Parker and Collins (2010) group a broad set of different proactive behaviors in terms of three higher order categories, namely 1) the internal organizational environment (proactive work behavior), 2) the organization's fit with its environment (proactive strategic behavior), and 3) the individual's fit with the organization (proactive Person-Environment (PE) fit behavior). This last category, defined as "self-initiated behaviors that aim to change oneself or the situation to achieve greater compatibility between one's own attributes and the organizational environment" (Parker & Collins, 2010, p.640), appears particularly relevant for career research because of its strong emphasis on the self. Parker and Collins (2010) classify career initiative as a key indicator of this higher order category of proactive PE fit behavior suggesting that this type of proactive behavior can help improve the match between individuals and their work environment (or PE fit).

Belschak and Den Hartog (2010; 2017) developed a classification of proactive

behaviors in terms of target (as opposed to content). In their framework, career initiative is argued to reflect pro-self proactive behaviors that are aimed to further personal (career) goals and improve one's own situation in the workplace (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2017). This framework also suggests that career and self-improvement oriented proactive behavior may contribute to PE fit as these describe proactive behaviors individuals engage in with the aim of improving their compatibility with the work environment.

Since PE fit, and more specifically person-job fit, has been found to be an important driver of attitudes and behaviors such as job satisfaction and performance (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001), the extensive literature on the consequences of fit may also inform research on career related proactive behavior. In the current study we address the role of two forms of person-job fit, namely demands-abilities fit, describing the fit between the individual's capabilities with the demands in the job, and needs-supplies fit, describing the fit between the individual's needs and the rewards or supplies provided by the job (Edwards, 1991, 1996). Combining the PE fit and proactivity literatures, we suggest that demands-abilities and needs-supplies fit mediate the relationship between career initiative and career outcomes. Because in showing career focused proactive behaviors, individuals are likely to plan and act (Seibert et al., 2001; Tharenau & Terry, 1998) to enhance their compatibility with current and future job demands and needs in order to secure a job (current or new) and anticipate career opportunities (Parker & Collins, 2010).

Thus, we test a mediational model (see Figure 1) that draws from both the proactivity and PE fit literatures. Specifically, our study explores how career initiative relates to job performance and career satisfaction and tests whether the aforementioned two forms of person-job fit act as mediators. We test this model in a multisource study among unique leader-follower dyads. The study aims to contribute to the literature on both proactivity and PE fit. Specifically, we aim to enhance our understanding of the role of PE fit in the

relationship of proactive career behavior with outcomes relevant for both the individual and the organization. In addition, we aim to provide empirical support for the conceptualization of career initiative as a type of proactive PE fit behavior (Parker & Collins, 2010). Finally, differential effects of demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit are explored by assessing these in a unified model as called for in the PE fit literature (e.g., Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005).

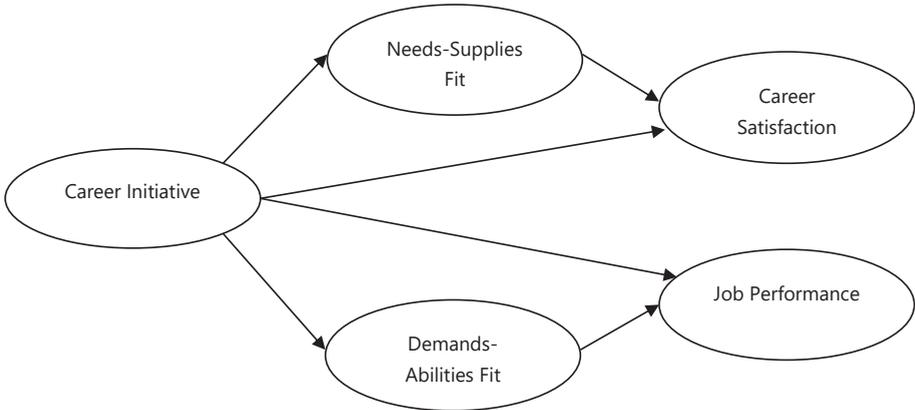


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

## **Proactive Career Behavior, Career Satisfaction and Performance**

Drawing on goal-setting theory and human capital theory, scholars have argued that individuals who proactively manage their careers, strive to obtain desired outcomes by both selecting and creating situations that increase the likelihood of success (e.g. Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Wang et al., 2017). In support of this line of reasoning, research has demonstrated that proactive career behaviors are positively related to desirable outcomes such as task performance, salary, promotions, and career satisfaction (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; De Vos et al., 2009; Plomp et al., 2016; Seibert et al., 2001; Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefoghe, 2005; Thompson, 2005). In the present study, career initiative is defined as an individual's active attempt to promote his or her career, and refers to a broad conceptualization of proactive career behaviors (Sonnentag, 2017) associated with career advancement, including behaviors such as career planning, skill development, feedback seeking, and consultation with, for example, senior colleagues (Seibert et al., 2001; Tharenou & Terry, 1998). These behaviors are thought to both foster the attainment of promotions and enhance feelings of accomplishment or career satisfaction (De Vos et al., 2009; Seibert et al., 2001; Tharenou & Terry, 1998).

For example, consultation behavior and seeking a mentor can provide one with social support, developmental opportunities, access to information, and may help in identifying career opportunities, and accessing social networks (Allen et al., 2004; Tharenou & Terry, 1998). Based on social learning theory, building a good relationship with a more experienced individual (i.e. mentor) and seeking advice may also positively relate to skill development (Allen et al., 2014). Furthermore, as skills and knowledge are important predictors of performance and career success (Ng et al. 2005), proactive skill development in anticipation of future career opportunities may create more career mobility opportunities and thereby

positively affect not only performance but also career satisfaction. Moreover, feedback seeking can positively contribute to performance as it helps one to monitor how one is doing (Ashford, 1986; Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sackett, 2015), and potentially facilitates career advancement by means of more positive performance reviews. Also, seeking consultation and discussing career prospects may help one to gain insight in career-related strengths and weakness (i.e. career insight) and may help in making deliberate choices that contribute to career satisfaction (De Vos & Soens, 2008). Finally, research indicates that proactive career behaviors may not only positively relate to effective performance (objectively), but may also elicit higher performance evaluations (subjectively), for instance by promoting visibility or influencing the political landscape (Bindl & Parker, 2017; Ng et al., 2005; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997).

In sum, career initiative may help employees feel more satisfied with their careers and may help them to attain favorable performance evaluations (Ballout, 2007; Gould & Penley, 1984; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Seibert, et al., 2001). In line with previous work, we therefore expect that career initiative is positively related to career satisfaction and job performance evaluations.

*Hypothesis 1a: Career initiative is positively related to career satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Career initiative is positively related to job performance evaluations.*

### **Proactive Career Behavior as an Antecedent of Person-Job Fit**

By proactively managing their career, employees become active agents who shape and influence their work environment. As a result of such behavior, individuals are thought to actively enhance their congruence, or fit, with the work environment (Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker & Collins, 2010). The PE fit literature may therefore serve as a useful starting point

for understanding the process underlying the impact of career initiative on desirable outcomes. PE fit is broadly defined as the congruence between the attributes of the individual and his or her work environment (Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Research on PE fit shows that a closer match between an individual and his or her job, team, supervisor, or organization, is positively related to both attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and behaviors (e.g., job performance) (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001).

The individual's congruence with the work environment is commonly conceptualized in terms of either supplementary or complementary fit (Kristof, 1996; Edwards, 2008). Supplementary conceptualizations refer to similarities between a person and his or her environment (i.e. value or goal congruence), while complementary conceptualizations refer to situations where the individual or environment provides what the other needs. This latter notion applies to the conceptualization of Person-Job fit, i.e. individuals' compatibility with their job (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Person-Job fit, which is the focus of the current study, encompasses two dimensions including the individual's match with the requirements of the job (demands-abilities fit) as well as the extent to which the work environment meets the employee's needs (needs-supplies fit) (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). More specifically, demands-abilities fit reflects the compatibility of an employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities with the requirements of the job, whereas needs-supplies fit reflects the compatibility of an employee's needs, desires, or preferences with the work environment (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

As previously noted, proactive behavior that is particularly focused on enhancing the compatibility between the individual and the work environment is categorized as proactive person-environment fit behavior (Parker & Collins, 2010). Parker and Collins operationally defined this category as a combination of proactive behaviors. While some proactive

behaviors may be more focused on enhancing either demands-abilities or needs-supplies fit, career initiative is thought (Parker & Collins, 2010) to have an impact on both demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit. This is because career initiative can be focused on meeting organizational requirements as well as personal preferences (Parker & Collins, 2010). For example, by taking initiative in skill development employees may improve their abilities and thereby affect their demands-abilities fit. Alternatively, by engaging in behaviors that promote career advancement, the supplies provided by the job (such as salary, autonomy, developmental opportunities, and meaning) may expand. Also by engaging in career planning and seeking mentorship, employees may effectuate changes in their work (or construe the meaning of their work differently) thereby affecting the compatibility between their values and the supplies provided by their work environment. Finally, in the contemporary work environment where job demands, as well as individuals, continuously evolve (Frese & Fay, 2001), it is to be expected that individuals who do not proactively manage their career may over time experience a deterioration in their level of fit. Hence, proactive career behaviors and in particular career initiative is argued to be positively related to both dimensions of person-job fit. Though this rationale would advocate for a process view on fit (Edwards, 2008) that is dynamic instead of static, the current cross-sectional study provides a first tentative test of these ideas by testing whether these proposed relationships indeed exist (chapter 3 takes a more dynamic approach to the relationship between career initiative and fit). We therefore hypothesize a positive association between career initiative and needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit.

*Hypothesis 2a: Career initiative is positively related to needs-supplies fit.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Career initiative is positively related to demands-abilities fit.*

## **Person-Job Fit and Career Related Outcomes**

We proposed that the relationship of career initiative with career satisfaction and job performance is mediated by demands-abilities and needs-supplies fit. Demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit have been argued to be important predictors of career related outcomes such as performance and career satisfaction (e.g. Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Theoretically, needs-supplies fit is positively related to attitudinal outcomes because of need-fulfillment, as people will experience positive attitudes when their needs are satisfied (e.g. Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Alternatively, demands-abilities fit is hypothesized to be primarily related to performance criteria due to its emphasis on meeting situational demands (i.e. proficiency) as opposed to personal needs (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Two additional relationships, namely between demands-abilities fit and career satisfaction on the one hand, and needs-supplies fit and job performance on the other, have received limited research attention and the exact nature of these paths is ambiguous. Whereas Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) argued and found support for a small, yet significant, effect of needs-supplies fit on overall performance and a small effect of demands-abilities fit on attitudinal criteria (e.g. job satisfaction and organizational commitment), Cable and DeRue (2002) theorized and found support that demands-abilities fit is not related to career satisfaction after controlling for other types of fit. Furthermore, although Cable and DeRue did not articulate any specific expectations regarding the nature of the relationship between needs-supplies fit and performance, their results do not provide any support for its existence either. Theory and empirical evidence thus suggests demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit predominantly relate to different outcomes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), even though they have been found to be empirically related to one another (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

In sum, previous work has not arrived at unequivocal conclusions with respect to

these ‘crossover’ relationships. On the basis of these theoretical considerations we therefore expect the distinctive types of fit, that is demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit to relate *primarily* to job performance and career satisfaction respectively. Although no formal hypotheses will be formulated with regard to the crossover effects, their plausibility will be explored by means of model comparison. Thus, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 3a: Needs-supplies fit is positively related to career satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Demands-abilities fit is positively related to job performance.*

### **The Research Model**

The hypotheses of the current study are depicted in Figure 1. In essence, this model suggests that employees engaging in more proactive career behaviors vis-à-vis their career are likely to report higher levels of career satisfaction and job performance by forging, and as a result experiencing, a better match between themselves and their work environment. Thus, we propose that person-job fit mediates the relationship between career initiative and these outcomes. Specifically, we hypothesize that the relationship between career initiative and career satisfaction is primarily mediated by needs-supplies fit and that the relationship of career initiative with job performance is primarily mediated by demands-abilities fit. Although a fully mediated model is plausible, theoretical and empirical work (cf. Seibert et al., 2001) suggests that career initiative may also have a direct effect on career related outcomes beyond the indirect impact through person-job fit. Therefore, we will assess the plausibility of a partial as well as fully mediated model.

*Hypothesis 4a: The relationship between career initiative and career satisfaction is primarily mediated by needs-supplies fit.*

*Hypothesis 4b: The relationship of career initiative to job performance is primarily mediated by demands-abilities fit.*

## **Method**

### **Sample and Procedure**

The sample consisted of Dutch employees and their direct supervisors working in a variety of sectors such as banking, insurance, retail and national government. Employees received two surveys (one for themselves and one for their direct supervisor), two separate stamped return envelopes, and an accompanying letter that explained the purpose of the study and stressed confidentiality and anonymity of participation. In total 382 questionnaires were distributed to employees, who were also asked to give one survey and return envelope to their direct supervisor. Employees and supervisors thus did not have access to one another's responses as the questionnaires were independently sent back to the university. In total we received 186 employee questionnaires and 189 supervisor questionnaires resulting in a total of 166 matched (employee-supervisor dyads) surveys. Thus, in a few cases either the supervisor or the respective employee did not send his or her response back by the end of the deadline for this study. Cases with one or more missing data points were eliminated from the analyses resulting in a total of 162 complete responses from matched dyads, yielding an overall response rate of 42%. No supervisor evaluated more than one employee, the data was therefore not nested (it was stated in the instruction that the manager should not assess more than one employee).

Of the final employee sample 51.9% was male and the average age was 33.9 years ( $SD = 12.6$ ). Employees had an average tenure (employment in their current organization) of 6.9 years ( $SD = 9.0$ ). Most employees (58.8%) indicated that they had daily or at least weekly contact (36.9%) with their direct supervisor. The majority of supervisors was male (72.8%)

and had been supervising their employee for 3.5 years on average ( $SD = 4.3$ ).

## Measures

Items from published scales were used to assess all constructs. Questionnaires were administered in Dutch. Items that were not already available in the Dutch language were translated using a translation–back translation procedure (Brislin, 1970). The employee-survey included measures of career initiative, perceived needs-supplies fit, demands-abilities fit, and career satisfaction. The supervisor-survey included measures of the employee’s career initiative and job performance. All responses were scored on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 = *completely disagree* and 7 = *completely agree*, unless indicated otherwise.

**Career initiative.** Previous research on proactive behavior has shown that self- and other-ratings of such behavior may differ and only correlate moderately (cf. Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007; Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997). This may be due to the fact that some proactive behaviors are not clearly visible to others or that such behaviors may be interpreted differently by different raters. Since research in this area does not identify one source to be more valid than another (Ohly & Fritz, 2009), we gathered ratings of employee’s career initiative from their direct supervisor (supervisor-ratings) as well as from the focal employees themselves (self-ratings). On the one hand, self-ratings of career initiative may be distorted due to social desirability and self-concept related biases, on the other hand supervisor-ratings only reflect behaviors that are observable by the supervisor. Hence, to strengthen the test of our hypotheses and to include both perspectives, we use both rating sources. As such the threat of common source bias is diminished and threats to validity identified in each source are mitigated through triangulation (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Career initiative was assessed with six items from Tharenou and Terry’s enactive career aspiration scale (1998), later relabeled as career initiative (Seibert, et al., 2001; Parker

& Collins, 2010). In addition to the employee's self-report ( $\alpha = .84$ ), direct supervisors also rated the focal employee's career initiative ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Supervisor-rated items were preceded by "This employee shows initiative in..." followed by for example "career path planning", or "updating his/her skills that make him/her more competitive for promotion". Employee self-reports were preceded by "I take initiative in..." followed by for example "career path planning", or "updating my skills to be more competitive for promotion". The six items pertain to feedback seeking regarding job performance, discussing career prospects and aspirations with a more senior person (i.e. seeking mentorship and networking), engaging in career path planning, updating skills to make promotions more likely and engaging in extra-role activities. This measure is thus considered as a summative measure of self-initiated career behaviors and thereby taps into a broad conceptualization of self-initiated career management behaviors (Seibert et al., 2001; Sonnentag, 2017).

**Person-job fit.** Employee perceptions of needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit were each measured with three items (Cable & DeRue, 2002). An example item for needs-supplies fit is "There is a good fit between what my job offers me and what I am looking for in a job" ( $\alpha = .94$ ). A sample item for demands-abilities fit is "My abilities and training are a good fit with the requirements of my job" ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Career satisfaction.** Career satisfaction was measured using five items obtained from Greenhaus et al. (1990). Employees could indicate their levels of satisfaction with five aspects of their careers on a 7-point Likert scale anchored 1 = *very dissatisfied* to 7 = *very satisfied*. A sample item is "The progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals" ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Job Performance.** Job performance was assessed on a five item scale by the employee's supervisor (Ashford & Black, 1996; Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009). In line with Grant et al. (2009) items were introduced with the statement "Thinking about the overall

performance of the person you are rating, please indicate how you would rate them relative to others in the same/similar jobs on a percentage basis.” Responses were scored on a 9-point scale (1 = 10<sup>th</sup> percentile and 9= 90<sup>th</sup> percentile) (Grant et al., 2009). Items referred to, for example, the quality of the employee’s performance and the achievement of work goals ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

## Results

### Analytical Strategy

We employed a two-stage analytic procedure using the AMOS software package. The measurement model was evaluated in the first step and the structural model was assessed in the second step. In evaluating model fit we used the following five indices; 1) Chi square goodness of fit to degrees of freedom ratio, 2) comparative fit index (CFI), 3) Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), 4) root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and 5) the standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR). Previous work suggest a satisfactory fit when  $\chi^2$  ratio to  $df$  is smaller than two, CFI and TLI values are higher than .90, RMSEA is no greater than .08 and SRMR values are no higher than .10 (Bentler, 1990; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). In accordance with Hu and Bentler’s recommendations (1999) and in line with Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008) we used a combinational rule based on values close to .95 or higher for CFI and TLI in combination with a value close to .08 or smaller for SRMR.

Bootstrapping procedures were used to test the significance of the hypothesized direct and indirect paths (mediation). In order to construct a bias corrected 90% confidence intervals, 1,000 resamples were drawn. Bootstrapping is a nonparametric resampling procedure which does not impose the assumption of normality on the sampling distribution and is recommended over more mainstream methods for testing indirect effects, such as the causal steps approach or Sobel test (Bollen & Stine, 1990; Preacher & Hayes, 2008b; Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

As described earlier, career initiative was assessed by both supervisor- as well as self-reports. Therefore, the same analytic procedures used to test a model including supervisor-rated career initiative were also used to test a model including self-rated career initiative.

### **Preliminary Analyses**

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to examine the construct validity of the measurement model which consisted of career initiative, demands-abilities fit, needs-supplies fit, career satisfaction, and job performance (see Table 1). One item of the career satisfaction scale was removed due to high cross loadings. Hence, career satisfaction was assessed using a four-item scale with a scale reliability of  $\alpha = .85$ . The hypothesized five-factor measurement model showed a good fit and was significantly better than a one-factor model in which all items loaded on a single factor or a four-factor model in which demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit loaded on a single factor. In line with Cable and DeRue (2002), this justifies distinct fit dimensions for demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit. Similar results were found for the measurement models in which career initiative was assessed by employees' self-reports, the statistics are reported in Table 1. The means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables are presented in Table 2.

Though confirmatory factor analyses indicated a better fit when modelling needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit as separate constructs as opposed to a single construct (the five-factor model compared to the four-factor model), correlations (Table 2) indicate that both types of fit are strongly related. These findings are in line with other studies (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016).

Table 1.

*CFA Model fit statistics*

Measurement Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Supervisor rated								
career initiative								
Hypothesized five-factor model	232.28*	178	1.30		.98	.95	.04	.0528
Four-factor model	310,87*	182	1.71	78.59*	.94	.91	.07	.0548
One-factor model	1320,32*	188	7.02	1088.04*	.49	.43	.19	.1812
Employee rated								
career initiative								
Hypothesized five-factor model	269.59*	178	1.51		.96	.94	.057	.0637
Four-factor model	348,18*	182	1.91	78.59*	.92	.90	.075	.0653
One-factor model	1299,29*	188	6.91	1029.70*	.48	.42	.192	.1845

*Notes.* N=162. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual.

\**p*<.05.

Table 2.

*Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha, N=162*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-								
2. Age	33.94	12.64	-.02	-							
3. Tenure	6.89	8.96	-.13	.67**	-						
4. Career initiative (supervisor rated)	4.45	1.14	-.04	-.06	-.11	(.88)					
5. Career initiative (self-rated)	4.72	1.04	.08	-.14	-.14	.49**	(.84)				
6. Demands-abilities fit	5.14	1.28	-.03	.26**	.24**	.26**	.20*	(.94)			
7. Needs-supplies fit	4.41	1.47	.07	.34**	.27**	.33**	.20*	.79**	(.88)		
8. Career Satisfaction	4.93	1.05	.07	.09	.08	.37**	.45**	.46**	.50**	(.85)	
9. Job performance	7.29	.85	-.01	.16*	.18*	.40**	.10	.29**	.25**	.34**	(.84)

Notes. Cronbach's alphas are reported on the diagonal. \* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed). Values for age and tenure expressed in

years. <sup>a</sup>Gender coded as 0 = male and 1 = female.

## Hypothesized Model

To test the proposed structural model, a set of theoretically plausible nested models were compared; a partially mediated model (direct paths from career initiative to the outcome variables were freely estimated in addition to indirect paths through both mediators), a fully mediated model (direct paths from career initiative to both outcome variables constrained to zero) and a non-mediated model (paths from career initiative to both mediators constrained to zero). The residuals of the two mediator variables were allowed to covary in the structural models (cf. Preacher & Hayes, 2008a). As shown in Table 3, the partially mediated model showed a good and significantly better fit compared to the fully mediated and non-mediated models. Fit indices were also calculated for the same structural models in which career initiative was assessed by employees' self-report instead of supervisor-report. Consistently with the previous model (encompassing the supervisor-rated measure of career initiative) it was found that a partially mediated model fitted the data better as compared with a fully mediated and a non-mediated model.

With regard to the non-hypothesized yet plausible additional paths of demands-abilities fit on career satisfaction and needs-supplies fit on job performance, we found that the structural models including these additional paths did not show a significant improvement in model fit ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = .61, p = .74$ ; for the partially mediated model) (Mueller & Hancock, 2008), see Table 4. Moreover, none of the additional paths in the less parsimonious model were significant. Again, similar results were found for the structural models in which career initiative was assessed by employee self-reports instead of supervisor-ratings. The most parsimonious model was therefore retained as the final model, that is the partially mediated model without the crossover paths.

Table 3.

*Fit statistics of tested structural models*

	$\chi^2$	<i>Df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Supervisor rated								
career initiative								
Partially mediated	238.32*	181	1.32	-	.974	.970	.044	.060
Fully mediated	267.19*	183	1.46	28.87*	.962	.957	.053	.110
Non-mediated	253.60*	183	1.39	15.28*	.968	.964	.049	.12
Employee rated								
career initiative								
Partially mediated	283.83*	181	1.57	-	.952	.944	.059	.077
Fully mediated	310.23*	183	1.70	26.40*	.941	.932	.066	.106
Non-mediated	289.97*	183	1.59	6.14*	.950	.943	.060	.101

*Notes.* Testing the measurement model with control variables age and tenure (since age and tenure showed small to moderate correlations with key variables) did not significantly improve the model fit nor did it affect the level of significance of the pathways in the model.

\* $p < .05$ .

Table 4.

*Fit statistics of tested structural models including additional paths of demands-abilities fit on career satisfaction and needs-supplies fit on job performance*

	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Supervisor rated								
career initiative								
Partially mediated	237.71*	179	1.33	-	.974	.969	.045	.059
Fully mediated	265.83*	181	1.47	28.12*	.962	.956	.054	.107
Non-mediated	252.98*	181	1.40	15.27*	.968	.963	.050	.116
Employee rated								
career initiative								
Partially mediated	282.77*	179	1.58	-	.952	.943	.060	.075
Fully mediated	308.94*	181	1.71	26.17*	.940	.931	.066	.104
Non-mediated	288.85*	181	1.60	6.08	.950	.942	.061	.099

*Note.* \* $p < .05$

Findings for the direct and indirect relations are presented in Table 5 (supervisor rated career initiative) and Table 6 (employee rated career initiative). In support of Hypothesis 1a, career initiative was found to be positively related to career satisfaction. The hypothesized relationship between career initiative and job performance received partial support (Hypothesis 1b). This direct relationship was found to be significant when career initiative was assessed by supervisors, but not when career initiative was assessed by employees themselves. Pertaining to the other hypothesized relationships, both models (supervisor-rated and employee-rated career initiative) yielded similar results. In support of Hypothesis 2a and 2b, we found career initiative to be positively related to needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit. Furthermore, results showed a positive relationship between needs-supplies fit and career satisfaction (Hypothesis 3a) and between demands-abilities fit and job performance (Hypothesis 3b). Finally, results (see Table 6) showed significant indirect effects of career initiative on career satisfaction and job performance through needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit respectively (Hypothesis 4a and 4b).

Table 5.

*Standardized direct and indirect effects and the associated 90% bias corrected confidence interval. Employee career initiative assessed with supervisor ratings.*

Predictor	Outcome							
	Needs-supplies		Demands-abilities		Career satisfaction		Job Performance	
	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Career initiative	0.32*		0.29*		0.27*	0.14*	0.36*	0.05*
	(0.19 - 0.44)		(0.15 - 0.42)		(0.15 - 0.38)	(0.09 - 0.22)	(0.21 - 0.52)	(0.01 - 0.12)
Needs-supplies					0.44*			
					(0.31 - 0.56)			
Demands-abilities							0.19*	
							(0.03 - 0.36)	

*Notes.* Upper and lower bounds of the 90% bias corrected confidence intervals are shown in parentheses;

1,000 bootstrap samples. \* $p \leq .05$ .

Table 6.

*Standardized direct and indirect effects and the associated 90% bias corrected confidence interval. Employee career initiative assessed with self-reports.*

Predictor	Outcome							
	Needs-supplies		Demands-abilities		Career satisfaction		Job Performance	
	Direct		Direct		Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Career initiative	0.20*		0.20*		0.39*	0.09*	0.02 n.s.	0.06*
	(0.05 - 0.36)		(0.03 - 0.36)		(0.25 - 0.52)	(0.02 - 0.17)	(- 0.12 - 0.17)	(0.02 - 0.13)
Needs-supplies					0.45*			
					(0.33 - 0.55)			
Demands-abilities							0.29*	
							(0.13 - 0.45)	

*Notes.* Upper and lower bounds of the 90% bias corrected confidence intervals are shown in parentheses;

1,000 bootstrap samples. \* $p \leq .05$ .

## Discussion

The goal of the current study was to gain a better understanding of how proactive career behaviors relate to the attainment of favorable outcomes for the individual and the organization. A model was proposed in which demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit mediate the relationship of career initiative with respectively job performance and career satisfaction. We found support for a partially mediated model in which the two different forms of fit were related to distinctive outcomes, such that needs-supplies fit mediated the relationship of career initiative with career satisfaction, and demands-abilities fit mediated the relationship of career initiative with job performance. In finding these positive associations, the results provide preliminary support for the notion that employees who engage in proactive career behaviors may be attaining higher levels of career satisfaction and job performance by forging a better match between themselves and the work environment.

We opted to assess career initiative through employee self-reports in addition to ratings obtained from their direct supervisors. We included both sources to contend with the issue of common source bias, and because previous research had not provided an unequivocal answer to the question of which rating source is more valid. As expected, self- and supervisor ratings did not show perfect but only moderate congruence (correlation of .49). This finding is not surprising given that other studies have also found that, across multiple constructs, self- and other- ratings are usually only moderately correlated (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988; Heidemeier & Moser, 2009). It remains unclear though whether this implies that self- and other-ratings tap into somewhat different constructs or interpretations of behavior and/or whether this difference results from the observation of different behaviors (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007; Frese et al., 1997; Ohly & Fritz, 2009). Yet, in assessing the overall model, highly similar results were found in our study for supervisor-rated and self-rated career initiative, providing support for the robustness of our model.

The only deviating finding between supervisor and employee reported career initiative

was its relationship with job performance evaluations. Whereas support was found for a positive, direct effect of supervisor-rated career initiative on job performance, no such effect was found for employee rated career initiative. This may be due to the fact that in the former case both initiative ratings and job performance evaluations were based on supervisor ratings. Another possible explanation is that supervisors may think more in terms of work related aspects of career initiative such as consultation and feedback which may be related more strongly to performance than other aspects (e.g., outward mobility focused initiatives). That is, employees may think and act more broadly in terms of boundaryless careers when rating their own levels of career initiative and thereby also include and rate how they engage in career behaviors that are not restricted to the current organization. Such externally oriented career initiative is likely to be less visible to the supervisor and to contribute less to job performance. Moreover, supervisor reports may be subjective as well and colored by the attributions they make (De Stobbeleir, Ashford, & de Luque, 2010).

Findings of the current study contribute to the literature in several ways. First, the mediated model tested here integrates and explains findings from earlier studies in the field of proactivity, careers, and person-environment fit. The mechanism underlying the impact of career initiative on desirable outcomes was illustrated by examining individual compatibility with the job as a mediating factor. Previous studies that demonstrated main effects of proactive career behaviors on career related outcomes explained this impact on the basis of the rationale that individuals who take a proactive stance select and create work environments that match their needs and values (cf. Seibert et al., 1999). However, the suggested link between career initiative and person-job fit, has hardly been the scope of empirical studies. As such, the current study adds to the field by investigating the tenet that individuals, who take more career initiative, may be more likely to attain desirable outcomes because they are generally better adapted to the requirements of the job and work in environments that supply

valued and desired attributes.

Second, findings of the current study contribute to research on fit perceptions by simultaneously exploring differential outcomes of demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit. One of the critiques of research on PE fit in general is the limited research attention for the differential outcomes of fit, as well as the lack of studies that examined needs-supplies fit relative to other types of fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002). The current study attempted to address this issue by exploring different hypotheses with regard to the possible outcomes of needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit in an integrated model. In line with theory (Cable & DeRue, 2002), we found that needs-supplies fit was primarily related to career satisfaction and not to job performance, whereas demands-abilities fit was primarily related to job performance and not to career satisfaction. While significant zero-order correlations were found between needs-supplies fit and job performance, and between demands-abilities fit and career satisfaction, these relationships were not significant when both types of fit were simultaneously tested in one model using structural equations modeling. In general, this pattern suggests the importance of differentiating among needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit as they appear to relate to distinctive outcomes. However, these results do require more research as the data showed that need-supplies fit and demand-abilities fit were highly correlated (62% shared variance) and were both found to relate to the different criterion variables job performance and career satisfaction. This suggests that, statistically, the alternative paths could be modelled instead of the hypothesized paths. Yet, based on theoretical considerations and best practices to preserve the most parsimonious model the presented model was retained (Mueller & Hancock, 2008). Developing more distinctive measures of the two forms of fit in future work may be of use to further tease out differential effects that may be in place.

Third, by reaffirming a positive relationship between career initiative and desirable

career outcomes, the current findings support conclusions from other studies that identified proactive career behaviors as an important antecedent of job and career success (e.g. De Vos et al., 2009; Seibert et al., 2001; Sonnentag, 2017). In addition, to the best of our knowledge<sup>1</sup>, this study is the first to report a positive relationship between career initiative with demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit, thereby providing support for Parker and Collins's (2010) conceptualization of career initiative as a form of proactive behavior through which individuals achieve greater compatibility between their own attributes and the organizational environment. This finding also informs research on person-job fit by revealing support for the mechanisms of how individuals may proactively improve their match with the work environment. Several researchers have stated that fit, as a dynamic concept which can be affected by the employee, is an area that requires more attention (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Latham & Pinder, 2005; Sylva, Mol, Den Hartog, & Dorenbosch, 2019). While some previous studies have examined how employees can be proactive in increasing their fit with the work environment (e.g. Morrison, 1993; Saks & Ashforth, 2002), these studies were primarily focused on socialization during organizational entry (e.g. Cable & Parsons, 2001; Kraimer, 1997). However, fit may change over time during the employment relationship. The current findings add to the literature by demonstrating a positive association between behaviors that have been argued to stimulate fit (and are not restricted to the socialization phase) with perceived levels of fit in a multisource study.

Finally, Schneider's (1987, 1995) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model takes a somewhat limited view on employee fit in that it posits that employees can only be attracted to or repelled by the organization. The model does not explicitly allow for the possibility that employees might proactively improve their fit with the organization by acting on their own

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<sup>1</sup> Though a recent study by Bayl-Smith and Griffin (2018) explored the relation between career initiative and demands-abilities fit (excluding needs-supplies fit), their study conceptualized career initiative as a predominantly reactive construct and used a different measure as opposed to the presented measure in the current study that, in line with Parker and Collins (2010) and Seibert et al. (2001), emphasizes the proactive nature of the behavior.

needs and abilities and/or the supplies and demands of their organizations. Thus perhaps “The people make the place” (Schneider, 1987, pp. 437) in more ways than Schneider originally anticipated. A remaining issue is whether people who engage in proactive career behaviors experience higher levels of fit by actively shaping the characteristics of their work environment (i.e. job crafting) and/or whether they excel in identifying jobs that provide a good match for their skills and needs.

### **Limitations**

Even though the study entailed multisource data, which forms a strength, it also has limitations. The main drawback is that it is cross-sectional. Specifically, we did not demonstrate a process showing how *changes* in person-job fit unfold over time as a result of within and between person differences in career initiative. Also, the cross-sectional data does not allow us to unequivocally determine the causality or direction of relationships found. A longitudinal study would be needed to draw any conclusions regarding such causal effects. However, there are arguments in favor of the suggested direction of causality. First, a central core of the theories in the field of proactivity is the proposition that individuals can and do actively shape and create situations and thereby affect their compatibility with the environment. Similarly, action theory posits that active behaviors lead to changes in the environment that are conducive to the individual (Frese & Fay, 2001; Raabe, Frese, & Beehr, 2007). Moreover, some scholars (Tims et al., 2016; Kooij, van Woerkom, Wilkenloh, Dorenbosch, & Denissen, 2017) have started to report on multiple wave data that support the notion that, albeit for a different form of proactive behavior namely job crafting, that such proactive behavior can and does impact the perceived level of person-job fit. Second, theories and empirical studies in the field of person-job fit support the assumed direction of effects insofar as they argue that fit has positive effects on desirable outcomes such as job performance and satisfaction (cf. Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Third,

previous longitudinal research (e.g. Seibert et al., 2001) *has* demonstrated positive effects of career initiative on career success. Fourth, research on organizational entry and socialization provides support for the notion that individuals can in fact modify the fit with their work environment. All this work supports the proposed direction of causality. However, it remains theoretically plausible that proactive behaviors may not only influence fit, but that in turn, fit may also reciprocally influence the extent to which individuals engage in proactive behaviors (De Stobbeleir, De Boeck, & Dries, 2017). Such a relation would not be inconceivable considering constructs such as job involvement, which can be an outcome variable of fit as well as a predictor of proactivity (Crant, 2000; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Future research may clarify this issue by gathering multiple wave data that address such proactive fitting processes and overlapping constructs.

Although operationalizing fit by respondents reporting how well the job meets or fulfills their needs and by how well their knowledge, skills and abilities meet the demands of the job, is consistent with the vast majority of research (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), studies that wish to further our understanding of the mechanisms that are in place should also consider measuring each component separately (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006). That is, measuring the demands, abilities, needs and supplies as separate entities to unravel which dimension(s) are impacted by individuals who engage in proactive behaviors and subsequently identifying how these changes contribute to improving overall person-job fit. However, as scholars have debated, assessing fit by separately measuring the components is difficult as it requires commensurate measures (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) and even when they are, one can debate on how to consider them jointly to construe ‘fit’ (Edwards, et al., 1998; Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Hence this raises another discussion and taps into the current and ongoing debate in the literature on the meaning of fit (Edwards, 2008).

From a practical perspective, the current findings imply that organizations may benefit from providing space and opportunity for employees to take a proactive role in managing their careers. Coupled with studies suggesting that people with proactive career attitudes do not necessarily exhibit high levels of inter-organizational mobility (Briscoe et al., 2006; Fuller & Marler, 2009), our findings imply that employers should promote, rather than shun proactive career behaviors. Giving leeway to these proactive behaviors can foster the development of a good match between the employee's abilities and job requirements, as well as fulfillment of the employee's values and needs. Moreover, when employees deem it unlikely to establish or restore fit when experiencing or anticipating misalignment in their job, it will most likely be beneficial for both employee and employer for the employee to take initiative and leave the organization to establish fit in a different work environment.

With regard to the extant literature, our findings support the need for incorporating a proactive perspective in contemporary work design theories to capture the importance of employees taking initiative in shaping their work context (Grant & Parker, 2009). Moreover, these findings suggest that PE fit is a worthwhile avenue of future research to investigate how proactive behaviors result in the attainment of beneficial outcomes for the individual and the organization. In sum, this study suggests that employees who take a proactive role in managing their careers attain and experience a better match with their jobs and thereby achieve higher levels of performance evaluations and career satisfaction.



## CHAPTER 3

### **Person-job fit and proactive career behavior: A dynamic approach**

This chapter is based on: Sylva, H., Mol, S. T., den Hartog, D. N., & Dorenbosch, L. (2019). Person-job fit and proactive career behavior: A dynamic approach. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*.

I would like to thank TNO Institute for Applied Research for granting access to the data that is reported on in this study, and Rein de Cooman and Wouter Vleugels for their help in collecting the data used to demonstrate the convergent validity of our career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit measures. Furthermore, I would like to thank Renske van Geffen for her statistical advice, and two anonymous reviewers at the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* for their constructive reviews on earlier versions of this manuscript.

## **Abstract**

This two-wave study among 637 employees explores how individuals' perceived demands-abilities fit may change over time by virtue of career initiative (i.e. the proactive management of one's career and professional development). Using a parallel growth model, we found that (between-person) career initiative was related to (between-person) perceived demands-abilities fit. In addition, increases in (within-person) career initiative over time were associated with increases in (within-person) perceived demands-abilities fit over time. The findings furthermore indicate that such improvements in perceived demands-abilities fit occur among those who change jobs as well as among those who stay in their current job.

Comparing individuals who had switched jobs between wave 1 and wave 2 to those who had not, we found that turnover was i) preceded by lower levels of perceived demands-abilities fit; ii) accompanied by an increase in the level of career initiative; and iii) associated with greater improvement in perceived demands-abilities fit. This study advances our understanding of temporal dynamism in person job fit and the findings support the idea that by employing a proactive approach towards their career, individuals can both attain and enhance the alignment between their abilities and the demands of their job.

## Introduction

Although the achievement of important work-related outcomes may not be fully under the focal employee's control, the current careers literature place significant emphasis on personal agency in achieving desired outcomes (Akkermans, Seibert, Mol, 2018). Seen from the contemporary focus on lifelong learning and sustainable employability on the one hand, and computerization of jobs, delayering, downsizing, and project based work on the other, this individual agency is increasingly likely to be directed at establishing, enhancing, maintaining and/or restoring the alignment of one's knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) to perpetually changing job demands. An important question for individuals and organizations alike is thus what employees can do to attain, adapt, and sustain their fit to these changing job demands. Clearly, an important part of the answer lies in the recognition that in the contemporary labor market such demands-abilities fit is more often volatile than stable, and that individuals can and do succeed in proactively enhancing their fit over time, either within their current job (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018), or by changing jobs.

Demands-abilities fit has been found to be related to a host of important outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to quit, and overall job performance (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Accordingly, demands-abilities fit may be considered to be a critical antecedent that benefits individuals as well as their employing organization. However, in contrast to the many studies on the outcomes of demands-abilities fit, limited attention has been devoted to its antecedents, and particularly those individual differences that instigate between-job or within-job changes in perceived demands-abilities fit. In the studies that have addressed antecedents, the focus has primarily been on organizational entry, which is reflected in studies on recruitment, selection, and early socialization tactics (Cable & Judge, 1997; Caldwell, Herold, & Fedor, 2004; Carless, 2005; Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Kristof-Brown,

2000). Since most people spend a significant amount of years in a job or an organization however, it is imperative that we understand how individuals may take initiative in optimizing their person job fit, not only by moving from one job to the other (as a last resort), but also within the confines of a single job, for instance by proactively engaging in a resolution strategy that involves changing either the environment or the self (Follmer, Talbot, Kristof-Brown, Astrove, & Billsberry, 2018).

Most earlier studies on demands-abilities fit, and this is true of the larger person-environment fit paradigm as well, have employed a static approach toward fit in which characteristics of the person and work environment are conceptualized and operationalized as stable entities, and these are then investigated with predominantly cross-sectional research designs (for notable exceptions see Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Caldwell et al., 2004; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004; Schneider, 2001; Simmering, Colquitt, Noe, & Porter, 2003; Devloo, Anseel, & De Beuckelaer, 2011). This static approach, however, may neglect non-trivial temporal dynamism in both the work environment and the individual (Frese & Fay, 2001), both of which are likely to impact changes in actual and perceived demands-abilities fit, as argued earlier.

Taking an agentic perspective and conceptualizing the compatibility between an individual and his or her job as an ongoing and dynamic process (e.g., Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Shipp & Jansen, 2011; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006) thus yields the need to study fit and its individual-level antecedents over time. The objective of the present study, therefore, is to examine how both inter-individual (between-person) and intra-individual (within-person) differences in career initiative are related to inter-individual and intra-individual differences in perceived-demands-abilities fit. That is, this study sets out to contribute to the extant literature not only by investigating how those people who are higher on career initiative (as compared to those who are lower) perceive higher demands-abilities fit and growth therein over time (cf.

Bay-Smith & Griffin, 2018), but also by investigating how those who exhibit higher *growth* in (within-person) career initiative over time perceive higher growth in demands-abilities fit over time, and investigating how turnover (i.e., job change) plays into this process. Specifically, we present a two-wave study focused on how individual differences and changes in career initiative, which Parker and Collins (2010) classify as a proactive person-environment fit behavior, are related to perceived person job-fit over time. Below, we develop our hypotheses pertaining to the inter- and intra-individual relationship between career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit. Furthermore, we explore changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time among individuals who remained, as well as individuals who switched between jobs. Specifically, we focus on the role of proactive career behavior as a mechanism by means of which individuals can and do manage their compatibility with their job. We thus aim to contribute to the extant literature on perceived demands-abilities fit by integrating the concept of career initiative.

### **Current developments in the nature of work**

The work environment is becoming increasingly dynamic and decentralized (Grant & Parker, 2009; Frese & Fay, 2001). In order to keep pace with global competition, technological advances, and the fast rate of innovation, many organizations nowadays rely on employees to initiate change and adapt to new situations rather than having them perform strictly defined tasks (Grant & Parker, 2009; Crant, 2000; Campbell, 2000). As a result, job roles are becoming more flexible, and tasks continuously develop and change as organizations address shifting demands and opportunities (Frese & Fay, 2001; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007). All these developments require employees to cope with uncertainty on an ongoing basis and to adopt flexible roles to be able to function in these decentralized and dynamic work environments. As a consequence, individuals must proactively develop and update their KSAOs so as to seize opportunities and meet shifting demands (Grant & Parker, 2009).

From a contemporary career perspective too, individuals are increasingly challenged to adopt a proactive approach. Most modern careers no longer comprise lifetime employment within a limited set of organizations. Instead, modern careers are characterized by increased mobility and a higher variety of competencies (Frese & Fay, 2001; Waterman, 1994; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). This implies a shift in terms of responsibility regarding one's career such that rather than (solely) the employing organization, individual employees themselves need to proactively manage their careers and their employability to obtain and sustain employment over time (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; Hall, 1996). The need to act proactively regarding one's employability and career becomes even more pressing in light of the rise of temporary and project based employment as opposed to 'traditional' job based work that provides more job security (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Employees' altering expectations also imply a more proactive stance to their careers (Grant & Parker, 2009; Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). For example, with roles becoming more flexible, expectations arise regarding tailor-made and personally meaningful jobs (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006; Grant & Parker, 2009). This spurs behaviors such as job crafting (e.g. Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims & Bakker, 2010), role adjustment (e.g. Clegg and Spencer, 2007) and the negotiation of idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006), that are targeted at modifying the boundaries of work, seeking out tasks that best fit the individual, and personalizing employment arrangements (Grant & Parker, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006).

Taken together, the above developments suggest that the work environment changes continuously, and that individuals can and do both affect and shape this environment and develop themselves to keep meeting job demands and to capitalize on opportunities. Accordingly, the (perceived) compatibility between an individual's abilities and the demands

of his or her job, i.e., demands-abilities fit, is inherently an ongoing and dynamic process (see also Follmer, Talbot, Kristof-Brown, Astrove, & Billsberry, 2018; Shipp & Jansen, 2011; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Edwards, 2008). To date, research in the demands-abilities fit domain, however, has addressed the characteristics of the person and the job that bring about such perceptions as stable entities (Latham & Pinder, 2004). By applying a perspective on perceived demands-abilities fit that incorporates the tenets of individual proactive career behavior, the current study set out to contribute to our understanding of how perceived demands-abilities fit is achieved and maintained by the individual employee (Simmering et al., 2003; Frese, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010; Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018).

### **Perceived demands-abilities fit**

The 'fit' between a person and his or her work environment is commonly defined in terms of supplementary fit or complementary fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Edwards, 2008). Supplementary fit occurs when a person's characteristics are similar to, or match, those in the environment. This type of fit has been applied to capture person-organization fit (P-O fit) and is primarily operationalized in terms of value congruence or goal congruence between the individual and the organization (Chatman 1989; Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991; Kristof-Brown, 2000). In contrast, complementary fit occurs when "individuals' characteristics fill a gap in the current environment, or vice versa" (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005, p.288). This type of fit has mostly been applied to capture demands-abilities fit (P-J fit), and to capture the fit between an individual and his or her group (Seong, Kristof-Brown, Park, Hong, & Shin, 2015). P-J fit is typically operationalized in terms of two different dimensions, namely needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit. These types of fit respectively refer to the congruence between the needs, desires, and preferences of an individual with the environmental supplies provided by the job, and the (perceived) congruence between the KSAOs of an individual with the requirements of the job (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Edwards, 2008). In light of the

contemporary emphasis on developing and sustaining individual employability in modern careers (Smith, 2010), with the onus for attaining important career outcomes now mostly resting on the individual rather than the organization, perceived demands-abilities fit can be considered to be a particularly pertinent gauge of where an individual employee stands in developing his or her KSAOs vis-à-vis the changing demands of his or her idiosyncratic and dynamic environment. The current study therefore aims to shed light on both the antecedents and consequences of (changes in) demands-abilities fit over time.

Demands-abilities fit has been found to relate to several fundamental attitudinal and behavioral criteria including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, strain and job performance (De Crom & Rothmann, 2018; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In the current study we focus on perceived (as opposed to actual) demands-abilities fit. Specifically, we consider fit as a psychological phenomenon and focus on the perceived, or subjective, level of demands-abilities fit. Although it would be worthwhile to objectively assess attributes of the environment and the individual separately, as this would allow for the direct identification of changes in either the environment or the person, this may be problematic given that an assessment where the ‘P’ and ‘E’ are separately administered, has been argued to reflect implicit comparisons between individual and environmental characteristics (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert and Shipp, 2006). In addition, the interaction between the person and the environment does not in effect reflect the (in)compatibility of the two dimensions, which is essential to the assessment of fit (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Moreover, previous studies show that the subjective evaluation of fit is a stronger predictor of employee attitudes and behaviors than objective fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Carless, 2005). Hence, the perceived level of fit is a more proximal driver of employee behavioral outcomes than the ‘actual’ situation. Finally,

‘objective’ or ‘indirect’ approaches to assessing demands-abilities fit imply an idiosyncratic approach to the operationalization of demands-abilities fit because the constituent demands and abilities that are salient in a particular context or job may vary from person to person, and even within jobs. Thus, such an approach would impede between-subjects hypothesis testing since the aggregate fit scores would not be comparable from person to person. In the present study we therefore relied on the individual’s appraisal regarding their match with the environment rather than assessing the environment and individual aspects of fit as separate dimensions.

In contrast to what is known about the critical outcomes of demands-abilities fit, research on how to achieve or maintain this perceived fit through individual actions or organizational practices is scarce (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). To the extent that studies focused on what makes people ‘fit’ with their work environment, research has mainly relied on the matching process during organizational entry and has largely been drawn from Schneider’s (1987) attraction selection attrition (ASA) framework. The ASA framework was originally developed to explain homogeneity in organizations (Schneider et al, 1995; 1998) and depicts the process by which people are attracted to, selected by, and ultimately remain in or leave the organization. It holds the premise that a good ‘match’ between the individual and job or organization results in long-term effectiveness whereas a mismatch should result in turnover (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Schneider et al, 1995; 1998). In other words, employees who ‘fit’ will stay, and those who do not will leave.

Although the ASA framework has been successfully applied to explain homogeneity in organizations, researchers have argued that this framework is too limited to explain and identify factors that may prompt changes in perceived fit at the individual level (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; DeRue & Morgeson, 2007; Devloo, et al., 2011). It overlooks, for example, whether and if so how and why the perceived demands-abilities fit of incumbents

might change over time, and the role individuals can fulfil in these processes, by for example resolving misfit (see also Follmer et al., 2018) or by anticipating changing work demands.

Specifically, the ASA model implies that individuals leave the organization in case of misfit and inherently does not build on the idea that individuals may proactively manage their abilities or environmental demands to enhance or establish (re)alignment between themselves and their current and future jobs. Particularly given the nature of today's work, which is characterized by ongoing developments and the growing importance of proactive employees who effect change and self-direct their working conditions (Simmering et al., 2003; Devloo et al., 2011; Grant & Parker, 2009), a dynamic approach to the investigation of perceived demands-abilities fit may help to account for changes in such fit and facilitate a better understanding of the drivers of such changes. The present study departs from the notion that individuals can act as agents who proactively promote their ability to meet work demands by engaging in proactive career behaviors thereby developing their knowledge and skills or altering characteristics of the job. It addresses this issue by investigating how (changes in) career initiative (a type of proactive career behavior) and perceived demands-abilities fit covary over time, both within a single job and prior to and after acquiring a new job.

### **Career initiative**

The literature on proactive career behavior provides a framework for understanding how perceived demands-abilities fit can be enhanced or maintained. Proactivity has become a topical issue in a variety of research domains over the past years (Thomas, Whitman & Viswesvaran, 2010; Crant, 2000; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker & Bindl, 2017). Proactive behavior is generally considered to consist of self-initiated anticipatory action that is aimed at changing oneself or the situation. It typically refers to an agentic approach that challenges the status quo to bring about positive change (Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker et al. 2006; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Crant, 2000). Proactivity has been

conceptualized as either a trait, namely proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993), or as a more general or more specific type of proactive behavior (Grant & Ashford, 2008). An example of the more general form of proactive behavior is personal initiative, whereas examples of more specific forms of proactive behavior include voice behavior, feedback seeking, and career initiative (e.g., Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Parker & Collins, 2009). Generally speaking, proactive personality as well as distinct forms of proactive behaviors have been found to benefit both the individual as well as their organization (e.g. Fuller & Marle, 2009; Crant, 2000; Thomas, Whitman & Viswesvaran, 2010; see Tornau and Frese, 2013, for a meta-analysis). In the present study we focus on behavior rather than personality as we focus on testing for changes over time, which implies a focus on behavior rather than the stable trait..

In a taxonomy outlined by Parker and Collins (2010), a diverse set of proactive behaviors were categorized corresponding to the primary intended target of impact. This resulted in three-higher order categories; i) proactive work behavior focused on the internal environment of the organization; ii) proactive strategic behavior focused on the organization's alignment with its external environment; and iii) proactive person-environment fit behavior focused on the individual's fit with the work environment (Parker & Collins, 2010). In the current study we concentrate on the third dimension, which is defined in terms of "self-initiated behaviors that aim to change oneself or the situation to achieve greater compatibility between one's own attributes and the organizational environment" (Parker & Collins, 2010, p.640). In particular, we address proactive career behavior, also commonly labelled career initiative, which is a key indicator of this higher order category (Seibert et al., 1999; Fuller & Marler, 2009).

Career initiative is defined as an individual's active attempt to promote his or her career, and involves proactive behaviors such as career planning and skill development

(Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Tharenou & Terry, 1998; King, 2004; De Vos & Soens, 2008). It refers to an entrepreneurial approach one may adopt towards one's employability and career. This type of behavior is not necessarily confined to one's present job or employing organization, but rather involves a broader scope of actions that can occur within as well as outside the context of the present job or employing organization. Empirically, proactive career behavior has been linked to objective career success, namely career progression and performance, as well as to subjective career success, i.e. career satisfaction (Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001; Ng et al., 2005).

While there has not been much empirical research on the relationship between career initiative and fit (for a notable exception in the related job crafting field see Lu, Wang, Lu, Du & Bakker, 2014), theoretically, individuals who engage in proactive career behaviors should achieve higher levels of success in their career as their proactive approach should help achieve and maintain a better personal fit with their work environment, which allows them to better play to their strengths (Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker & Liao, 2016; Roberts et al., 2005; Seibert et al., 2001; Tims & Bakker, 2010). For instance, authors have proposed that individuals who engage in proactive career behavior may seek out better fitting jobs that better fulfill their needs (Yu & Davis, 2016). Furthermore, individuals who proactively manage their fit with the work environment may also be more likely to take initiative in gathering feedback regarding their performance, capitalizing on the degrees of freedom in their job, negotiating about assignments and role expectations, identifying career opportunities, and/or engaging in career planning and consultation (Roberts et al., 2005; Ashford & Black, 1996; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Such behaviors should promote the fit between individual abilities and job demands. Moreover, individuals who proactively manage their career take initiative in developing their skills and knowledge, which should keep them more employable and make them more capable of acting on altering job demands

than people who are less inclined to behave proactively (Parker & Liao, 2016). Hence, individuals who act more proactively vis-à-vis their career (as compared to those who do not) are expected to perceive greater fit. In line with this, at the between-person level we hypothesize that individuals who engage in more career initiative will achieve higher levels of demands-abilities fit by impacting their work environment, themselves, or both (Parker & Collins, 2010).

*Hypothesis 1: People with higher career initiative will generally report higher perceived demands-abilities fit than people with lower career initiative.*

It is important to note at this point that in this study we distinguish between i) between-person hypotheses, such as the above, where the relationship in question is solely specified in terms of a (cross-sectional) comparison *between* people, ii) within-person hypotheses, that pertain to how *within-person changes* in career initiative over a particular time period are associated to *within-person changes* in perceived demands-abilities fit over that time period; and iii) between-to-within-person hypotheses where *between-person* differences in career initiative and actual turnover are proposed to be related to the magnitude of within-person changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time. The crux to understanding the difference between the between- and within-person perspectives incorporated in this study thus lies in an appreciation of who the referent other is (respectively a different person at the same point in time or the same person at a different point in time). It should be noted that the latter operationalization yields the strongest practical implications, a point we will return to in the discussion.

Turning now to the role of time, and drawing in particular on the anticipatory, self-starting, and behavioral nature of career initiative as a perpetual driving force to enhance the

fit of one's abilities to the demands of the environment (see hypothesis 1), we propose that the relationship of career initiative with perceived demands-abilities should not only become manifest in between persons-comparisons, but also within the person over time. Specifically, we hypothesize that those higher on (between-person) career initiative (i.e. those who report more career initiative behaviors relative to their peers) should exhibit a greater within-person growth in perceived-demands abilities fit over time than those lower on career initiative.

Furthermore, and heeding in particular the behavioral (as opposed to dispositional) nature of the career initiative construct we propose that the magnitude and valence of within-person changes in career initiative should relate to the magnitude and valence of within-person changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time. Indeed, and in light of the nature of 'tomorrow's job' (Frese & Fay, 2001), individuals who do not manage to sustain a proactive approach to managing their careers may experience difficulties in maintaining their perceived demands-abilities fit over time since they will be less capable of anticipating and acting on the continuous changes demanded by the work environment. Hence we not only hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 2: Career initiative affects changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time such that the higher one's career initiative is (i.e., relative to other people), the greater that person's growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time.*

But also that:

*Hypothesis 3: Change in one's career initiative (i.e. relative to an earlier time) is positively related to change in one's perceived demands-abilities fit, such that positive change in the former is associated with positive change in the latter, and vice versa.*

## Turnover

In line with research on Person Environment (PE) fit and the ASA model, we expect that perceived demands-abilities fit will be negatively related to turnover (see also Boon & Biron, 2016). This applies both to voluntary and involuntary turnover as individuals with a low demands-abilities fit are more likely to be motivated to leave their job (Lee & Mitchell, 1994) and are more likely to be pressured to do so (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984; Schneider, 1987). While individuals may improve their fit within their current job through career initiative, we expect that as the level perceived demands-abilities fit is lower, individuals are more motivated to reach outside the boundaries of their current job and seek a different work environment that provides a better fit (Lee, Mitchell, Wise & Fireman, 1996). Similarly, Lee and Mitchell (1994) argue that misfit may result in voluntary turnover when a certain acceptability threshold is passed and Follmer and colleagues (2018) indicate that resignation is one of the responses to misfit, in particular when other strategies to overcome misfit have failed. At the same time, individuals who do experience a certain degree of fit are, in line with the ASA framework, likely to stay (and are also likely more welcome to stay) in their current job. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 4: Perceived demands-abilities fit affects turnover such that the higher one's perceived demands-abilities fit is at time 1 (i.e., relative to other people), the lower the likelihood of having left one's organization at time 2.*

In relation to turnover we further hypothesize that job transitions are accompanied by increases in the level of career initiative for that period of time as job mobility and related activities such as networking, job search, negotiation, onboarding, and socialization, will

generally require greater effort and initiative from the individual compared to those who remain in the same job.

*Hypothesis 5: Turnover affects career initiative over time such that those who switch jobs exhibit greater growth in career initiative over time than those who do not.*

We further argue that job change is likely to result in improved levels of perceived demands-abilities fit. Specifically, perceptions of poor demands-abilities fit that result in turnover (H3) are likely to instigate a two-way (i.e. attraction and selection) matchmaking process vis-à-vis the subsequent job (Schneider, 1987). Not only is the individual likely to seek out a new job with demands that are more commensurate with his/or her abilities but also the (new) organization is likely to evaluate the applicant's abilities against (recently benchmarked) job requirements. We therefore argue that employees who change jobs will exhibit a larger positive change in the level of demands-abilities fit than those who do not. This line of argumentation is further supported by the fact that those who stay in their jobs may already perceive high demands-abilities fit (with likely limited room for improvement) and/or more limited opportunities for improvement than the demands-abilities fit 'reset' that those who take a new job experience. Finally, the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) suggests that individuals who have gone through the process of exiting the organization and selecting a new job may be more likely to perceive a better fit as part of a post-hoc justification, thereby potentially further strengthening the growth in perceived levels of person job fit.

*Hypothesis 6: Turnover affects growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time such that those who switch jobs exhibit greater growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time than those who do not.*

## Method

### Sample and procedure

To test our set of hypotheses a secondary dataset was used that comprised a two-wave panel study among employees working in the Dutch healthcare and welfare sector.

Respondents were panel members who received an email in which they were invited to participate in a research project on employability. At Time 1 the sample consisted of 702 employees. Two years later, Time 2, questionnaires were again distributed among the respondents which resulted in 637 matched responses. A prerequisite was that respondents needed to have a job at both times of administration. Among the matched responses, 454 individuals had remained in the same job between Time 1 and Time 2, whereas 183 individuals had acquired a new job between the measurements.

The sample consisted primarily of women (82 %), which is representative for the labor force in the healthcare and welfare industry to which the survey was targeted. The average age at Time 1 was 34.9 years ( $SD = 10.5$ ). Most of the participants had a permanent (as opposed to fixed-term) job contract (67.7 %) at their employing organization. The sample comprised 437 individuals who were working as operational staff and 200 individuals who performed support and management tasks. Among the participants, 38.0 percent held a bachelor's or master's degree and 30.3 percent a degree in lower vocational education.

As data collection was part of larger project, only short measures were incorporated<sup>2</sup>. Career initiative was assessed using a two item scale. Items are ‘I actively develop my skills and knowledge’ and ‘I do a lot to manage my career’. Perceived person-job demands-abilities fit was assessed with the single-item ‘My current job fits my knowledge and skills’. Career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit were both assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 using a five-point scale ranging from ‘*strongly disagree*’ (1) to ‘*strongly agree*’ (5).

To test whether our two-item measure of career initiative and our single item measure of perceived demands-abilities fit showed convergent validity with established measures, we collected additional data in a separate study among 191 employees from various organizations. Results showed adequate correspondence between the two item career initiative measure and the validated measure of career initiative of Tharenou and Terry (1998), ( $r = .61$  (.76 when corrected for unreliability),  $p < .01$ ) and the single item perceived demands-abilities fit measure showed substantial correspondence with the validated perceived demands-abilities fit measure of Cable & DeRue (2002), ( $r = .71$ , (.73 when corrected for unreliability),  $p < .01$ ). These findings are in line with Carlson and Herdman’s (2012) recommendation that convergent validity should exceed ( $r = .70$ ) in order to curtail the odds of predictor – outcome relations varying from predictor measure to predictor measure.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed a reasonable fit for the hypothesized 2 factor model in which the items of perceived demands-abilities fit were set to load on factor one and the items of career initiative were set to load on factor two ( $\chi^2 = 95.95$ ,  $df = 34$ ,  $p = < .01$ ; CFI = .96, RMSEA = .09). The RMSEA was on the high side considering the general

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<sup>2</sup> Our study used the dataset to operationalize the constructs proactive career behavior, perceived demands abilities fit, and turnover (with age, gender, job type, and type of contract as controls), whereas Preenen, De Pater, Van Vianen, & Keijzer (2011) used the dataset to operationalize challenging assignments, on-the-job learning, turnover intentions, job search behaviors, and voluntary turnover (with age as a control). Hence (disregarding the control age) at both the construct and item level, the only overlap occurs for the turnover construct. However, Preenen et al. (2011) assessed *voluntary turnover* as a dependent variable, by incorporating the item "Was this a voluntary job change?", whereas we solely relied on the item "Did you switch between jobs in the past two years?" for our operationalization of *turnover* as a moderator. Note also that turnover only figures in the test of our second model.

rule of thumb (RMSEA < .08), however SEM models with a small sample size ( $N < 200$ ) are known to inflate the RMSEA fit index (Chen, Curran, Bollen, Kirby, & Paxton, 2008; Kenny, Kaniskan & McCoach, 2015; Kim, 2005). Overall, these results may be taken as evidence that the measures employed in this study correspond to accepted measures of career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit. In addition, reliability analysis revealed acceptable values for career initiative at Time 1 ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and Time 2 ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

Turnover was assessed at Time 2 with the question ‘Did you switch between jobs in the past two years?’ (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). In addition to these measures, several demographic characteristics were indicated by the respondent. These were age, gender, educational level, job type (operational staff versus support and management), and job contract (permanent versus fixed term employment).

## Results

### Hypothesis testing

The hypothesized paths were estimated in a parallel growth model using structural equation modelling (SEM) (Byrne, 2001; MacCallum & Austin, 2000). This model comprised a within-person model and a between-person model. It allows for the simultaneous examination of change in multiple dimensions (Kline, 2005; Willett & Sayer, 1996). In the present study these dimensions are i) the level of perceived demands-abilities fit and ii) the level of career initiative over time. As we explore whether changes in these dimensions are also related to each other, these analyses are also referred to as cross-domain analyses (Willett & Sayer, 1996).

### Measurement Model

A parallel growth model was constructed in which the intercept and slope for career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit were modelled as latent factors (see Figure 1). Values of the intercepts were constrained to one and are thus indicative of ‘initial status’, i.e.

the measurement at Time 1. These intercepts reflect between-person differences in the starting point against which the growth for a particular individual is benchmarked. Values of the slope were respectively set to zero (Time 1) and one (Time 2) reflecting the rate of within-person change over time (Willett & Sayer, 1996; Kline, 2005). Intercepts and the corresponding slopes were allowed to covary to model the latent process. Residual variance of career initiative at Time 1 and career initiative at Time 2 were set to be equal as these are measures of the same construct at different moments in time (Landis, Edwards & Cortina, 2009).

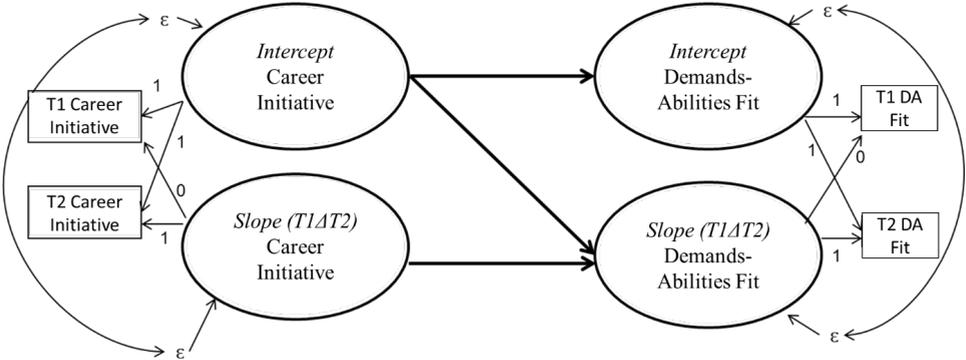


Figure 1: Parallel growth model for career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit. Note. Control variables were omitted for reasons of parsimony. Only the structural part of the path diagram is shown.

The same applied for perceived demands-abilities fit. In this model the relation between career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit is modelled at different levels; on the one hand by assuming a relation between the intercept of career initiative and the intercept of perceived demands-abilities fit (i.e., Hypothesis 1), and, on the other hand, by assuming a relation between the separate slopes (i.e., Hypothesis 3) as well as a relation between the intercept of career initiative and the slope of demands-abilities fit (i.e., Hypothesis 2).

Age, gender, job type (i.e. operational staff versus support and management) and type of contract (permanent versus fixed-term) were added to the model as control variables as these variables might relate to the study variables. These control variables were modelled on the endogenous variable career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit at both Time 1 and Time 2.

### **Career initiative – Perceived demands- abilities fit dynamics within jobs**

The goal of the first part of this study was to explore to what extent perceived demands-abilities fit may change while remaining in the same job. In order to do so, the model was tested with a subset of the sample that comprised only those individuals who remained in the same job between Time 1 and Time 2. This yielded a sample of 454 respondents, i.e. 71% of the participants had remained in the same job between Time 1 and Time 2. Subsample means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables are presented in Table 1 above the diagonal. Indices of fit showed that the hypothesized model fit the data well ( $\chi^2 = 2.91$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .23$ ; CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03).

A significant and positive relationship (see Table 2) was found between the intercept of career initiative and the intercept of perceived demands-abilities fit. Results thereby support our hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) by showing a positive association between the between-person level of career initiative and the between-person level of perceived demands-abilities fit. No significant association was found between the intercept of career initiative and the slope of demands-abilities fit. This indicates that, for those who did not change jobs between Time 1 and Time 2, the data did not support hypothesis 2, which anticipated those higher on between-person career initiative to exhibit higher within-person growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time. Finally, a significant relationship was found between the slope of career initiative and the slope of demands-abilities fit. This means that, for those individuals who remained within the same job, a within-person increase in career initiative

was positively related to a within-person increase in perceived demands-abilities fit over time, thereby yielding support for Hypothesis 3.

With respect to the control variables, a significant negative association was found between age and career initiative, i.e., the older respondents were, the lower the level of career initiative was ( $B = -.01$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = -.16$  at Time 1 and  $B = -.02$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = -.19$  at Time 2). This is in line with other studies indicating negative relationships between age and engagement in developmental activities (Warr & Fay, 2001; Boerlijst, Van der Heijden & Van Assen, 1993). Age was also significantly and positively related to perceived demands-abilities fit at Time 2 ( $B = .01$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\beta = .13$ ), which is similar to findings of Singh and Greenhaus (2004). For the control variable gender, it was found that males reported higher levels of career initiative as compared with females ( $B = .20$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .08$ ,  $\beta = .08$  at Time 1 and  $B = .26$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\beta = .10$  at Time 2). This corresponds to other studies on proactive behavior which have consistently found that males, as compared with females, are more likely to behave proactively and may indeed be more expected to do so (Grant, Parker & Collins, 2009; Kidder & Parks, 2001). With respect to contract type the outcomes indicate a significant relation between fixed-term versus permanent job contracts and the level of career initiative at Time 1, such that individuals with a fixed-term contract reported higher levels of career initiative compared to individuals with a permanent job contract ( $B = -.27$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = -.13$ ). Finally, regarding the control variable job type it was found that operational staff reported higher levels of perceived demands-abilities fit compared to individuals with management and support tasks ( $B = .27$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = .14$ ).

### **Career initiative – Perceived demands- abilities fit dynamics including turnover**

In order to address the role of turnover (between Time 1 and Time 2) in relation to within-person changes in career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit, a second model

was tested. A duplicate of the parallel growth model from the previous part of the study was constructed for the entire sample, hence including individuals who had switched jobs.

Turnover was included as a factor that was allowed to relate to the slopes of career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit (corresponding to hypotheses 5 and 6, respectively).

Furthermore, turnover was also set to covary with the error term of perceived demands-abilities fit (see Figure 2 for the structural part of the model).

Control variables were allowed to covary with turnover such that permanent versus fixed-term contracts were allowed to relate to turnover. Age was also allowed to relate to turnover as older employees are less likely to change jobs as compared to younger employees.

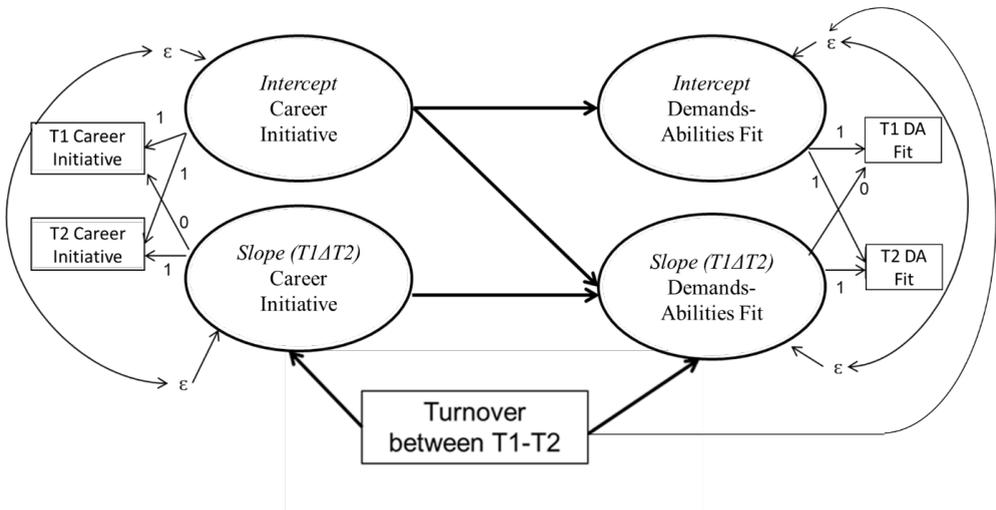


Figure 2: Parallel growth model for career initiative and demands-abilities fit including turnover. Note. Control variables were omitted for reasons of parsimony. Only the structural part of the path diagram is shown.

Finally, job type was allowed to covary with turnover as employees who conducted support and management tasks more frequently changed jobs compared to operational staff. The model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 8.87, df = 4, p = .06; CFI = .99,$

RMSEA = .04). For the entire sample ( $N = 637$ ) means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables are presented below the diagonal in Table 1.

Findings indicate a significant and positive relationship between the intercept of career initiative and the intercept of demands-abilities fit (see Table 2), meaning that, in this larger sample that included respondents who had changed jobs between Time 1 and Time 2, between-person career initiative is positively associated to between-person perceived demands-abilities fit. Results thereby corroborate the previous outcomes and support Hypothesis 1.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the variables.

	Larger sample										Subset of sample	
	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	M	SD
1. Age	34.86	10.51	-	.16**	-.11*	.26**	-.18**	.03	-.21**	.13**	36.19	10.66
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	.15**	-	-.13**	-.03	.05	-.06	.06	-.02	-	-
3. Job type <sup>b</sup>	-	-	-.11**	-.15**	-	.08	.04	.14**	.08	.07	-	-
4. Job contract <sup>c</sup>	-	-	.32**	.02	.08*	-	-.17**	.03	-.13**	.10*	-	-
5. Career initiative T1	3.81	0.93	-.23**	.06	.03	-.22**	-	.16**	.48**	.06	3.72	0.93
6. Perceived DA fit T1	4.28	0.95	.09*	-.07	.19**	.07	.12**	-	.09*	.33**	4.41	0.87
7. Career initiative T2	3.80	0.96	-.19**	.07	.06	-.13**	.47**	.05	-	.10*	3.68	0.97
8. Perceive DA fit T2	4.36	0.95	.14**	-.03	.04	.08*	.06	.32**	.10*	-	4.37	0.94
9. Job change <sup>d</sup>	-	-	-.20**	.07	-.09*	-.21**	.15**	-.21**	.20**	-.03	-	-

Note. Below the diagonal N varies between 633 and 637 due to missing cases. Above the diagonal N varies between 451 and 454 due to missing cases. T1= Time 1; T2 = Time 2. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. <sup>a</sup> Male was coded as one. Female was coded as zero. <sup>b</sup> Operational staff was coded as one. Support and management was coded as zero. <sup>c</sup> Permanent contracts were coded as one. Fixed-term contracts were coded as zero. <sup>d</sup> Turnover was coded as one. No-turnover was coded as zero.

Table 2. Hypothesized paths estimated in a parallel growth model using structural equation modelling for Sample 1 (subset of the sample including only participants who remained in the same job between T1 and T2)  $N=454$  and Sample 2 (total sample including turnover,  $N=637$ ).

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Sample 1</i>				
Career Initiative (Intercept) → Perceived DA Fit (Intercept)	.17	.04	<.01	.18
Career Initiative (Intercept) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	-.02	.06	.81	-.01
Career Initiative (T1ΔT2) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	.10	.05	.04	.10
<i>Sample 2</i>				
Career Initiative (Intercept) → Perceived DA Fit (Intercept)	.19	.04	<.01	.18
Career Initiative (Intercept) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	-.02	.05	.71	-.02
Career Initiative (T1ΔT2) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	.11	.04	.01	.10
Turnover → Career Initiative (T1ΔT2)	.26	.08	<.01	.12
Turnover → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	.40	.10	<.01	.16

*Note.* Intercept (denotes between-person differences), T1ΔT2 = slope (denotes within-person change over time).

No significant effect was found for the relationship between the intercept of career initiative and the slope of perceived demands-abilities fit (See Table 2). This means that again there is no support for hypothesis 2, which stated that between-persons career initiative affects changes in within-person perceived demands-abilities fit over time. The slope of career initiative, however, exhibited a positive and significant relationship with the slope of perceived demands-abilities fit (See Table 2), thereby indicating that a within-person increase in the level of career initiative over time is associated with a within-person increase in the level of perceived demands-abilities fit over time. Hence, hypothesis 3, pertaining to changes in career initiative being related to changes in perceived demands-abilities fit was further supported in this larger sample.

Due to modelling constraints, Hypothesis 4 could not be tested directly using the parallel growth model, since the arrow from the intercept of perceived demands-abilities fit to our 1 item turnover measure that it would require, would entail the turnover item effectively being modelled as a third indicator of perceived demands-abilities fit. Reversing the arrow (to point from turnover to the perceived demands-abilities fit intercept) was also not deemed a viable analytical strategy, as this would entail modelling an antecedent as an outcome of its consequent (i.e. turnover occurred sometime between the Time 1 and Time 2 measurement waves). A separate hierarchical logistic regression analysis to predict turnover was therefore conducted with the Time 1 measure of demands-abilities fit entered in the second step, after the control variables (contract type, age, job type, gender, and education) were entered in the first. Results indicated that above and beyond the constant and control variable only model, the block in which Time 1 demands-abilities fit was entered was statistically significant ( $\chi^2=16.78, p <.001, df=1$ ), indicating that it accounted for significant variance in turnover, with Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  indicating a weak combined effect of the control variables and perceived demands-abilities fit on turnover. In the final model, it was found that the Wald

criterion was significant ( $p < .05$ ) for age, contract type, gender, and perceived demands-abilities fit with all variables exhibiting a weak negative relationship with turnover and an overall prediction success of 72.5% (18.6% for those who changed jobs and 94.3% for those who did not). These results therewith provide support for hypothesis 4.

Returning now to the parallel growth model, both within-person increases in career initiative and within-person perceived demands-abilities fit were found to be significantly related to turnover. Specifically, results show a positive and significant relationship between turnover and the slope of career initiative (See Table 2). Considering that if people reported to have changed their jobs this referred to a switch between Time 1 and Time 2, this means that more growth in the level of career initiative between Time 1 and 2 was found for those individuals who had changed their jobs during that period of time as compared to those individuals who had remained in the same job. Thus, generally speaking, switching jobs was associated with larger within-person increases in career initiative over time, providing support for Hypothesis 5. With regard to changes in demands-abilities fit, a positive and significant relationship between turnover and the slope of demands-abilities fit was found (see Table 2). This result shows that job change generally relates to larger, positive, changes in demands-abilities fit as opposed to not changing jobs (Hypothesis 6). To summarize, individuals with a poorer initial perceived demands-abilities fit were not only more likely to change jobs, but also more likely to report larger improvements in their level of perceived demands-abilities fit as compared to people with a higher initial level of perceived demands-abilities fit.

Regarding the control variables for the relationships onto turnover, it was found that, contract type co-varied significantly with turnover such that individuals with a permanent contract changed jobs less often between Time 1 and Time 2 as compared to individuals with a fixed-term contract ( $B = -.04, SE = .01, p < .01, \beta = -.21$ ). Furthermore, age was

significantly associated with turnover such that the older respondents were, the less likely they were to change jobs ( $B = -1.0, SE = .19, p < .01, \beta = -.21$ ). With respect to job type it was found that operational staff were less likely to change between jobs as compared to employees holding support and management tasks ( $B = -.02, SE = .01, p = .03; \beta = -.08$ ).

Regarding the control variables for the relationships onto the endogenous variables career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit at Time 1 and Time 2 it was found that the age of the employees negatively impacted the level of career initiative at Time 1 ( $B = -.02, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = -.19$ ) and Time 2 ( $B = -.01, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = -.15$ ). Age was also found to significantly relate to perceived demands-abilities fit such that the older employees were, the more likely they were to report higher levels of perceived demands-abilities fit ( $B = .01, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = .11$  at Time 1 and  $B = .02, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = .18$  at Time 2). Regarding gender, this model too, showed that males generally reported higher levels of career initiative compared to females ( $B = .23, SE = .09, p = .01, \beta = .09$  at Time 1 and  $B = .24, SE = .10, p = .02, \beta = .09$  at Time 2). Furthermore, it was again found that fixed-term job contracts were associated with higher levels of career initiative at Time 1 than permanent job contracts ( $B = -.32, SE = .08, p < .01, \beta = -.16$ ). Finally, and again consistent with the previous model, a significant association was found for the control variable job type and perceived demands-abilities fit at Time 1, such that operational staff reported higher initial levels of demands-abilities fit compared to employees holding support and management tasks ( $B = .38, SE = .08, p < .01, \beta = .19$ ).

### Discussion

The current study aimed to advance a dynamic approach to perceived demands-abilities fit by investigating how changes in career initiative over time are related to changes in demands-abilities fit over time. By bridging the literature on proactive career behavior and person-environment fit we aimed to enhance insight in the process by which individuals can

actively manage their alignment with their jobs. Using a parallel growth model, hypotheses pertaining to how changes in career initiative relate to changes in perceived person-job demands-abilities fit, were generally supported. In support of our hypotheses, results of the present study indicated that people with higher career initiative generally report higher perceived demands-abilities fit than people with lower career initiative (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, we found that change in one's career initiative (i.e. relative to an earlier time) is positively related to change in one's perceived demands-abilities fit, so that positive change in the former is associated with positive change in the latter, and vice versa (Hypothesis 3). Indeed, these hypotheses were supported in both the restricted (no turnover) sample and the full sample that included people who had switched jobs between Time 1 and Time 2. Hypothesis 2, pertaining to the idea that the higher one's career initiative is (i.e., relative to other people), the greater that person's growth in perceived demands-abilities fit will be over time, was not supported in either of the samples.

With regard to turnover, data indicated that it was preceded by lower levels of perceived demands-abilities fit (Hypothesis 4). Findings furthermore show that individuals who had switched jobs between Time 1 and Time 2 exhibited growth in their level of career initiative (Hypothesis 5) and perceived demands-abilities fit (Hypothesis 6) over time.

In contrast to the dominant person-environment fit paradigm, which is grounded in the ASA-framework, findings of the current study indicate that improvements in perceived demands-abilities fit can be established without necessarily having to change to a new job. Though turnover was found to be associated with positive changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, improvements in fit could also be discerned whilst individuals remained in the same job, particularly for those individuals who exhibited increases in career initiative over time. Findings thus support the idea that in more proactively approaching their career, individuals can secure and enhance their alignment with their work environment.

Findings of the present study have several practical and theoretical implications for the PE fit domain in general and the perceived demands-abilities fit literature in particular. First, the current two-wave study allowed us to identify changes in the level of perceived demands-abilities fit over time, including individuals who remained in the same job. This finding thereby does justice to the idea that perceived demands-abilities fit is a dynamic construct. This study therewith underpins recent calls that have been made for adopting a more dynamic approach to studies on PE fit in order to improve our understanding and the validity of PE fit theories (Billsberry, De Cooman, Mol, Boon, Den Hartog, 2016; Latham & Pinder, 2005; Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani & Slowik, 2007). The presented framework also relates to recent work of Follmer and colleagues (2018) which provides insight in the actions people can take in response to misfit and indicates that exiting the organization is just one of the many strategies people can use to address misfit. From a practical perspective these findings imply that establishing and maintaining a match between an employee and the work environment merits attention that stretches beyond the recruitment and selection stages. Rather, it is a continuous process that organizations and employees will need to manage to establish and sustain a fit between job demands and individual abilities over time.

Secondly, findings of the current study showed that changes in career initiative over time are related to changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time. This finding is in line with reasoning in proactivity research which argues that proactive individuals forge a better match between themselves and the work environment which should ultimately result in career success (c.f. Seibert et al., 1999; Parker & Collins, 2010) and may thereby inform PE fit research and theory on how specific individual behaviors can establish or even improve the perceived correspondence between individuals' KSAOs with their job demands. Whereas past research has demonstrated empirical relations between proactivity (operationalized as

proactive personality as well as proactive career behaviors) with career progression and career satisfaction (Seibert et al., 2001; Seibert et al., 1999; Crant, 1995; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005), hardly any empirical evidence exists on the relation between proactive career behavior and person-job fit (see Yu and Davis, 2016, for an exception). Accordingly, the current study contributes to the extant literature by empirically demonstrating a positive relationship between career initiative, a type of proactive career behavior, and perceived demands-abilities fit.

Moreover, by incorporating the context of time, the present study allows us to go beyond cross-sectional results and helps inform how perceived demands-abilities fit can be attained and enhanced over time. It was found that both the intercepts as well as the slopes of career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit were predictably related to one another, meaning that the between-person level of career initiative relates positively to between-person perceived demands-abilities fit and that when individuals became more agentic regarding their career (i.e., within-person change), they also exhibited a larger, positive within-person change in their alignment with the work environment. Interestingly, the data indicate that it is not the absolute (between-person) level of career initiative that brought about such changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, but rather individuals exhibiting growth in career initiative over time (regardless of their initial status). This finding is somewhat challenging in that it may imply that in order to sustain correspondence with job demands, one needs to actively manage one's career on an ongoing basis. Or, in other words, it may imply that a person's fit might deteriorate over time if one does not nourish one's career initiative. From a modern career perspective this is to be expected when job demands, as well as individuals, continuously evolve and adapt (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Regarding turnover, the present study indicated that a change between jobs was preceded by a higher degree of between-person misfit compared to individuals who remained

with their job. This finding is in line with the ASA-framework and PE-fit theory which argues that misfit is a driver of turnover (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Schneider et al, 1995; 1998). Findings also indicated that individuals who switched jobs reported a larger, positive change in their level of demands-abilities fit than individuals who did not. Hence, people who experienced a larger degree of misfit were more likely to switch jobs and acquire a new work environment which they perceived to provide them with a better match. As indicated earlier, such growth in perceived demands-abilities fit may be associated with the perceived demands-abilities fit ‘reset’ and the concomitant dual selection (re)fitting processes that a job change entails. Hence, even though the study is limited by measuring change in the perceived level of fit as opposed to change in the actual level of fit, we would expect, in line with the reasoning of Fields, Dingman, Roman and Blum (2005), that change in perceived fit are not merely the result of altering perceptions, but are likely to also reflect actual changes in fit given the job search and selection process that comes with a job change and the importance for both employer and employee to establish a good fit.

In addition, study results indicated that switching jobs was accompanied by an increase in the level of career initiative. This finding supports research on job transitions (Raabe, Frese, & Behr, 2007) and newcomers’ socialization and learning processes (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005) which proposes that job transitions require individuals to engage in active career behaviors.

In sum, findings indicate that individuals who increase their career initiative tend to improve their perceived demands-abilities fit either within the boundaries of their present job or by acquiring a new job, where the latter scenario is more likely to occur when the experienced level of perceived demands-abilities fit is poorer. These results suggest that individuals who proactively manage their career over time are not necessarily more likely to leave their employing organization. They thereby tap into the discussion of whether

proactivity may serve as a double-edged sword when it results in the external mobility of valued employees (Belschak & den Hartog, 2010<sup>b</sup>; Ito & Brotheridge, 2005; Campbell, 2000; Bolino et al., 2017). Although this issue merits further research attention, the present findings may add some nuance to this discussion in that the experienced degree of (mis)fit may influence whether proactive individuals are more likely to optimize their fit within or outside the boundaries of the employing organization. The current findings and the study by Follmer and colleagues (2018) suggest that turnover is one way to deal with poor levels of fit, but not the only way and that it potentially serves as a last resort when the degree of misfit is perceived as irreconcilable or other strategies are considered ineffective.

### **Limitations and future research**

There are several limitations to this study. First of all, by measuring the perceived level of demands-abilities fit we were able to ascertain changes in the level of perceived fit. However, we were unable to specify whether these alterations are a result of (perceived) changes in the demands of the job or in the KSAOs of the individual, or both. Hence although we identified changes in career initiative as a likely antecedent of changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, it would be interesting to know what the target of this career initiative was and the conditions under which people change themselves (e.g. through lifelong learning, or on-the-job training) or their job (e.g., through job crafting and indeed turnover).

Moreover, given the fact that we assessed perceived levels of demands-abilities fit because of earlier research indicating stronger associations of perceived fit with outcomes, it would be interesting and worthwhile to explore to what extent actual changes and perceptions overlap or differ. Specifically, we suggest that future research could set out to identify contextual and dispositional moderators of the relationship between the changes in actual fit and changes in perceived fit that result from career initiative. For instance, in ‘strong’ situations (e.g., Blake & Pfeffer, 1989) it may well be that demands are relatively constant or

constrained and hence only changes in abilities will be a realistic precursor of changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, whereas in ‘weak’ situations both changing demands (for instance through job crafting) and abilities (for instance through training or mentoring) might relate to changes in perceived fit. At the person level, individual differences such as self-monitoring, self-esteem, reframing (Follmer et al., 2018) and behavior outside of the workplace (Vogel, Rodell, & Lynch, 2016) may also be posited to moderate or mitigate the relationship between changes in actual and changes in perceived fit.

Also, although career initiative turned out to be related to perceived demands-abilities fit, it would be interesting to explore in greater detail what specific actions and variety of things people (can) engage in to promote their compatibility with the job, such as involvement in developmental activities, political knowledge, consulting, voice, capitalizing on the degrees of freedom in the job, or stretching the boundaries of the job (Crant, 2005; Parker & Collins 2010; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010<sup>a</sup>; Thompson, 2005; Devloo et al., 2011; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). From an organizational perspective it would be valuable to enhance our understanding of how organizations and managers foster employee proactive career behaviors among their employees to ensure alignment and that employees continue to add value to the organization (Fuller, Marler & Hester, 2006; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). Particularly the current finding that levels of change in career initiative, as opposed to initial levels of career initiative, was related to changes in fit, implies that selecting on career initiative may be less fruitful than assisting individual incumbent employees in enhancing their career initiative.

Secondly, from a methodological perspective the current study is limited by the use of a single-item measure for perceived demands-abilities fit. Ideally a validated multiple-item measure should have been used. However, the data in our separate employee scale validation sample did demonstrate a substantial correlation between the single-item measure and the

multiple-item measure of demands-abilities fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002) thereby providing support for the single item tapping into the same construct. Indeed, from a content validity perspective, it would be hard to argue that our measure is tapping something very different than demands-abilities fit as assessed by Cable and DeRue's measure, due to the near synonymy of the concomitant items, respectively "My current job fits my knowledge and skills" and "The match is very good between the demands of my job and my personal skills" (Cable and DeRue, 2002).

Also, in spite of psychometric advantages of multiple-item scales, there are several research domains that identified single-item measures with adequate content validity such as on global self-esteem, satisfaction, and well-being (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Robins et al. (2001) argue that single self-report measures can be adequate when pertaining to constructs that are i) unidimensional in content, ii) reflect primarily subjective experiences and iii) are highly schematized by individuals, that is repeatedly activated. Perceived demands-abilities fit is likely to be chronically accessible, as it is a critical factor in a wide range of work situations. Such fit has a subjective nature and is unidimensional. If we take these points together with the findings reported in this study, this may suggest that perceived demands-abilities fit might suitably be assessed with a single-item measure. Further research on this is needed.

Furthermore, this study set out to investigate change over time. However, for truly *longitudinal* research more than two waves are needed (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Singer & Willett, 2003). Specifically, Singer and Willett (2003) argue that studies that employ two waves of data collection, such as ours, are only marginally better than cross-sectional studies because they do not allow for generating an understanding of the type of change (i.e., whether it is immediate, steady, or delayed) and because they confound true change with measurement error. With regard to the former, our study established a relationship between

change in career initiative and change in perceived demands-abilities fit, however we cannot rule out the possibility that changes in perceived demands-abilities fit preceded changes in career initiative. Indeed, from a theoretical perspective one can argue that proactive behaviors not only affect the level of perceived-demands-abilities fit, but also that fit triggers career initiative to resolve misfit (Devloo et al., 2011; Simmering et al., 2003; Yu & Davis, 2016; De Stobbeleir, De Boeck, & Dries, 2016). Our design is however not strong enough to rule out alternative explanations or reverse causality. Finally, our study did not allow for the testing of non-linear growth in our independent and dependent variables. Longitudinal research with three or more time points is therefore needed to disentangle true growth from measurement error and to better capture the nature of the dynamic relationships between career behaviors and perceived demands-abilities fit over time (Schmitt, Den Hartog & Belschak, 2016).

Regarding turnover, the present study allowed us to follow up individuals' perceived demands-abilities fit after acquiring a new job. The data thereby add to the literature on turnover and PE fit by allowing us to assess changes in demands-abilities fit among individuals who switched jobs. Yet the present study is limited in that we chose not to disentangle voluntary and involuntary turnover because i) this would have further complicated the modeling constraints as discussed in the results section and ii) required alternative antecedent measures, that were not measured. That is, although voluntary and involuntary turnover are both likely to be fueled by (perceived) demands-abilities misfit, differential processes may be in effect in relation to proactive career behavior and the acquirement of a new job that provides the individual with a better fit. A theoretical basis for such differential relations may be found in the work of De Stobbeleir et al. (2016) who distinguish between  $D > A$  Fit and  $D < A$  Fit. Future research could examine the hypothesis that the former is related to voluntary turnover and the latter to involuntary turnover. In addition,

it would be interesting to explore whether personal attributes and environmental characteristics such as alternative and appealing job opportunities predict which strategy people may employ to optimize their fit, that is, either within or outside the boundaries of their employing organization.

In conclusion, the present study supports the premise that perceived demands-abilities fit fluctuates over time and that individuals who engage in proactive career behaviors are more likely to acquire a better match with their job in the long term. This finding is relevant for both theory and practice given that perceived demands-abilities fit is a critical driver of employee behavior and attitudes that benefit both individuals and their organizations (Kristof-Brown, et al., 2005). Identifying changes in the degree of demands-abilities fit over time underscores the need for a dynamic approach to PE fit research. The dynamics of fit is of topical interest given that organizations increasingly rely on a flexible workforce to meet altering demands in the organization's environment and employees bear greater responsibility for ensuring their employability within these dynamic environments (Waterman, 1994; Frese & Fay, 2001). Proactive career behavior may help to better understand how employees and their organizations can address these challenges.

# CHAPTER 4

## **The proactive employee: Champion and Rebel?**

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Academy of Management and published in the Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings:

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I would like to thank the students for their support in collecting the data that is reported on in this study.

## **Abstract**

The aim of the current research is to explore desirable as well as less desirable outcomes generated by proactive individuals in the eyes of their supervisor. To address this issue we conducted two multi-source studies in which we not only explored whether proactivity is related to performance but also whether proactive employees may incite disharmony or disagreement and may even engage in dysfunctional behaviors, as these have been proposed as potential costs of being proactive (e.g., Bateman & Crant, 1999; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Bolino et al., 2010; Campbell, 2000). In Study 1 we found that proactive personality relates positively to overall job performance and to supervisor-employee conflict. While curvilinear relationships were expected for both, this was only found for conflict. In Study 2 we assessed whether this also held when using a more differentiated performance construct. We found that proactive personality relates positively to task performance and OCB, as well as to counterproductive work behavior, and that the expected curvilinear effects only occurred for counterproductive work behavior. Overall, these studies revealed that highly proactive individuals are typically perceived as performing better than their less proactive counterparts, but at the same time risk being seen by their supervisors as fueling more interpersonal conflict and behaving more counterproductively. Finally, both studies assessed the role of relationship quality in the proactivity-outcome relationship and showed that supervisor affective regard toward the employee has a profound effect on the relationship between proactive personality and the various outcomes.

## Introduction

Dynamic, decentralized, and complex work environments require employees who are willing and able to go beyond narrowly defined task requirements. Particularly in light of the uncertain and dynamic nature of the contemporary work environment, jobs consisting of highly detailed and prescribed tasks that are fully planned out by management are less effective. Instead, the changing conditions and demands this environment imposes increases the need for the organization of work to be flexible in order to facilitate adaptation and innovation (Griffin, Neal, Parker, & 2007). Consequently, many organizations nowadays rely more heavily on employees to show initiative and take self-directed actions. Accordingly, employee proactivity has come to be seen as a desirable asset. These developments imply that employees who engage in anticipatory, self-initiated actions to impact their work environment are increasingly likely to generate the favorable conditions needed to attain effective organizational performance (e.g. Crant, 2000; Grant & Parker, 2009).

With the growing importance of this topic, proactivity has started receiving considerable attention in diverse streams of organizational research (Bindl & Parker, 2017; Parker, Wang, & Liao, 2019) such as job performance (e.g. Crant, 1995; Thompson, 2005; Tornau & Frese, 2013 Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), empowerment (e.g. Campbell, 2000; Grant & Parker, 2009), careers (e.g. Fuller & Marler, 2009; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012), entrepreneurship (e.g., Becherer & Maurer, 1999; Crant, 1996), socialization (e.g. Frese, Garst, Fay, 2007), and innovation (e.g. Howell, 2005; Kickul & Gundry, 2002; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001). These streams of literature have commonly identified proactivity as an important component of performance and career success (cf. Crant, 2000; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Seibert et al., 2001) and have provided substantial evidence of the positive effects of proactivity whether it is conceptualized as a broad

personality trait, or in terms of specific behaviors (e.g., Fuller & Marler, 2009; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Tornau & Frese, 2013; Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010).

Yet, despite the many desirable outcomes that proactivity has been found to bring about, there may also be a downside to it. For instance, proactive employees may, even with the best intentions, take initiatives that are misguided, may fall short, or upset relations when challenging the status quo (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b). Even though scholars have repeatedly argued that proactivity is unlikely to be an unmitigated benefit (c.f. Bateman & Crant, 1999; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b; Bolino, Turnley, & Anderson, 2017; Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001), published research to date has hardly documented this potential darker side of proactivity. Rather than tackling mixed effects, as Grant and Ashford (2008) have advocated, most studies only briefly acknowledge the possibility of negative (side) effects but subsequently tend to portray proactivity as consistently and positively related to desirable individual and organizational outcomes (see Chan, 2006; De Stobbeleir et al., 2010; Grant, 2013; and Grant et al., 2009 for notable exceptions). Moreover, to the extent that studies have explored and provided valuable insights on the potential undesirable consequences of proactivity, research has tended to focus on isolated effects of proactivity instead of addressing proactivity as a potential double-edged sword that may simultaneously produce both beneficial and harmful effects (see Bolino et al., 2017 for a review).

Specifically, the few studies that have addressed the potential downside of proactivity, predominantly explored these effects by indicating contextual factors that influence the relationship between proactivity and performance. However, 'less of a positive construct' (e.g. lower performance levels) only partially redresses the aforementioned imbalance and omits altogether the negatively framed outcomes that are no less likely to occur. Specifically, the conceptual work of different authors suggests that taking a proactive stance potentially upsets interpersonal relationships and can be experienced as counterproductive or as an expression of

rebellion (Bateman & Crant, 1999; Burris, 2012; Campbell, 2000; Chan, 2006; Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant, 2013; Morisson & Phelps, 1999; Seibert et al., 2001). Proactive people assert themselves and go against the status quo, thus even while performing well, this may simultaneously be seen as rocking the boat, antagonizing, or being troublesome (e.g., Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant et al, 2011). In this regard, authors have called for a more balanced approach in which this potentially undesirable side is incorporated (e.g., Belschak, Den Hartog, & Fay, 2010; Bolino et al., 2010; Bolino et al., 2017). In the current investigation, we therefore challenge the dominant ‘more is always better’ assumption and consider both positive and negative ramifications of employee proactivity simultaneously.

The aim of the current multi-source study is to explore both desirable as well as undesirable outcomes generated by proactive individuals in the eyes of their supervisor. To address this issue we conducted two studies in which we not only explored how proactivity is related to different performance dimensions, namely overall job performance, task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior, but also whether proactive employees may incite disharmony or disagreement (conflict) or even engage in dysfunctional behaviors (counterproductive behavior), as these have been proposed as potential costs of a proactive stance (e.g., Bateman & Crant, 1999; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Bolino et al., 2010; Campbell, 2000).

Specifically, Study 1 tested the proposition that employee proactivity has an overall positive association with overall job performance as rated by the supervisor. Recent work suggests that researchers often implicitly assume linear relations while non-linear ones may be likely (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Le et al., 2011). On the basis of theoretical considerations and challenging the often implicit assumption of linearity, here we explored the idea that the positive effect of proactive personality on job performance may weaken at higher levels of proactivity. Furthermore, Study 1 tested the proposition that even though proactive employees

may generally bring about positive change, they may also incite disharmony and upset the interpersonal relationships they have with their supervisors, resulting in supervisors simultaneously experiencing more conflict and disagreement with such employees, especially at excessive levels of proactivity.

In Study 2, we aimed to test the robustness of the premise that proactive personality has an overall, yet potentially attenuating, positive association with performance and retested the possibility of a non-linear effect of proactive personality on performance using more specific subcomponents of overall performance, namely task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). In addition, and following the Study 1 rationale that proactivity may also be associated with undesired outcomes, we explored the association of proactive personality with supervisor rated counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Study 2 thereby not only addressed the question of whether proactive individuals perform better than less proactive individuals on task performance and organizational citizenship, but also whether proactive individuals simultaneously engage in behaviors that are considered to be dysfunctional (or misguided) by their supervisors.

Finally, both studies took the role of employee-subordinate relationship quality into account as a proposed contingency in the proactivity-outcome relationship. Specifically, the supervisor's affective regard towards (or in other words their liking of) the focal employee was modelled as a moderator of the relationships between employee proactive personality and supervisor-rated performance dimensions because supervisor's affective regard has been found to have a nontrivial impact on performance appraisals and on the quality of the working relationship (Dulebohn, Wu, & Liao, 2017).

## **STUDY 1**

Proactivity is generally defined as “taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to

present conditions” (Crant, 2000, p.436). It thereby has three core defining characteristics, namely being future-focused, change-oriented, and self-starting (Parker & Bindl, 2017). The degree to which people engage in proactive behaviors differs across individuals and situations. It is manifested in numerous forms of proactive behavior (or ways of behaving) (Torneau & Frese, 2013; Parker & Collins, 2010) as well as in terms of a relative stable disposition (Bateman & Crant, 1993), that is, as a personality trait. The trait component, proactive personality, is the focal construct of this paper. Proactive people have a tendency to “scan for opportunities, show initiative, take action, and persevere until they reach closure by bringing about change” (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p. 105). This personality dimension has been found to be meaningfully distinct from other personality dimensions (Spitzmuller, Sin, Howe, & Fatimah, 2015) and has been shown to be related to a host of proactive behaviors such as expressing voice, taking charge, expanding roles, crafting jobs, and personal initiative (e.g., Crant, 2000; Seibert, et al., 2001; Thomas, et al., 2010). Moreover, research has shown that proactive personality predicts key outcomes such as job performance and career advancement (see Fuller & Marler, 2009; Ng et al., 2005; Tornau & Frese, 2013; Spitzmuller et al., 2015 for meta-analyses on these topics).

Individuals who score higher on proactive personality are thought to be more inclined to anticipate, create, and seize opportunities that contribute to job and organizational performance in dynamic and decentralized workplaces (Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008). By expressing a wide range of proactive behaviors, such as taking charge, feedback seeking, network building, strategic scanning, job crafting, voice, and career initiative (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005) employees who are high on proactive personality seem to forge a better match between their personal strengths and needs and the work environment, as well as improve the organization’s strategy with its environment and internal work methods and procedures (e.g. Bateman & Crant, 1993; Parker & Collins, 2010). Hence,

individuals who are inclined to act proactively (i.e. who have a proactive personality) are generally portrayed as individuals who create work environments that are conducive to their success and that contribute to organizational performance (Crant, 2000; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). Empirical research supports this, as several meta-analyses have reported positive associations between proactive personality and job performance (e.g. Fuller & Marler, 2009; Tornau & Frese, 2013), as well as specific facets of job performance such as task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Spitzmuller et al., 2015).

At the same time however, and as mentioned earlier, scholars have pointed out that taking a proactive stance comes with potential risks (Bateman & Crant, 1999; Campbell, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001). Given that proactive behaviors imply change and challenge to the status quo, they may interfere with work routines and can be construed as inappropriate or even threatening by supervisors and coworkers who may be directly affected by such change (e.g., Bolino, et al., 2010; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). For instance, a proactive employee, who constantly pushes for new ideas, may come across as someone who is too critical, rebellious, or even counterproductive, instead of someone who is a highly committed, independent contributor (e.g., Campbell, 2000). Hence, proactive workers may not only alter characteristics in the work environment, but may also damage professional relationships as they push new ideas and challenge the status quo.

Moreover, too much or misguided independent employee initiative potentially produces undesirable effects (Bateman & Crant, 1999; Bolino et al., 2017; Campbell, 2000; Chan, 2006). A proactive stance may bring about different undesirable effects as proactive individuals may come across as ‘rocking the boat’ (Grant, 2013) and as challenging authority (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b; Burriss, 2012; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Accordingly, proactive behaviors and personal initiative meant to bring about constructive change may not always be welcomed or appreciated (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant et al., 2009), even though it is

generally intended to be constructive and considered to be a valuable resource for organizations.

### **The initiative paradox**

Establishing (e.g., through personnel selection) and encouraging a proactive workforce inevitably comes with some unpredictability (Bolino, 2010; Campbell, 2000). Expecting employees to take initiative, show judgment, and to go beyond formal job requirements in order to attain a competitive advantage in a complex and dynamic work environment may thus also come at a cost (Campbell, 2000). Employees who show initiative and independent judgment bring new ideas and change, but also increase the likelihood of the occurrence of unanticipated consequences and possibly unwanted effects (Bolino, 2010; Campbell, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Morrison, 2006; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Because proactive behaviors typically challenge how things stand, proactive individuals may not only go beyond narrowly defined task requirements in desired ways, but may also go beyond or even against what management desires (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001).

Campbell (2000) refers to this issue as the initiative paradox. He argues that employees are expected to demonstrate independent judgment and take initiative to create constructive change, while they are “simultaneously expected to think and act like their bosses” (Campbell, 2000, p.57). This paradox implies that self-initiated actions of employees may only be deemed appropriate and desirable by supervisors when they mirror management’s own diagnostics and actions. Similarly, Seibert and colleagues (2001) have found that not all proactive behaviors were positively related to salary progression or promotions. Instead, their study indicated that voice, a specific manifestation of proactive behavior, was negatively related to objective career success. A possible explanation Seibert and colleagues (2001) posit is that employees may experience negative repercussions in terms of their career success when they are perceived as overly challenging, too critical or imply criticism of management. Based on their findings,

Seibert and colleagues. (2001) stated that: “Managers want empowered employees who act to create positive change in their organizations, and yet appear to punish employees whom they perceive to be too critical or too prone to draw attention to problems without also offering solutions” (p. 867).

This paradox and the associated negative effects may occur for several reasons. Firstly, perspectives on the appropriateness and desirability of proactive actions are likely to differ across multiple stakeholders and goals (Chan, 2006; Grant et al., 2011; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Morrison, 2006). Proactive behaviors may serve different interests and accessibility to contextual information (Bizzi, 2017) may vary across stakeholders thereby influencing the (perceived) effectiveness of proactive actions that have been initiated and directed solely on the basis of the actor’s judgment (in contrast to tasks that are fully laid out by management). In this regard, individual attempts may fall short and various stakeholders can view the implications of proactive behavior differently as each may have different interests (Bolino, et al., 2017; Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

Not only may the proactive employee have an all-together different agenda than the organization, problems may even arise when substantial goal alignment exists. Self-initiated actions seem particularly susceptible to judgment errors and disagreement, given that they typically occur outside the bounds of the defined contract and rely on independent judgment (Campbell, 2000). Employees, coworkers and supervisors may therefore differentially construe the value and contribution of a specific course of action, particularly in such ‘weak’ situations (Mischel, 1977; Seibert et al., 1999). Supporting this line of reasoning, proactivity ratings pertaining to a single individual were found to differ across various rating sources (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007; Frese et al, 1997). Specifically, scholars have argued that various rating sources are prone to consider different criteria (Chan, 2006; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007)

and that observer ratings may be colored due to a bias deriving from the somewhat rebellious nature of self-initiated behaviors (Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker & Collins, 2010).

Second, proactive personality has been found to be related to a need for dominance (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Accordingly, highly proactive individuals are inclined to exert control and influence, which can unbalance the hierarchical relationships they have with their superiors (cf. Grant, et al., 2011). Moreover, as they are inclined to persist (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Frese & Fay, 2001), employees with high levels of proactive personality may fuel conflict when pursuing actions that are considered as misjudged or unconstructive in the eyes of their supervisor. Hence, even though perseverance can be a desirable asset to overcome obstacles in order to accomplish goals (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001), it might also fuel conflict when subordinates and supervisors hold different views. We therefore posit that supervisors are more likely to encounter conflicts or feel they have a lot of disagreements in managing highly proactive employees as opposed to less proactive individuals.

A related implication of proactive personality, is that highly proactive individuals may come across as overly challenging (cf. Frese & Fay, 2001; Seibert et al., 2001). Proactive individuals are inclined to deviate from existing routines and can thereby go against the grain (Grant & Ashford, 2008). By challenging the current state of affairs, they question routines and traditional views and risk being characterized as rebellious and irritating (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Seibert, et al., 2001). Also, drawing from the creativity and innovation literature, it is argued that individuals who challenge the status quo run the risk of falling into conflict with coworkers as they may obstruct established practices. Specifically, Janssen (2003) found that innovative individuals encounter conflict with peers and argued that changes in work methods may bring insecurity, stress or threaten status as people's habits and familiar practices are challenged (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). This too might be the case in relation to employee-supervisor when employees challenge them and attempt to

drive change through bottom-up initiatives. Supervisors may therefore perceive proactive individuals as undermining of authority, and therewith as a threat to their status (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Grant, et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2001).

Third, from a resource based perspective, highly proactive individuals may deplete resources thereby generating costs that may start to outweigh the benefits. Strauss and colleagues (2017) recently indicated that proactivity may be energizing on the one hand, but on the other hand may under certain conditions also result in employee strain. Alternatively, we posit that a resource based perspective may help explain why highly proactive individuals engage in behaviors that are deemed inappropriate by supervisors and that thereby generate negative returns or attenuating levels of performance evaluations. Specifically, as highly proactive employees spend time on pursuing actions that are self-initiated, they may deplete resources such as time and energy which at a certain point are likely to come at the expense of core tasks (Bergeron, 2007; Crant, 2000). Hence, proactive employees may be perceived as slacking duties when employment hours are spent on self-initiated actions at the expense of prescribed tasks (Bolino et al., 2010). In this regard we posit that supervisor's may not always judge highly proactive employees as constructive and contributing to group goals, particularly when their actions come at the expense of prescribed activities.

In sum, highly proactive individuals are likely to deviate from conventional routines and initiate actions that may originally not have been anticipated by managers. Proactive employees therefore do not only possess enterprising qualities that produce substantial performance benefits (for both themselves and the organizations they work for), but they can also instigate subordinate-supervisor conflict by acting outside prescribed boundaries and deviating from the accepted framework in which things are typically done (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant et al., 2009). We therefore hypothesize that proactive employees tend

to reach higher levels of overall job performance, but also provoke more conflict with their superiors.

*Hypothesis 1: Proactive personality is positively related to supervisor rated employee-supervisor conflict (H1a) and overall employee job performance (H1b).*

## **Nonlinear relationships of proactive personality with conflict and overall job performance**

Recent critiques in the field point out that researchers often implicitly assume linear relations and typically fail to recognize a need for balance between deficiency and excess (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Le et al., 2011). Several scholars have therefore advocated greater consideration of the nature of proposed relations and to include the possibilities of conditional effects, limits and countervailing mechanisms rather than implicitly assuming linear effects (e.g., Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Pierce & Aguinis, 2011). This implicit assumption of linearity of relationships between predictors and outcomes comes with the risk of producing inaccurate conclusions of unmitigated benefits by overlooking the possibility of diminishing effects or even negative returns at high levels of personality traits (Le et al., 2011). We propose that the need to balance deficiency and excess is likely to also hold for proactive personality. Particularly in the case of proactive personality there are grounds on the basis of which non-linear relationships with conflict and performance can be expected.

We propose that proactivity is generally likely to be considered as constructive up to a certain point, beyond which excessive levels of proactivity may start to be perceived by supervisors as overly challenging. Whereas moderate levels of proactivity may be welcomed, highly proactive employees increase the risk of going beyond or against the intent of management and unbalancing the hierarchical relationships they have with their superiors.

Excessive levels of proactivity are therefore more likely than moderate proactivity to be seen as blurring authority lines. Hence, countervailing effects of proactivity in terms of inciting more conflict may be more of an issue for excessively proactive individuals rather than for low or moderately proactive people.

*Hypothesis 2a: The positive effect of proactivity on employee-supervisor conflict is curvilinear and stronger at higher levels of proactivity.*

In addition, we propose that proactive personality may also have a non-linear effect on performance evaluations. Although researchers have thus far reported only linear relationships between proactive personality and performance appraisals, we argue that excessive levels of proactivity may not add much more value to performance beyond moderate levels and may even be considered to be non-constructive. Along similar lines and as noted above, Bolino and colleagues (2010) argue, from a resource based perspective, that excessive levels of proactivity may deplete resources such as time and energy, and possibly come at the expense of core tasks (Bergeron, 2007; Crant, 2000). Given the importance of a proactive approach to contemporary jobs, we argue that in general, management will encourage and value proactivity in the workforce. However, given that highly proactive individuals may detract too many resources from prescribed tasks, by for example spending a lot of time and effort to the pursuit of self-initiated actions, their overall performance levels may be attenuated. We therefore posit that the positive association between proactive personality and overall job performance may attenuate at excessive levels of proactive personality.

*Hypothesis 2b: The positive relationship between proactive personality and overall job performance is curvilinear and weaker at higher levels of proactivity.*

### **Moderation of affective regard**

The extent to which proactive employees evoke higher ratings of performance and supervisor-subordinate conflict is likely to differ across individuals and situations. For instance, employees who have a poor performance history or a lack of general skills, incur image costs and actually receive worse performance evaluations when they engage in proactive behaviors (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Chan, 2006; De Stobbeleir et al., 2010). Thus far, however, studies that have scrutinized the potential costs of proactivity have focused primarily on employee characteristics. Indeed, the role of appraiser characteristics have largely been neglected.

Positive affective regard towards an individual, or liking, has been found to be a central component in the formation of impressions and attitudes (cf. Srull & Wyer, 1989; Dulebohn, et al., 2017). Researchers have developed a number of information-processing models to describe the ways in which information is processed and judgments of others are construed (e.g. Allen & Rush, 1998; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). These models suggest that people are inclined to use simplified information processing when evaluating others, rather than processing all available features objectively. Evaluative concepts such as schemata, prototypes, or implicit theories pertaining to the target, structure information processing and color interpretations of the target's behavior (e.g. Judge & Ferris, 1993; Srull & Wyer, 1989).

Affective reactions towards an individual usually serve as a basis for these processes (e.g. Judge & Ferris, 1993; Robbins & DeNisi, 1994; Srull & Wyer, 1989). Hence the appraisal of others' behavior or intentions does not only depend on objective criteria but also on subjective reactions and biases (Dipboye, 1985; Cardy & Dobbins, 1994; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Zajonc, 1980). Particularly in the field of performance appraisal, researchers have found that supervisors' affective regard influences their judgments of subordinates. Specifically,

Lefkowitz (2000) concluded that a rater's affective regard for an individual is associated with higher performance evaluations, greater halo effects, reduced accuracy and less inclination to punish poor performance. Accordingly, Dulebohn and colleagues (2017) highlighted the importance of taking affective regard of the supervisor towards the employee into consideration in research on supervisor-subordinate dyads pertaining to performance and OCB ratings. Affective regard, although highly correlated with leader-member exchange (LMX), is different in that it has a clear directionality and does not require a mutual exchange relationship.

Here, we argue that affective regard has a particularly profound influence on the reactions proactive individuals elicit. Proactive individuals are inclined to act outside the confines of a narrowly defined job description and may thereby create ambiguous appraisal settings in which supervisors may draw upon (like-dislike) schemata (c.f. Dobbins & Russell, 1986). Parker and colleagues (2006; 2009; see also Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b) suggested that proactivity entails a personal risk, as individuals are acting outside predefined roles and challenging the status quo. We propose this to be more strongly so for individuals for whom supervisors hold low affective regard. When a supervisor holds low affective regard towards an individual, a proactive stance is more likely to be framed in negative rather than positive terms. For 'less liked' individuals, acting outside a specified framework is more likely to be perceived as irritating and as inciting disharmony. In contrast, supervisors might tolerate proactivity and consider it as less threatening or conflict-oriented when it is displayed by employees for whom they hold positive affective regard. We therefore hypothesize that supervisor's affective regard will moderate the relationship between proactive personality and conflict such that the relationship between proactivity and conflict will be particularly pronounced for those individuals for whom the supervisor holds low affective regard.

*Hypothesis 3a: Supervisor affective regard moderates the relationship between employee proactive personality and supervisor reported conflict, such that this relationship is stronger for employees for whom supervisors hold lower affective regard.*

Similarly, we expect that a supervisor's affect towards his or her subordinate also moderates the effect of proactive personality on performance evaluations. Given that positive affective regard not only elicits higher performance ratings, but also greater halo effects, reduced accuracy and a disinclination to punish poor performance (Lefkowitz, 2000), we expect that proactivity coming from individuals for whom supervisors hold high affective regard, is more likely to be framed in positive rather than negative terms. Moreover, even in case they show misguided or unwanted initiatives, supervisors are likely to be less inclined to 'punish' liked individuals by giving poor ratings. Accordingly, supervisor evaluations may be particularly susceptible to the influence of affective regard when appraising proactive individuals and consequently we expect a stronger relationship between proactivity and overall job performance evaluations for better liked employees.

*Hypothesis 3b: Supervisor affective regard moderates the relationship between proactive personality and overall job performance evaluations, such that this relationship is stronger for employees for whom supervisors hold higher affective regard.*

## Method

### Sample and Procedure

A diverse sample of employees from different industries and professional backgrounds were approached and asked for their cooperation. Respondents received two surveys (one for themselves and one for their direct supervisor), two separate stamped return envelopes and an accompanying letter that explained the purpose of the study and stressed confidentiality and anonymity of participation. In order to collect dyadic data, employees were asked to pass on a survey package (including an invitation letter, the survey, and a return envelope) to their direct supervisor. In this way, employees and supervisors did not have access to one another's responses. No supervisor rated more than one employee, meaning the data was not nested. In total data from 252 matched dyads were obtained. Participants worked in a variety of industries in the Netherlands, such as healthcare, national government, education, retail, IT and financial services. The employee sample included 256 respondents with an average age of 35.13 years ( $SD = 12.04$ ) and an average company tenure of seven years ( $M = 7.39$ ,  $SD = 8.85$ ). Fifty-one percent of the employees were male. Regarding education, 66.5 percent had completed a degree in applied science or higher and 24.2 percent had completed a degree in lower vocational education. Most supervisors (74.80 %) were male and the average age of the supervisor sample was 43.49 years ( $SD = 9.96$ ). The majority of supervisors had daily (66.28 %) or at least weekly contact (26.74 %) with their employee and had been supervising their employee for 4 years on average ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 4.24$ ).

### Measures

The employee survey included measures of proactive personality and control variables, namely job autonomy and demographics. The supervisor-survey included measures of employee-supervisor conflict, overall job performance, affective regard, and the control variables relationship duration and frequency of contact between the employee and the

supervisor. All items were translated into Dutch by means of a back-translation procedure. Unless indicated otherwise, all responses were scored on a seven-point Likert scale anchored at 1=*completely disagree* and 7=*completely agree*. Cronbach's alphas are reported on the diagonal in Table 1.

**Proactive Personality.** Proactive personality was measured using the proactive personality scale (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Specifically, the shortened version used by Parker, Williams and Turner (2006) was applied. An example item is 'I am always looking for better ways to do things'.

**Employee-Supervisor conflict.** The extent to which supervisors experienced conflict (e.g., disagreements or tensions) with their employees was measured using four items derived from the 'conflict with co-workers' scale of Janssen (2003). The scale was modified to be indicative of supervisor-employee conflict as opposed to co-worker conflict. An example item is: 'My employee has different ideas on work related issues'.

**Overall Job Performance.** Supervisors provided job performance ratings for their employee on a five item scale (Ashford & Black, 1996; Grant, et al., 2009). Items were introduced with the statement 'Thinking about the overall performance of the person you are rating, please indicate how you would rate him/her relative to others in the same/similar jobs on a percentage basis' (Grant et al., 2009). Responses were scored on a 10-point scale (1 = *bottom 10%* and 10=*top 10%*). Items referred to, for example, the quality of the employee's performance and the achievement of work goals.

**Affective regard.** The supervisor's affective regard towards the employee, or liking, was assessed with a four-item scale from Wayne and Ferris (1990). Example items are 'I get along well with this subordinate' and 'I like this subordinate very much'.

**Control variables.** In addition to the demographic variables employee age, gender, and company tenure, we controlled for potential confounding effects of job autonomy on the

criterion variables. Job autonomy is argued to affect the need or desirability of proactive behaviors in a given work setting (Thompson, 2005; Griffin et al., 2007) and is therefore included as a control variable. Job autonomy was assessed with a three-item measure derived from Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger, and Hemingway (2005). An example item is 'I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job' ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Furthermore, we controlled for relationship duration (in years) and frequency of contact between the employee and the supervisor (daily, weekly, monthly) as these variables may influence the supervisor-employee relationship (affective regard), the likelihood of having disagreements, and the opportunities supervisors have to evaluate the employee's performance (see e.g. Grant et al., 2009).

## **Results**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations. In line with expectations, proactive personality was positively related to overall job performance as well as to conflict (Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b). The relationship between performance evaluations and conflict was negative. Affective regard had relatively high correlations with overall job performance ratings and reported levels of conflict.

Table 1.  
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Cronbach's Alpha.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-									
2. Age	35.13	12.04	.01	-								
3. Tenure	7.39	8.85	-.07	.69**	-							
4. Job autonomy	5.44	1.03	.04	.20**	.05	.85						
5. Relationship duration	4.02	4.24	-.01	.18**	.19**	-.01	-					
6. Contact frequency	1.41	.62	.06	.16*	.17**	-.00	-.04	-				
7. Proactive personality	5.25	.81	-.02	.01	-.03	.31**	-.15	.03	.76			
8. Affective regard	5.80	.86	.09	-.05	-.06	.20**	.13	-.05	.03	.81		
9. Performance	7.58	1.14	-.00	.10	.07	.25**	-.01	.03	.20**	.49**	.89	
10. Conflict	3.16	1.23	-.07	.04	.04	-.05	.13*	.05	.15*	-.33**	-.24**	.84

Notes. N = 244-258. Cronbach's alphas are reported on the diagonal. Values for age, tenure, and relationship duration expressed in years.

<sup>a</sup>Gender was coded 0 = male and 1 = female.

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01.

With a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) the discriminant validity of the measures were examined. Analyses were conducted on the basis of all individual items of the predictor and criterion measures. Items were set to load on the corresponding factors, that is a four-factor model consisting of proactive personality, affective regard, overall job performance, and conflict. This four-factor model was compared to a model in which items of the overall job performance measure were set to load on the same factor as items of the affective regard scale (a three-factor model). In addition, comparisons were made to a model in which all items were set to load on the corresponding rating source (a two-factor model) and a model in which all items were set to load on one single factor (a single-factor model). Hence, the hypothesized four-factor model (consisting of proactive personality, affective regard, overall job performance and conflict) was compared to a three factor model (affective regard and overall job performance loading on a single factor), a two-factor model (affective regard, overall job performance and conflict loading on a single factor), and a one-factor model. In support of the validity of the measures, fit indices showed that the four-factor model had a satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 279.20$ ,  $df = 129$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .93, RMSEA = .06) and significantly better fit to the data than a three factor model ( $\chi^2 = 580.86$ ,  $df = 132$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .79, RMSEA = .11), a two factor model ( $\chi^2 = 965.70$ ,  $df = 134$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .61, RMSEA = .15), and a one factor model ( $\chi^2 = 1212.98$ ,  $df = 135$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .49, RMSEA = .18).

We used polynomial regressions to investigate the hypothesized non-linear associations between proactive personality and the conflict and overall job performance criteria (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). To facilitate interpretation, all independent variables were standardized (cf. Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen et al., 2003). In the first step of the regression analysis, covariates were entered to control for their relations with the criterion and predictor variables. In the second step we entered proactive personality ( $X$ ) and in the third step its

quadratic term ( $X^2$ ), representing the proposed curvilinear effect. The existence of a curvilinear relationship is considered to be supported by the data when the quadratic term explains significant additional variance beyond the linear term (Cohen et al., 2003). To test the hypothesized interaction effect of affective regard on the curvilinear relationships of proactive personality with respectively conflict and overall job performance, we used the following equation:  $\hat{Y} = B_1X + B_2X^2 + B_3Z + B_4XZ + B_5X^2Z + B_0$  (cf. Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen et al., 2003). A fourth and fifth step were thus added to the regression equation entering the variable affective regard ( $Z$ ) in Step 4 and its cross-products with the linear ( $XZ$ ) and quadratic term ( $X^2Z$ ) of proactive personality in Step 5. Regression analyses were run separately for conflict and overall job performance ratings.

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis of conflict and performance evaluations as a function of proactive personality and affective regard. Regression diagnostics and standardized residual statistics indicated no serious violations of model assumptions. Furthermore, variance inflation factor (VIF) values indicated no significant multicollinearity issues ( $VIF < 2.03$ ) (cf. Cohen et al., 2003). The control variables in Step 1 did not explain significant variance in conflict. Omission of the control variables did not substantially alter the findings of the regression analyses nor the conclusions reported vis-à-vis the hypotheses. Proactive personality in the second step and the quadratic term in the third step did account for significant variance such that the quadratic term explained incremental variance beyond the linear term. This supports a curvilinear association between proactive personality and conflict (Hypothesis 2a).

Table 2  
*Results of Regression Analyses*

Predictor	Criterion					
	Conflict			Performance evaluations		
	$\beta$ (entry)	$\beta$ (final)	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ (entry)	$\beta$ (final)	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1						
Age	.02	-.02	.03	.04	.05	.07
Gender <sup>a</sup>	-.06	-.02		-.03	-.07	
Tenure	-.01	.00		.03	.06	
Job autonomy	-.04	-.02		.25**	.09	
Relationship duration	.14*	.19*		-.04	-.10	
Contact frequency	.04	.04		.02	.04	
Step 2						
Proactive personality	.22*	.23*	.04**	.14*	.15*	.02*
Step 3						
Proactive personality <sup>2</sup>	.13*	.09	.02*	.03	.07	.00
Step 4						
Affective regard	-.34**	-.24*	.10**	.49**	.47*	.22**
Step 5						
Proactive personality x affective regard	-.14*	-.14*	.03**	-.10	-.10	.01
Proactive personality <sup>2</sup> x affective regard	-.15*	-.15*		.03	.03	
$R^2$			.22			.32
Adjusted $R^2$			.18			.28
$F$			5.89**			9.71**
$Df$			11, 232			11, 232

Note. Regression coefficients shown are from the equation at the step indicated ( $\beta$  entry) and from the final equation ( $\beta$  final).

<sup>a</sup>Gender coded as 0 = male and 1 = female.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

To test whether affective regard moderates this curvilinear relationship we added affective regard (Step 4) and its interaction terms (Step 5). The quadratic by linear interaction term was significant. These results support the hypothesis that there is a non-linear association between proactive personality and conflict which is moderated by supervisor affective regard towards the employee (hypothesis 3a). To facilitate interpretation, we plotted the effect of proactive personality on conflict at three levels of affective regard (see Figure 1). This was accomplished using the unstandardized regression coefficients (cf. Aiken & West, 1991). The three lines represent low ( $-1 SD$ ), average ( $z\text{-score} = 0$ ) and high levels of affective regard ( $1 SD$ ).

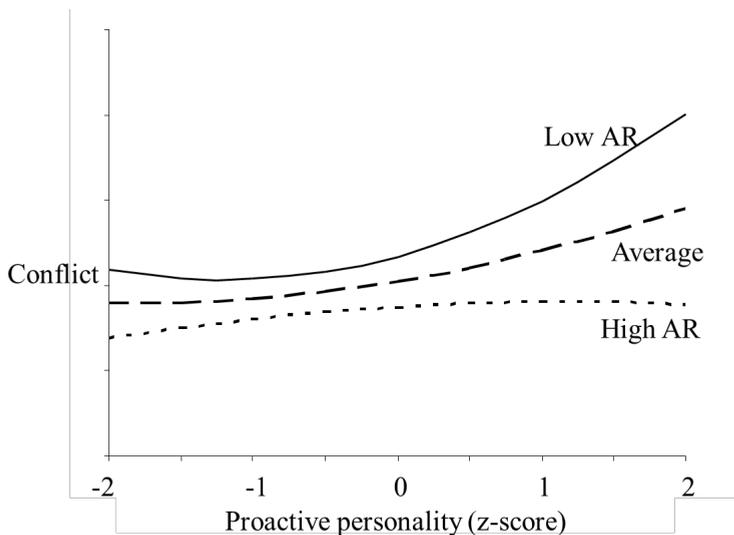


Figure 1. Relationship between Proactive personality and Conflict depicted at low ( $-1 SD$ ), average, and high ( $+1 SD$ ) levels of Affective Regard (AR).

To test the hypothesized effect of proactive personality on overall job performance and the moderating effect of affective regard on this relationship, the same procedure as for conflict was followed. In Step 2 the linear term was found to be significant (supporting hypothesis 1b), but the quadratic term in Step 3 did not explain significant variance beyond the linear term. Hypothesis 2b was therefore not supported. Results thus indicate a linear effect of proactive personality on job performance. In Step 4 and Step 5 we tested the moderating role of affective regard. Results show that affective regard has a significant main effect on job performance, but does not moderate the relationship between proactive personality and job performance. Hypothesis 3b was therewith rejected. Thus, highly proactive employees and those for whom supervisors have high affective regard received higher job performance ratings as compared to less proactive employees and employees for whom supervisors have lower affective regard (Table 2).

### **Discussion Study 1**

This study suggests that a proactive personality may not only relate to receiving higher performance ratings, but can also bring about disharmony between employees and their supervisors. The current study thereby provides empirical support for the proposition that proactivity can simultaneously relate to both desirable and undesirable outcomes. As Grant and Ashford (2008, p. 24) put it: “Insofar as proactive behavior involves expending additional effort, challenging the status quo, and disrupting or deviating from assigned tasks, prescribed roles, reified norms, accepted practices, and existing routines, researchers should expect to find mixed effects and unintended consequences...”. Our study provides initial support that such mixed effects can indeed occur.

Supporting hypothesis 1a, we found that proactive personality related positively to employee-supervisor conflict. Moreover, we found support for a curvilinear association between proactive personality and conflict (hypothesis 2a). Specifically, we found that highly

proactive individuals are especially and increasingly at risk of having a conflict with their supervisor. Furthermore, a supervisor's affective regard towards the employee has a profound effect on this relationship such that the effect of proactive personality on conflict differs substantially between employees for whom supervisors hold low as opposed to high affective regard (hypothesis 3a). These results suggest that it is undesirable, in terms of the ensuing conflict it gives rise to, for employees to stand out by being highly proactive when their supervisors hold low affective regard towards them. In contrast, employees for whom supervisors hold high affective regard do not seem at risk of disturbing the relationship with their supervisors through their proactivity, even when they are extremely proactive.

In line with the aforementioned previous research, the current study indicates a positive effect of proactive personality on performance (hypothesis 1b). In contrast to our expectation (hypothesis 2b), however, we found no support for a curvilinear association between proactivity and performance. Furthermore, we did not find support for the anticipated interaction with supervisor's affective regard (hypothesis 3b). However, affective regard did have an additional, large positive main effect on overall job performance such that employees for whom supervisor's held positive regard received better performance ratings as compared to less 'liked' employees (irrespective of their level of proactive personality). Thus, while there was no support for moderation, the direct effect of affective regard on performance evaluations emphasizes the weight of the interpersonal affective determinants in appraisal settings.

Notably, we found a positive relationship of proactive personality with both overall job performance ratings and employee-supervisor conflict. At the same time performance and conflict were negatively related. This suggests that the nature of the initiative paradox is such that high levels of employee proactivity do not lead to a reduction in desirable, but to an increase in undesirable outcomes. Furthermore, our results suggest that the role of the appraiser

and his or her affective regard towards the focal employee plays a critical role in the emergence of this effect.

## **STUDY 2**

In Study 1 we found initial support for the initiative paradox as proactive personality was not only associated with better performance appraisals, but also with higher levels of employee-supervisor conflict. In this second study, we build on these findings and try to test the robustness of the notion that proactive individuals may produce both advantageous as well as disadvantageous outcomes for the organization. Specifically, in we explore the impact of proactivity in relation to two more specific components of performance, namely task performance and OCB, which are both considered to contribute to organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, we take its relation with counterproductive behavior into account to test whether the positive relationship with perceived conflict found in Study 1 also holds for the broader and more performance related notion of CWB. As noted in Study 1, while we did find support for the proposed curvilinear relationship for conflict, we found no support for the proposition that the relationship between proactivity and performance is also curvilinear. The lack of support for this hypothesis may have resulted from the measurement generality of the criterion, that is our focus on overall job performance. Focusing on specific performance dimensions may yield a more nuanced understanding of the potential tradeoffs that proactive employees bring about and an increased likelihood of detecting such a nonlinear effect on the positive outcomes of proactivity, if it exists. Specifically, the coexistence of true positive and negative effects may remain undetected when using a general criterion measure. We therefore set out to tap into three commonly identified performance domains, namely task or in-role performance, organization citizenship behavior (OCB) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) (e.g. Motowidlo, 2003; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000).

Task or in-role performance refers to a set of behaviors that is considered to be part of one's formal job description and that contributes to the core of the organization (e.g. Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). A second dimension that is an important constituent of overall performance, is OCB which refers to discretionary behaviors that are not explicitly prescribed and required by the work role (Organ, 1997). These behaviors thereby go beyond formal job requirements, and are considered to be beneficial to the organization as they enhance the organizational "environment in which task performance takes place" (Organ, 1997, p. 95). Although the debate in the OCB literature (and the closely related concept of contextual performance) is yet to reach agreement on dimensionality and naming of various forms of OCB (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Choi, 2007; Li, Frese, & Haidar, 2017; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), Organ's (1988) dimensions have been widely adopted and are provided by sound measures (Podsakoff et al., 1990). We therefore build on this line of work. In the spirit of Campbell's (2000) rationale in managing workplace initiative (the initiative paradox), we focused on behaviors primarily aimed at contributing to the organization. That is citizenship behaviors that benefit the organization in general, i.e. OCB-O (Podsakoff et al., 1990). This dimension is predominantly targeted at the organization and is argued here to be more related to challenging dimensions of OCB in contrast to affiliative behaviors (OCB-I) (Choi, 2007). Moreover, with respect to the rating source for the current study, namely supervisors, OCB-O ratings are considered more appropriate (Ilies, Fulmer, Spitzmuller, & Johnson, 2009; LePine et al., 2002) because of the limited observational opportunities that supervisors may have with regard to behaviors that are aimed at other individuals in the organization (e.g., helping colleagues) as opposed to behaviors that are directly targeted at the organization and work processes.

Unlike OCB and task performance, counterproductive work behavior (CWB), or workplace deviance, describes behaviors that run counter to the organization's interests (cf.

Dalal, 2005; Sackett, Berry, Wiemann, & Laczo, 2006). These behaviors refer to any voluntary employee behavior that violates organizational norms and potentially harms the organization. Spector (2011) notes that multiple and distinct perspectives on CWB exist. Specifically, some researchers have adopted an organizational perspective so that CWB refers to those behaviors that violate organizational norms and interests (cf. Sackett & DeVore, 2002), whereas others have taken an employee perspective in which CWB refers to behaviors that are *intended* to harm the organization (Spector & Fox, 2005). For reasons similar to our focus on OCB-O, here we refer to CWB as acts that are considered to be counterproductive by the supervisor. We thus focus on perceived (counter)effects for the organization instead of employee intentions. Examples of such behaviors are noncompliant behavior such as slacking on duties as well as expressions of rebellion.

Though OCB and CWB both refer to volitional non-task behaviors, they cannot be considered polar opposites along the same continuum. They make up distinct performance dimensions as they differentially relate to antecedents and may in fact co-occur rather than being mutually exclusive (cf. Dalal, 2005; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Sackett et al., 2006).

### **Proactive personality and task performance**

Similar to the rationale discussed in Study 1, and in line with previous research (Crant, 1995; Fuller & Marler, 2009; Grant et al., 2009; Seibert et al., 1999; Thompson, 2005), we argue that more proactive individuals generally receive higher performance evaluations. Although in Study 1 we found no support for a nonlinear association of proactivity with overall job performance, this may have been due to the undifferentiated measure we used for performance. Here, we argue that from a resource based perspective an attenuating effect may be especially profound when it comes to task performance. Heavily invested time and effort in self-guided actions may come at the expense of time and resources assigned to core activities.

In this respect, excessive levels of independent judgment and initiative may deplete resources and detract from performing high on assigned tasks that are part of one's formal job description (cf. Bateman & Crant, 1999; Bolino et al., 2010). Thus in line with previous studies, we argue that , proactive personality positively relates to task performance, but also that at higher levels of proactive personality, individuals may be taking on more non-core activities which can produce attenuated effects and increase the likelihood of generating diminished returns. Accordingly, we hypothesize a non-linear association between proactive personality and task performance such that excessive levels of proactivity may have a diminished effect on task performance evaluations.

*Hypothesis 1: The positive effect of proactive personality on task performance (Hypothesis 1a), is curvilinear and weaker for higher levels of proactivity (Hypothesis 1b).*

### **Proactive personality and OCB**

In this study we hypothesize, and expect to corroborate findings of other studies on the positive association between proactive personality and OCB (Parker et al., 2006; Spitzmuller et al., 2015). Although OCBs and proactive behaviors are not by definition necessarily the same (as OCB's can be carried out in a more or less reactive manner and, alternatively, proactive behaviors are not necessarily targeted at the organization but may also be targeted at benefiting the self), proactive personality is argued and found to positively relate to OCBs. Specifically, the drive of proactive individuals (in terms of personality or trait) to take initiative and anticipate and create constructive change can be expressed through OCBs (Campbell, 2000; Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010; Li, Liang, & Crant,

2010). For example, Belschak and Den Hartog (2010a) found that employees who show more personal initiative in general also show more proactive pro-organizational behavior. Furthermore, proactive personality has been found to relate to role breadth self-efficacy (RBSE), meaning the confidence one has “to be able to carry out a broader and more proactive role, beyond traditional prescribed technical requirements” (Parker, 1998, p.835). In this regard highly proactive individuals (in terms of proactive personality) are likely to feel more capable to execute a broad set of tasks that extend formal job requirements, amongst which OCBs. Also, proactive personality has been found to relate to flexible role orientation (Parker & Sprigg, 1999) and perceived role breadth (Bergeron, Schroeder, & Martinez, 2014) which suggests that proactive individuals are more likely to consider a broader set of goals as part of their job and would thereby be more inclined to engage in OCBs. Hence, in line with other researchers (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010; Li et al., 2010; Parker, 1998), we expect a linear relationship between proactive personality and OCB-O.

*Hypothesis 2. Proactive personality is positively related to OCB-O.*

## **Proactive personality and CWB**

As discussed in Study 1, proactive individuals may not only accomplish desired outcomes but also bring about (unintended) negative consequences. Several reasons exist why excessive proactive behavior may be related to or in itself regarded as dysfunctional or as an expression of noncompliance (Grant et al., 2009; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). First, authors have postulated that an excessive level of proactivity may be perceived as dysfunctional when it results in too many fragmented activities (Bateman & Crant, 1999; Morisson, 2006; Campbell, 2000). Without an adequate balance between action and broad based control, proactivity is likely to cross strategic boundaries and to produce increased levels of unpredictability and

confusion (Bateman & Crant, 1999; Morrison, 2006). In this regard, highly proactive individuals who frequently challenge the status quo may start to generate negative side effects which could undermine organizational efficiency (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011).

Second, proactivity requires personal judgement as actions go beyond the prescribed requirements of the job. As outlined in Study 1, the (perceived) effectiveness of such self-initiated behaviors are not necessarily mutually agreed on as interpretations of proactive behaviors and their implications for organizational performance may differ across various stakeholders (Morisson & Phelps, 1999). For instance, employees and supervisors may differ in terms of their access to information and thereby hold different views on effective behavior and what should be considered as the ‘right’ goals (or problems that need to be prioritized and/or fixed) that are worth the effort, time, and resources. Hence, in spite of well-intended actions, these goals may be construed differently by observers and could even be regarded as a waste of resources when they are not aligned. Moreover, proactive individuals tend to engage in salient and easily observable behaviors. Rather than ‘going with the flow’, they are inclined to go against the status quo and initiate actions that rely on independent judgment and speaking up. Such behaviors bear a greater personal risk as actors are more likely to be held accountable and criticized for undertaking such self-chosen actions rather than acting within prescribed role boundaries (cf. Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010a; Parker & Collins, 2010).

Third, by frequently pushing new ideas and challenging the status quo, highly proactive individuals risk being portrayed as irritating and rebellious (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001). Finally, since proactive personality is related to a need for dominance (Grant et al., 2011) and associated with the tendency to persevere in the face of obstacles it might be that highly proactive individuals do not shy away from violating norms in order to bring about meaningful change or when they encounter differences of opinion with management (c.f. Bateman & Crant, 1993; Morrison, 2006). This implies that highly proactive employees may

not be regarded as behaving constructively but instead as deviant. Bolino (1999, p.328) stated that “in these cases, then, it is unlikely that the label ‘proactive behavior’ would even be used to describe such actions. Indeed, proactive behavior might instead be labeled as ingratiation, insubordination, trouble making, or given other derogatory labels.” Hence, in some instances, supervisors may construe the behavior of highly proactive individuals as counterproductive. Thus, similar to the expectation voiced for conflict in Study 1, we therefore propose that, even though proactive employees generally produce desirable performance outcomes, at excessive levels proactivity may thus also result in increased perceptions of counterproductivity.

While for conflict we expected the non-linear effect to be become more profound for high proactivity, for perceptions of CWB we also expect an increase when proactivity is extremely low (in case of deficiency). The low extreme is formed by employees who are not proactive at all and who may be so passive that they are seen as slacking, not caring, or ignoring duties. Although the instigation of conflict (as tested in Study 1) requires action on the part of the employee and is thus likely to be most pronounced when proactivity is very high, an employee may be counterproductive either by acting (e.g., overly challenging, trouble making) or by not acting (e.g., slacking, ignoring). Thus, people who score either very high or very low on proactivity may be regarded as behaving in a way that is considered to be counterproductive by supervisors. Non-proactive or passive individuals are characterized as people who “fail to identify, let alone seize, opportunities or change things. They show little initiative, and rely on others to be forces for change” (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p.105). Such a passive attitude is likely to be dysfunctional for the organization and possibly signals a lack of commitment to supervisors (Campbell, 2000). We therefore hypothesize that extreme levels of proactive personality, whether excessively low or high, will yield behaviors that the supervisor will consider to be counterproductive.

*Hypothesis 3: Proactive personality will have a U-shaped association with (supervisor rated) CWB.*

### **Affective regard**

Following the same rationale as in Study 1, we hypothesize and explore the influence of affective regard on the association between proactive personality and supervisor appraisals of the three performance dimensions task performance, OCB, and CWB. We argue that supervisors' liking, or disliking, of the employee will influence the meaning supervisors attach to the behavior shown by this employee and therefore hypothesize a moderating effect of affective regard on the relationship of proactive personality with supervisors' evaluation of all three performance dimensions.

*Hypothesis 4: Affective regard moderates the relationship between proactive personality and task performance and OCB so that proactivity results in more positive ratings of task performance (Hypothesis 4a) and OCB (Hypothesis 4b) for those employees for whom supervisors hold higher affective regard. Affective regard moderates the relationship between proactive personality and ratings of CWB so that employees for whom supervisors hold lower affective regard receive higher ratings of CWB (Hypothesis 4c).*

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Data were obtained through an Internet-based multi-source study which was part of a larger international research project. Participants were approached and informed about the purpose of the research through a variety of sources including a press release in a local newspaper and several online social media. Participants were offered a free personalized feedback report on their job attitudes in return for their participation. Surveys were available in English and Chinese and primarily distributed in The Netherlands, the USA, and China. Employees who signed up for the study received an email with a link to the survey. Employees also received a separate link they could send to their direct supervisors. Confidentiality was assured and participants did not have access to one another's responses. No supervisor rated more than one employee, hence the data was not nested.

A total of 229 employees and 130 supervisors completed the survey. Employee demographics and proactive personality ratings did not significantly differ between employees with matched supervisor responses and employees without matched supervisor responses. Among the 130 dyads 43% were completed in English and 57% in Chinese. Employees had an average age of 30 years ( $SD = 8.8$ ) and 41.5% of the sample was male. Employees worked in a wide variety of industries such as financial services, education, IT, and administration. Most employees held a university bachelor degree or higher (76%) and had been working at their current organization for 3.81 years on average ( $SD = 4.96$ ). Among the supervisors 54% was male and the average age was 37.43 years ( $SD = 7.23$ ). Supervisors had an average organizational tenure of 14.05 years ( $SD = 8.09$ ) and had been supervising the focal employee for an average of 2.09 years ( $SD = 2.00$ ). Most of the supervisors had daily (35.2%) or weekly (61.7%) contact with the focal employee.

## Measures

Demographics and personality ratings were obtained through employee self-report. Performance evaluations and affective regard was assessed by the supervisor. Unless indicated otherwise, responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* and 5= *strongly agree*). For multiple items scales, Cronbach's alphas are reported on the diagonal in Table 3.

**Proactive personality.** Proactive personality was assessed using employee self-reports. Employees indicated the extent to which they agreed with 10 items on a shortened version of Bateman and Crant's (1993) proactive personality scale (Seibert et al., 1999). Example items are 'I excel at identifying opportunities' and 'No matter what the odds, if I believe something I will make it happen'.

**Task performance.** Task performance was assessed using a seven item measure developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). Supervisors indicated agreement with each item. Example items are 'This employee adequately completes assigned duties' and 'This employee fulfills responsibilities specified in his/her job description'.

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior.** Organizational citizenship behavior was measured using 14 items developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990). Items assessed citizenship behaviors that benefit the organization (OCB-O) and pertained to conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and civic virtue. An example item is 'This employee attends functions that are not required, but help the company image'.

**Counterproductive Work Behavior.** Counterproductive work behavior was assessed by an eight item scale which was originally developed by Aquino, Lewis, and Bradfield (1999). The scale was modified in line with Bordia, Restubog and Tang (2008) in order for supervisors

to rate the employee's behavior. An example item is 'This employee purposely ignored my instructions'. Supervisors were asked to indicate the frequency of the employee's behavior within the last six months. Answer options ranged from 'never' (coded as 1) to '20 times or more' (coded as 21).

**Affective Regard.** Affective regard was assessed with the same scale used in Study 1, the four-item measure of Wayne and Ferris (1990). A sample item is 'I get along well with this subordinate'.

**Control variables.** Demographic information on age, gender, and tenure, was collected in the employee survey. In line with Study 1 information on relationship duration (in years) and frequency of contact (daily, weekly, monthly) between the employee and supervisor were reported by the supervisor. We also controlled for whether the English or Chinese survey form was filled out.

## **Results and Discussion**

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the validity of the current measurement model. The hypothesized measurement model was compared to a two factor model in which all items loaded on the respective rating source, that is task-performance, OCB, CWB and affective regard loading on one factor and proactive personality loading on a different factor, and a one factor model, in which all items loaded on a single factor. The hypothesized model was composed of 5 factors, namely proactive personality, task-performance, OCB, CWB and affective regard. OCB was set as a second-order factor which comprised the lower-order factors conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and civic virtue. Confirmatory factor analyses showed better fit of the hypothesized measurement model ( $\chi^2 = 1339.02$ ,  $df = 845$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .90, RMSEA = .04) compared to a two-factor model ( $\chi^2 =$

1908.88,  $df = 854$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .75, RMSEA = .06), or a one-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 2443.15$ ,  $df = 858$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .63, RMSEA = .08).

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations. Proactive personality was significantly and positively related to task performance and OCB and significantly and negatively to CWB. Affective regard correlated substantially with task performance and OCB ratings.

Table 3.  
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-										
2. Age	29.71	8.84	-08	-									
3. Tenure	3.81	4.96	-09	.69**	-								
4. Relationship duration	2.08	2.00	-04	.55**	.61**	-							
5. Contact frequency	1.69	.52	.01	.05	-.13	-.03	-						
6. Language <sup>b</sup>	-	-	-.23**	.16*	.17*	-.08	-.39**	-					
7. Proactive personality	3.51	.66	.05	.01	.02	.07	-.23**	.15*	.90				
8. Affective regard	3.71	.78	-.13	.05	.16	.07	-.34**	.39**	.54**	.92			
9. Task performance	3.87	.68	-.06	.13	.13	.05	-.26**	.39**	.57**	.78**	.90		
10. OCB	3.61	.59	-.08	.10	.13	.13	-.17*	.21*	.55**	.78**	.67**	.89	
11. CWB	1.86	1.81	.03	-.13	-.12	-.13	.30**	-.13	-.45**	-.53**	-.49**	-.48**	.91

*Notes.* For dyadic correlations N ranges between 112 and 130. For non-dyadic employee reported variables N ranges between 171 and 229.

For non-dyadic supervisor reported variables N ranges between 136 and 142. Cronbach's alphas are reported on the diagonal. Values for age, tenure, and relationship duration are expressed in years. <sup>a</sup>Gender was coded as 0 = female and 1 = male. <sup>b</sup>Language was coded as 0 = Chinese and 1 = English.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

The same analytical procedure was followed as in Study 1 to test the hypotheses. Regression diagnostics including standardized residual statistics and VIF values (no greater than 3.04) indicated no serious violations of model assumptions (cf. Cohen et al., 2003). In Step 1 of the regression analyses the control variables were entered, followed by proactive personality in Step 2. Subsequently the quadratic terms of proactive personality (Step 3) and affective regard (Step 4) were added to the equation. The interaction terms were added in the final step (Step 5). Analyses were run separately for each performance dimension. Although we hypothesized only a linear association between proactive personality and OCB (in contrast to task performance and CWB), we did examine the possibility of a curvilinear relation on an exploratory basis<sup>3</sup>. Results for task performance, OCB, and CWB<sup>4</sup> are presented in Table 4. Again, omission of the control variables did not substantially alter the findings of the regression analyses nor the conclusions reported vis-à-vis the hypotheses.

We found an overall positive association between proactive personality and task performance (Hypothesis 1a) and OCB (Hypothesis 2). Only limited support was found however for Hypothesis 1b stating that the positive effect of proactive personality on task performance would weaken at excessive levels of proactivity. Although the quadratic term of proactive personality in Step 3 of the regression analysis explained significant variance beyond its linear term providing support for Hypothesis 1b, this effect became non-significant after including supervisor affective regard towards the employee in Step 4. Furthermore, no moderation of affective regard on the relationship between proactive personality and task

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<sup>3</sup> Running the same regression analyses for task performance and OCB without the quadratic term of proactive personality yielded similar results, that is a significant effect is found of proactive personality and affective regard on both task performance and OCB.

<sup>4</sup> Because our theorizing particularly pertains to the somewhat rebellious expressions and self-guided actions of proactive individuals, we conducted an additional analysis in which we used only those two items which tap most explicitly into such expressions. Whereas the original eight item scale taps into general expressions of noncompliant behavior, including slacking on duties, these two items focused on expressions of rebellion and a self-willed course of action. These items were 'This employee worked on a personal matter on the job instead of working for the employer' and 'This employee purposely ignored my instructions'. Results using the two-item scale were very similar to the original eight-item scale.

performance was found as proposed in hypothesis 4a. In contrast, regression results for task performance showed a similar pattern as was found in Study 1 pertaining to general performance, such that both employee proactive personality and supervisor's affective regard were both positively and directly related to task performance ratings.

Similar to the effect on task performance, findings pertaining to OCB suggest that proactive personality and affective regard both independently and positively impact OCB ratings. Although we did not hypothesize a non-linear effect, we did check for it to be comprehensive. Again the non-linear term became non-significant after including the effect of affective regard in the equation. Again, no support was found for a moderating effect (Hypothesis 4b), but instead proactive personality and particularly affective regard were positively and directly related to OCB ratings as provided by the supervisor.

With respect to counterproductive behavior a pattern emerged which was somewhat similar to the relationship of proactivity with employee-supervisor conflict reported in Study 1 (albeit more pronounced). Results indicate a curvilinear by linear effect of proactive personality and affective regard on counterproductive behaviors such that very high and very low levels of proactivity were more likely to be considered to be counterproductive (Hypothesis 3), particularly when supervisors held low or moderate levels of affective regard towards the employee (Hypothesis 4c). In contrast, employees for whom supervisors held high affective regard were not considered to behave counterproductively, regardless of how proactive these individuals were (see Figure 2).

Table 4. Results of Regression Analyses

Predictor	Task Performance			OCB		
	$\beta$ (entry)	$\beta$ (final)	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$ (entry)	$\beta$ (final)	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1						
Age	-.03	.10	.20**	-.06	.09	.09
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.05	.05		-.04	-.04	
Tenure	.03	-.08		.00	-.13	
Relationship duration	.10	-.00		.20	.08	
Contact frequency	-.11	.05		-.10	.07	
Language <sup>b</sup>	.40**	.14*		.20	-.06	
Step 2						
Proactive personality	.47**	.16*	.21**	.46**	.15†	.19**
Step 3						
Proactive personality <sup>2</sup>	-.18*	-.02	.03*	-.25**	-.11	.06**
Step 4						
Affective regard	.68**	.66**	.27**	.73**	.75**	.30**
Step 5						
Proactive personality x affective regard	-.03	-.03	.00	.00	.00	.00
Proactive personality <sup>2</sup> x affective regard	.05	.05		-.04	-.04	
$R^2$						.64
Adjusted $R^2$						.60
$F$						15.50**
$df$						11, 96

Notes. Regression coefficients shown are from the equation at the step indicated ( $\beta$  entry) and from the final equation ( $\beta$  final).

<sup>a</sup>Gender coded as 1 = male and 0 = female. <sup>b</sup>Language coded as 1 = English and 0 = Chinese.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , †  $p = .07$ .

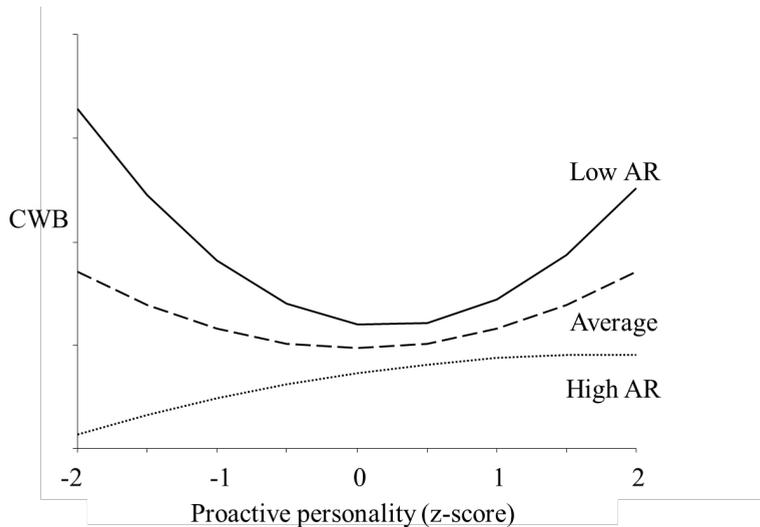
Table 4 (continued). Results of Regression Analyses

Predictor	CWB		
	$\beta$ (entry)	$\beta$ (final)	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1			
Age	-.07	-.11	.15*
Gender <sup>a</sup>	-.05	-.03	
Tenure	.08	.10	
Relationship duration	-.18	-.10	
Contact frequency	.18	.04	
Language <sup>b</sup>	-.24**	.15	
Step 2			
Proactive personality	-.37**	-.00	.12**
Step 3			
Proactive personality <sup>2</sup>	.41**	.16†	.15**
Step 4			
Affective regard	-.37**	-.17	.08**
Step 5			
Proactive personality x affective regard	.16†	.16†	.07**
Proactive personality <sup>2</sup> x affective regard	-.38**	-.38**	
$R^2$			.57
Adjusted $R^2$			.53
$F$			11.76**
$df$			11, 96

Notes. Regression coefficients shown are from the equation at the step indicated ( $\beta$  entry) and from the final equation ( $\beta$  final).

<sup>a</sup>Gender coded as 1 = male and 0 = female. <sup>b</sup>Language coded as 1 = English and 0 = Chinese.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , †  $p = .07$ .



*Figure 2.* Relationship between Proactive personality and Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) depicted at low (-1 *SD*), average, and high (+1 *SD*) levels of Affective Regard (AR).

### General Discussion

Highly proactive individuals do not only produce desirable outcomes but can also bring about adverse consequences in the eyes of their supervisors. Specifically, Study 1 indicated that proactive personality had a curvilinear effect on supervisor-rated conflict such that especially highly proactive individuals were increasingly at risk of inducing interpersonal conflict with their supervisors. Additionally, Study 2 showed a curvilinear relationship indicating that excessive levels of proactivity (both deficiency and excess) were undesirable as these were increasingly related to counterproductive work behaviors, as opposed to moderate levels of proactivity. For these effects on both conflict and the broader measure of CWB to arise,

however, supervisor affective regard was found to be critical. Results highlight that supervisor affective regard acted as a moderator of the relationships, such that the nonlinear effects of employee proactive personality on supervisor ratings of conflict with the employee (Study 1) and of the broader construct of employee counterproductive work behaviors (Study 2) became more evident as affective regard decreased. Hence, supervisor 'disliking' of the employee, was found to play an important role in whether the behavior of proactive individuals was rated as conflictual and counterproductive.

Combined, the results of Study 1 and Study 2 indicate that, in general, proactive personality is positively related to task and contextual performance outcomes. In contrast to our hypothesis that the positive effect of proactive personality on performance evaluations would attenuate at relatively high levels of proactivity, current findings indicated a linear relationship. That is, the more proactive individuals were, the better they seemed to perform not only in terms of overall job performance (Study 1), but also on the more specific dimensions task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Study 2), especially when affective regard was taken into account. With regard to the effects of proactive personality on overall job performance no moderating effect of supervisor affective regard was found. Instead, supervisor affective regard towards the employee had a strong direct effect (beyond the significant positive main effect of proactive personality) on overall job performance ratings (Study 1) as well as on the ratings of two more specific performance dimensions, namely task performance and OCB (Study 2).

These findings contribute to the literature on proactivity in several ways. First, and in line with the notion of the initiative paradox (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b; Campbell, 2000; Grant et al., 2009), this research is among the few empirical studies to date to simultaneously address positive as well as negative outcomes of proactivity. Findings of this study thereby not

only reaffirm prior work on the positive ramifications of employee proactivity, but also extend the scope by indicating that adverse and unintended side effects can co-occur. We not only explored the possibility of a decreased likelihood of beneficial outcomes as an indication of undesirable effects, but also explicitly explored the possibility of an increased likelihood of less desirable outcomes, namely employee-supervisor conflict and counterproductive work behaviors and for whom these occur. Accordingly, the current research provides empirical support for the notion that proactivity entails mixed effects that may become disadvantageous for not only proactive employees themselves, but also for their organizations (cf. Grant & Ashford, 2008; Seibert et al., 2001).

These findings underline the paradoxical nature of proactivity (cf. Campbell, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001). Study 1 and Study 2 both revealed that highly proactive individuals are not particularly at risk to be perceived as performing less well than their non-proactive counterparts, but that high levels of proactivity do increase the risk of employees fueling interpersonal conflicts with and being considered as behaving counterproductively by their supervisors, especially when they are less liked by these supervisors. Hence, these outcomes support the suggestion that management may typically want and value a proactive stance in terms of performance outcomes, yet may not always accept and appreciate this active approach as it may also damage relationships and be seen as rebellious or harmful (see e.g., Burris, 2012; Collins, 2009; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant et al., 2001). Specifically, our findings show that positive and negative effects may co-occur, and, somewhat paradoxically, that the perceived positive effects do not seem to diminish at higher levels of proactivity, while the likelihood of perceived negative effects increases.

The current investigation also advances the literature on proactivity as it stresses the importance of affective regard in the evaluation of others. Though the role of affective regard

is well known in the performance appraisal literature (cf. Lefkowitz, 2000; Levy & Williams, 2004), results of our studies broaden its influential role to a larger set of domains including the proactivity field. Findings indicate that the supervisor's affective regard towards the employee affects the strength of the relationship between proactivity and relevant work criteria. This suggests that it is critical to take the role of the appraiser and his/her relationship with the appraisee into account in order to advance our understanding of the reactions and evaluations that proactive individuals can trigger.

Additionally, our results imply that indeed there may be no such thing as a simple appreciation of proactivity (Lam, Huang & Snape, 2007). Instead, interpretations of proactive behavior may be particularly susceptible to the outcomes of social construction processes, such as schemata and attributions, since proactive individuals typically act outside prescribed roles and thereby create more ambiguity in the appraisal setting. Furthermore, this finding adds to the debate in the field of proactivity on the use of various rating sources and the meaning that can be derived from observer scores (Frese & Fay, 2001; Ohly & Fritz, 2009; Parker & Collins, 2010). Our findings suggest that proactivity may not only be differently construed across various rating sources such as the self, peers or supervisors (Frese et al., 1997; Grant et al., 2011; Parker & Collins, 2010), but also that supervisors themselves may construe the valence of the behavior of proactive individuals differently depending on the degree to which they like or dislike the focal employee.

The current research also explicitly incorporated propositions regarding the functional form of the relationship between proactive personality and relevant work-criteria. We thereby aimed to enhance theoretical precision (Edwards & Berry, 2010) regarding the effects of this personality trait. The outcomes provide a caution against the still dominant implicit assumptions of linearity, and underline calls (Grant & Schwartz, 2011; Le et al., 2011) for greater concern

for the nature of the relationship between personality traits and job-related outcomes. This is particularly well illustrated by the effect we found for proactive personality on counterproductive behaviors. Negative correlations between these variables suggest a decrease in counterproductive behaviors for more proactive individuals, whereas further investigation indicated that, for ‘less liked’ individuals, this initial negative effect of proactive personality reached an inflection point and turned positive such that relatively high levels of proactivity were associated with increasing levels of counterproductivity. Accordingly, by developing propositions pertaining to the functional form as well as to contingent factors (i.e. affective regard) the current investigation aims to advance theoretical development and allows for a better and more precise understanding of the outcomes of proactivity in the workplace.

In relation to the criterion measures, findings of the current research also highlight the importance of level of specificity. Particularly where mixed effects can be hypothesized, a differentiation between social and task related outcomes may help to elucidate the effects of personality in the workplace. Specifically, these findings suggest that the occurrence of desirable effects do not necessarily indicate the absence of negative side effects and vice versa.

### **Practical implications**

Practically, our findings yield several implications for proactive employees, their supervisors and the organizations they work for. At the individual level, the presented findings imply that high levels of proactivity can become increasingly problematic for ‘less liked’ employees in terms of the ensuing conflict and perceptions of CWB it gives rise to. Consequently, this may have undesirable effects on employee stress, commitment and work satisfaction as these are typically related to conflict at work (Wall & Callister, 1995). Moreover, hierarchical conflicts potentially harm the subordinate’s career progress as its effects may

extend to the availing of social resources, sponsorship and promotions (Burriss, 2012; Seibert et al., 2001; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). The moderating effect of affective regard furthermore suggests that the ‘political’ landscape in which proactive individuals maneuver at work is an important factor for whether proactive individuals start to derive negative returns. Though any new initiative bears some risks, it seems that political tact and social skills are indeed crucial for individuals to avoid potential adverse effects from their own proactivity (Grant, 2013). Managing proactive employees also brings on several challenges for supervisors and organizations. Our results imply that proactive individuals can indeed come across as somewhat rebellious and may, in that respect, be difficult to manage. Accordingly, to realize the benefits of a proactive workforce, managers will need adequate skills to deal constructively with disagreements and conflicts.

Given the impact of affective regard, it is also important for managers to be aware that they may be judging the same proactive actions differently when they come from individuals for whom they hold high or low affective regard. This awareness can help them to not be too quick to judge actions of subordinates they like less as counterproductive.

On the organizational level, a certain degree of tolerance towards constructive dissent is needed in order to benefit from the entrepreneurial qualities of proactive individuals. Campbell, (2000, p.63) stated that “They should view these instances [disagreements about the appropriateness of an employee’s initiative and judgment] as opportunities to refine the implications of the firm’s core set of values, rather than as problems of inappropriate initiative or of overstepping authority”. The curvilinear effect on counterproductive behavior also bears some practical challenges. The results empirically support the notion that proactive personality is not an unmitigated benefit and may even result in organizational costs when it becomes excessive (cf. Campbell, 2000). It thus seems important to find a balance between deficiency

and excess, in particular for 'less liked' employees. This balance may, however not always be straightforward and differences in judgment are likely to exist (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Also in light of short- versus long-term gains and costs, one may hold different views in terms of the feasibility of proactivity (cf. Fay & Sonnentag, 2010).

The effects of proactive personality on desirable outcomes on the one hand (overall job performance, task performance, and OCB) and less desirable outcomes on the other (perceived conflict and counterproductive work behavior) also has implications for personnel selection practices. Whereas personnel selection commonly applies a top-down approach in the use of personality, i.e. selecting individuals with the 'best' or highest score, these findings caution that this approach may not be optimal. Depending on the type of job and organization, one may wish to balance the costs and benefits associated with proactive personality in a more nuanced way.

### **Limitations and future research**

The effects of proactive personality and supervisor's affective regard on the criteria seem substantial and the relatively large effects and correlations especially for affective regard and particularly in Study 2, call for further research. These relatively high associations may raise some concerns, though we did collect multi-source data in which all scales were found to be valid not only in previous research but also in the current study using confirmatory factor analyses. Moreover, substantial relations between affective regard and performance appraisals have been documented by other scholars (see Lefkowitz, 2000). Additionally, these studies point out that affective regard and appraisals are indeed different constructs. Yet, the present findings underline the need for objective evaluation methods and future research to explore the mechanisms between affective regard and performance appraisals. For example, it would be

interesting to explore if affective regard is related to goal congruence and thereby explains some of the variance in performance appraisals. In addition, leader-member exchange (LMX) may elucidate the mechanism between affective regard and performance appraisals (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Specifically, affective regard facilitates the development of LMX (Dulebohn et al., 2017) and may thereby increase the availability of information which may help prevent employees engaging in misguided actions.

The presented results also match previous empirical research in that proactive personality is positively related to overall performance, task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (Crant, 1995; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010; Thompson, 2005; Tornau & Frese, 2013). Furthermore, the quadratic and interaction effects on employee-supervisor conflict and CWB cannot artificially have resulted from common method variance (CMV) (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010). In fact, Siemsen et al. (2010) argue that quadratic and interaction effects get attenuated and are more likely to remain undetected in light of CMV. Hence, finding significant quadratic and interaction terms “should be taken as strong evidence for the existence of such an effect” (Siemsen et al., 2010, p.468). Yet, further research is needed to triangulate the present findings and to advance our understanding of the mechanisms through which proactive individuals produce positive as well as negative consequences simultaneously.

The current research design bears limitations in terms of inferences pertaining to causality. While personality is commonly regarded as a predictor of behavior and performance, the directionality of the relationships between affective regard and performance appraisals and conflict remains indeterminate as our cross-sectional study does not allow testing for directionality of those results. However, the bulk of research in the appraisal domain suggests that these effects are most likely bidirectional (Sutton et al., 2013). Also the extent to which affective regard represents bias of nonperformance-based factors or a product of true objective

performance, remains debatable. Still, this does not detract from our finding that affective regard has a moderating impact on conflict and supervisor rated levels of CWB.

Taken together, findings of both studies support the premise that proactive individuals can and do yield both desirable as well as less desirable outcomes in the eyes of their supervisors. Hence, proactive personality is typically a positive trait, but also one which can, at high levels, produce costs that may start to outweigh these benefits, especially when supervisors do not hold the proactive individual in high affective regard.



# CHAPTER 5

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

In the introduction of this dissertation the relevance of employee proactivity to the contemporary work environment and modern employment relations was delineated. In order to gain a better understanding of the construct and how it relates to outcomes relevant for both employees and employers, four empirical studies were conducted. These four studies addressed two core themes, namely 1) the role of employee proactive career behavior in the congruence between the individual and the characteristics of his or her job and the attainment of career success (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3), and 2) the initiative paradox and the potential co-occurrence of beneficial and adverse consequences of proactivity (in terms of proactive personality) (Chapter 4). The current chapter briefly summarizes the findings of these empirical studies followed by an overall consideration of their theoretical implications. Limitations of the presented studies are discussed and suggestions for research are offered. This chapter closes by highlighting the practical implications of these studies.

### **Main themes and findings**

Inspired by the growing need for employees to engage in self-directed, anticipatory actions to perform effectively in the contemporary work environment, four studies were conducted to explore how employees impact critical outcomes in the work domain by acting proactively. Overall, the four empirical studies included in this dissertation support the dominant view that generally speaking, proactivity, whether as a trait or behavior, is desirable for both employees and the organization (cf. Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011; Parker & Collins, 2010). In line with previous research, results indicated that employees who behave proactively on the job were likely to be more successful at work and in their career than employees who behave less proactively. Specifically, individuals who show initiative in anticipation of opportunities, problems or changes (i.e. proactivity) were more likely to achieve higher levels of performance in the eyes of their supervisors and reported themselves

to be more satisfied with their career. These findings corroborate previous academic work and highlight that proactivity is not just another management fad, but instead a significant concept that can benefit individuals as well as organizations (cf. Parker & Bindl, 2007; Spitzmuller, Sin, Howe, & Fatimah, 2015).

The research presented in Chapter 2 and 3 was grounded on the idea that individuals who proactively manage their career achieve higher performance levels and greater career satisfaction by establishing and maintaining a higher level of congruence between the self and the characteristics of the job. That is, individuals who engage in more proactive career behavior are generally better adapted to the requirements of the job and work in an environment that provides valued attributes to the individual. Although Parker and Collins (2010) had proposed a set of proactive P-E (person-environment) fit behaviors focusing on different proactive behaviors that can impact the ‘fit’ between the person and their work environment, the literature has hardly empirically addressed whether the impact of these behaviors on fit indeed occurs. In addition, the potential role of such fit as a mediating mechanism in the relationship of proactive career behaviors with performance and career satisfaction has, to the best of our knowledge, not yet been addressed empirically. By integrating perspectives from the proactivity domain and person-environment fit theory in a single structural equation model the study in Chapter 2 aimed to contribute to both research domains. Using multisource data, preliminary support was provided for a partially mediated model indicating that Demands-Abilities (DA) fit and Needs-Supplies (NS) fit are indeed implicated in transmitting the effect of career initiative on performance and career satisfaction respectively.

As the results seem to support this indirect effects model, the findings shed light on how employees can achieve greater career success and ensure employability by behaving

proactively. Furthermore, the findings of this study support the notion that career initiative is a type of proactive P-E fit behavior (Parker & Collins, 2010) and suggests that, in light of the preliminary differential effects of DA fit and NS fit that were found, deliberation on the more specific fit dimensions and their outcomes may help in developing a better understanding of the processes that are in place.

Although the empirical study reported on in Chapter 2 addressed the relationship of proactivity with two types of person-job fit, its design did not (due to the cross sectional nature of the data) capture the within person dynamism that is implied in this relationship, i.e. that proactive individuals can meaningfully *change* their own compatibility with the work environment by adjusting characteristics of the job and/or by modifying their own attributes such as knowledge, skills, abilities, preferences, and expectations. In order to elucidate the dynamic nature of this process, secondary data of a two-wave study was analyzed (Chapter 3). Specifically, a parallel growth model was deployed to identify changes in the level of perceived demands-abilities fit over time. Empirical support was found for the positive impact of career initiative on person-job fit (a between-person effect). Furthermore, increases in career initiative were found to be associated with increases in person-job fit over time (a within-person effect). The findings of this study also indicated that (within-person) improvements in perceived person-job fit can occur among employees who change jobs as well as among employees who do not. Hence, it appears that improvement in person-job fit is not exclusively realized by changing jobs (as implied by Schneider's ASA model, 1995), but that it may also be attained as an outcome of proactive behavior within the confines of the current job. Finally, results of the study indicate that turnover was preceded by lower levels of fit, accompanied by an increase in career initiative, and associated with greater improvement in person-job fit over time. These findings are consistent with the idea that employees are

more likely to change jobs when they perceive that their level of fit is ‘too low’ making it more difficult and less likely to establish a good fit within the confines of the current job. It would be interesting for future research to explore why, beyond such pragmatic considerations, employees opt for a strategy of improving their fit within or beyond the confines of their current job.

With the two studies presented in Chapter 4, we sought to redress the strong emphasis the literature has placed on the positive consequences of proactivity in the workplace. The studies were designed to take an inclusive approach in which the potential negative consequences of proactivity were represented as well. With two empirical studies using multisource data, the often implicit assumption of proactivity as an ‘unmitigated benefit’ (Campbell, 2000) was challenged, in two distinct ways. First, we hypothesized, operationalized, and evidenced specific manifestations of the initiative paradox, by showing that proactivity can simultaneously be associated with positive (e.g., performance) and negative outcomes (e.g., conflict). Findings of both studies support this line of reasoning. We showed that employees who act proactively were more likely to attain higher performance levels in terms of overall job performance (Study 1) as well as more specific performance dimensions, namely task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Study 2). At the same time however, highly proactive individuals were also found to be increasingly at risk of inducing interpersonal conflict (Study 1) and to be seen as behaving counterproductively in the eyes of their supervisors (Study 2). Hence, findings of both studies supported the overall premise that proactive individuals can and do bring about both desirable as well as undesirable outcomes in the eyes of their supervisors.

Second, in further examining potential downsides to proactivity, we considered the plausibility of nonmonotonic effects. Hence, we explored whether there may be a ‘proactivity

optimum' such that, beyond a certain level, higher levels of proactivity no longer result in higher performance levels or may even start to generate negative returns (i.e. curvilinear relationships). Instead of a "more is always better" perspective pertaining to proactive personality, we thus tested for the possibility of attenuating effects which when evidenced would underline the need to balance deficiency and excess (Pierce & Aguinis, 2013; Le et al., 2011). In both our studies only partial empirical support was found for this line of reasoning. That is, with regard to positively framed outcomes such as job or task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior, only linear effects were found. However, for both of the negatively framed outcome variables, perceived conflict and counterproductive behavior, support was found for conditional curvilinear effects, suggesting that both deficiency and excess can generate negative returns.

Both empirical studies (Chapter 4) showed that affective regard of the supervisor towards the focal employee had a profound effect on the reactions that proactive individuals elicit. Specifically, it was found that the relationship between proactivity and the negative outcomes, that is conflict and counterproductive behavior, was conditioned by supervisor affective regard, such that the relationship between proactivity and negative returns is more profound for employees for whom supervisors hold lower affective regard. This suggests that proactive employees while perceived as performing better, may at the same time be perceived as inciting conflict or behaving counterproductively, particularly when the supervisor finds this employee less amiable.

### **Contributions and implications for theory on proactivity, fit, and careers**

The insights provided in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 pertain to how individuals can acquire and maintain congruence between themselves and their work environment by acting

proactively, and contribute to the field in several ways. The relationships reported in Chapter 2 suggest that person-job fit may indeed partially explain how proactive career behavior translates into critical career outcomes. Findings imply that individuals who take initiative in managing their career generally established a better match between themselves in terms of personal abilities and job demands (demands-abilities fit) and also were more likely to work in environments that supply valued and desired attributes (needs-supplies fit). In turn, these individuals were found to attain higher performance levels and greater career satisfaction. Combined with the results of Chapter 3, the findings provide preliminary support for our theorizing that proactive individuals are not only more likely to establish a better match between themselves and the job, but can in fact enhance and improve their ‘fit’ within the confines of their job over time. The presented research thereby underscores the importance of addressing the dynamic nature of person-job fit in relation to proactivity.

By integrating the extant literature on person-environment fit with proactivity, the presented research aimed to contribute to explaining why proactive individuals are typically found to attain higher levels of career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Seibert Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Fuller & Marler, 2009). The results corroborate earlier findings that fit is critical to performance and affects related outcomes (Oh et al., 2013; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), and further builds upon this body of work by demonstrating the malleability of person-job fit and the significant role of career initiative in this process. The findings of Chapter 3 imply that person-job fit is an ongoing process in which individuals may not merely be reacting to their fit (i.e. through work behaviors such as performance or withdrawal behaviors when faced with poor fit), but can instead anticipate and take initiative to ensure or enhance their compatibility with the work environment.

While person-environment fit (PE-fit) theory does allow for a dynamic approach (cf. Edwards, 2008; Boon & Biron, 2016), this dynamic side of fit has been largely neglected in empirical research. Most studies have taken a relative static approach to the PE fit phenomenon (see for notable exceptions the recent studies of Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016; and Kooij, Woerkmom, Wilkenloh, Dorenbosch, & Denissen, 2017). Moving beyond organizational entry (selection and socialization), little research has filled this void thereby somewhat overlooking the strategies employees can adopt to sustaining their fit with the work environment over time once they are ‘on board’ (see for example comments by Edwards, 2008; Shipp & Jansen, 2011). Consequently, within-person change in fit and its correlates has only been marginally addressed in empirical studies to date. Yet, job demands and supplies continuously evolve and individuals’ skills and needs most likely also alter over the course of their career. The presented studies therefore intended to contribute to research in this domain by adopting a more dynamic and agentic approach which explicitly accounts for the possibility, or even the need, for employees to proactively manage their compatibility with their work environment in order to attain career success. In this regard, the results support the usefulness of Parker and Collins’ (2010) framework of proactivity to addressing the dynamic nature of person-environment fit more explicitly than has been done so far.

The basic premise in this dissertation thus departed from the notion that, beyond selection and attrition mechanisms to establishing fit and resolving misfit (c.f. Schneider’s Attraction-Selection-Attrition model, 1983), (improvements in) person-job fit can be established without necessarily having to switch to a new job. In fact, individuals can take initiative in anticipation of altering demands or changing values and needs in order to establish and sustain fit over time. However, the presented studies are limited in that they do not point out what specific set of career behaviors are in place nor do they identify the specific

aspects of the person or the job that are impacted (i.e. changes in oneself by affecting abilities or needs, or by changes in the demands that are placed on them or the supplies provided by the job). In line with the statement of Follmer and colleagues (2018, p.440) that “creating and maintaining a sense of fit frequently involves an effortful, dynamic set of strategies”, it would be worthwhile to further unravel the processes underlying such proactive fitting. More specific career related behaviors one could think of in that regard are job crafting (a process of bottom-up job redesign affecting the job role in accordance to one’s preferences) (Tims et al., 2016), negotiating idiosyncratic work arrangements (meeting individual needs by tailoring the supplies) (Rousseau, Tomprou, & Simosi, 2016), anticipatory skill development and knowledge acquisition (thereby affecting one’s abilities), or career planning and seeking mentorship (anticipating job opportunities and/or (re)defining personal needs) (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; De Vos & Soens, 2008).

In addition, it would be interesting to explore to what extent perceptions of- and actual changes in fit dimensions overlap. For instance, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) argue that changes in job demands can result from cognitive changes or physical changes. While the first refers to altering the way in which people define, or see, their job, the latter involves actual changes in the job's task boundaries. Likewise, engaging in career planning activities may alter one’s beliefs of what one values through gaining better career insight (i.e. cognitively changing needs), or may provide individuals with actual developmental opportunities and greater access to career progression (i.e. changing the actual supplies). It is also possible that, engaging in developmental activities does not bring about actual improvements between one’s abilities and job demands, but instead merely results in *perceived* improvements in fit due to motivational and confirmation biases of the individual. For example, when developmental activities have not resulted in actual skill mastery, based on cognitive dissonance theory

(Festinger, 1957), individuals may enhance the subjective value of the outcome (skill improvement/ training effectiveness), to justify their efforts as a way to reduce dissonance. In addressing the dynamics of fit and how individuals may alter their congruence with the work environment it would thus be interesting to unravel the dimensions of fit that are affected and the extent to which changes result from cognitive and perceptual change or ‘actual’ and more objective change.

Taking this line of thought forward suggests that future research will also need to address the question for whom changes in fit, resulting from proactive actions, are deemed effective. Perceived and objective changes in fit can be construed differently by the individual and the employing organization. For instance, engaging in developmental activities may potentially improve an individual’s feelings of mastery and appreciate perceptions of demands-abilities fit, thereby positively affecting attitudes and motivation. However, if the developmental activities have not resulted in actual mastery of tasks, it is unlikely to yield, and be seen as yielding, effective functioning and performance. In this regard, the individual may experience an improved level of demands-abilities fit, while his or her supervisor may not perceive any changes.

The subjective measures of person-job fit are also limited in that they do not inform us about the way in which fit comes about and whether highly proactive individuals construe a ‘good fit’ differently than less proactive individuals. If proactive individuals tend to set goals that go beyond narrowly described task demands (Bateman, 2017; Crant, 2000), and are more inclined to create opportunities and challenge the status quo, they may construe, or experience, a (mis)fit differently. Also, given that proactive personality is associated with role breadth self-efficacy (see Parker, 1998) and persistence in the face of obstacles (Bateman & Crant, 1999; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010), one could argue that individuals with a

proactive personality are more likely to feel competent in carrying out a broad set of work tasks, and may therefore be less inclined to construe evolving job demands as a situation of misfit or as an insurmountable obstacle. Hence, a misalignment between for instance demands and abilities might still be within their ‘comfort zone’ due to differences in (perceived) capacity to navigate through such situations (Parker & Collins, 2010; De Stobbeleir, De Boeck & Dries, 2017). Such differences would have implications for the design of (motivating) work and selection. Specifically, highly proactive individuals would be more likely to thrive in a work context that requires a flexible role orientation and provides a high degree of autonomy, whereas less proactive individuals may want, or need, more clearly defined roles and may even experience strain when expectations and requirements of the role are not clearly defined.

Regarding future avenues of research, the results and suggested implications pertaining to career initiative and the (continuous) attainment of congruence with the work environment raise questions on how and to what extent employees can learn to take initiative in managing their career and learn how to hold their ground in a dynamic work environment. As the presented studies point out, employees who take career initiative have (or create) a better position for themselves which is likely to be more sustainable in terms of employability. Personal initiative training (Mensmann & Frese, 2017) or training to stimulate employee’s active career behavior (Raabe, Frese, & Beehr, 2007; Kooij et al., 2017; Strauss & Parker, 2018) are therefore interesting and promising avenues for those employees who are not naturally inclined toward proactive behavior. Likewise, it would be interesting to learn more about how organizations, through for example HR practices (van Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008) or leadership (Wu & Parker, 2017; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2017), can support and motivate employees to take actions that ensure and sustain their fit with the

(future) work environment and the proactive management of their career. After all, even self-started actions do not occur in isolation and are driven, affected, or sparked by other factors (Bandura, 1997; Frese, Garst & Fay, 2007).

### **Contributions and implications for theory on the mixed effects of proactivity**

Now turning to the second theme covered in this dissertation, the studies presented in Chapter 4 aim to meet calls that have been made in the literature for the need to offer a more nuanced view on proactivity that takes both positive and negative aspects into account (Bolino, Valcea & Harvey, 2010; Bolino, Turnley, & Anderson, 2017; Parker, Wang, & Liao, 2019). The studies presented in this chapter show empirical support for the mixed effects that proactive individuals can and do bring about. The two studies not only reaffirm prior work on the positive ramifications of employee proactivity, but also extend the scope of proactivity research by indicating the co-occurrence of adverse side effects, instead of focusing on isolated effects.

In focusing on the potential downside and conditional effects, the studies indicated that affective regard had a particularly influential role on the (curvilinear) relation between proactivity and the negatively framed outcomes (conflict and counterproductivity). While these effects suggest the need to balance deficiency and excess in terms of proactivity, especially for those employees who are deemed less likable by their supervisor, the linear positive association between proactivity and the positively framed outcomes (performance and OCB) do not suggest this need. Therefore, the presented findings provide some preliminary indication of an optimal midrange level beyond which proactivity no longer adds value or may even become harmful which warrants further research. Combined, the two empirical studies may contribute to the development of a more nuanced framework on

proactivity that helps us to better understand the proactivity-outcome relationship and ultimately, to better understand how the associated benefits and costs can be optimized by employees and management alike.

In a different vein, the studies presented in Chapter 4 highlight the importance of taking affective regard into account when studying the evaluations of others' work behavior and the reactions that proactive individuals may bring about. Indeed, the findings reported in these studies indicate that when supervisors hold low affective regard towards the focal employee, the employee is in a more delicate position and needs to carefully balance his or her level of proactivity (insofar as this is possible) in order to avoid his or her actions to be perceived as counterproductive or fueling conflict. On the other hand, when the supervisor finds the focal employee is more likeable, there do not seem to be such negative returns, even when being highly proactive. This suggests that individuals for whom supervisors hold higher levels of affective regard have more leeway to exhibit their proactive personality and take initiative without being perceived as overly challenging or disruptive.

Though the powerful influence of affective regard has been well documented in the performance evaluation literature (Sutton, Baldwin, Wood, & Hoffman, 2013), these results suggest that its important role stretches to a broader domain including that of proactivity. Given that proactivity is argued to be particularly relevant in situations that are characterized by more autonomy and higher levels of uncertainty (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007), it would be interesting to find out whether in these 'weak' situations (Mischel, 1977; Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010) the effect of proactivity and affective regard is even more profound. That is, in weak situations the desired behaviors are not specified *ex ante* which is likely to increase the relevance of proactivity (Glaser, Stam & Takeuchi, 2016). Yet, such situations may be

particularly susceptible to the outcomes of social construction processes and attributions (Kelley, 1973; Lam, Huang, and Snape, 2007; Lord, & Maher, 1991; Schneider, 1991).

While the current research did not examine whether the effect of affective regard on performance represents bias or true difference in performance, a meta-analysis by Sutton et al. (2013) indicates that the substantial overlap between affective regard and performance ratings ( $\rho=.77$ ) results from bias as well as from potential 'true' differences. Furthermore, one can only wonder about the directionality of this relationship as managers might over time develop more affective regard for high performers and their liking of employees who do not perform well may decrease over time. Given the pervasiveness and centrality of the job performance construct to the Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management literature, the reverse occurring (i.e. affective regard causing supervisor perceptions of job performance) would clearly be more problematic, because it would open the door to the possibility that many of our researched interventions and instrumentation may be targeting the improvement of supervisor affective regard as opposed to job performance. What the current results do imply, is that affective regard had a pervasive effect and brought about different patterns between proactivity and the evaluations on various performance dimensions. In this regard, research that addresses how such processes unfold over time is needed and I thus repeat Sutton et al.'s (2013) call for more research into the directionality of this relationship and add to this a call to also include wider evaluations of employee behavior in this research, not only task performance, but also other relevant performance related constructs such as citizenship and counterproductive work behavior.

Furthermore, with respect to research in the proactivity domain, findings suggest that employee situational judgement and interpersonal or political skills are likely to be critically important to the way in which proactive behaviors are appreciated (or penalized) by

managers. To better understand these processes additional work is needed that identifies the extent to which negative outcomes result from misguided, non-constructive actions, or from the way in which actions and intentions are construed by observers (e.g., peers, teammates, or managers). This direction of research alludes to a recent framework published by Parker and colleagues (2019) who argue that relationship quality and contextual knowledge are likely to play a vital role in the proactivity- outcome relationship. Taking this line of thought forward suggests that the seminal work on leader-member exchange (LMX) may pave the way for future avenues of research.

Specifically, affective regard and proactivity contingent performance may reinforce one another. If proactivity is most appropriate in ambiguous or ‘weak’ situations, information sharing and feedback in the absence of clearly prescribed tasks is critical to acquire contextual knowledge (Campbell, 2000). Yet, supervisors may be inclined to exchange more information with employees with whom they are on good terms, as liking has been found to facilitate the initial and on-going development of LMX (Dulebohn, Wu, & Liao, 2017; Tse, Troth, Ashkanasy, & Collins, 2018). A high quality relationship may thereby decrease the chances of ill-judgment and allow employees to better anticipate and capitalize on opportunities (Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016) as opposed to those with a poor relationship quality. This would imply a form of information asymmetry, depending on the quality of the employee-supervisor relationship and thereby affecting employees’ opportunities to make better judgment calls to successfully navigate ambiguous situations.

The presented studies were primarily focused on the interplay between subordinates and their supervisors. To further accumulate knowledge on the reactions that proactive employees bring about, alternative perspectives that focus on reactions amongst co-workers, teammates, or clients are needed. For instance, future research could address when or under

which conditions highly proactive individuals inspire their teammates as they may be regarded as role models or high performers. Or, alternatively, under which conditions highly proactive individuals are regarded as overly ambitious and of undermining cohesiveness by, for example, negotiating idiosyncratic work arrangements (Liao, Wayne & Rousseau, 2014; Rousseau, 2005). Also, when proactive employees start to generate negative returns that are visible to others, team members may wish to avoid risks and become more inclined to conform to narrowly defined tasks rather than to challenge the status quo and take initiative. This line of research could offer not only insight in the positive and negative effects that proactive employees inflict on themselves but also whether proactive behavior may encourage or discourage others. Moreover, there is little research that has examined to what extent proactive employees may affect the work of others. For instance, new initiatives or job crafting (Bolino et al., 2017) might imply changes in procedures that upset work habits or increase the workload of coworkers and the team.

As the research reported in this dissertation suggests that proactive individuals may simultaneously create both positive and negative outcomes, it would be interesting to explore further under which conditions this occurs and when and how the costs may start to outweigh the benefits. For example, in further research it would be interesting to explore, more comprehensively, how this ‘double-edged sword’ relates to personal outcomes, such as for instance the impact of proactive issue-selling on one’s reputation and career sponsorship (Dutton, et al., 1997; Grant et al., 2009). Complementarily to employee outcomes, additional research may seek to address how proactivity impacts critical outcomes at the organizational level. Building upon the current work, research could address what organizations can do to manage the risks arising from employees who deviate from established procedures without discouraging employee initiative, by clearly articulating the organizations mission, putting

formal and informal controls in place and setting clear boundaries. For example, ensuring alignment with the organization's strategy, the value of risk taking, and job autonomy in relation to risk propensity have been argued to moderate the performance outcomes of proactivity (Bolino et al., 2010; Campbell, 2000; Glaser et al., 2016).

Likewise, contextual variables in the job and organizational environment may determine the relative value and appropriateness of proactivity in specific work environments. For instance, the level of regulation in jobs due to safety standards or the level of information sharing that allows one to draw the right diagnostics and take appropriate actions, are likely to be important contingencies that influence the desirability of proactivity as well as the relation between proactivity and outcomes at different levels. Thus, to better understand when proactivity contributes to organizational effectiveness, it would be of value to learn more about the risks that may be contingent upon specific work environments and occupations, as well as how to manage these risks in the work setting.

Combining the results covered in Chapter 2, 3 and 4, employee proactivity seems to generate effective outcomes, but also indicates the relevance of addressing the question for who these outcomes are deemed effective. As some proactive behaviors may serve the individual, the team, and/or the organization, other outcomes of proactive behaviors may serve primarily the self and potentially come at the expense of team members, the organization or even, somewhat paradoxically, the self in case of adverse effects. This too might be the case for proactive career behaviors including career initiative. For example, effectuating a better fit between one's own needs and the supplies in the work environment or engaging in developmental activities that may serve one's career, do not necessarily benefit the organization or colleagues. In fact, when this raises the appearance of favoritism,

increases turnover among high performers, or when (developmental)activities are not aligned with the organization's goals it may generate negative returns.

### **Methodological considerations pertaining to the four presented studies**

Moving beyond the typical linear paradigm disclosed in research on the organizational behavioral domain, the presented studies underscore the importance of deliberating on the functional form of the relationship(s) between antecedents and consequences (Chapter 4). Rather than making implicit assumptions of linearity, future research could enrich our understanding of the association between predictors (such as personality traits) and criteria (such as job related outcomes) by elaborating on the nature of the relationship in greater depth. Omission of such an exploration may in fact lead to inconclusive results and perpetuate misguided inferences among practitioners and academics (Le, et al., 2011; Pierce & Aguinis, 2013). Pertaining to the proactivity domain, future research may not only consider the functional form of the relationship between proactive personality and relevant criteria, but could also consider the full range of effects of proactivity by examining if, and when, quantitative differences become qualitative (Grant & Schwartz, 2011). For instance, when challenging the status quo shifts from being 'constructive rebellion' to being dysfunctional, conflict seeking or destructive behavior.

A second methodological issue raised in this dissertation pertains to temporal issues in the research domain. As the vast majority of research in work and organizational psychology uses cross-sectional designs (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010), including the studies in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, these studies are limited in the inferences regarding causality and changes over time. I aimed to overcome some of the limitations of the cross-sectional data in Chapter 2 by analyzing secondary data of a two-wave study in Chapter 3. With a parallel growth

model the dynamic process of achieving and maintaining fit was addressed. However, even though the two-wave data appear to demonstrate changes in fit over time (i.e. changes at the intra-individual level), full longitudinal research, meaning collecting data from more than two-waves, is needed in order to gain better insight in fit as an ongoing dynamic phenomenon and to rule out alternative explanations (such as reversed causality or measurement error; Singer & Willett, 2003). Despite multiple calls (cf. Edwards, 2008; Bindl & Parker, 2017) for more longitudinal research in order to develop stronger theory and to better understand processes and the role of ‘time’, cross-sectional research designs still dominate the literature on organizational behavior, including that on proactive work behavior.

Given the practical challenges that are associated with longitudinal designs, as it requires a long-term focus, cooperation from focal individuals at multiple points in time and thus an investment in terms of time from both researchers and subjects, it is hardly surprising that academics struggle to meet these calls. In addition to diary designs and retrospective research (e.g., Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), more use of secondary data and closer collaboration with practitioners in the field are a potentially productive avenue. Yet, secondary data usually have their own limitations, which is for example illustrated by the brief measures (single- and two-item measures) that were employed in Chapter 3. Closer collaboration between academics and practitioners, could not only facilitate access to more data, but could also facilitate the generation of higher quality data that would meet academic standards in terms of reliability and validity.

Moreover, closer collaboration between academics and practitioners may promote more ‘evidence-based’ practice in the field, and may provide an interesting angle on the issues that academics place on their agenda. Embedding academia in the field and vice versa may, for example, drive more research focused on how the effects of employee behavior funnel into

unit-level performance or firm-level performance, thereby augmenting the predominant research on outcomes at the individual level (Bolino et al., 2017). Also, from an organizational perspective it would be interesting to place greater emphasis on factors that are under the control of the organization and management, such as (bundles of) HR practices and policies, and how they may promote desirable (or prevent undesirable) employee actions. Alternatively, practitioners may learn from collaboration with academics and make better informed decisions. Particularly businesses in environments that are strongly driven by (sales) targets and commercial interests, people are generally inclined to speed up processes to generate short-term returns which may come at the cost of adopting a comprehensive and fundamental approach to business issues. Elaborate analyses of available (HR)data are frequently omitted. Unfortunately, this results all too often in decisions or policies that are made ‘on the fly’ and that are based on ‘gut feeling’ or tenacious views and dogmas which by no means reflect the decisions one would make based on insights generated (and considered as common knowledge) by academics. Hence, I repeat Binning and Barrett’s (1989) call for experimenting organizations. In my view both the field and academia could and should benefit from closer integration by sharing data and insights and thereby diminishing the discrepancy between research findings (and the issues academics place on their agenda) and organizational practice.

### **Practical implications**

Despite the above, the insights presented in this dissertation raise several practical implications in the context of contemporary work settings. As today’s jobs are increasingly characterized by continuous change and greater autonomy, it is increasingly important to understand how individuals can manage their fit with the work environment to ensure they sustainably add value to the employing organization and to secure sustainable employability

in the (external) labor market. As job requirements alter, particularly in the face of rapidly evolving technological developments, individuals will continuously need to develop their skills and organizations cannot just rely on establishing fit upon job entry. Establishing fit does not ‘end’ during the selection and onboarding phase, but in fact begins there and needs to be gauged and addressed on a continuous basis as job demands evolve and employees’ needs alter over time.

Moreover, as life-time employment relations and predetermined career paths have become the exception rather than the norm (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; CBS, 2018; Eurostat, 2017), individuals are not only challenged to keep pace with altering work requirements, but also need to give direction to their own career rather than relying on the employing organization to manage this process for them. As the ‘organization-based career’ moves to a ‘self-based career’ (Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Sonnentag, 2017) this raises the question of how one can prevent certain groups of individuals being ‘left behind’ on the job market (Capelli, 1999; Eurostat, 2017). Specifically, individuals who have the skills and ‘knowhow’ to take initiative in managing their career are more likely to thrive in this ‘new deal’ as opposed to those who have more difficulties in doing so. Also, considering the outlook on future work, it is to be expected that repetitive and predictable tasks will (insofar as they have not already) be significantly impacted by automation and robotization (Bresnahan, 1999; Frey & Osborne, 2013; McKinsey & Company, 2017). Hence, specifically for those individuals who work in such occupations it is perhaps particularly critical to take initiative and manage their alignment with the work environment by anticipating on changing, and emerging tasks as well as tasks that may cease to exist in the labor market, as a result of technological advancement. In search for sustainable participation, it is therefore important that organizations support individuals (particularly those who experience more difficulty in managing their career on

their own accord) to engage in career development activities and to ensure that they expand and develop skills that are fit for the future. Ultimately, this may help ensure that employees sustainably add value to the employing organization and remain competitive in the job market (Capelli, 1999; Waterman, Waterman & Collard, 1994).

The presented insights provided by the combined studies in Chapter 4 also hold several practical implications to be considered by managers and employees. Given the profound effect of the affective regard of the supervisor towards the employee, on the way proactive individuals are perceived in the work setting, raises the question when, and particularly by whom, high levels of proactivity are deemed to be appropriate. Individual employees need to be aware of these potential risks associated with taking a proactive stance at work.

Likewise, managers may try to prevent inequity at the workplace by keeping an open mind and realizing that liking or not liking an employee may affect their judgement of what that employee does. Given the particularly profound effect of affective regard on the proactivity-outcome relationship may suggest that proactivity potentially reinforces unfair situations. Along similar lines, Rousseau and colleagues (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006; Bolino & Turnley, 2009) suggested that proactive behaviors may reinforce inequity in the workplace. Specifically, they noted that idiosyncratic deals are more likely to be negotiated (a different type of proactive behavior) successfully by employees for whom supervisors hold high affective regard and thereby creating the appearance, or reality, of favoritism.

Furthermore, if managers truly wish to promote proactive behavior among their workforce, they should be aware of, and properly manage the pitfalls associated, with such behaviors in order for these behaviors to be beneficial rather than harmful. Particularly in

contemporary structures where work design is set to encourage innovation and adaptability by empowering employees and providing greater role flexibility (Griffin et al., 2007), it would be valuable to learn more about how organizations can nurture and promote proactive behavior while at the same time effectively dealing with undesired side effects (Wu & Parker, 2017; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010). The extant literature indicates that both attributes of the actor, the behavior itself, as well as the (interpersonal) context matter.

Paradoxically, managers often claim to value employee initiative and encourage employees to exercise their own judgment rather than performing narrowly defined tasks (Campbell, 2000). Yet, at the same time they seem to punish initiatives when they are not in line with their own judgement (Campbell, 2000; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010) and will most likely label such actions as misguided or inappropriate. However, diverse stakeholders may hold different perspectives and interests thereby potentially construing the effectiveness and appropriateness of their actions differently. In fact, the perceived desirability of a chosen action may not only vary between an employee and supervisor, due to different perspectives and interests, but it may also differ between middle management and the institution as a whole (Dutton, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001). Moreover, constructive dissent and even questioning the organization's fundamental goals may under some conditions serve the greater good. In this regard, highly proactive individuals may be regarded as 'rebels' in an organization who deviate from common expectations and push innovation.

Establishing a balance between conformity and allowing employees to challenge the status quo does put managers in a somewhat precarious role that will require a high level of trust between employees and management (Campbell, 2000; Grant et al., 2009). In this respect organizations who wish to promote a proactive workforce will need to have managers who not only share information and grant subordinates a fair amount of autonomy (Carnevale,

Huang, Crede, Harms, & Uhl-Bien, 2017; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012), but also managers who strive to learn from dissonance and who create opportunities rather than aiming for conformity as a goal in and of itself (Heifetz, 1994; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2017). Additionally, even when there is goal alignment and values are shared, there is most likely ‘no safe option’ as errors and unanticipated side effects are to some extent inherent to processes where people deviate from established paths and challenge the status quo (Campbell, 2000; Hammond, Farr, & Sherman, 2011; Glaser et al., 2016). Some tolerance for ‘legitimate’ errors and a climate in which wrong decisions are framed as facilitating organizational learning will therefore be necessary to create the safe climate needed to nurture proactive behavior (Kriegesmann, Kley, & Schwering, 2005). Managers who strive for a proactive workforce and truly wish to embrace constructive rebellion will have to create an atmosphere where employees have on the one hand, confidence in a fair resolution in the face of errors or disharmony, and on the other hand, a clear understanding of the boundaries and the amount of leeway at their disposal within which they can operate (Campbell, 2000; Gino, 2016; Kriegesmann et al., 2005). In this view, effective conflict management becomes an increasingly important skill for contemporary workplaces (Trudel & Reio, 2011).

While leadership is a particularly prominent factor in the work setting (Den Hartog, & Belschak, 2012; Carnevale et al., 2017), employees themselves can also exert influence on the reactions they bring about from their leaders and coworkers. Not only the ability to make effective judgements in terms of appropriate goals, methods, and timing (Chan, 2006; Wihler, Bickle, Ellen, Hochwarter & Ferris, 2017), but also the way in which actions are framed will determine whether proactive behavior is deemed to be appropriate (Grant, 2013). For example, Davidson and Van Dyne (2017) suggest that the framing of proactive voice in terms of level of abstraction and desirability, may influence supervisor judgments of effectiveness.

Likewise, Grant et al. (2009) found that employees with strong prosocial (as opposed to self-serving) values or impression management, were more likely to be given credit for proactive behaviors. In sum, employees can to some extent manage the reactions that their proactive behavior brings about by expressing values, emotion regulation, and political skill.

In conclusion, the presented studies suggest that proactivity at work can be ‘blessing *and* a bane’ (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b). Findings indicate that proactive career behaviors can promote and ensure congruence between the individual and the job. Also these behaviors, as well as the personality dimension, have been found to positively relate to job performance. However, highly proactive employees can simultaneously give rise to conflict and engage in behaviors that are considered as counterproductive by supervisors. These findings imply that proactivity in the workplace can make an important contribution to performance and personal career success (Parker & Bindl, 2017), but may also come with a downside by giving rise to conflict and potentially harming effective functioning.



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# ENGLISH SUMMARY

Inspired by the growing need for employees to engage in self-directed, anticipatory actions to perform effectively in the contemporary work environment, four empirical studies were conducted on employee proactivity. The studies presented in this dissertation address two lines of research in relation to employee proactivity. While both lines of research were aimed at enhancing our understanding of *how* employee proactivity results in critical outcomes for the individual and employing organization, the first line of research was focused on a specific type of proactive behavior, namely career initiative, in relation to the individual's congruence with the work environment. The second line of research was focused on proactive personality in relation to various performance dimensions and potential adverse effects.

In addressing the first line of research, the studies depicted in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 integrate the work on proactivity and the theoretical framework of person-environment fit. The studies aimed to add to the current literature by theorizing that the positive association that is found in the extant literature between proactive behaviors with performance and career outcomes, can be (partially) explained through their impact on person-job fit. Specifically, it was argued that individuals who proactively manage their career, achieve higher performance levels and greater career satisfaction by establishing and maintaining a higher level of congruence between themselves and the characteristics of their job.

As a first step to test this idea, a multisource study was conducted in which two specific dimensions of person-job fit, namely demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit were modelled to mediate the effect of career initiative on job performance and career satisfaction respectively. Based on cross-sectional data, preliminary support was found for this model, such that career initiative was positively associated with both dimensions of person-job fit and (in)directly related with performance and career satisfaction. The two distinct fit dimensions,

although highly correlated, were found to relate to the differential outcome factors such that demands-abilities fit primarily mediated the impact of career initiative on job performance whereas needs-supplies fit primarily mediated the impact of career initiative on career satisfaction. These results suggest that individuals who proactively manage their career may indeed be better able to attain a high level of congruence between their own attributes and the characteristics of the job that allows for better performance and greater levels of career satisfaction.

Although the results in Chapter 2 therewith seemed to support the hypothesized relationships, the cross-sectional design limited inferences pertaining to within person change and the theorized dynamics. To overcome some of these limitations and to start shedding light on the dynamic nature of fit, a parallel growth model was constructed in Chapter 3. By analyzing data of a two-wave study, it was explored how individuals' perceived demands-abilities fit may change over time by virtue of career initiative. Support was found for the positive impact of career initiative on person-job fit (a between-person effect) and increases in career initiative were found to be associated with increases in person-job fit over time (a within-person effect). In contrast to the dominant person-environment fit paradigm which is in large part grounded in Schneider's seminal Attraction Selection Attrition -framework, findings of the current study indicated that improvements in perceived demands-abilities fit can be established without necessarily having to change to a new job. Although actual turnover was found to be generally associated with positive changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, improvements in fit could also be discerned for those individuals who remained in the same job, and particularly for those individuals who exhibited increases in career initiative over time. The relationships that were found in the data may imply that in order to sustain correspondence with job demands, one needs to actively manage one's career on an ongoing



basis. Or in other words, findings suggest that people who fail to nourish their career initiative, may see a deterioration in their demands-abilities fit over time.

Combined, the two studies set out to contribute to the academic field by providing tentative empirical support for the conceptualization of career initiative as a type of proactive person-environment fit behavior and suggests that employees who engage in such behaviors may indeed effectuate change in themselves and/ or the characteristics of the job in order to achieve and sustain compatibility with their work environment. In focusing on the dynamic nature of fit and the deliberate ways in which individuals can impact their fit within the confines of their job, the presented studies intend to contribute to the Person Environment (PE) fit literature. While this literature provides valuable insights into the effects of fit on work-related outcomes, less research has focused on the deliberate ways in which individuals can establish or maintain person-job fit beyond the selection and early socialization phase. Accordingly, the presented studies aim to address this void by exploring within-person change and by highlighting the potential proactive role employees may adopt to ensure compatibility between themselves and their job. The studies thereby highlight the idea that establishing fit does not ‘end’ during the selection and onboarding phase, but in fact begins there and suggests that individuals can and do engage in anticipatory actions to manage their alignment without necessarily having to switch to a new job.

Turning to the second theme covered in this dissertation, the two empirical studies presented in Chapter 4 aimed to answer calls that have been made in the literature for offering a more nuanced view on proactivity that takes both positive and negative ramifications into account. While multiple studies, including meta-analyses, have shown that proactive personality (i.e. the individual’s propensity to act in a more or less proactive manner) relates to a broad set of proactive behaviors and a number of advantageous outcomes for both the

individual and organization, scholars have cautioned that employee proactivity may not always be desirable and may indeed entail adverse effects. The extant literature on proactivity has however only marginally answered the repeated calls for a more balanced approach towards employee proactivity.

Based on two empirical studies using multisource data, Chapter 4 challenges the often implicit assumption of proactivity as good without qualification in two distinct ways. First, the both positive and adverse outcomes of proactive personality were examined simultaneously. Specifically, the studies examined whether highly proactive employees may fuel employee-supervisor conflict (Study 1) and risk being perceived as behaving counterproductively (Study 2), next to achieving higher performance levels. Second, and in addition to the potential effects on negatively framed outcomes, the two studies explored whether there can be ‘too much of a good thing’ when it comes to extreme levels of proactive personality. That is, by testing for non-monotonic relations between proactive personality and the outcomes included in these studies, it was examined whether highly proactive individuals may start to generate diminished returns beyond a certain point.

Findings did not support the hypothesized attenuating effects of proactive personality on the performance dimensions (job performance, task performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors). However, results did provide support for the co-occurrence of adverse effects as highly proactive individuals were more at risk of fueling employee-supervisor conflict and being perceived as behaving counterproductively. This association was found to be curvilinear such that particularly excessive levels of proactive personality related to conflict, and that both deficiency and excess in terms of proactive personality related to higher levels of perceived counterproductive behaviors. These associations were however conditional and strongly impacted by the supervisor’s affective regard towards the focal



employee. Results thereby suggest that relational quality has a profound effect on the proactivity-outcome relationship.

The final chapter of this dissertation discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Limitations of the presented studies are addressed and suggestions for future research are offered.

# NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Geïnspireerd door het toenemend belang van proactief gedrag voor werknemers om succesvol te functioneren in de hedendaagse werkomgeving, zijn vier empirische studies beschreven. De studies die in dit proefschrift aan bod komen, richten zich op twee onderzoekslijnen met betrekking tot proactiviteit onder werknemers. Hoewel beide onderzoekslijnen zijn gericht op het vergaren van kennis over de manier waarop proactiviteit onder medewerkers kan bijdragen aan het succesvol functioneren in de werkomgeving, belichten ze verschillende aspecten. De eerste onderzoekslijn is gericht op een specifieke vorm van proactief gedrag, namelijk loopbaan-initiatief en loopbaangerelateerde uitkomsten. De tweede onderzoekslijn is daarentegen gericht op proactieve persoonlijkheid en de relatie met verscheidene prestatiedimensies en potentiële negatieve effecten op de werkvloer.

Ten aanzien van de eerste onderzoekslijn beogen de studies in Hoofdstuk 2 en Hoofdstuk 3 het werk op het gebied van proactiviteit te integreren met de theorie omtrent de *person-environment fit* (de mate waarin eigenschappen van het individu en kenmerken van de werkomgeving op elkaar aansluiten en in elkaars behoeften voorzien). De studies trachten een bijdrage te leveren aan de academische literatuur door het positieve verband dat door onderzoekers is vastgesteld tussen proactief gedrag enerzijds en het functioneren van medewerkers en het behalen van een succesvolle loopbaan anderzijds, ten dele te verklaren door de mate waarin kenmerken van het individu en het werk op elkaar aansluiten en voorzien in elkaars behoeften (*person-job fit*). Concreet is de veronderstelling uitgewerkt dat individuen die op proactieve wijze hun loopbaan vormgeven beter functioneren in het werk en tevredener zijn over de eigen loopbaan doordat ze middels het vertonen van dit gedrag in staat zijn om een betere *person-job fit* te realiseren én te behouden.

Om dit idee te toetsen is in eerste instantie een *multisource* studie uitgevoerd waarin twee specifieke dimensies van *person-job fit*, namelijk *demands-abilities fit* en *needs-supplies*

*fit*, zijn gemodelleerd als mediators waarlangs loopbaaninitiatief een effect heeft op respectievelijk werkprestaties en loopbaantevredenheid. Op basis van cross-sectionele data is enige steun gevonden voor deze aanname doordat loopbaaninitiatief positief gerelateerd was aan de beide vormen van *person-job fit* en (in)direct gerelateerd was aan werkprestaties en loopbaantevredenheid. Ondanks dat de twee verschillende vormen van *person-job fit* onderling sterk gecorreleerd waren, bleken ze wel verschillend te relateren aan de uitkomstfactoren waarbij *demands-abilities fit* primair de relatie tussen loopbaaninitiatief en werkprestaties medieert en *needs-supplies fit* primair de relatie tussen loopbaaninitiatief en loopbaantevredenheid medieert. Deze uitkomsten suggereren dat mensen die op proactieve wijze hun loopbaan vormgeven in staat zijn een betere aansluiting tussen hun eigen kenmerken en de werkomgeving te bewerkstelligen, waardoor men beter kan presteren en tevredener is over de eigen loopbaan.

Hoewel de resultaten in Hoofdstuk 2 de veronderstelde relaties lijken te ondersteunen, heeft het cross-sectionele ontwerp van de studie beperkingen ten aanzien van veranderingen binnen persoonsniveau (*within person change*) en ten aanzien van de veronderstelde dynamiek. Om enkele van deze beperkingen te adresseren en inzicht te creëren in de dynamiek ten aanzien van *fit*, is in Hoofdstuk 3 een *parallel growth model* geconstrueerd. Middels analyse van secundaire data die bestaat uit een herhaalde meting is getoetst in hoeverre de ervaren *demands-abilities fit* na verloop van tijd kan veranderen als gevolg van loopbaaninitiatief. Uit de analyse blijkt dat er sprake is van een positief effect van loopbaaninitiatief op de *demands-abilities fit* (variatie tussen personen) en dat een toename van loopbaaninitiatief relateert aan een verbetering van de fit over de tijd heen (variatie binnen de persoon). In tegenstelling tot het dominante perspectief op *person-environment fit*, dat in sterke mate gestoeld is op het gedachtegoed van Schneider's *Attraction Selection*

*Attrition* raamwerk, duiden de bevindingen van het huidige onderzoek erop dat verbeteringen in *demands-abilities fit* tot stand kunnen komen zonder noodzakelijkerwijs van baan te veranderen. Hoewel verandering van baan bleek samen te hangen met een positieve verandering in de ervaren *demands-abilities fit*, konden er ook verbeteringen worden waargenomen onder individuen die niet van baan waren veranderd, en dan met name onder individuen die een toename van loopbaaninitiatief hadden vertoond in de tussenliggende periode. Deze relaties duiden er mogelijk op dat men op continue basis initiatief moet nemen om een goede aansluiting met de baan te onderhouden. Met andere woorden, de bevindingen suggereren dat mensen die geen loopbaaninitiatief vertonen, na verloop van tijd een verslechtering in hun *demands-abilities fit* zullen ervaren.

Gecombineerd trachten de twee studies bij te dragen aan het academisch veld door een voorlopige empirische ondersteuning te bieden voor het classificeren van loopbaaninitiatief als vorm van proactief *person-environment fit* gedrag en door aan te geven dat werknemers die dergelijk gedrag vertonen daadwerkelijk veranderingen teweeg brengen in zichzelf en/ of in de kenmerken van de baan, waardoor men aansluiting bij het werk vindt en behoudt. Door nadruk te leggen op de dynamische kant van *fit* en de doelbewuste manier waarop mensen invloed kunnen uitoefenen op hun aansluiting met het werk, binnen de grenzen van hun baan, beogen de beschreven studies bij te dragen aan de literatuur op het gebied van *person-environment fit*. Hoewel de huidige literatuur op dit onderwerp waardevolle inzichten biedt in de effecten van *fit* op werkgerelateerde uitkomsten, is er minder onderzoek gedaan naar de doelbewuste manier waarop mensen een goede fit met hun baan kunnen bereiken of waarborgen, nadat de selectie en vroege ‘socialisatiefase’ voorbij is. De huidige studies pogen deze leemte op te vullen door te verkennen in hoeverre er veranderingen in de mate van *fit* zijn waar te nemen (*within-person change*) in relatie tot de proactieve rol die mensen zelf

kunnen aannemen om aansluiting tussen henzelf en het werk te waarborgen. De studies benadrukken daarbij dat het vaststellen van een goede ‘match’ tussen het individu en de baan niet eindigt na de selectie- en inwerkperiode, maar daar in feite pas begint en dat individuen anticiperende acties kunnen en zullen ondernemen om ervoor te zorgen dat er een goede aansluiting blijft bestaan tussen de baan en de persoon zelf, zonder noodzakelijkerwijs van baan te hoeven veranderen.

Met betrekking tot het tweede thema dat in dit proefschrift is beschreven, zijn er in Hoofdstuk 4 twee empirische studies gepresenteerd in reactie op verscheidene oproepen die in de literatuur zijn gedaan om een meer genuanceerde visie op proactiviteit te vormen waarin rekening wordt gehouden met zowel positieve als negatieve gevolgen. Hoewel meerdere studies, inclusief meta-analyses, hebben aangetoond dat proactieve persoonlijkheid (d.w.z. de neiging van het individu om in mindere of meerdere mate proactief te handelen) samenhangt met een brede reeks aan proactieve gedragingen en gunstige uitkomsten voor zowel het individu als de organisatie, waarschuwen wetenschappers dat proactiviteit niet in alle gevallen tot wenselijke uitkomsten zal leiden en zelfs gepaard kan gaan met negatieve (bij)effecten. De huidige literatuur over proactiviteit heeft echter nog maar in zeer geringe mate gehoor gegeven aan herhaalde oproepen om tot een meer evenwichtige benadering te komen.

Op basis van twee empirische studies met *multisource* data, wordt in Hoofdstuk 4 de vaak impliciete aanname dat proactiviteit zonder meer een positief gegeven is, op twee verschillende manieren ter discussie gesteld. Ten eerste zijn zowel de positieve als potentiële negatieve effecten van proactieve persoonlijkheid gezamenlijk onderzocht. Specifiek is onderzocht of zeer proactieve medewerkers, naast het bereiken van hogere prestatieniveaus, ook aanleiding kunnen geven tot meer conflicten met de leidinggevende (Studie 1) en in hoeverre proactieve medewerkers het risico lopen om als contraproductief te worden gezien

(Studie 2). Ten tweede is, in aanvulling op de potentiële negatieve effecten, onderzocht of er sprake kan zijn van ‘te veel van het goede’ als het gaat om extreme niveaus van proactieve persoonlijkheid. Dat wil zeggen dat er is getoetst op niet-lineaire relaties tussen proactieve persoonlijkheid en de prestatiedimensies om zodoende te verkennen of proactieve mensen boven een bepaald punt een afname zien van de doorgaans positieve uitkomsten die ze genereren.

De bevindingen ondersteunden niet de veronderstelling met betrekking tot het afnemende effect van proactieve persoonlijkheid op de verschillende positief geformuleerde prestatiedimensies (werkprestatie, taakprestaties en *organizational citizenship behavior*). Daarentegen bleek wel dat proactiviteit gepaard kan gaan met negatieve effecten doordat zeer proactieve mensen een groter risico op conflict met de leidinggevende bleken te hebben en het risico liepen om als contraproductief bestempeld te worden. Deze relatie was kromlijinig van aard waarbij een zeer hoge mate van proactieve persoonlijkheid relateert aan conflict en waarbij zowel een gebrek aan- als een zeer hoge mate van proactieve persoonlijkheid samenhangt met gepercipieerde contraproductiviteit. Deze associaties waren voorwaardelijk en sterk afhankelijk van de mate waarin de leidinggevende sympathie had voor de desbetreffende medewerker. De resultaten suggereren daarmee dat de kwaliteit van de relatie tussen leidinggevende en medewerker een bepalend effect heeft op de effecten die proactieve medewerkers teweegbrengen.

In het laatste hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift worden de theoretische en praktische implicaties van de bevindingen besproken. Beperkingen van de gepresenteerde studies worden behandeld en suggesties voor toekomstig onderzoek worden aangedragen.

# DANKWOORD

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