Employee Proactivity: Champions and Rebels in the Workplace
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Employee proactivity:
Champions and rebels in the workplace

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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 additional 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.