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# The dynamics of proactivity at work

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## Abstract

As the organizational literature on specific proactive behaviors grows, researchers have noted inefficiencies and redundancies in the separate study of different proactive behaviors when their underlying nature, antecedents, processes, and consequences may be similar. We develop a framework designed to generalize across specific manifestations of proactivity, describing the nature, dimensions, situational antecedents, psychological mechanisms, dispositional moderators, and consequences of proactive behavior. We conclude by discussing implications and recommendations for organizational scholars to take a more proactive approach to constructing, evaluating, and cumulating theory about proactive behavior. Our chapter thus answers recent calls for integrative theory about the general dynamics of proactivity, and fits with current trends emphasizing the increasing importance of proactivity in organizational life.

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### If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door.--Milton Berle

Employees do not just let life happen to them. Rather, they try to affect, shape, curtail, expand, and temper what happens in their lives. Although our theory and research have focused historically on management, managers, and their influence, in the past two decades, organizational research on the proactive behaviors of individual employees in organizations has blossomed. Proactive behavior refers to anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments. Existing research provides extensive evidence of the different ways in which employees express proactive behavior, including seeking feedback (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; Ashford & Cummings, 1983, 1985), taking initiative in pursuing personal and organizational goals (Frese & Fay, 2001; Roberson, 1990), actively adapting to new environments (Ashford & Black, 1996; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Saks & Ashforth, 1996; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), expressing voice (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001), selling issues (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), acting in advance to influence individuals and groups (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Williams, Gray, & von Broembsen, 1976), expanding roles (Nicholson, 1984; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997), revising tasks (Staw & Boettger, 1990), crafting jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), breaking rules (Morrison, 2006), implementing ideas and solving problems (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006), harming individuals and organizations (Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Spector & Fox, 2002), and building social networks (Morrison, 2002; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). These various literatures portray proactive behaviors as prevalent at work, and as affecting outcomes for both the individuals who carry them out and their organizations.

Although these literatures on proactive behaviors have grown rapidly, they have grown largely in isolation from each other. Most research on proactive behavior has been phenomenon-driven; researchers have noticed a particular behavior and then developed theory and collected data to describe, predict, and explain it as a distinct phenomenon. For example, the literatures on role expansion and task revision have grown up with little reference to the near cousins of voice and

issue-selling; issue-selling research, in turn, rarely references the proactive behaviors of feedback-seeking, social network-building, and taking charge. Accordingly, the study of proactive behavior has not been systematic or integrated. As a result, we have learned much about the nature, antecedents, processes, and consequences of specific proactive behaviors, but we know little about the more universal dynamics that might govern proactive behavior.

Concern over these trends led several scholars to suggest that researchers should focus on the dynamics that might be general and common across multiple or all proactive behaviors (Crant, 2000; Parker, 2000; Rank, Pace, & Frese, 2004). There are certainly inefficiencies for the field in maintaining separate literatures for specific behaviors if they share similar dimensions, antecedents, processes, and consequences. Comprehensive theorizing can help scholars to see basic dimensions, antecedents, processes, and consequences that may pertain to proactivity more generally, regardless of its specific manifestations. We are not suggesting that all research on specific proactive behaviors be collapsed into the study of general proactive behavior. Rather, we are suggesting that there is value in examining similarities across different proactive behaviors to draw lessons for understanding both the specific manifestations and the general phenomenon of proactivity, and to enable scholars to pursue research in specific areas with a sense of the general dynamics. Our focus in this chapter is thus on "lumping" across literatures rather than "splitting" between them (e.g., Fiske, 2006; Judge, 2003; Petty, Wheeler, & Bizer, 1999; Zerubavel, 1996), in the interest of identifying common patterns in the nature, antecedents, processes, and consequences of proactive behavior.

In addition to answering calls for more integrative theory and research, our focus on the general dynamics of proactivity fits with recent trends in practice. In an increasingly global and ambiguous world of work, proactivity is perhaps more important than ever before. As organizations shift from production economies to knowledge economies, they rely on employees to engage in proactive behavior in order to promote creativity, innovation, and change, as highlighted by both organizational scholars (e.g., Campbell, 2000; Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Howell, 2005; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Parker, 2000; Rank et al., 2004; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004; Unsworth, 2001) and journalists (e.g., Gladwell, 2000; Pink, 2001, 2005). To gain a deeper understanding of how to cultivate proactive behavior and what consequences this might yield, frameworks are needed that specify the nature and dimensions of proactive behavior, the relevant contextual and dispositional factors that promote proactive behavior, the psychological mechanisms through which these factors exert their influences, and the general consequences of proactive behavior. This chapter takes a step toward developing such a framework.

We begin by situating proactivity in the broader development of work motivation theory and research, calling attention to the rise of more proactive perspectives in several bodies of organizational scholarship. Next, we discuss the nature of proactivity, with particular emphasis on proactivity as a process, as well as the key dimensions that describe proactive behavior. We then turn to an examination of the common situational and dispositional antecedents, psychological mechanisms, and consequences of proactive behavior. We conclude by discussing implications and future directions for organizational research.

# 1. Proactive behavior in organizational research

Proactive behavior is a particular form of motivated behavior at work (Bateman & Crant, 1993). As such, to develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature, antecedents, mechanisms, and consequences of proactivity, it is important to situate the concept in existing theory and research on work motivation. Below, we provide a brief historical review of how work motivation theory and research began with assumptions that employee behavior was passive and reactive, and slowly moved over time to acknowledge the active and proactive nature of employee behavior.

## 1.1. Reactivity in "golden age" theories of work motivation

Scholars developed early conceptualizations of work motivation in line with the orthodox principles of behaviorism. Employees were seen as passive recipients of reinforcement contingencies, engaging in particular behaviors in direct response to the stimuli in their environments, which were typically viewed as under the control of managers (Locke & Latham, 2002). In the 1960s, the advent of the cognitive revolution spawned a series of new perspectives, representing what is often referred to as the "golden age" of work motivation theories (Steers, Mowday, & Shapiro, 2004; for recent reviews, see Ambrose & Kulik, 1999; Donovan, 2001; Latham & Pinder, 2005; Mitchell & Daniels, 2003). Expectancy theory and equity theory, two dominant work motivation theories, emerged during this

period. These two theoretical perspectives abandoned the assumption that behavior was a direct function of environmental stimuli and emphasized the importance of psychological processes in shaping employees' behavioral responses to environmental stimuli.

Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) focused on the role of employees' beliefs and values in driving and explaining motivated behavior. The core premise of expectancy theory is that employees evaluate the personal utility of engaging in various behaviors at work and select the behaviors that are most likely to achieve outcomes that they value (for a review, see Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965) focused on the role of employees' perceptions of fairness in driving and explaining motivated behavior. The core premise of equity theory is that employees make comparative judgments to evaluate the fairness of the rewards and compensation that they receive from managers, and expend effort accordingly (for recent reviews, see Ambrose & Kulik, 1999; Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005).

Although these two theoretical perspectives spurred a flurry of new theory and research, they still afforded a backseat role to conscious intentions, motives, and desires, as they portrayed employees as passively evaluating and selecting among the options that managers provided. Need theories (Maslow, 1954; McClelland, 1961, 1971) did focus on motives, but relegated them to the unconscious, with little attention to more conscious, intentional, purposeful desires that had the potential to influence motivated behavior. The development of goal-setting theory (Locke, 1968; Locke, Shaw, & Saari, 1981) shifted the focus of work motivation theories toward the role of employees' conscious objectives and intentions in driving and explaining motivated behavior. A core premise of goal-setting theory is that employees are more motivated to expend effort when they are focused on difficult, specific goals (for recent reviews, see Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002).

## 1.2. Proactivity emerges in separate literatures

Despite these advances, in the 1970s and 1980s, organizational researchers working from diverse theoretical perspectives in a broad range of specific domains sought to challenge a central assumption of these dominant work motivation theories. Although expectancy theory, equity theory, need theories, and goal-setting theory gave prominent attention to the importance of intentions, motives, and desires, researchers argued that all four perspectives conceptualized employees as relatively passive, reactive respondents to organizational contexts. Expectancy theory assumed that employees expend effort in response to rewards and outcomes offered by managers and organizations. Equity theory assumed that employees expend effort in response to the fairness of outcomes and treatment from managers and organizations. Need theories assumed that employees expend effort in response to the fairness of outcomes to the fit between the affordances of organizational contexts and personal motives. Goal-setting theory, in its early formulations, assumed that employees accept and pursue the goals that managers set for them.

In light of this reactive focus, in recent decades, organizational scholars have developed more active conceptualizations that account for the role of agency in human behavior. Researchers studying a wide variety of phenomena under the rubrics of social processes, work structures, and development and change processes have begun to recognize – and call for systematic attention to – the creative ways in which employees deliberately plan and act to influence, change, and alter their environments.

#### 1.2.1. Social processes

Researchers studying a number of specific social processes have begun to highlight the ways in which employees actively shape their interpersonal relationships and social interactions. In the influence literature, researchers have called attention to the tactics that employees actively create and use to influence other people and groups (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Williams et al., 1976). In the feedback literature, researchers have asserted that employees do not sit around waiting for feedback during annual performance reviews; they also actively seek feedback through a variety of agentic tactics (Ashford & Cummings, 1983, 1985; Ashford et al., 2003). In the citizenship literature, in attempting to understand discretionary contributions that employees make at work, researchers have challenged the focus on reactive citizenship behaviors such as complying with norms and helping in response to requests, and introduced a more proactive focus on offering help (Rioux & Penner, 2001), taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), and intentionally breaking rules (Morrison, 2006). In the socialization literature, researchers have observed that employees do not only react to organizational socialization practices; they also engage in a variety of proactive behaviors to accelerate the socialization process and improve their own experiences (Ashford & Black, 1996; Nicholson, 1984; Saks & Ashforth, 1996). In studying emotional labor, researchers have asserted that

employees do not only react passively to emotional expression demands, but also actively deploy a range of creative tactics to regulate their emotions (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). In striving to understand social networks, researchers criticized traditional assumptions that employees merely react to environmental opportunities, and began to assess the ways in which employees are involved in actively building, expanding, and maintaining social networks (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b, 2002; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Together, these developments accentuated the active steps that employees take to shape their own interpersonal relationships and social interactions.

# 1.2.2. Work structures

Similar trends appeared in the specific literatures on work structures, as researchers studying jobs, tasks, roles, and goals have begun to examine how employees actively create, shape, and alter the work that they perform. In the task performance literature, researchers have argued that employees are not only concerned with completing assigned tasks, but also with actively revising and improving their tasks (Staw & Boettger, 1990) by implementing ideas and solving problems (Parker et al., 2006). In studying job designs, researchers have suggested that employees do not merely react to jobs as structured by managers; they also negotiate job changes with managers (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991) and actively alter the task and relationship boundaries of their jobs (Black & Ashford, 1995; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Likewise, in studying roles, researchers have examined how employees do not only merely enact roles assigned from above, but also actively change, shape, expand, and use their roles as resources (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Callero, 1994; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997; see also Nicholson, 1984; Saks & Ashforth, 1996). In explaining goal pursuit, researchers have observed that employees do not merely internalize the goals handed down by managers, and have studied how employees take initiative to set and pursue personal goals (Roberson, 1989, 1990) and actively participate in setting goals with managers (Latham, Erez, & Locke, 1988). Together, these trends highlight the active role that employees take in influencing their own work structures, rather than merely reacting passively to jobs, tasks, roles, and goals assigned by others.

## 1.2.3. Development and change processes

Similar patterns have surfaced in research on development and change processes, as researchers studying career trajectories, organizational change, routines, and learning have begun to recognize that employees actively shape how development and change unfolds in organizations. In explaining career trajectories, researchers have argued that employees are not merely sculptures of their environments, but exert control and influence by acting as sculptors of their environments (Bell & Staw, 1989). In studying the process of organizational change, researchers have questioned the notion that employees accept changes delivered from above, and developed a framework for understanding how employees actively champion important issues from below (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001). In examining routines, researchers have argued that employees do not only merely react to the routines passed along by their organizations, but also engage in active efforts to create, maintain, modify, and use routines as resources (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). In investigating the process of learning, researchers have asserted that employees do not only passively absorb knowledge and skills through formal training; they also seek out development opportunities and engage in a series of proactive behaviors in order to expand their knowledge and skills (Edmondson, 1999; Sonnentag, 2003). As a whole, these lines of research emphasize the active role that employees adopt in shaping change and development processes, instead of merely reacting passively to the changes and development opportunities that are assigned and offered in organizations.

# 1.3. Integrated conceptualizations of proactivity emerge

While researchers were developing these proactive conceptualizations in largely separate literatures on social processes, work structures, and development and change processes, two camps of organizational scholars began to advance integrative views of proactivity. Below, we briefly discuss these views, which focus on the proactive personality and personal initiative.

#### 1.3.1. Proactive personality

In the 1960s, Swietlik (1968) sought to integrate the diverse views on personality structure presented by major theorists such as Allport, Freud, Maslow, and Murray under the rubric of "reacting personality" or "proactive

personality." The paper was published in an obscure journal and received little attention. However, in the 1990s, an influential body of organizational research on the proactive personality emerged. In a seminal paper, Bateman and Crant (1993: 103) introduced the concept to organizational research, defining the proactive personality as "the relatively stable tendency to effect environmental change." Although the ensuing literature provides a wealth of evidence about the characteristics of proactive employees (e.g., Crant & Bateman, 2000; Parker & Sprigg, 1999; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001), the dispositional perspective offers relatively little information about what behaviors should be classified as proactive (Crant, 2000). A recent body of research on personal initiative speaks directly to this issue.

#### 1.3.2. Personal initiative

While Bateman, Crant, and colleagues were conceptualizing and studying the proactive personality in the United States, Frese and Fay developed the concept of personal initiative in Europe, defined as "Work behavior characterized by its self-starting nature, its proactive approach, and by being persistent in overcoming difficulties in the pursuit of a goal" (Frese & Fay, 2001: 133). Frese and co-workers thus distinguished personal initiative from traditional passive, reactive conceptualizations of work performance. Whereas the absence of action constitutes inactivity and responding directly to situational cues constitutes reactivity, personal initiative is a proactive concept, as it involves acting in advance (Frese, 2006; Frese & Fay, 2001; Rank et al., 2004).

This conceptualization advances our understanding of proactivity in two significant ways. First, rather than focusing on personalities of individuals who tend to behave proactively (cf. Bateman & Crant, 1993; Seibert et al., 1999, 2001), personal initiative focuses squarely on the proactive behaviors themselves. Second, personal initiative expands conceptualizations of proactivity beyond the definition offered in the proactive personality literature. Whereas Bateman and Crant (1993) described proactive behaviors as actions that effect change, Frese and colleagues add the important criterion that proactive behaviors are anticipatory and forward-looking (Frese, 2006; Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996).

This conceptualization faces at least one noteworthy limitation, however, in terms of its applicability to proactive behavior. Frese and Fay include only pro-company behaviors in their definition of personal initiative; actions that are intended to benefit only the self, or harm others or the organization, are excluded (Frese, 2001; Frese & Fay, 2001). This exclusion restricts the scope of personal initiative to a relatively narrow set of proactive behaviors. Given that employees often engage in self-starting, anticipatory actions to benefit only themselves (e.g., Ashford et al., 2003), or have a destructive rather than constructive effect on their organizations (e.g., Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Spector & Fox, 2002), personal initiative does not paint a complete picture of the nature of proactive behavior. As such, an integrative conceptualization of proactive behavior may take a valuable step toward filling in this gap.

## 2. Defining and dimensionalizing proactive behavior

In this section, we offer an integrative definition and set of dimensions of proactive behavior. We begin by defining proactive behavior and discussing how proactivity operates as a behavioral process that can occur either in-role or extra-role. Next, we consider anticipation, planning, and action directed toward future impact as three key phases of the proactivity process. Finally, we identify form, frequency, intended targets of impact, timing, and tactics as common dimensions along which proactive behaviors vary.

#### 2.1. Defining proactivity

Recently, Parker and colleagues have taken steps toward combining the favorable features of the proactive personality and personal initiative concepts into an integrated conceptualization of proactive behavior (Parker et al., 2006). Building on their conceptualization, we define proactive behavior as anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments. This definition is consistent with dictionary definitions of proactive behavior as that which "creates or controls a situation by taking the initiative or by anticipating events (as opposed to responding to them)," and to proact as "to take proactive measures; to act in advance, to anticipate" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989).

This definition distinguishes proactive behavior from more general motivated behavior and more reactive, passive behavior in two noteworthy ways. The first distinctive characteristic of proactive behavior is *acting in advance*.

Whereas social scientists have argued that people overestimate their own agency (Wegner & Wheatley, 1999) and that the majority of human behavior is governed by nonconscious mental processes (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999) and mindless scripts (Ashforth & Fried, 1988), proactive behavior concerns a domain of behavior in which employees are agentic and anticipatory in their actions. Proactive behavior is future-focused (Frese & Fay, 2001) and mindful (Langer, 1989; Sternberg, 2000; Weick & Roberts, 1993). Employees are thinking, deliberating, planning, calculating, and acting in advance with foresight about future events before they occur (e.g., Bandura, 2006; Gollwitzer, 1999; Karniol & Ross, 1996; Klein, 1989; Little, Salmela-Aro, & Phillips, 2006; Murray, 1938). Employees anticipate and envision a future outcome, and select and modify situations in order to create that outcome (e.g., Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Buss, 1987; Gross, 1998). The second distinctive characteristic of proactive behavior is *intended impact*. Proactive behavior is change-oriented (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000); employees are explicitly intending to have a discernible effect on the self and/or the environment—in other words, to make a difference (Grant, 2007). When employees choose to behave proactively, they are focused on the goal of meaningfully altering the self, others, or the contexts in which they are situated.

## 2.1.1. Proactivity as process

This definition highlights that proactivity is not limited to a unique set of actions, such as feedback-seeking or taking charge. Rather, proactivity is a process that can be applied to any set of actions through anticipating, planning, and striving to have an impact. Just as Weick (1979) suggested that we should think more about "organizing" than "organizations" – more about verbs and less about nouns – we propose that proactivity is not a noun, but an adverb: any behavior can be carried out reactively or proactively.

Understood as an adverb, proactivity describes a particular process of action (Crant, 2000) that can occur either within or beyond the boundaries of employees' roles. It is worth noting that this conceptualization contrasts with perspectives in the citizenship behavior literature, where scholars have often treated proactive behavior as exclusively extra-role (Parker et al., 2006; Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995). According to these views, proactive behaviors are necessarily extra-role by definition (e.g., O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Organ & Konovsky, 1989), because in-role behaviors are assigned by others and therefore may neither be agentic nor anticipatory. However, scholars have recently converged around the view that proactivity is a process that can be applied to either in-role or extra-role activities. First, employees can perform in-role tasks in a proactive manner (e.g., Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001). For example, employees can complete tasks ahead of schedule or marshal additional resources to carry out these tasks. Second, the distinctions between in-role and extra-role behavior are often unclear (e.g., Frese & Fay, 2001; Morrison, 1994), given that many behaviors can be considered either in-role or extra-role depending on how they are construed by the employee and by observers. For example, employees vary in how broadly they define their roles (Morrison, 1994), with dispositionally proactive employees defining their roles more broadly (e.g., Parker, 2000; Parker et al., 1997).

The in-role/extra-role distinction appears more applicable to jobs with low autonomy and freedom, where both the means and ends of tasks are specified (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Parker et al., 1997). In these jobs, proactive role behaviors are anticipatory actions taken following prescribed means or directed toward achieving prescribed ends, and proactive extra-role behaviors are anticipatory actions undertaken beyond specified means and ends. Today, jobs increasingly provide higher levels of autonomy, larger spans of control, and expanded discretion (e.g., Parker, 2000; Weick, 1996). Thus, the ends, but not the means, are typically specified. In such jobs, proactivity may include behaviors enacted to achieve specified ends before being asked to do so, inventing new means, or negotiating new ends. Thus, the key criterion for identifying proactive behavior is not whether it is in-role or extra-role, but rather whether the employee anticipates, plans for, and attempts to create a future outcome that has an impact on the self or environment (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Parker et al., 2006). Table 1 portrays a 2 (anticipatory preparation: high, low)  $\times 2$  (in-role, extra-role) diagram with examples from the feedback-seeking behavior (FSB) and social networkbuilding (SNB) literatures to further describe proactivity as an adverb and illustrate how proactive behavior can occur either within or beyond role prescriptions.

#### 2.1.2. Phases of the proactivity process

Whereas the majority of organizational research focuses on explaining variance in outcome variables, our process view highlights that proactive behavior is a sequence of interrelated acts and phases (e.g., Mohr, 1982; Staw, 1984, 1985). The literature on mindfulness and related concepts offers a useful window into the different phases of the

Table 1	
Proactivity as a process	operating in-role and extra-role

		Role prescriptions	
		In-role	Extra-role
Anticipatory preparation	High	Proactive role behavior FSB: Intentionally seeking out a supervisor with specific questions about performance feedback on an assignment (Ashford & Black, 1996) SNB: Holding meetings to build relationships with coworkers (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b, 2002)	Proactive extra-role behavior FSB: Showing a business plan to a contact outside one's department for feedback (Dutton et al., 2001) SNB: Planning to form and seeking out relationships with knowledgeable contacts outside one's department (Ashford & Black, 1996)
	Low	Role behavior FSB: Spontaneously asking a supervisor for performance feedback on an assignment during a weekly meeting (Ashford et al., 2003) SNB: Coming to form relationships with coworkers on the basis of proximity (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b, 2002)	<ul> <li>Extra-role behavior</li> <li>FSB: Happening to overhear a supervisor's conversation about one's efforts to plan a party to celebrate a coworker's nuptials (Elfenbein &amp; Ambady, 2002)</li> <li>SNB: Spontaneously forming relationships outside one's department based on chance encounters (Morrison, 2002)</li> </ul>

*Notes.* FSB refers to feedback-seeking behavior and SNB refers to social network-building. All examples in this table assume that the employee is intending to impact at least one target. Although many of these behaviors can be construed as either in-role or extra-role by the actor (e.g., Morrison, 1994), we have chosen prototypical examples of in-role and extra-role behaviors, respectively.

proactive behavior process. Below, we discuss anticipation, planning, and action directed toward future impact as three core phases of the proactive behavior process.

2.1.2.1. Anticipation. Anticipation represents the initiation of the proactive behavior process. In order to engage in proactive behavior, employees think ahead to anticipate future outcomes (Weick & Roberts, 1993; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999). Anticipation relies on the imagination of possible futures, or mentally representing a vision or picture of an object, person, or event that may exist at some point forward in time (Beach, 1990; Karniol & Ross, 1996; Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). Anticipation can also involve imagining the benefits and costs of pursuing – or not pursuing - various possible futures. According to Kosslyn (1987), imagination is similar to vision in serving at least two critical functions. First, it serves navigation and tracking functions: it enables people to envision how events will unfold. Second, it serves a comprehension function: it enables people to understand and process information. When people imagine a scenario, they temporarily assume that it is accurate and construct a plausible version of it unfolding, which evokes emotional reactions and stimulates problem-solving (Taylor et al., 1998). Anticipating and imagining events increases people's confidence that they will occur in the future (Koehler, 1991). As such, anticipating and imagining future states increases the probability that one will act to promote or prevent these states (Ajzen, 1991); in other words, anticipation can fuel self-fulfilling prophecies (Eden, 1984, 2003; Rosenthal, 1994; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). For example, researchers have shown that anticipating and imagining future goals motivates people to pursue these goals (Locke & Latham, 2002), and envisioning ideal relationship partners leads them to act in ways that create these relationships over time (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Likewise, employees may anticipate and imagine future costs, and use these visions to alter the nature of the behaviors in which they engage.

2.1.2.2. Planning. Planning represents the second phase of the proactive behavior process. In order to engage in proactive behavior, employees develop plans for how they will act to implement their ideas. Planning refers to preparing in advance for a given task, project, activity, or action (Little, 1983; Nurmi, 1991) by outlining steps that link one's anticipations and future goals to concrete actions and outcomes (Ajzen, 1991; Frese & Fay, 2001). Whereas anticipation signifies envisioning an event or outcome, planning signifies transforming this vision into an implementation guide that specifies how the event or outcome will be prevented or promoted (Gollwitzer, 1999). Moreover, planning often involves developing alternative strategies and backup plans to prepare for the possibility that one's initial course of action may not succeed (Fiol & O'Connor, 2003; Frese & Fay, 2001). Planning thus plays a

critical role in translating visions into behaviors. For example, researchers have shown that specifying plans for how goals will be achieved increases the likelihood that people will pursue and achieve their goals (Gollwitzer, 1999; Gollwitzer & Brandstätter, 1997; Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 1998), planning strategies for achieving possible selves increases the likelihood that people will pursue and achieve these selves (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006), and planning to overcome barriers and formulating backup plans increases the likelihood that people will succeed in finding a job (Vinokur, Price, & Schul, 1995; Vinokur & Schul, 1997). It is important to note that planning is at some times elaborate, as in a carefully orchestrated issue-selling attempt, and at other times momentary, as in Tom Peters' quip, "Ready, fire, aim." Although planning is often overlooked by scholars, it represents a critical phase of the proactive behavior process, as it enables employees to connect what they anticipate psychologically with concrete behavioral steps and plans.

2.1.2.3. Action directed toward future impact. Action directed toward future impact represents the third phase of the proactive behavior process. Whereas anticipation and planning signify the psychological representation of a possible behavior, action directed toward future impact signifies the physical manifestation of anticipation and planning in concrete behaviors. When employees direct their actions toward future impact, they are mindful of the effects of their actions on themselves and their environments (Weick & Roberts, 1993; see also Grant, 2007, 2008b). They often consider not only the short-term impact of their actions, but also the potential long-term impact of their actions (Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988; Hall & Hall, 1987; Schriber & Gutek, 1987). They are acting with foresight (Tsoukas & Shepherd, 2004) to prevent future problems and seize future opportunities (Frese & Fay, 2001).

# 2.2. Dimensions of proactivity

When researchers study different proactive behaviors, what do they care about, and what do they measure? If we were to study proactivity as a general phenomenon, what would we want to know? In this section, our goal is not to portray the various literatures on proactivity bibliographically, but rather to gain insights into the different dimensions along which proactive behavior, as a general category of action, varies. Our review of proactivity research indicates that proactive behavior varies along at least five dimensions: form, intended target of impact, frequency, timing, and tactics. We chose these dimensions on the basis of two criteria. First, the dimensions appeared in multiple literatures on proactive behavior. Second, based on suggestions that folk schemas have value for constructing conceptual frameworks (e.g., Adler & Kwon, 2002), we drew on one such folk schema from journalism suggesting that behavior is adequately described by answering the questions "who, what, when, where, how, and why" (e.g., Stovall, 2005). In our dimensions, the "who" is captured in part by the employee enacting the proactive behavior and in part by the intended target of impact; the "what" is captured by form and frequency; the "when" and "where" are captured by timing; and the "how" is captured by the tactics used. We reserve discussion of the "why" for a subsequent section on antecedents and mechanisms.

## 2.2.1. Form

First, proactive behavior varies with respect to form—the type or category of behavior carried out. Earlier in the chapter, we described a series of forms of proactive behavior that have been studied in organizational research. In this section, we focus on two exemplar forms of proactive behavior – feedback-seeking and social network-building – and examine their fit with our definition. FSB refers to voluntary actions that employees undertake to obtain information and evaluations (Ashford & Cummings, 1983, 1985). The Ashford et al. (2003) review suggests that feedback-seeking generally matches our definition of proactive behavior. FSB is typically anticipatory and future-focused; employees often make momentary plans and conscious choices to ask others for feedback with various intended impacts in mind, such as improving their performance or enhancing their egos. SNB refers to proactively forming interpersonal ties and connections (e.g., Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). SNB is generally anticipatory and future-focused, as employees are mindful in identifying individuals and contexts that may facilitate fruitful relationships (e.g., Higgins & Kram, 2001). SNB is intended to have an impact; for example, employees often build social networks in order to improve their own careers (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Now that we have defined two exemplar forms of proactive behavior, we discuss the remaining dimensions of proactivity with reference to these two forms.

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#### 2.2.2. Intended target of impact

Intended target of impact – whom or what the behavior is intended to affect or change – is the second dimension of proactivity. Our review indicates that employees engage in proactive behavior in order to impact three primary targets: the self, other people, and the organization (Van Dyne et al., 1995). These targets are not mutually exclusive, as employees may intend for their proactive behaviors to impact multiple targets, but in the interest of parsimony, we treat them as such. With respect to the self as the intended target of impact, many employees seek feedback in order to enhance their own egos, images, adaptation to the context, and performance (Ashford et al., 2003), and many employees engage in SNB to gain knowledge for themselves (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). With respect to other people as the intended target of impact, managers sometimes seek feedback on their own performance to benefit their employees (Ashford & Tsui, 1991), and managers often engage in SNB to provide advice and mentoring to others (Higgins & Kram, 2001). With respect to organizations as the intended target of impact, leaders frequently seek feedback to improve the organization's functioning (Ashford et al., 2003), and employees often engage in SNB to garner resources for their organizations (Burt, 1992).

## 2.2.3. Frequency

Frequency, the third dimension, is the likelihood of proactive behavior—whether it happens or not, and if so, how often it occurs. In the FSB literature, frequency is a dependent variable of considerable interest (Ashford et al., 2003). Similarly, in the SNB literature, researchers have observed that employees vary in how frequently they seek to build social networks (Morrison, 2002). Based on its prominence in prior research, frequency appears to be an important dimension along which proactive behavior varies. However, frequency has typically been studied as a dichotomous variable, in terms of whether or not it occurs, rather than as a continuous variable, in terms of its temporal incidence (how regularly it occurs).

# 2.2.4. Timing

Timing refers to the degree to which the behavior occurs at particular occasions, phases, or moments (for reviews, see Ancona, Okhuysen, & Perlow, 2001; Fried & Slowik, 2004; George & Jones, 2000; McGrath & Kelly, 1986; McGrath & Rotchford, 1983; McGrath & Tschan, 2004; Mitchell & James, 2001). Our review indicates that several proactive behaviors vary with respect to timing, typically in terms of the degree to which the actor is strategic in choosing when to engage in a proactive behavior (or not). Research on FSB suggests that employees are more likely to seek feedback after they have adjusted to their jobs (Brett, Feldman, & Weingart, 1990) and after positive performance reviews (Morrison & Bies, 1991). Similarly, SNB research indicates that timing is an important dimension of variance in proactive behavior. For example, employees often time the search for exchange partners and the expansion of social networks to correspond with opportunities for obtaining resources (Rangan, 2000). Taken together, these findings suggest that proactive behavior is more likely to occur at some times than others. In order to understand the nature and emergence of proactive behavior, it is important to take into account this temporal dimension.

## 2.2.5. Tactics

Proactive behavior also varies in terms of the tactics, or behavioral strategies and methods, that employees use to carry it out. Although timing can be used as a tactic – for example, by strategically seeking feedback after a strong performance – tactics differ from timing in that timing describes when, whereas tactics describe how. The FSB literature reveals that feedback is sometimes sought through inquiry, and other times sought through monitoring (Morrison, 1993a). Further, inquiry and monitoring tactics can themselves be carried out through the use of more specific and varied tactics, such as asking directly or indirectly for feedback, and monitoring other people or the environment (Ashford et al., 2003). Likewise, the SNB literature indicates that the tactics for building social networks vary considerably, from offering emotional support (Higgins & Kram, 2001) to asking for instrumental information (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Together, these findings suggest that employees draw on different tactics, methods, and strategies in the course of engaging in proactive behavior.

# 2.2.6. Summary

We have proposed that these five dimensions will apply to any specific proactive behaviors studied, reflecting our basic claim that any specific proactive behavior is a manifestation of a more general underlying process. Our discussion of the dimensionality of proactivity has important implications for organizational research. Because

researchers often measure only one dimension of the proactive behavior of interest, they may be missing out on critical information relevant to understanding the nature, causes, processes, and consequences of the behavior. For example, FSB research suggests that inquiry and monitoring tactics for seeking feedback are associated with different outcomes for the seeker (see Ashford et al., 2003). If over time, researchers omit one tactic of feedback-seeking or another, we will have an incomplete understanding of the nature, antecedents, processes, and outcomes of FSB. These distinctions should be relevant for all proactive behaviors. Accordingly, in order to understand the nature, causes, processes, and consequences of proactive behavior, both in general and in specific manifestations, it is prudent for researchers to take into account the dimensions along which it varies. We believe that all proactive behaviors can be categorized not only in terms of the processes or phases through which they progress, but also in terms of their form, intended target of impact, frequency, timing, and tactics. Each dimension contributes to our understanding of whether, how, and why the behavior occurs; overlooking a dimension implies overlooking a full description of the specific behavior of interest.

## 3. Antecedents and consequences of proactivity: toward an integrative model

Now that we have described the nature and dimensions of proactive behavior, we turn to its antecedents and consequences. Based on a review of proactivity research, we develop an integrative framework, the Proactivity Dynamics Framework, which is displayed in Fig. 1. In the sections that follow, we focus on the antecedents of proactive behavior. We specify three common situational features that increase the likelihood of proactive behavior, the psychological mechanisms that may mediate these relationships, and the personality traits that may moderate these relationships. At the outset of this discussion, it is important to note that there are certainly situational antecedents, psychological mechanisms, dispositional moderators, and consequences that are unique to specific proactive behaviors. For example, the desire to improve one's own performance that often motivates feedback-seeking is likely to be prompted by a lack of information, impending evaluations, or promotion opportunities (e.g., Ashford et al., 2003), whereas the desire to benefit others that often motivates proactive helping is more likely to be prompted by

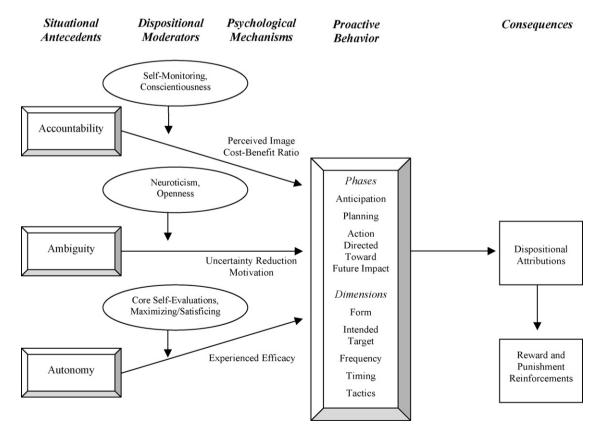


Fig. 1. The Proactivity Dynamics Framework.

close interpersonal relationships (e.g., Grant et al., 2007; Rioux & Penner, 2001; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). Our aim in developing this framework is not to gloss over the antecedents, mechanisms, moderators, and consequences unique to specific forms of proactive behavior. Rather, we seek to highlight the common antecedents, mechanisms, moderators, and consequences that may generalize to multiple forms of proactive behavior.

## 3.1. Antecedents of proactivity

In this section, we discuss how situational features of accountability, ambiguity, and autonomy are likely to increase the likelihood of proactive behavior. We also examine the psychological mechanisms through which these effects occur and the individual dispositions that moderate these effects.

# 3.1.1. Accountability

We first propose that situational accountability increases the likelihood of proactive behavior. Situational accountability refers to circumstances in which others expect employees to justify and explain their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Tetlock, 1985). When employees are not held accountable, the potential image costs of proactive behavior are considerable: if employees fail, under-perform, or make an error, the spotlight will be on them, as proactive behavior is difficult to blame on external circumstances due to its self-starting nature. Thus, under low accountability, the safest route to protecting and enhancing their images is to avoid proactive behavior (e.g., Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990). On the other hand, when employees are held accountable, impression management theory and research (e.g., Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000; Morrison & Bies, 1991) suggests that they are more likely to engage in proactive behavior. Accountability decreases the perceived image costs of proactive behavior and increases the perceived image benefits of proactive behavior. That is, because they will be held personally responsible for their actions regardless of whether they behave reactively or proactively, employees face little additional risk in engaging in proactive behavior. Given that they are already in the spotlight, they may as well anticipate, plan, and act in advance as much as possible to increase their chances of success and demonstrate that they are taking initiative.

Feedback-seeking research provides support for this proposition. When employees are not held accountable, they can simply react to feedback from others as it is delivered, as they need not justify their decisions and actions to others. The path of least resistance is to avoid feedback-seeking so that they do not draw additional attention to their actions (Levy, Albright, Cawley, & Williams, 1995; Moss, Valenzi, & Taggart, 2003; Tuckey, Brewer, & Williamson, 2002). On the other hand, when employees are held accountable, they will be evaluated on the basis of their personal decisions and actions. They thus can gain considerably, and lose little, by gathering as much information as possible. The benefits of feedback-seeking now outweigh the costs, as they have the potential to obtain valuable information that will improve their effectiveness and signal to others that they care about performing well (e.g., Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Brett et al., 1990; Morrison & Bies, 1991; Stapel & Tesser, 2001). Similarly, research shows that when promotion decisions are imminent, employees who perceive helping as instrumental to promotions are more likely to help others (Hui et al., 2000). Under these circumstances, employees are being evaluated and may be asked to justify their behaviors to supervisors; they thus recognize the decreased costs and increased potential benefits of proactive behavior. We thus offer the following propositions.

## Proposition 1a. Situational accountability increases proactive behavior.

**Proposition 1b.** Decreases in perceived image cost–benefit ratios mediate the effect of situational accountability on proactive behavior.

3.1.1.1. Dispositional moderators. Personality research suggests that two individual dispositions – conscientiousness and self-monitoring – are likely to moderate the effects of accountability on proactive behavior. First, conscientiousness refers to the degree to which individuals tend to be disciplined, careful, dependable, well organized, goal-oriented, and persistent (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). Highly conscientious employees are unlikely to vary their proactive behavior as a function of accountability because they tend to care about doing well in a wide range of situations (Grant, 2008b). Conscientious employees are willing to anticipate, plan, and expend additional effort in order to achieve future goals in a variety of circumstances (Judge & Ilies, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1999). Indeed, research shows that highly conscientious, goal-oriented employees are likely to engage in a variety of proactive behaviors in different situations, such as seeking information (e.g., Butler, 1993) and pursuing learning and development (Colquitt & Simmering, 1998). Less conscientious employees, on the other hand, tend to live in the moment and avoid responsibility for anticipating, planning, and expending effort directed toward future goals (e.g., Sarchione, Cuttler, Muchinsky, & Nelson-Gray, 1998). When held accountable, they are likely to recognize that their actions have significant consequences, and will be more likely to display proactive behavior as a result. Thus, we expect that less conscientious employees are especially likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of accountability, whereas highly conscientious employees are likely to engage in proactive behavior regardless of situational accountability.

**Proposition 2a.** Conscientiousness moderates the effect of situational accountability on proactive behavior, such that less conscientious employees are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of accountability, whereas highly conscientious employees may engage in proactive behavior irrespective of accountability.

Second, self-monitoring refers to the degree to which individuals tend to be motivated toward and capable of actively controlling and shaping their public images and behavioral expressions (Snyder, 1974, 1979). High self-monitors are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of accountability because they tend to be concerned about others' impressions in evaluative situations. When held accountable for their actions, they are motivated to engage in anticipatory action to create favorable impressions (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Low self-monitors, on the other hand, are less concerned with the impressions that they create, and tend to base their behavior on internal cognitions and emotions rather than external norms for situationally appropriate behavior. As such, low self-monitors are less likely to engage in proactive behaviors under conditions of accountability, as they tend to ignore and resist social expectations (DeMarree, Wheeler, & Petty, 2005). Indeed, research shows that high self-monitors are generally more concerned with – and successful in – getting along and getting ahead at work (Day & Schleicher, 2006). They tend to engage in proactive behaviors such as pursuing leadership roles (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002), feedback-seeking (Moss et al., 2003), and offering help to coworkers (Blakely, Andrews, & Fuller, 2003). Thus, under conditions of accountability, high self-monitors are likely to be comparatively indifferent to how their actions appear to others and thereby less likely to engage in proactive behavior.

**Proposition 2b.** Self-monitoring moderates the effect of situational accountability on proactive behavior, such that high self-monitors are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of accountability than low self-monitors.

#### 3.1.2. Ambiguity

We now turn to a second situational antecedent of proactive behavior: ambiguity. We propose that proactive behavior is more likely to occur under situations of ambiguity, or circumstances that are uncertain, unclear, or equivocal about how one should act (c.f. Weick, 1979, 1992). Ambiguity signifies a weak situation rather than a strong situation. In weak situations, individuals feel less pressure from the environment to think, feel, and act in a prescribed manner (Barker, 1968; Bem & Funder, 1978; House, Shane, & Herold, 1996; Jackson, 1965; Kenrick & Funder, 1988; Mischel, 1968; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Murray, 1938; Shoda, LeeTiernan, & Mischel, 2002; Zucker, 1977). Ambiguity may be present in a variety of weak situations, including unclear job and role prescriptions, vague task instructions, or unspecified interpersonal expectations, routines, and standard operating procedures.

Research indicates that when employees encounter situations of ambiguity, they are often more likely to display proactive behavior (e.g., Griffin et al., 2007). Researchers have linked various sources of situational ambiguity – including role ambiguity, environmental uncertainty, career transitions, and organizational change – to a wide range of proactive behaviors (Ashford, 1988; Ashford & Black, 1996; Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Battman, 1988; Callister, Kramer, & Turban, 1999; Morrison, 1993a; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). The psychological mechanism underlying this pattern is based on employees' motives to reduce uncertainty. When employees encounter ambiguity, they are generally motivated to reduce it (e.g., Elliot & Devine, 1994; Festinger, 1957; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996) by seeking information and support to clarify the meaning, purpose, and objectives of their actions (e.g., Ashford, 1986; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; McGregor, 2006; Weick, 1995). To do so, employees can engage in a variety of proactive behaviors, such as seeking feedback, building social networks, and negotiating job changes. These proactive

behaviors reduce uncertainty by providing information and support that resolves ambiguity and enables employees to predict, understand, and influence their environments in advance (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993a; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Thus, ambiguity motivates employees to reduce uncertainty by engaging in proactive behaviors. It is worth noting that these proactive behaviors may succeed in reducing uncertainty, thereby resolving situational ambiguity and curtailing further proactivity. However, insofar as situational ambiguity persists, employees are likely to engage in further proactivity in continued efforts to reduce uncertainty. We therefore present the following propositions.

# Proposition 3a. Situational ambiguity increases proactive behavior.

Proposition 3b. Uncertainty reduction motivation mediates the effect of situational ambiguity on proactive behavior.

*3.1.2.1. Dispositional moderators.* Personality research suggests that two individual dispositions – neuroticism and openness to experience – are likely to moderate the effects of ambiguity on proactive behavior. First, neuroticism refers to the degree to which individuals tend to be nervous, anxious, depressed, self-conscious, and vulnerable (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; McCrae & Costa, 1991). Under conditions of ambiguity, neurotic employees are more likely to engage in proactive behavior than less neurotic, or emotionally stable, employees. In general, neurotic employees tend to display poor self-regulation and emotional adjustment (Judge & Ilies, 2002) and weak skills for building and maintaining relationships (Klein, Lim, Saltz, & Mayer, 2004). However, in ambiguous situations, neurotic employees tend to become especially anxious, worried, and concerned (e.g., Fortunato, Jex, & Heinish, 1999; Organ, 1975). This may lead them to anticipate, plan, and expend additional effort in order to prevent undesired outcomes and promote desired outcomes. In support of this line of reasoning, research suggests that in ambiguous situations, neurotic individuals often engage in high levels of planning to compensate for the self-regulation difficulties that they expect to encounter (Morossanova, 2003; Tamir, 2005). Thus, we expect that neurotic employees are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of ambiguity than more emotionally stable employees.

**Proposition 4a.** Neuroticism moderates the effect of situational ambiguity on proactive behavior, such that neurotic employees are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of ambiguity than emotionally stable employees.

Second, openness to experience refers to the degree to which employees tend to be flexible, curious, intelligent, and imaginative (Barrick & Mount, 1991; McCrae & Costa, 1991). Under conditions of ambiguity, open employees are more likely to engage in proactive behavior, as they are likely to recognize and embrace a broader array of possibilities for action than closed individuals, who are more likely to repeat past behaviors or follow existing rules. Indeed, research suggests that in ambiguous situations, open individuals are more likely to engage in future planning (Prenda & Lachman, 2001), as well as to display a variety of specific forms of proactive behavior, such as seeking out information, organizing ideas, and solving problems (e.g., Feist, 1998; McCrae & Costa, 1997; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Shalley et al., 2004). Accordingly, we expect that open employees are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of ambiguity than more closed employees.

**Proposition 4b.** Openness to experience moderates the effect of situational ambiguity on proactive behavior, such that open employees are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of ambiguity than closed employees.

#### 3.1.3. Autonomy

We further propose that proactive behavior is more likely to occur in situations of autonomy, or freedom and discretion regarding what to do, when to do it, and how to do it (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Researchers have shown that under conditions of autonomy, employees are more likely to display a series of proactive behaviors, including problem-solving and idea implementation (Parker et al., 2006), prosocial rulebreaking (Morrison, 2006), and role expansion (Axtell & Parker, 2003; Parker et al., 1997). The psychological mechanism that explains the effect of autonomy on proactive behavior is experienced efficacy, or a sense of confidence that one can act effectively to orchestrate outcomes (e.g., Bandura, 1977, 1997; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Autonomy that is granted by an organization or by managers increases efficacy by signaling to employees that they have the ability and opportunity to take initiative, broaden their roles, alter their tasks, craft their jobs, and build their skills (Axtell & Parker, 2003; Frese & Fay, 2001; Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger, & Hemingway, 2005; Parker, 1998, 2003; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Autonomy also increases efficacy by enabling employees to choose roles, tasks, jobs, and relationships that fit their interests and skills (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Efficacy, in turn, increases employees' willingness to anticipate, plan, and act in advance in order to obtain desired outcomes (e.g., Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). We thus present the following propositions:

Proposition 5a. Situational autonomy increases proactive behavior.

**Proposition 5b.** Experienced efficacy mediates the effect of situational autonomy on proactive behavior.

3.1.3.1. Dispositional moderators. Personality research suggests that two individual dispositions - core selfevaluations and maximizing/satisficing - are likely to moderate the effects of autonomy on proactive behavior. First, core self-evaluations describe employees' levels of positive self-regard, or the degree to which employees judge their own identities favorably (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). Core selfevaluations represent a meta-trait at the intersection of self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism, and locus of control (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002). Employees with favorable core self-evaluations are more likely to display proactive behavior in situations of autonomy than employees with unfavorable core self-evaluations. Upon encountering autonomy, employees with favorable core self-evaluations are likely to believe that they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to anticipate, plan, take charge, exert control, and exercise influence (Erez & Judge, 2001), whereas employees with unfavorable core self-evaluations are likely to feel incapable and unskilled, and prefer to react to others' actions. Indeed, research indicates that employees with favorable core self-evaluations display more persistence in the job search (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005; see also Kinicki & Latack, 1990), greater social network-building activity during socialization (Johnson, Kristof-Brown, Van Vianen, De Pater, & Klein, 2003), and higher levels of individual goal-setting and goal pursuit (Erez & Judge, 2001). We therefore expect that employees with favorable core self-evaluations are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of autonomy than employees with unfavorable core self-evaluations.

**Proposition 6a.** Core self-evaluations moderate the effect of autonomy on proactive behavior, such that employees with favorable core self-evaluations are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of autonomy than employees with unfavorable core self-evaluations.

Second, maximizing/satisficing refers to the degree to which people prefer to select ideal outcomes versus acceptable outcomes (Schwartz, 2000; Simon, 1955, 1956, 1957). When making decisions, maximizers prefer to consider all possible alternatives in order to select the best possible option, whereas satisficers prefer to consider a smaller range of alternatives select an option that exceeds their thresholds of acceptability (Janis & Mann, 1977; Schwartz et al., 2002). Employees with maximizing tendencies are more likely to display proactive behavior in situations of autonomy than employees with satisficing tendencies; freedom and discretion signifies to maximizers that they can and should pursue all possible options. On the other hand, freedom and discretion signifies to satisficers that they have the opportunity to truncate their information searches and choose an option that is "good enough." In support of this reasoning, research suggests that in the autonomous context of job searches, maximizers tend to be more proactive and successful than satisficers (Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006). We therefore expect that maximizers are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of autonomy than satisficers.

**Proposition 6b.** *Maximizing/satisficing moderates the effect of autonomy on proactive behavior, such that maximizers are more likely to engage in proactive behavior under conditions of autonomy than satisficers.* 

# 3.2. Consequences of proactivity

Although considerable research has examined the consequences of proactive behavior, there are at least two noteworthy gaps in current knowledge. First, we know much about the consequences of engaging in specific forms of proactive behavior, but relatively little about the general consequences of proactive behavior irrespective of the form.

Second, researchers have largely emphasized the benefits of proactive behavior, with surprisingly little attention to the costs. Our propositions about the consequences of proactive behavior are directed toward redressing these two gaps in proactivity research.

#### 3.2.1. Dispositional attributions

An important consequence of engaging in proactive behavior is that when others observe it, they are more likely to make dispositional attributions for the actor's behavior. Dispositional attributions are inferences that one's behavior is caused by internal characteristics rather than situational forces (e.g., Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Ross, 1977). Dispositional attributions are often thought to be errors that arise when observers fail to sufficiently consider situational forces (e.g., Harvey & Weary, 1984; Malle, 2006). However, because proactive behavior derives from employees' voluntary choices to anticipate, plan, and act in advance, dispositional attributions are quite appropriate, as employees appear personally responsible for agentic choices to engage in the behavior. As such, proactive behavior appears to be an expression and reflection of employees' personal signatures and idiosyncratic styles. Since employees are anticipating, planning, and acting in advance, it is difficult to attribute proactive behavior as diagnostic of who employees are and what they believe and value (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Tetlock, 1985). Indeed, research indicates that people frequently offer dispositional attributions for and personal evaluations of proactive behaviors ranging from helping behavior (e.g., Bolino, 1999; Eastman, 1994) to feedback-seeking (e.g., Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Edwards, 1995; Morrison & Bies, 1991). We thus offer the following proposition.

**Proposition 7.** Proactive behavior increases the likelihood that interpersonal attributions for behavior will emphasize dispositional rather than situational causes.

## 3.2.2. Reward and punishment reinforcements

These dispositional attributions for proactive behavior increase the likelihood that employees will receive both reward and punishment reinforcements for their actions (for reviews, see Stajkovic & Luthans, 1997; Staw, 1984). When supervisors and coworkers attribute employees' proactive behaviors to dispositional causes, they are evaluating the actions that employees have chosen to take. The reward and punishment reinforcements that employees receive as a result of engaging in proactive behavior will depend heavily on how others evaluate the proactive behavior (e.g., Ashford et al., 2003; Williams, Miller, Steelman, & Levy, 1999). If supervisors and coworkers are pleased with the proactive behavior, they will be more likely to reward it; if they are displeased with the proactive behavior, they will be more likely to punish it.

This argument is supported by a growing body of research documenting the heightened reinforcements that employees receive as a result of engaging in proactive behavior. First, proactive behaviors that are perceived as interpersonally or organizationally beneficial have been linked to reward reinforcements. For example, employees who build social networks and take personal initiative are evaluated more favorably by supervisors (Thompson, 2005), employees who display career initiative and innovation receive more promotions and higher salaries (Seibert et al., 1999, 2001), employees who tend to display proactive behaviors are viewed by others as charismatic leaders (Crant & Bateman, 2000), and employees who offer help to others and display high levels of effort, initiative, persistence, and self-discipline receive higher supervisor ratings, more awards, and a greater number of promotions (Van Scotter, Motowidlo, & Cross, 2000).

Second, proactive behaviors that are perceived as unethical, self-serving, or causing harm have been linked to punishment reinforcements. For example, employees who commit premeditated corporate crimes such as theft and fraud are frequently ostracized, reprimanded, fired, and jailed (e.g., Greenberg, 1990, 1997, 2002; Hollinger & Clark, 1983; Holtfreter, 2005; Ivancevich, Duening, Gilbert, & Konopaske, 2003), employees who engage in premeditated aggression and violence are reprimanded, disciplined, prosecuted, and even retaliated against (e.g., Griffin & Lopez, 2005), and employees who engage in premeditated acts of betraying the trust of others are penalized (e.g., Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998). Whereas these behaviors are proactive – as indicated by anticipation, planning and premeditation – accidental or inadvertent behaviors are less likely to be punished (e.g., Darley & Pittman, 2003; Darley & Zanna, 1982).

Third, proactive behaviors that are perceived as mixed in their effects – for example, beneficial to some parties but harmful to others – may be linked to both rewards and punishments. For example, proactively expressing voice and engaging in premeditated whistle-blowing are rewarded in some contexts and punished in others, and rewarded by some individuals and punished by others (e.g., Miceli & Near, 1997; Near & Miceli, 1995; Warren, 2003). As a second example, when employees engage in proactive self-handicapping, which refers to broadcasting limitations in order to set low expectations that one can then exceed (e.g., Becker & Martin, 1995; Higgins, Snyder, & Berglas, 1990; Tice & Baumeister, 1990), they may receive rewards from some for exceeding performance expectations, and punishments from others for setting low performance expectations. Based on these lines of reasoning and evidence, we offer the following summary propositions:

**Proposition 8a.** Dispositional attributions for proactive behavior increase the likelihood that employees will receive reward or punishment reinforcements.

**Proposition 8b.** *Proactive behaviors that are perceived as interpersonally or organizationally beneficial are more likely to be rewarded.* 

**Proposition 8c.** *Proactive behaviors that are perceived as unethical, self-serving, or harmful are more likely to be punished.* 

**Proposition 8d.** *Proactive behaviors that are perceived as both constructive and destructive are likely to be both rewarded and punished.* 

## 4. Discussion

Although organizational scholars have conducted extensive research on specific proactive behaviors in recent years, little theorizing and research has addressed the more general dynamics that may govern this class of behaviors. We have taken a step toward redressing this gap by selectively reviewing the history of proactive behavior in organizational theory and research, introducing an integrative conceptualization of the nature and dimensions of proactive behavior, and developing a general framework that specifies common situational antecedents, psychological mechanisms, dispositional moderators, and consequences of proactive behavior at work. This examination of the dynamics of proactive behavior reveals that valuable lessons can be learned from considering proactive behaviors at a general level, rather than treating different forms of proactive behavior as separate phenomena, and thereby offers several key theoretical contributions to organizational research.

## 4.1. Theoretical contributions

#### 4.1.1. Toward a general framework for proactivity

Recently, organizational scholars have begun to explore the general dynamics of proactivity by drawing parallels between multiple proactive behaviors in conceptual pieces (e.g., Bateman & Porath, 2003; Crant, 2000; Rank et al., 2004; Spector & Fox, 2002) and empirical studies (e.g., Parker, 2000; Parker et al., 2006; Seibert et al., 1999, 2001). We build on these efforts to advance organizational research toward a deeper and more cumulative understanding of the dynamics of proactive behavior at work. The first contribution of our chapter to organizational research lies in the illustration that there is value in the integration of multiple literatures that, although largely disparate, are all examples of an underlying dynamic of proactivity at work. If researchers wish to gain a complete understanding of why, how, and when proactive behavior occurs, how it is expressed, and what effects it has, it is worthwhile to integrate separate but related literatures on proactivity.

A general framework such as the one proposed here is valuable in that it suggests a set of central questions as a focus for researchers embarking on an investigation of specific proactive behaviors. Such a framework should provide structure to the specific literatures on individual behaviors that do not reference a more general dynamic, and also allow for the consolidation of knowledge about proactive behavior more generally. There will always be behavior-specific dimensions, antecedents, processes, and consequences, but consolidation of research findings concerning what is generally true for all proactive behaviors will allow for greater progress in both specific and general research streams, as well as a more significant impact on organizational research writ large.

Ironically, much of the research on specific proactive behaviors has been reactive in nature. Researchers have discovered a behavioral phenomenon and then responded by building theory and collecting data to describe, predict, and explain the phenomenon. As such, many studies of specific proactive behaviors have focused on a somewhat limited, underspecified set of dimensions, antecedents, mediating mechanisms, moderators, and consequences. We hope that our chapter serves to encourage a more proactive approach to research on proactivity. We believe it will be fruitful for researchers to consider a more complete menu of options to focus on conceptually, and measure, as they study specific and general proactive behaviors. Our framework is directed toward providing such a menu and may thus serve as a guide for scholars as they plan their theorizing and research on both well studied and relatively unexplored proactive behaviors. When studying a relatively unexplored proactive behavior, such as taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), for example, researchers can use the framework to choose a set of dimensions, antecedents, mediating mechanisms, moderating dispositions, and consequences of proactivity to investigate. With proactive planning about the nomological networks in which specific and general proactive behaviors are situated, researchers will be equipped to interface more efficiently and productively toward a more complete understanding of the nature, causes, processes, and effects of proactivity.

#### 4.1.2. Nature and dimensions of proactivity

The second contribution of our chapter is to current understandings of the nature and dimensions of proactive behavior. Progress in theory and research has been hampered by debates about whether proactivity can describe any anticipatory action or is necessarily change-oriented, and whether it can occur in-role or is limited to extra-role behaviors. We have sought to resolve these debates by describing proactivity as an adverb referring to action that is both anticipatory and change-oriented, and occurs both in-role and extra-role. Progress has also been forestalled by disagreements about what dimensions are most appropriate to measure. One of our important goals in writing this chapter is to advance understandings of the nature and dimensions of proactive behavior by offering an integrative definition of proactive behavior and identifying five common dimensions that describe multiple proactive behaviors. This definition and set of dimensions may be useful in guiding further efforts to conceptualize, theorize about, and study proactivity as both a general and specific phenomenon.

#### 4.1.3. Situational antecedents of proactivity

As a third contribution, our chapter calls attention to a new range of situational antecedents of proactive behavior. Whereas the impressive body of research on the proactive personality provides important insights into the dispositional characteristics of employees who tend to engage in proactive behavior, it offers little information about the conditions under which proactive behavior is more and less likely to occur, and about how work contexts can cultivate proactive behavior (Kirby, Kirby, & Lewis, 2002). Our chapter takes a step toward redressing this gap by focusing on situational antecedents of proactive behavior, a topic of increasing interest in organizational scholarship (e.g., Crant, 2000; Fay, Lührmann, & Kohl, 2004; Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker, 1998, 2000) and increasing importance in organizational practice (e.g., Campbell, 2000; Howell, 2005; Unsworth, 2001). Our discussion of accountability, ambiguity, and autonomy as three situational features that prompt proactive behavior may serve useful in organizing previously disparate bodies of research and in highlighting common antecedents of multiple proactive behaviors.

#### 4.1.4. Dispositional influences on proactivity

The fourth contribution of our chapter lies in our efforts to fill a gap in research on dispositional influences on proactive behavior. As discussed previously, in order to understand the dispositional antecedents of proactive behavior, scholars have conducted considerable research on the proactive personality. Not surprisingly, studies suggest that the proactive personality is associated with higher levels of various proactive behaviors, including career initiative and innovation (e.g., Seibert et al., 1999, 2001), social network-building (Lambert, Eby, & Reeves, 2006; Thompson, 2005), proactive socialization into organizations (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), proactive problem-solving and idea implementation (Parker et al., 2006), job search behavior (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006), and learning and development activity (Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006; Parker & Sprigg, 1999). This body of research is valuable in theory, as it enables scholars to understand which employees are likely to display proactive behavior, and in practice, as it enables organizations to select proactive employees. However, in focusing on the proactive personality, researchers have accumulated comparatively little knowledge about how other dispositional factors may influence proactive behavior, as well as the circumstances under which less proactive employees may be

motivated to engage in proactive behavior. Our chapter begins to redress this gap in theory and research by focusing on more general, broad-bandwidth personality traits that are more conceptually distant from proactive behavior (Staw, 1985) and may carry greater weight in employees' overall experiences (e.g., Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki, & Cortina, 2006; Ones and Viswesvaran, 1996). Our propositions suggest potentially productive avenues for future research that seeks to document which employees are most likely to display proactive behavior under various conditions.

## 4.1.5. Consequences of proactive behavior

As a fifth contribution, our chapter expands and complicates existing knowledge about the consequences of proactive behavior. Although Bateman and Crant (1993) explicitly stated that not all proactive behaviors are beneficial, the majority of research focuses on the benefits that proactivity accrues to individuals, groups, and organizations (Chan, 2006; see also Bolino, Turnley, & Niehoff, 2004). For example, researchers have studied the benefits of the proactive personality (e.g., Seibert et al., 2001), personal initiative (e.g., Frese & Fay, 2001), proactive socialization tactics (e.g., Morrison, 1993b), and a broad array of other proactive behaviors (Crant, 2000). In an effort to rebalance proactivity research and paint a more complete portrait of the consequences of proactivity, we have considered the potential costs of proactive behaviors that are perceived as unethical, self-serving, or harmful to other people or organizations, as well as the potential costs of apparently beneficial proactive behaviors. Our efforts to specify a set of consequences of proactive behavior that may generalize across multiple forms of proactive behavior may promote future research that examines both the constructive and destructive effects of proactive behaviors on individuals, groups, and organizations.

## 4.2. An agenda for future research

Our chapter points to six important directions for future research on proactivity. Specifically, we recommend that researchers devote more attention to distinct profiles of proactivity, situational antecedents of proactivity, the role of values and affect in proactivity, the influence of knowledge, skills, and abilities on proactivity, the benefits and costs of proactivity, and the temporal dynamics of proactivity. We outline this agenda in detail below.

#### 4.2.1. Profiles of proactivity

In conceptualizing the proactive personality as a unitary disposition, researchers have devoted insufficient attention to the different profiles that may characterize patterns of proactivity. In other words, do different situational and dispositional antecedents cultivate different styles of, tactics for, and approaches to proactivity? We know much about the tactics that employees use to carry out specific forms of proactive behavior, such as direct inquiry and indirect monitoring methods for feedback-seeking (Ashford et al., 2003), shotgun, tactician, ingratiatory, and bystander strategies for upward influence (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988), tactics of offering support and seeking information for social network-building (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992), and tactics of bundling issues together, recruiting others' involvement, and displaying different amounts of formality for issue-selling (Dutton et al., 2001). However, we know comparatively little about the more general profiles that characterize employees' patterns of engaging in multiple proactive behaviors.

An intriguing implication of our model is that particular combinations of situational and dispositional influences may give rise to distinct proactivity profiles. Consider, for example, our propositions concerning how different employees will respond differently to situations of ambiguity and autonomy. On one hand, we proposed that high neuroticism increases proactivity in ambiguous situations. On the other hand, we proposed that favorable core self-evaluations (which include low neuroticism) increase proactivity in autonomous situations. We thus suggest that neurotic employees are more likely to display proactivity under circumstances of ambiguity because they seek to reduce uncertainty, whereas they are less likely to display proactivity under circumstances of autonomy because they lack confidence. Examining these propositions in tandem highlights two distinct, general proactivity profiles: prevention-focused and promotion-focused (see Brockner & Higgins, 2001). The former circumstance, in which neurotic employees are seeking to avoid, avert, and preclude an unfavorable outcome. The latter circumstance, in which less neurotic employees display proactivity because they feel confident, represents promotion-focused proactivity, as employees are seeking to create, obtain, and orchestrate a favorable outcome. These profiles may apply to multiple forms of proactivity. Employees may seek feedback in order to prevent unfavorable performance reviews

or to promote favorable performance reviews, offer help in order to prevent poor impressions or to promote good impressions, and sell gender equity issues in order to prevent destructive consequences for the organization or to promote constructive consequences for the organization. We hope that researchers will investigate prevention focus and promotion focus as two general proactivity profiles, and also build and test theory about other dimensions along which general proactivity profiles may vary.

# 4.2.2. Situational antecedents of proactivity

Our focus on accountability, ambiguity, and autonomy provides only a sampling of the multitude of situational factors that may cultivate or constrain proactive behavior. Considerable research is needed to examine a broader range of situational influences on proactivity. One promising direction involves assessing the influence of organizational cultures, climates, practices, and norms for proactivity (e.g., Davidson, Worrell, & Fox, 1996; Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; Fay et al., 2004; Gersick, 1994; Heath, Larrick, & Klayman, 1998; Hui, Lam, & Schaubroeck, 2001; Kirby et al., 2002; Reason, 1995; Swanson, 1995; van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005; Vredenburgh, 2002). Another promising direction involves considering whether proactivity can operate not only as an individual behavior, but also as a team-level characteristic (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999) or an organization-level behavior or attribute (e.g., Aragon-Correa, 1998; Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999; Marcella & Davies, 2004; Ramus & Steger, 2000; Smith & Marcus, 1984). We hope to see more systematic, focused attention to the situational antecedents of proactive behavior in future research. We also encourage further attention to the relationship between the situational antecedents of accountability, ambiguity, and autonomy, which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

#### 4.2.3. Values and affect

Cold, calculative cognitive mechanisms have provided the dominant lens for explaining proactive behavior. Employees are typically described as performing implicit or explicit cost-benefit analyses to decide whether or not to seek feedback (VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000), express voice (Withey & Cooper, 1989), take charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), and sell issues (Dutton et al., 2001). Researchers have devoted insufficient attention to the roles that basic values and affective experiences, as less rationalistic mechanisms, play in proactive behavior. Because proactive behavior requires long-term thinking to develop a clear intention regarding the impact one wants to create, we expect that when planning proactive behavior, employees reflect on their core values or guiding principles (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). In support of this assumption, research suggests that prosocial values are associated with proactive behaviors directed toward benefiting others, such as interpersonal helping (Rioux & Penner, 2001).

Moreover, because proactive behavior often involves taking ego and image risks, we expect that the process of planning and acting in advance is often more emotional than rational, despite what the word "planning" might suggest. Thus, proactive behaviors are fueled in part by one's affective experiences and emotional states (e.g., Seo, Barrett, & Bartunek, 2004; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Psychological research provides several reasons to expect that moods and emotions will influence proactive behavior (for organizational reviews, see Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus, 2002; Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Isen & Baron, 1991; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Although people are often unaware of it, moods and emotions serve as important inputs into their judgments and choices (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Negative moods and emotions tend to narrow an employee's focus of attention, resulting in critical, discerning thinking and psychological and behavioral vigilance (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; George & Zhou, 2002). Positive moods and emotions broaden an employee's thought-action repertoires, build physical, intellectual, and social resources for initiating and sustaining action (Fredrickson, 1998), and enable people to see the social and physical worlds in a more positive light (Carlson, Charlin, & Miller, 1988; George, 1991). As such, employees' motivations to carry out proactive behavior are likely to be shaped by their moods and emotions.

Consistent with this assumption, Sonnentag (2003) demonstrated that employees are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors involving personal initiative and the pursuit of learning when they feel relaxed and recovered from the previous day. Related research suggests that under some circumstances, the experience of stress can increase proactive behavior by motivating employees to change their contexts (Fay & Sonnentag, 2002). Additionally, FSB research includes clues that affect may influence proactive behavior. Trope and Neter (1994) found that a positive mood helps to buffer people against the sting of negative feedback and increases their willingness to seek it. Roberson, Deitch, Brief, and Block (2003) found that when minorities fear engaging in behavior that might corroborate a

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negative stereotype of their groups, they are likely to seek indirect feedback. Esses (1989) found that people are most likely to accept feedback that matches their moods.

By dedicating greater attention to the influence of basic values and affective experiences on proactive behavior, researchers may learn that different psychological mechanisms drive different forms of proactive behavior. For example, cost–benefit analyses may be likely to lead employees to offer help at strategic times (e.g., Hui et al., 2000; Organ & Konovsky, 1989), whereas strong values or intense affective experiences may be more likely to motivate employees to seize any opportunity to offer help, regardless of strategic timing (e.g., George & Brief, 1992). As a second example, employees engaging in value-laden or affect-driven FSB may be less discriminating regarding sources of feedback and tactics used than calculative FSB. Employees seeking feedback based on their affective states, such as high anxiety, may tap the first source they encounter or monitor indiscriminately for feedback and thereby pick up much irrelevant information. Additional research will be critical in exploring these possibilities and shedding light on the implications of basic values and affective experiences for understanding proactive behavior.

#### 4.2.4. Knowledge, skills, and abilities

In studying the situational and dispositional antecedents and psychological mechanisms of proactivity, researchers have focused primarily on motivational factors – desires or "will-do" factors – rather than ability factors – capabilities or "can-do" factors (see Barrick & Mount, 1998; Vroom, 1964). For example, researchers have emphasized ego defense and enhancement, image defense and enhancement, and instrumental motives that guide feedback-seeking behavior (e.g., Ashford et al., 2003) and impression management, social exchange, prosocial values, and organizational concern motives that guide proactive helping (e.g., Organ, 1988; Rioux & Penner, 2001). Researchers have also highlighted a variety of individual and contextual factors that motivate taking charge (e.g., Morrison & Phelps, 1999), issue-selling (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998), and whistle-blowing (e.g., Near & Miceli, 1995). Like these streams of research, our model takes a motivational perspective on the situational antecedents, psychological mechanisms, and dispositional moderators of proactive behavior. We assume that accountability, ambiguity, and autonomy influence employees' desires to engage in proactive behavior, as represented in image cost–benefit analyses, uncertainty reduction motives, and experienced efficacy. Likewise, we assume that individual differences in conscientiousness, self-monitoring, neuroticism, openness to experience, core self-evaluations, and maximizing/ satisficing influence employees' desires to engage in proactive behavior in various contextual circumstances.

As such, we know much about the role of motivational processes in proactive behavior, but surprisingly little about the role of knowledge, skills, and abilities in proactive behavior. Several exceptions to this general trend highlight the value of focusing more closely on knowledge, skills, and abilities. First, recent research has shown that high levels of knowledge, skill, and ability are associated with greater personal initiative (Fay & Frese, 2001). Second, a growing body of research in industrial/organizational psychology accentuates the importance of intelligence or general mental ability in proactive behavior. A series of studies show that individuals with higher general mental ability display higher job performance, which is in large part a result of proactive information-seeking and learning behaviors that allow them to acquire more knowledge more quickly than other employees (e.g., Hunter & Schmidt, 1996; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004).

Third, in an innovative study, Chan (2006) has shown that situational judgment skills are important moderators of the relationship between the proactive personality and a variety of work outcomes, including supervisor ratings of job performance. Specifically, the proactive personality was only associated with increased job performance among employees with high-situational judgment effectiveness. Among employees with low-situational judgment effectiveness, the proactive personality was actually associated with decreased job performance. Chan interpreted these results as indicating that proactive behaviors can be maladaptive when employees lack accurate situational judgment skills: their anticipatory plans and actions are likely to be inappropriate, ill-timed, counter-normative, insensitive, inconsiderate, and ineffective.

Fourth, the feedback-seeking literature contains several useful insights into the role of knowledge and skill in proactive behavior. Because proactive behaviors are often undertaken voluntarily outside of formal job descriptions, or in jobs where there are few clear directions about means, there are often fewer clear rules or prescriptions for how to carry proactive behaviors out. As such, much of the knowledge about how to carry out these behaviors is likely to be tacit (e.g., Berman, Down, & Hill, 2002; Gerwin & Ferris, 2004; Smith, 2001; Sternberg & Horvath, 1999; Wagner & Sternberg, 1985), picked up through observation and experience but never explicitly communicated. Research suggests that employees are more likely to ask directly for feedback in settings in which they know that FSB is

considered a sign of openness and conscientiousness, and more likely to monitor indirectly for feedback in settings in which they know that FSB is considered a sign of weakness (Ashford et al., 2003). Furthermore, studies indicate that employees are more likely to seek feedback when they know that the source is in a good mood (Ang, Cummings, Straub, & Earley, 1993; Morrison & Bies, 1991) and credible (Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992; Vancouver & Morrison, 1995). Likewise, FSB research suggests that the skills needed to engage in proactive behaviors are rarely taught, but rather are picked up through observation. Because these skills are based largely on tacit knowledge, it is easy to obtain inaccurate information and proceed unskillfully (e.g., to ask for feedback too often, or to help when inappropriate). Employees are often reluctant to directly inquire for feedback when they worry that they lack the social skills or tact to ask effectively and monitor appropriately (Ashford et al., 2003), and may be more likely to monitor for feedback when they possess the ability to eavesdrop on feelings (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).

Despite these contributions, researchers have devoted scant attention to understanding the processes through which knowledge, skills, and abilities are acquired, communicated, and applied in service of proactive behavior. There may be circumstances in which a lack of knowledge or skill leads employees to engage in proactive information-seeking and learning behaviors, and circumstances in which a lack of knowledge or skill prevents employees from being able to engage in proactive behaviors. Do employees with high levels of knowledge and skill engage in less anticipatory planning because they can adjust more easily in the moment and, based on high-context sensitivity and political understanding, may more effectively select tactics that have a high probability of success in the environment? Alternatively, do employees with high levels of knowledge and skill apply their abilities in service of effective anticipatory planning?

In general, knowledge, skills, and abilities may be important variables for understanding proactive behavior in a wide variety of contexts and situations that require subtle, tacit, complex knowledge and skills (Myers & Davids, 1993; Piderit & Ashford, 2003; Wagner & Sternberg, 1985). Knowledge and skills may be particularly pertinent to proactive behavior in rapidly changing environments, subjective and ambiguous situations, and politicized climates. Consider the example of feedback-seeking. In rapidly changing environments, employees may not know how to develop an accurate feedback portrait of how they are doing, and may avoid seeking feedback as a result. They may also lack the skills to determine how to best help others or advance the organization's objectives. In situations in which performance and expectations are subjective or ambiguous, employees may seek feedback only if they possess the skills to identify accurate sources for gathering information effectively. They may also be unsure about whether they possess the skills to help others effectively. In highly politicized climates, employees may decide to seek feedback when they feel they possess the appropriate interpersonal skills to do so tactfully in order to avoid image costs. Finally, there may be knowledge, skills, and abilities about proactive behavior itself that form an important part of what Wagner and Sternberg (1985) describe as practical intelligence, an ability that allows individuals to get things done successfully in the world. Further research is needed to examine these issues and illuminate the role of knowledge, skills, and abilities in proactive behavior.

#### 4.2.5. Benefits and costs of proactivity

As discussed previously, researchers explicitly studying proactive behavior have often touted its benefits while largely overlooking its costs. Recent research has begun to redress this imbalance by investigating the satisfaction and performance costs of the proactive personality when employees lack situational judgment skills (Chan, 2006) and encounter interpersonal conflict (Harvey, Blouin, & Stout, 2006), the importance of person-job and person-organization fit in enabling the beneficial effects of proactivity (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005), the destructive individual, social, and organizational effects of antisocial proactive behaviors (e.g., Griffin & Lopez, 2005), the detrimental consequences of whistle-blowing (Miceli & Near, 1997), and the image risks of feedback-seeking (Ashford et al., 2003). Researchers have also observed that employees often feel pressured to be proactive in displaying helping and persistence, which can lead to stress, role overload, work–family conflict, and decreased proactivity over time (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Grant, 2008a). However, research on many specific forms of proactive behavior continues to focus only on the benefits at the expense of the costs. In future research, it will be important for researchers to simultaneously examine the benefits and costs of the proactive behaviors that they study. 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 for groups, organizations, and employees themselves.

Additionally, the majority of research on proactive behaviors has focused on building conditions for success and survival for oneself (Crant, 2000), with less research on building conditions for success and survival for others and the

organization. We encourage researchers to examine whether building conditions for others and for the organization is associated with different dynamics, processes, and outcomes. Research on how proactive behaviors change organizational contexts will provide insight into how contexts are not only shaped from the top down, but also from the anticipatory actions of employees acting sometimes out of self-interest, and sometimes out of concern for and commitment to people and organizations. Finally, proactivity may have a self-reinforcing, self-fueling quality. We base this suggestion on learned industriousness theory (Eisenberger, 1992), which proposes that when employees are rewarded for engaging in proactive behavior, the sheer experience of anticipating, planning, and acting to achieve future impact may take on secondary reward properties. According to this line of reasoning, after being rewarded for proactivity over time, employees may come to display proactive behavior regardless of expected reinforcement contingencies or consequences. We recommend that researchers investigate this possibility in further depth.

## 4.2.6. Temporal dynamics of proactivity

The temporal dynamics of proactivity merit further exploration. Proactive behaviors are not isolated incidents that occur at one point in time. Rather, they are informed, cultivated, and constrained by past experiences, successes, and setbacks. As such, we expect that proactivity unfolds in deviation-amplifying and deviation-counteracting loops (e.g., Weick, 1979) that are dynamic and change over multiple cycles (e.g., George & Jones, 2000). For example, successes achieved through initial proactive behaviors are likely to build efficacy, increasing the likelihood of engaging in proactive behavior in the future (Weick, 1984). Failure that results from proactive behaviors may undermine efficacy, decreasing the likelihood of doing so (Lindsley, Brass, & Thomas, 1995). Alternatively, failure may provide valuable lessons and learning opportunities (Sitkin, 1992) and motivate employees to seek out knowledge and build skills (e.g., Dweck, 1986; VandeWalle, 2003). Similarly, favorable interpersonal reactions are likely to curtail it (e.g., Hackman, 1992; Nemeth & Staw, 1989; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Are there conditions under which negative interpersonal reactions fuel proactive behavior and positive interpersonal reactions curtail it? This raises additional questions about how reactions of multiple constituencies, such as peers, supervisors, clients, customers, subordinates, and family members, interact to affect proactive behavior. In the spirit of these questions, we hope to see future research on proactivity move beyond linear models to explore spirals and feedback loops.

# 5. Conclusion

Although organizational scholars have conducted extensive research on specific proactive behaviors in recent decades, little theory exists to explain the more general dynamics of proactivity at work. We have attempted to develop an integrative framework of the nature, dimensions, situational antecedents, psychological mechanisms, dispositional moderators, and consequences of proactive behavior. We hope this chapter proves useful in enabling researchers to take an increasingly proactive approach to constructing, evaluating, and cumulating theory about proactive behavior at work.

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