



## **Proactive Behavior in Organizations**

J. Michael Crant  
*University of Notre Dame*

*Many practitioner-oriented publications argue that managers should be more proactive on the job, and that proactive behavior is an increasingly important component of job performance. Organizational research on the antecedents and consequences of proactive behavior has appeared in several different literatures and has taken different approaches toward defining, measuring, and understanding proactivity. In this article, I review a diverse set of literatures that directly address proactive behavior in organizational contexts. I describe four constructs related to proactive behavior: proactive personality, personal initiative, role breadth self-efficacy, and taking charge. Next, I review six research domains that have explicitly addressed proactive behaviors: socialization, feedback seeking, issue selling, innovation, career management, and certain kinds of stress management. After considering findings from these research streams, I offer an analysis of the different approaches to the study of proactive behavior and provide a set of suggestions for future research. © 2000 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.*

As work becomes more dynamic and decentralized, proactive behavior and initiative become even more critical determinants of organizational success. For example, as new forms of management are introduced that minimize the surveillance function, companies will increasingly rely on employees' personal initiative to identify and solve problems (Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997). Proactive behavior can be a high-leverage concept rather than just another management fad, and can result in increased organizational effectiveness (Bateman & Crant, 1999). Companies must focus on identifying and correcting policies and systems that minimize and mitigate individual initiative (Frohman, 1997).

Proactive behavior at work has received considerable scholarly research attention over the past fifteen years. It has not, however, emerged as an integrated research stream in the organizational behavior literature. There is no single definition, theory, or measure driving this body of work; rather, researchers have adopted a number of different approaches toward identifying the antecedents and consequences of proactive behavior, and they have examined them in a number of seemingly disconnected literatures. Potential and actual job performance (e.g.,

Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Crant, 1995), leadership (e.g., Crant & Bateman, 2000; Deluga, 1998), careers (e.g., Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Bell & Staw, 1989), entrepreneurship (e.g., Becherer & Maurer, 1999; Crant, 1996), work teams (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999), socialization (e.g., Morrison, 1993a, 1993b), feedback (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1985; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), and even the reputation of American presidents (Deluga, 1998) have all been examined through the lens of proactivity and initiative. However, there are not yet any published reviews of the proactive behavior literature. The purpose of the present article is to synthesize findings from these diverse areas of inquiry and draw some conclusions about proactive behavior in the work environment. Toward that end, I will highlight the theoretical underpinnings of research on proactivity and initiative, describe various approaches to its conceptualization and measurement, review empirical findings, and offer some summary observations and suggestions for future research.

Because proactive behavior has been conceptualized and measured in a variety of ways, a definition of proactive behavior that captures the essence of the various approaches must be coarse grained. I define proactive behavior as taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions. Employees can engage in proactive activities as part of their in-role behavior in which they fulfill basic job requirements. For example, sales agents might proactively seek feedback on their techniques for closing a sale with an ultimate goal of improving job performance. Extra-role behaviors can also be proactive, such as efforts to redefine one's role in the organization. For example, employees might engage in career management activities by identifying and acting on opportunities to change the scope of their jobs or move to more desirable divisions of the business.

This article is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all published literature that could be interpreted as containing elements of proactive behavior. For example, I do not review impression management research (see Gardner & Martinko, 1988, for a review of this literature), even though it could be argued that aggressive tactics like self-promotion and ingratiation are examples of proactive behaviors. To establish a content domain for the present review, I conducted an electronic search of the PsychINFO database on the keywords "proactive" and "initiative" for the period from January 1967 to June 1999. Based on this search, I decided to focus on 1) various conceptualizations and measures of proactive behavior, and 2) six research streams that explicitly incorporate the idea of proactive behavior and have received considerable research attention. While I have attempted to review a representative set of articles in the six areas, this should not be considered an exhaustive review of the specific behaviors.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

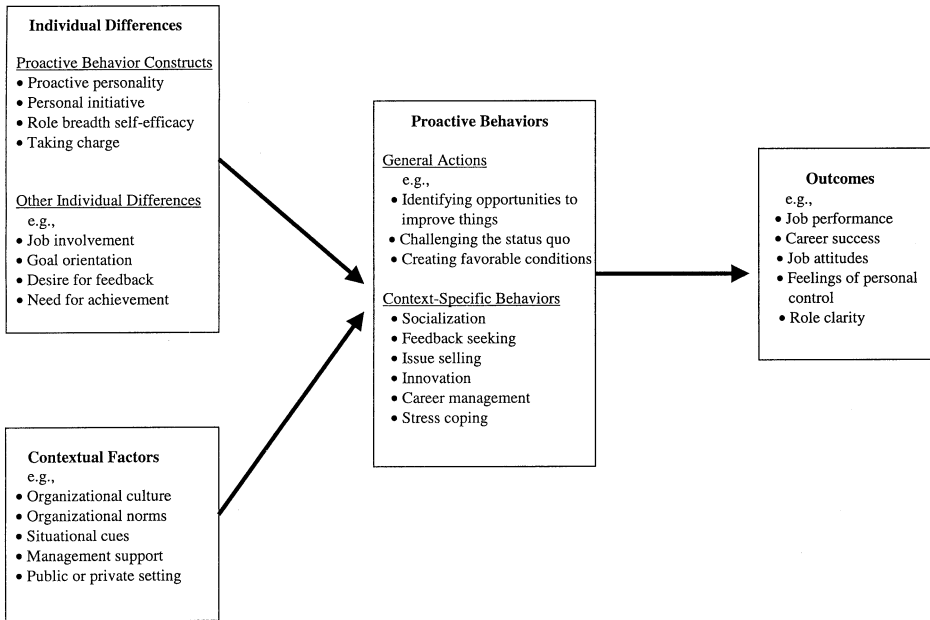
A common thread binding the various approaches to the study of proactivity and initiative is an action orientation toward organizational behaviors. Under this perspective, employees take an active role in their approach toward work; they

initiate situations and create favorable conditions. This is in contrast to a more passive, reactive pattern of behavior. Proactive people actively seek information and opportunities for improving things; they don't passively wait for information and opportunities to come to them. For example, Frese et al. (1997) described the concept of personal initiative as involving an active and self-starting approach to work. Bateman and Crant (1993) argued that proactive individuals actively create environmental change, while less proactive people take a more reactive approach toward their jobs. One theme of Ashford and her colleagues' research on proactive feedback seeking (e.g., Ashford & Cummings, 1983, 1985) is that many people are not simply passive recipients of information at work; rather, they actively seek it. Similarly, the concept of issue selling (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998) involves middle managers actively shaping the strategic planning process by calling attention to particular areas of interest.

Despite this shared emphasis on active rather than passive behaviors at work, there is not uniform agreement on how to best conceptualize and measure proactivity at work. Some researchers have emphasized personal dispositions toward proactivity (e.g., Bateman & Crant, 1993; Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996), while others maintain that proactive behavior is more a function of situational cues (e.g., Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Furthermore, some researchers have examined the general concept of proactivity across a wide array of organizational behaviors, such as work on the proactive personality and its effects on outcomes including job performance, perceptions of leadership, career outcomes, and team effectiveness (e.g., Crant & Bateman, 2000; Crant, 1995; Deluga, 1998; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). In contrast, other researchers have focused on specific proactive behaviors that occur in a particular context. For example, research on proactive socialization has focused on newcomers' initiative in gathering information in the context of their first six months on the job (e.g., Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b).

Drawing from both general and context-specific conceptualizations of proactive behavior, Figure 1 depicts an integrative framework of the antecedents and consequences of proactive behavior. The model is intended to help researchers interested in various proactive behaviors identify the types of variables that have been studied. In addition, the model demonstrates that proactive behaviors have been characterized in different ways and studied in an array of literatures, which might spur organizational scholars whose primary research interests lie in other domains to consider how proactive behaviors may inform their own research.

Two broad categories of antecedents are included in the model: individual differences and contextual factors. One set of individual differences is composed of constructs specifically designed to capture one's disposition toward or potential to perform proactive behaviors, such as proactive personality and role breadth self-efficacy. The other set of individual differences included in the model consists of variables associated with specific proactive behaviors, such as desire for feedback and job involvement. Contextual factors, such as uncertainty and organizational norms toward proactive behavior, appear in the model as antecedents because they also are associated with the decision to behave in a proactive fashion. The central portion of the model depicts two classes of proactive



**Figure 1.** An Integrative Model of the Antecedents and Consequences of Proactive Behaviors

behaviors. General actions—for example, challenging the status quo and creating favorable conditions—refer to broad categories of proactive behaviors that might occur in any number of work-related situations. Context-specific behaviors, such as proactive socialization and feedback seeking, capture particular proactive behaviors that occur in a limited domain. Finally, the ultimate outcome of the model is the consequences of proactive behavior, such as improved job performance and career success.

The next section of this review considers the theoretical and empirical support for the components of the model. I organize the discussion around four general constructs designed to broadly capture elements of proactive behavior (proactive personality, personal initiative, role breadth self-efficacy, and taking charge) and six context-specific proactive behaviors (socialization, feedback seeking, issue selling, innovation, career management, and stress coping).

### Proactive Behavior Constructs

As a starting point toward examining extant work on proactive behavior on the job, I will review four constructs that take a general approach toward the conceptualization and measurement of proactive behavior. While other constructs and measures exist that tap particular, context-specific proactive behaviors (e.g.,

feedback seeking, socialization), these are the only constructs I am aware of that specifically capture the broad concepts of proactive behavior and initiative. These constructs will be reviewed in the order in which they appeared in the literature.

### *Proactive Personality*

People are not always passive recipients of environmental constraints on their behavior; rather, they can intentionally and directly change their current circumstances (e.g., Buss, 1987; Diener, Larsen, & Emmons, 1984). Bateman and Crant (1993) introduced the proactive disposition as a construct that identifies differences among people in the extent to which they take action to influence their environments. They defined the prototypical proactive personality as someone who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces and who effects environmental change. Proactive people identify opportunities and act on them, show initiative, take action, and persevere until meaningful change occurs. In contrast, people who are not proactive exhibit the opposite patterns: they fail to identify, let alone seize, opportunities to change things. Less proactive individuals are passive and reactive, preferring to adapt to circumstances rather than change them.

The proactive personality scale (PPS; Bateman & Crant, 1993) measures this construct. Bateman and Crant (1993) presented the results of three studies demonstrating the scale's convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. Factor analyses and reliability estimates suggest that the scale is unidimensional. Test-retest reliability over a three-month period was .72, providing some evidence for the measure's stability. The PPS has been incorporated into a number of studies assessing an array of potential outcomes of proactive behavior at work. Research has established relationships between proactive personality and individual job performance (Crant, 1995), career outcomes (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999), leadership (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant & Bateman, 2000; Deluga, 1998), organizational innovation (Parker, 1998), team performance (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999), and entrepreneurship (Becherer & Maurer, 1999; Crant, 1996).

***Individual job performance.*** The relationship between a sales professional's PPS score and his or her job performance was examined in a longitudinal study of real estate agents (Crant, 1995). Using an index of job performance composed of the number of homes sold, listing agreements obtained, and commission income earned during a 9-month performance period subsequent to the collection of the predictor variables, proactive personality had a criterion validity coefficient of .23. This was second in magnitude only to the number of years of real estate experience ( $r = .28$ ) and similar to the validity coefficient for general mental ability ( $r = .21$ ). After controlling for experience, general mental ability, conscientiousness, extraversion, and social desirability, proactive personality explained an additional 8% of the variance in job performance. Proactive personality was presumed to trigger higher job performance through its effects on selecting and changing the sales environment, such as agents' focusing on the high-end market and actively soliciting new clients.

***Career outcomes.*** The relationship between proactive personality and a number of career-related outcomes has also been explored. In a sample of 496 employees from a diverse set of occupations and organizations, proactive person-

ality was positively associated with two measures of objective career success, salary ( $r = .15$ ) and the number of promotions over the span of one's career ( $r = .17$ ) (Seibert et al., 1999). Proactive personality was also correlated with subjective career success ( $r = .31$ ), operationalized as one's overall level of satisfaction with the career. After controlling for several variables that have previously been found to predict career outcomes (e.g., demographic, motivational, and organizational variables), proactive personality explained additional variance in both objective and subjective career success. These findings were consistent using both self-ratings and significant-other ratings of proactive personality, and the correlation between the self and significant-other ratings was .44.

**Leadership.** Perceptions of leadership and leadership effectiveness also are associated with proactive personality. In a sample of 156 manager/boss dyads, managers' scores on the PPS were significantly associated ( $r = .35$ ) with their bosses' ratings of the extent to which they displayed charismatic leadership behaviors (Crant & Bateman, 2000). This study took a "view from the top" approach to the study of leadership by assessing superiors' rather than subordinates' ratings of leader behavior. Another study of the relationship between proactive behavior and leadership creatively assessed the relationship between American presidential proactivity, charismatic leadership, and presidential performance (Deluga, 1998). Raters read personality profiles for all American presidents from Washington to Reagan and then judged the extent to which each possessed a proactive personality. These proactivity ratings were positively associated with independent ratings of presidential charismatic leadership and five separate archival ratings of presidential performance. Finally, a study of MBA students found a positive relationship between a student's PPS score and being nominated by peers as a transformational leader (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

**Organizational innovation.** Proactive personality was associated with an array of organizational practices and innovations in a study conducted at a glass manufacturing company undergoing a number of management initiatives (Parker, 1998). Proactive personality was positively and significantly associated with the use of communication briefings to distribute strategic information, membership in voluntary continuous improvement groups, and beliefs that one holds an enlarged and enriched job. The central focus of Parker's study was role breadth self-efficacy, which will be described later in this article. However, the reported correlations between proactive personality and organizational practices suggest that organizational interventions can have more positive effects for proactive individuals.

**Team performance.** The proactive personality concept was extended to the work-team level in a field study of 101 work teams from four organizations with formal teamwork systems (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Kirkman and Rosen's data showed that team-level proactivity was positively related to team empowerment ( $r = .49$ ). Team proactivity was also positively related to a number of crucial team-level outcomes, including productivity ( $r = .70$ ) and customer service ( $r = .73$ ). More proactive teams also experienced higher levels of job satisfaction ( $r = .29$ ), organizational commitment ( $r = .43$ ), and team commitment ( $r = .35$ ). This research was the first to apply the proactive personality construct to the team level,



providing empirical evidence for the importance of proactive behavior by work teams. The strong correlations between proactivity and team productivity and customer service suggest that proactive teams are more effective than less proactive teams.

**Entrepreneurship.** Finally, researchers have explored relationships between proactive personality and entrepreneurship. Crant (1996) presented data from undergraduate and MBA students demonstrating a positive correlation between proactive personality and intentions to own one's own business ( $r = .48$ ). Proactivity explained an additional 17% of the variance in entrepreneurial intentions after controlling for gender, education, and whether the students had a parent who was an entrepreneur. A study of 215 presidents of small companies explored the relationship between proactive personality and entrepreneurial behaviors (Becherer & Maurer, 1999). Company presidents' proactive personality scores were positively associated with changes in company sales ( $r = .17$ ) and with an aggressive entrepreneurial posture where the firm scans for opportunities and takes a bold market position. Analysis of variance on these data showed that proactivity was related to starting rather than buying or inheriting a business, and with the number of businesses started. Becherer and Maurer concluded that proactive presidents use their firms to actively shape the environment, and that they aggressively grow their companies as a business strategy.

In summary, the proactive personality construct has been applied in a variety of settings and used to study a diverse set of organizational behaviors and outcomes. Taken together, these studies suggest that proactive personality is an important element of employee, team, and firm effectiveness. The proactive disposition appears to be related to many desirable behaviors, such as job performance, team effectiveness, and leadership. However, longer-term evidence is needed to establish the stability of the PPS.

### *Personal Initiative*

Personal initiative is a behavioral pattern whereby individuals take an active, self-starting approach to work and go beyond formal job requirements (Frese et al., 1996, 1997). It is characterized by five components: 1) it is consistent with the organizational mission; 2) it takes a long-term focus; 3) it is action-oriented and goal directed; 4) it is persistent in the face of obstacles; and 5) it is self-starting and proactive. Personal initiative is measured using an interview-based methodology.

Because of concerns about social desirability (believed to be a particularly large problem with the East German sample studied), differing interpretations of scale anchor points among East and West German samples, and common method bias, Frese et al. argued that using questionnaire measures alone is problematic. These authors advocated an interview-based approach for measuring personal initiative. They collected three kinds of data: objective facts, interviewer judgments of behavior, and a narrative based on the interaction (Frese et al., 1996). Results of a longitudinal study showed that the interview technique had strong psychometric properties, and triangulated with other measures of initiative, such as self-reported and spouse-completed paper-and-pencil measures (Frese et al., 1997). These data showed that personal initiative is a unidimensional construct.

While the interview technique is cumbersome, Frese et al. argued that their technique may improve precision in the measurement of initiative compared to relying solely on survey methods. Empirical tests of this claim have not yet appeared in the literature. Is there a payoff from using the more intensive interview measurement strategy in terms of increased predictive validity?

Frese and his colleagues (e.g., Frese et al., 1996, 1997; Speier & Frese, 1997) have studied personal initiative extensively in East and West Germany. One study found that initiative is generally lower among formerly socialist East Germany compared to the West (Frese et al., 1996). Employee perceptions of control at work (job autonomy and discretion) and work complexity were also lower in the East, and both of these predicted changes in levels of personal initiative. Frese et al. (1996) interpreted these results as providing evidence for an occupational socialization effect, whereby control and complexity influence initiative primarily through motivational and skill development processes.

Speier and Frese (1997) examined both contextual and individual difference variables leading to two components of personal initiative. Retrospective initiative consisted of reported examples of demonstrated initiative at work. Concurrent initiative consisted of initiative demonstrated during the context of the research interview itself. Using longitudinal data from a sample of East Germans, Speier and Frese tested the extent to which generalized work-related self-efficacy intervenes in the relationship between control and complexity at work and personal initiative. Self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between control and complexity and concurrent initiative. Self-efficacy moderated the relationship between control at work and retrospective initiative. Thus, increasing perceptions of self-efficacy may help increase demonstration of personal initiative.

### *Role Breadth Self-Efficacy*

Parker (1998) recently introduced the concept of role breadth self-efficacy (RBSE) to capture employees' perceived capability of carrying out a broader and more proactive set of work tasks that extend beyond prescribed technical requirements. Unlike proactive personality, which is a relatively stable personal disposition, RBSE is expected to change as environmental conditions and employees' organizational experiences change. She noted that to cope with environmental dynamism, organizations need skilled employees who are both able and willing to take on a broader role. A key requirement is that employees exhibit proactive behaviors and demonstrate initiative on the job, but they must also possess interpersonal and integrative skills. Parker created a 10-item measure of RBSE to assess employees' beliefs that they are capable of performing an array of proactive, interpersonal, and integrative tasks.

Parker (1998) presented the results of two studies assessing the psychometric properties of the RBSE measure. A confirmatory factor analysis of data from a sample of 669 employees showed that the RBSE items loaded together and assessed a construct different from the proactive personality scale and a measure of self-esteem. RBSE was positively associated with organizational practices such as membership in improvement groups, job enlargement, and job enrichment. A second study took a longitudinal approach and drew from a sample of 459



employees at a closely held firm that manufactures and assembles large vehicles. The data again demonstrated that RBSE was a unidimensional construct with sound reliability (Cronbach's alpha was .95 at Time 1 and .96 at Time 2). Two organizational practices—increases in communication quality and job enrichment—promoted greater RBSE.

### *Taking Charge*

Morrison and Phelps (1999) argued that the proactive component of extra-role behavior has been underemphasized. Most extra-role behavior research has focused on organizational citizenship behavior, and particularly on what Organ (1988) referred to as modest and even trivial behaviors that sustain the status quo. Morrison and Phelps introduced the "taking charge" construct to capture the idea that organizations need employees who are willing to challenge the status quo to bring about constructive change. Taking charge is defined as constructive efforts by employees to effect functional change with respect to how work is executed. At its essence, taking charge is change-oriented and geared toward improvement.

Taking charge is measured with a 10-item questionnaire that is completed by coworkers, although the items could easily be adapted for self-report measures. The items are worded in such a way that individual differences in behavioral tendencies rather than specific proactive incidents are evaluated (a sample item is "This person often tries to institute new work methods that are more effective for the company"). Thus, the model displayed in Figure 1 categorizes the taking charge construct as an individual difference variable rather than as a particular proactive behavior. Preliminary assessment of the scale's psychometric properties showed strong reliability and adequate convergent and discriminant validities using a sample of part-time MBA students. Data from 275 professional employees from different organizations were used to assess variables that might motivate taking charge behavior (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Taking charge was positively related to felt responsibility, self-efficacy, and perceptions of top management openness. Thus, employees are more likely to take charge to the extent that they have an internalized sense of responsibility for changing their workplace, believe in their own capacity to perform, and view top management as supportive of change efforts.

### *Comparing and Contrasting the Four Constructs*

The four proactive behavior constructs described above—proactive personality, personal initiative, role breadth self-efficacy, and taking charge—overlap conceptually. In particular, the constructs share a common behavioral domain. Each construct considers the way in which an employee approaches and defines his or her work role, focusing on efforts to improve things in the workplace. Thus, the conceptual underpinnings of each construct incorporate employee changes to the work environment.

The four constructs differ in two regards: in the extent to which their theoretical foundations stress dispositional and/or situational causes of behavior, and in measurement strategies. Two of the four constructs—proactive personality and personal initiative—sought to capture dispositions toward proactive behavior,

while role-based self-efficacy and taking charge measure tendencies toward situation-specific proactive behavior presumed to change in response to environmental conditions. Research designs allowing the decomposition of person and environmental effects would be useful in reconciling these positions. Concerning methodological differences, proactive personality and role-based self-efficacy are measured via short self-report surveys, taking charge is measured with a scale completed by coworkers, and personal initiative is measured via personal interviews.

As the newer constructs have appeared in the literature, some efforts have been made to conceptually differentiate them from the others. For example, Frese et al. (1997) noted that personal initiative is theoretically similar to proactive personality, and they differentiated the two based largely on the data collection methods. Parker (1998) noted that RBSE was related to, but still distinct from, proactive personality in the sense that the former is expected to change in response to situational cues while the latter is a relatively stable behavioral tendency. Morrison and Phelps (1999) noted the similarity of their construct with personal initiative, and contrasted the two based on the situation-specific nature of taking charge versus the behavioral consistency of personal initiative. Morrison and Phelps did not cite any research about proactive personality in their article, which is surprising given the two constructs' common focus on effecting organizational change.

At present, there is insufficient research to empirically draw any meaningful conclusions about the relative utility of the four constructs. Few studies have simultaneously measured two or more of the constructs, and there is an imbalance in the number of empirical investigations using the various measures. Proactive personality was the first of these constructs to appear in the literature and has the most empirical evidence of the four. As more data is collected on the other constructs, it will be possible to supplement comparisons and contrasts based on conceptual grounds with empirical tests. Of the studies described above, only Parker's article (Parker, 1998) introducing RBSE presented data on one of the other proactive behavior constructs (she demonstrated discriminant validity against the proactive personality scale). Studies employing research designs that allow comparison of multiple proactive behavior constructs will be particularly useful as this area of research develops. For example, it would be informative to collect data on all four proactive behavior constructs and examine their respective criterion validities.

In sum, the four constructs described above are intended to capture one's propensity to engage in proactive behavior and display initiative across an array of work-related phenomena. Proactive personality and personal initiative describe behavioral tendencies toward proactive behavior in general; role breadth self-efficacy and taking charge are presumed to vary with environmental conditions. All four constructs consider a broad set of proactive behaviors across an array of situations.

### **Context-Specific Proactive Behaviors**

In contrast to the four general proactive behavior constructs described above, other research streams have examined particular proactive behaviors occurring in

certain domains or within a narrow context. Next, proactive behaviors will be examined in the areas of socialization, feedback seeking, issue selling, innovation, career management, and stress management.

### *Socialization*

Socialization is the process whereby newcomers learn the behaviors and attitudes necessary for becoming effective organizational participants (Fisher, 1986). Until recently, most work in this area portrayed newcomers as passive and reactive. The role of the organization in the socialization process, such as formal orientation and training programs, was the primary focus. Recent work, however, has acknowledged that newcomers can take a more active role as they adjust to work and become comfortable with their new roles. In particular, research has bridged the feedback seeking and socialization literatures to develop new insights into socialization based on newcomers' proactive efforts to collect relevant information.

Three conceptual contributions are particularly noteworthy. First, Jones (1983) argued that early research on the socialization process neglected the active role that newcomers can play. He offered an interactionist perspective, taking into account the idea that individual differences may affect newcomers' adjustments to organizations and may moderate the effects of socialization tactics on their personal and role outcomes. The upshot of this line of thought is a stage model of the socialization process whereby newcomers become more proactive in each subsequent stage. Ultimately, both the newcomers' interpretation of the context and the intentions of the socializing agents influence their responses and activity levels.

A study of 102 newcomers across 96 firms provided empirical support for this perspective (Jones, 1986). This work was grounded in both Jones' theory (Jones, 1983) and the conceptual work of Van Maanen and Schein (1979) regarding how various socialization tactics might affect one outcome of socialization, role orientation. Individualized, informal socialization tactics (rather than collective and formal tactics) lead to proactive, innovative role orientations. Institutionalized tactics, such as formal, collective programs featuring common learning experiences, lead to custodial role orientations in which newcomers accept the status quo and passively assume role requirements. An individual difference variable, self-efficacy, moderated the relationship between socialization tactics and role orientations.

A second conceptual contribution used a symbolic interaction perspective to explain the socialization process (Reichers, 1987). According to this perspective, verbal and symbolic interactions between people are the primary vehicles through which people ascribe meaning and significance to events. Reichers noted that both newcomers and insiders vary in the extent to which they proactively engage in behaviors that facilitate the socialization process, such as initiating lunch engagements and asking for feedback. She theorized that the highest rate of socialization occurs when both the newcomers and insiders are highly proactive.

Third, Miller and Jablin (1991) criticized previous information-seeking research on the grounds that the scope of information-seeking activities studied was

so narrow as to be uninformative. They proposed a model of seven proactive information-seeking tactics used by newcomers to reduce the uncertainty associated with a new job: testing limits, indirect questioning, surveillance, observing, disguising conversations, use of third parties/secondary information sources, and overt questions. Miller and Jablin theorized that the likelihood of each tactic being used is a function of the newcomers' uncertainty about the information, assessment of the target as an information source, and beliefs about potential social costs associated with the use of each tactic. Thus, the risks to one's social image are explicitly incorporated into this model of the socialization process.

Empirical evidence for proactive approaches to socialization can be found in a number of studies. Morrison (1993a) studied the proactive socialization tactics employed over a 6-month period by 240 newly recruited staff accountants. These data support the existence of newcomer proactivity; some newcomers actively sought information to facilitate their socialization, such as technical, social, and performance feedback information. These data also demonstrated a linkage between proactive information seeking and socialization outcomes. The frequency of information seeking was related to satisfaction, performance, and intentions to leave at six months. A second article based on data collected from the accountant sample showed that proactive information seeking had an effect on three of the primary tasks that make up the socialization process: task mastery, role clarity, and social integration (Morrison, 1993b). The results of these studies suggest that proactive behaviors by newcomers have valuable outcomes from an organizational perspective.

Other studies have failed to find relationships between newcomer information seeking and various socialization outcomes. Longitudinal data from a sample of recent college graduates and their managers failed to confirm a relationship between newcomers' information seeking and their job satisfaction, commitment, and managerial ratings of performance (Bauer & Green, 1998). Some research published in communication journals (i.e., Holder, 1996; Kramer, Callister, & Turban, 1995; Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995) also found few relationships between newcomer information seeking and socialization outcomes.

Organizational newcomers will engage in a variety of proactive activities in an effort to develop feelings of personal control and facilitate their own adaptation to the new organization (Ashford & Black, 1996). Ashford and Black's data from a diverse sample showed that newcomers engage in an array of proactive behaviors such as seeking information, building relationships, and negotiating job changes. A desire for control was associated with the frequency with which newcomers displayed these proactive tactics, suggesting that a newcomer's desire for control is related to his or her activity levels during the early stages of tenure in a particular job. These tactics were differentially related to two self-reported outcomes, job performance and job satisfaction. In another study, which explored proactive socialization tactics beyond information seeking, behavioral self-management—defined in organizational settings as behaviors enabling one to structure and motivate his or her own work behavior by setting goals, practicing new behaviors, keeping track of progress, and rewarding oneself for achieving the goal—was related to 153 professional newcomers' anxiety and stress at entry, and

to internal motivation, ability to cope, and task-specific anxiety 6 months later (Saks & Ashforth, 1996).

In summary, proactive approaches to the socialization process emphasize that newcomers do not always passively wait for external guidance as they attempt to learn how to become effective organizational participants; rather, they may actively initiate the socialization process. They will engage in specific proactive behaviors to facilitate socialization, such as seeking information, building social networks, and negotiating job changes (Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). These proactive socialization tactics are related to valuable personal and organizational outcomes, such as satisfaction, performance, role clarity, and social integration (Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b).

### *Proactive Feedback Seeking*

Much early research on performance-related feedback treated feedback recipients as relatively passive. Ashford and Cummings (1983) argued that there are two ways individuals can take a more proactive role in the feedback process: they can ask for it directly (inquiring) or infer it based on observations in the work environment (monitoring). This observation spurred quite a bit of research on both the predictors and consequences of proactive feedback seeking.

Feedback is a valuable resource to individuals because it helps them produce and achieve goals. Therefore, individuals will proactively seek feedback information when facing conditions of uncertainty (Ashford & Cummings, 1985). Ashford (1986) presented evidence that the extent to which an employee values feedback is positively associated with how often the employee actively inquires about how others perceive and evaluate his or her behavior. Her study showed that contextual factors and personal characteristics converge to make feedback a valuable resource that some employees will proactively seek to obtain (Ashford & Cummings, 1985). Individuals with high levels of job involvement, little tenure with the organization, high role ambiguity, and high levels of contextual uncertainty (defined as one's uncertainty toward links between evaluations of current performance and outcomes such as promotions) actively sought feedback more often than those employees for whom feedback was a less valuable resource. A re-analysis of these data showed that it was primarily job-related rather than problem-solving tolerance for ambiguity that affected proactive feedback seeking (Bennett, Herold, & Ashford, 1990).

Individual differences in goal orientation also predict feedback-seeking behaviors. In particular, proactive feedback seeking is positively related to having a learning-goal orientation and negatively related to having a performance-goal orientation (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). A learning-goal orientation is the tendency to develop competencies by acquiring new skills and mastering new situations; a performance-goal orientation is the tendency to demonstrate and validate one's competence by seeking favorable judgments and avoiding negative judgments about one's competence (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). The perceived cost and perceived value of feedback seeking mediates these relationships.

Field data from 137 Army helicopter pilot trainees suggested that the social costs of feedback seeking and individual differences in the student pilots' desire for external feedback consistently predicted both feedback inquiry and monitoring (Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992). A scenario-based study found that contextual (source expertise, accessibility, relationship quality, and reward power) and individual difference (need for achievement and self-esteem) variables predicted feedback seeking (Vancouver & Morrison, 1995).

The frequency and consequences of proactive feedback seeking were examined in a study of 387 executives and their superiors, peers, and subordinates (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Managers more actively solicited feedback from their superiors than from peers or subordinates. Managers who actively sought negative feedback had more accurate knowledge of how others evaluated their work and were viewed as more effective by others in the work environment. On the other hand, seeking positive feedback diminished others' opinions of the managers' effectiveness. Two experiments reported by Ashford and Northcraft (1992) suggested that 1) people seek less feedback when being observed; 2) people respond to situational cues concerning the appropriateness of feedback seeking behaviors; and 3) supervisors have favorable impressions of high-performing individuals who seek feedback.

Defensive impression management behaviors—intended to avoid creating an unfavorable public image (Morrison & Bies, 1991)—play an important role in decisions related to proactive feedback seeking. In a study of feedback seeking behaviors by students engaged in a time-management task, feedback seeking was less frequent for students in a public feedback condition compared to those in semi-private or private conditions (Levy, Albright, Cawley, & Williams, 1995). These data also indicated that when people reconsider and modify their feedback seeking behaviors, they do so largely because of impression management concerns and/or ego-enhancement concerns (Levy et al., 1995).

In sum, personal, contextual, and social variables influence decisions to engage in proactive feedback seeking. Individual differences in the perceived value and desire for feedback, goal orientation, and several dispositional variables all predicted propensity to engage in feedback seeking behavior. Contextual factors such as the hierarchical level of the target person (e.g., supervisor vs. subordinate), situational cues about the appropriateness of feedback seeking, and whether the feedback seeking would occur in public or private also were associated with feedback seeking behaviors. Thus, impression management concerns are salient to both an individual's decision to engage in proactive feedback seeking and its likely effect on others' opinions of the individual. People are concerned with the social costs of their behavior, and they pay attention to social cues regarding those costs. Such concerns are appropriate given Ashford and Tsui's (1991) finding that soliciting positive feedback may diminish others' perceptions of one's managerial effectiveness.

### *Issue Selling*

Managers who want to have a say in the strategies a firm follows can do so via proactive behaviors. Issue selling (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) refers to middle



managers proactively influencing the strategy formulation process by calling others' attention to—and influencing their understanding of—particular issues. Issue selling is voluntary and discretionary, and is presumed to take place early in the decision-making process. Dutton and Ashford presented a model of the timing, process, and success of issue selling attempts, noting that issue selling behaviors are simultaneously upward influence, claiming, and impression management activities. Subsequent empirical research tested various propositions from their model.

A qualitative study of managers from a telecommunications company generally supported the prediction that middle managers assess the favorability of the context before initiating image selling, paying particular attention to image risk and impression management (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997). Inductive analysis showed that perceptions of top management's willingness to listen, the supportiveness of the organizational culture, competitive pressures, and ongoing change initiatives created a favorable context for issue selling. On the other hand, fear of negative consequences, downsizing, uncertainty, and a conservative organizational culture created perceptions of an unfavorable context. Survey data from the same company shed light on the specific factors that create image risk for the issue seller (Dutton et al., 1997). Political vulnerability, distant seller-target relationships, and norm violation regarding how issues should be presented were seen as creating the most risk of potential image loss to an issue seller. Fear that violating norms would be viewed unfavorably and thereby create undesirable impressions was particularly salient.

A study of more than three thousand female graduates of a midwestern business school found that context favorability influenced impression management concerns, and thus both play a crucial role in one's willingness to sell gender-equity issues (Ashford et al., 1998). Stated another way, impression management concerns mediate the relationship between contextual factors and issue-selling decisions. People evaluate the risks and rewards of selling gender issues to top management, and are hesitant to do so if they believe that others will form an undesirable impression of them because of their issue-selling activities. Perceptions of a high degree of organizational support and a warm and trusting relationship with key decision makers created beliefs that the issue selling would succeed, and reduced the perceived impression management risks associated with attaching one's name to the gender equity issue. Strong organizational norms toward issue selling also reduced the perceived image risk, making it more likely that the participants would engage in issue selling. Two individual difference variables—optimism and risk-taking propensity—were unrelated to willingness to sell gender equity issues. This, of course, does not negate the possibility that other individual differences to engage in proactive behaviors might predict issue-selling behavior.

This emerging stream of research on issue selling highlights the importance of the social context of organizational behavior. Employee perceptions of a number of factors influence their propensity to proactively sell certain issues to top management. Psychological factors related to protecting one's image are particularly salient in this process. When people perceive risks to their image,

such as when an action would violate organizational norms, they are unlikely to pursue an issue even if they firmly believe in its importance. In contrast, contextual factors can create more hospitable conditions whereby people believe that the benefits of issue selling—such as an enhanced image in the eyes of others and increased credibility—make issue selling less risky.

### *Innovation*

Innovation refers to the production, adoption, and implementation of useful ideas, including the adaptation of products or processes from outside an organization (Kanter, 1988; Van de Ven, 1986). According to Kanter (1988), individual innovation is a process that begins with problem recognition and the generation of novel or adopted ideas or solutions. Next, the innovative employee seeks sponsorship for the idea and attempts to build a coalition of supporters for it. Finally, these activities result in some prototype or model of the innovation that can be used by the organization. Clearly, individual proactivity is related to each of these stages. However, West and Farr (1990) pointed out that little attention has been paid to innovation at the individual or group levels.

One exception is Scott and Bruce's (1994) study of the individual innovation process. Data from 172 engineers, scientists, and technicians employed in the R&D unit of a large organization were used to test a path model of individual innovation behavior. Leadership, support for innovation, managerial role expectations, career stage, and systematic problem-solving style were related to individual innovation behavior. Consistent with research on proactive behavior in other domains, a theme emerging from these findings was the importance of the social costs and benefits associated with the proactive behavior. Innovative behavior was partly determined by perceptions of the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. The extent to which the organizational climate is viewed as supportive also predicted innovative behavior. Finally, a Pygmalion effect was found for the technician sample, such that managerial role expectations predicted innovation.

For a major technological change to thrive, a champion must identify the idea as his or her own, actively promote the idea, and risk his or her own social identity to ensure the innovation's success (Schön, 1963). Champions informally arise, and they actively and enthusiastically promote an innovation through organizational hurdles (Achilladelis, Jervis, & Robertson, 1971). While innovation championing and issue selling are somewhat similar concepts, they can be differentiated on the basis of desired outcomes. Innovation champions desire concrete solutions, such as adaptation of a new production method, whereas issue sellers are more concerned with simply bringing a particular issue to management's attention (Ashford et al., 1998).

A model of the innovation championing process was developed and tested using a sample of matched pairs consisting of 25 champions and non-champions (Howell & Higgins, 1990). Compared to non-champions, champions: 1) used transformational leadership behaviors more frequently; 2) rated higher on two personality dimensions, risk taking and innovativeness; and 3) initiated more influence attempts and used more influence tactics. Howell and Higgins argued

that psychological tests could be used to identify people with high champion potential.

A qualitative study of over two dozen organizations sought to identify the common characteristics and key dimensions of individuals identified by senior executives as proactive change agents who effect change in their operations and institutionalize the change (Frohman, 1997). These proactive people were easily identified by top management, pointing toward the visibility afforded by proactive behavior. However, they were often not viewed by senior managers as "high potential" employees who may attain the level of vice president or above. Frohman argued that this may be because the traits associated with "high potential," such as being powerful, forceful, or visionary, are not necessary for the demonstration of personal initiative. Furthermore, personal initiative implies questioning the status quo, which is not always perceived as a positive behavior. The study also revealed that the change agents went well beyond their formal job requirements, providing additional support for arguments (e.g., Morrison & Phelps, 1999) that proactive behavior can be a form of extra-role behavior. Consistent with other conceptualizations of proactive behavior (e.g., proactive personality, personal initiative), the change agents were action oriented, had a sense of purpose, and showed a willingness to persevere in the face of adversity over a prolonged period of time.

Another example of innovative behavior is task revision, defined as taking action to correct a faulty procedure, inaccurate job description, or dysfunctional role expectation (Staw & Boettger, 1990). Such an action is consistent with Van Maanen and Schein's definition of "role innovation" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), in which job incumbents reject and redefine major premises about their present role's classification, and with Katz and Kahn's descriptions (Katz & Kahn, 1966) of spontaneous and innovative behavior. Task revision involves taking an active approach toward improving one's work role and environment, and thus can be considered a proactive behavior. Two experimental studies suggested that setting specific goals inhibits task revision, and that salience of alternatives and being in a supervisory position with accountability pressures enhances it (Staw & Boettger, 1990).

### *Career Management*

Proactive career behavior occurs when people choose to initiate, intervene in, or perceive of a career situation in such a way that the agent acts in valued directions rather than responds passively to imposed change (Fryer & Payne, 1984). Consistent with this definition, the research described earlier about newcomers' socialization can be thought of as a subset of proactive career management behaviors, as can Seibert et al.'s work (Seibert et al., 1999) on the relationship between proactive personality and career success. This section will review other areas of inquiry related to the active management of one's career.

Much early career research treated people as passive and malleable in their career activities, instead focusing on situational influences on human behavior (Bell & Staw, 1989). In contrast to this perspective, Bell and Staw argued that personality, through the process of personal control, can ultimately affect out-

comes that might otherwise be interpreted as situationally determined. They argued for a dispositional, proactive approach to individual career management behavior; when it comes to careers, people are more appropriately viewed as sculptors rather than as sculpture (Bell & Staw, 1989).

Other authors have further developed the theme of proactive career management. Dynamic, continuous environmental change has created new employment settings, forcing both organizations and careers to become boundaryless (cf. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). People engaging in boundaryless careers must be more proactive in their career management and approach to lifelong learning (Jackson, 1996). People become responsible for their own career development, constantly adding new skills to increase their value in the marketplace. In this context, proactive career behaviors are crucial for enacting career networks, coping with challenges, adjustment, and psychological success (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). A recent empirical study distinguished between four such proactive career behaviors: 1) *career planning*, referring to initiatives to explicitly make career changes; 2) *skill development*, initiatives leading to mastering the various tasks involved in one's occupation; 3) *consultation behavior*, referring to initiatives involving seeking information, advice, or help from others; and 4) *networking behavior*, or initiatives intended to build interpersonal networks in which to seek information, advice, or help (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998).

A longitudinal study conducted in six countries of over 1,200 people employed in two occupational groups—office technology and machine operators—explored the impact of prior experiences and situational influences on these proactive career behaviors (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998). National culture (operationalized via Hofstede's dimensions [Hofstede, 1991]), occupation, employment experience, and mobility experience all explained variance in the career initiatives. Particularly interesting were findings contrasting office technology workers with machine operators. Career planning and networking behaviors were consistent for both groups, but machine operators were lower in skill development and consulting behaviors. This suggests that there are differences in proactive behaviors among white- and blue-collar workers, a concept that has received little theoretical or empirical attention.

### *Coping with Stress*

Proactive coping occurs when people take actions in advance of a potentially stressful event designed to prevent or modify it before it happens (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Proactive coping has largely gone unstudied in the stress literature, although it has several important benefits such as minimizing acute and chronic stress (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). A conceptual framework described the proactive coping process in five stages: 1) resource accumulation, such as obtaining organizational skills or social support; 2) recognition that a potentially stressful event is likely to occur; 3) initial appraisal of the current and potential status of the potential stressor; 4) initial coping efforts designed to prevent or minimize the stressor; and 5) elicitation and use of feedback about the development of the stressful event (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997).

An empirical study of 158 undergraduate students who were anticipating a stressor (an examination) revealed interesting temporal effects: the use of proactive coping began to increase four days before the examination and peaked immediately before it (Raffety, Smith, & Ptacek, 1997). In addition, students scoring high on trait measures of both facilitating and debilitating test anxiety reported more proactive coping than students scoring low on these dimensions.

The domains of job loss and job search among unemployed individuals present a naturally occurring opportunity to study proactive coping with stressors. For example, Kinicki and Latack's "coping with job loss" scale (Kinicki & Latack, 1990) includes three subscales that suggest a proactive, taking-control coping strategy: proactive job search, non-work organization, and positive self assessment. These proactive coping strategies were positively associated with self-esteem, and negatively associated with self-blame for job displacement (Kinicki & Latack, 1990). In a longitudinal study of 363 unemployed job seekers, a cognitive variable, situational control, was associated with increased proactive job search behaviors (Wanberg, 1997). Of the coping strategies used during unemployment, only proactive search was positively related to employment status three months later.

Research investigating job transitions typically has assumed that such changes are stress inducing; however, some work argues that such changes can be considered as a proactive growth opportunity that may actually bring about positive individual outcomes (Nicholson, 1984; Nicholson & West, 1988). A longitudinal study of 1100 British managers suggested that proactive growth models of adjustment are more generally applicable to radical job changes into newly created jobs than reactive stress-coping models (West, Nicholson, & Rees, 1987), and a study of British engineering graduates over a two-year period also was consistent with the proactive growth model of job change (Newton & Keenan, 1990).

### *Summary of Context-Specific Proactive Behaviors*

The six research domains reviewed in this section suggest that employees may engage in specific proactive behaviors targeted toward a particular outcome, such as becoming better socialized or obtaining performance feedback. A variety of individual difference and contextual factors were shown to be associated with these proactive behaviors. Furthermore, many desirable outcomes result from the context-specific proactive behaviors. However, there is currently no comprehensive theory that ties together these many domains and constructs by specifying the proactive behavior process. Next, I will offer some ideas for the components of such a theory.

## **Proactive Behavior Process**

The literature reviewed thus far has provided a number of insights into the antecedents and consequences of proactive behavior in organizations. The model displayed in Figure 1 summarized these relationships, serving as an integrative framework for identifying the types of variables that have been studied in this



area. A comprehensive theory of the proactive behavior process should include these categories of variables, but would also need to address other ideas and relationships to more fully inform our understanding of how and why people exhibit proactive behavior in organizations. Creating a conceptual framework and theory of the proactive behavior process is a signal opportunity for future research, and in this section I will offer some observations about variables and relationships that such a model might include.

The literature discussed in this article suggests that both individual differences and contextual factors should be included in a comprehensive theory. However, such a model would also have to address the cognitive processes by which people decide when proactive behavior is or is not appropriate. A cost/benefit approach might be useful here, especially in light of evidence that people evaluate the social costs and other risks before engaging in certain proactive behaviors (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). A useful contribution would delineate the reasons why benefits would exceed costs in certain situations or for certain individuals, thereby leading to the decision to behave in a proactive fashion.

A model of the proactive behavior process should specify appropriate mediators and moderators, such as impression management concerns, goals, and other motivational forces. Self-efficacy has been studied as both a moderating and mediating variable (Speier & Frese, 1997; Jones, 1986), and the cost and value of feedback (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997) and impression management concerns (Ashford et al., 1998) have been shown to mediate relationships related to the proactive behavior process. A theory of the proactive behavior process should expand on these ideas and identify other relevant moderators and mediators. For example, goals might mediate the relationship between individual differences and contextual factors and proactive behaviors. That is, context and personality might yield particular goals that are best achieved through the exhibition of proactive behavior. Some of the contextual variables described earlier might actually moderate the relationships between individual differences and proactive behaviors. For example, people high in self-monitoring are sensitive to social cues regarding appropriate behavior (Snyder, 1987), so impression management concerns might be particularly salient to these individuals.

Because goals affect the direction, intensity, and duration of actions (Locke, 1991), relevant goals that are best achieved through proactive actions might be included in a theory of proactive behavior. In his model of the motivation sequence, Locke (1991) argued that individual performance is a function of two things: self-efficacy and goals/intentions. Following this logic, one's decision to engage in proactive behaviors would be a function of self-confidence and specific goals one had set. Research has already established that one element of self-confidence, self-efficacy, is related to proactive behaviors (Jones, 1986; Parker, 1998; Speier & Frese, 1997). Proactive behavior can itself stem from an array of goals, such as preventing a problem, fitting in with a particular organizational culture, or creating desirable impressions. Including goals in a model of the proactive behavior process captures this complexity by specifying a mechanism by which individuals set a direction for the action.



Frese et al. (1996) incorporated goals through the concept of action theory to explain personal initiative. They noted that long-term goals are essential for initiative because they imply a proactive rather than reactive response to problems. However, people differ in how quickly they translate goals into actions. Kuhl (1992) contrasted people who have a goal but do little to achieve it (a "state orientation") with those who rapidly put goals into action (an "action orientation"). They also differ in perseverance in the face of setbacks and barriers to goal accomplishment. Thus, having long-term goals, implementing them, and persisting in the face of obstacles is one way to conceptualize the proactive behavior process.

Another benefit of including goals in a model of the proactive behavior process is that people can have different motivations for engaging in proactive behaviors. For example, someone might be proactive because of a desire to help others, such as selling the issue of gender equity at the workplace. Alternatively, a person might be proactive in order to create conditions that will help him or her become a star performer, such as identifying promising customers or seeking feedback on previous performances. Furthermore, not all proactive behaviors are desirable. Bateman and Crant (1999) cautioned that too much, or misguided, proactive behavior can be dysfunctional and counterproductive. A bias for initiative, action, and change cannot come at the expense of necessary core activities. Incorporating goals into a theory of proactive behavior provides a mechanism for capturing these different motivations.

### A Synthesis

What have we learned from considering the many areas in which proactive behaviors have been studied? Perhaps the most fundamental observation is that proactive behavior has been studied in many forms and under different labels. The literature reviewed above considered the role of proactive behavior in an array of domains, such as leadership, job performance, socialization, and careers. The consistency of the findings across these various content areas is impressive. Based on the research reviewed here, it seems that proactive behavior 1) is exhibited by individuals in organizations; 2) occurs in an array of domains; 3) is important because it is linked to many personal and organizational processes and outcomes; and 4) may be constrained or prompted through managing context.

Based on these consistencies, it seems likely that proactive behavior might also be an important element of other research domains. The number of organizational phenomena where proactive behavior might be an important process variable appears limitless. Thus, one opportunity for future research is to study proactive behaviors in new contexts. For example, impression management and organizational citizenship behavior are two often-studied variables in organizational behavior, and it seems likely that proactive behavior would be relevant to the exhibition and effectiveness of both. Managerial actions intended to limit or elicit proactive behavior also appear to be an opportunity for further study.

The various ways in which proactivity has been conceptualized, operationalized, and incorporated into research designs affords the opportunity and makes

it necessary to assess similarities and differences. By considering areas of agreement and contention, the seeds for future research designed to resolve disagreements can be planted.

### *Common Themes*

Authors of the research reviewed here shared a common concern that extant research in the respective domains had overemphasized passive/reactive individual responses and paid insufficient attention to proactive ones. Many of the articles explicitly addressed this idea in the first few paragraphs, often as a primary rationalization for the value-added of the research study. Thus, authors of research incorporating a proactive approach toward organizational behaviors consistently argued for the utility of an action orientation in studying people's organizational behaviors as compared to a passive, reactive orientation.

A second theme is an element of taking control of a situation; the proactive behavior serves the purpose of removing uncertainty and ambiguity for the individual. Both dispositional and situational approaches shared the perspective that people can alter the situations in which they find themselves. The mechanisms posited to trigger the process of taking control differed across the research domains, from the proactive personality's perspective on environmental change to feedback seeking's emphasis on gaining information about performance. These and other perspectives can be interpreted through the lens of employees' taking control of organizational situations rather than simply adapting to unfavorable or ambiguous conditions.

The concept of an internal accounting via a cost/benefit analysis was another common theme across much of the research reviewed here, emerging in the feedback seeking, innovation, issue selling, and taking charge literatures. As people consider whether or not to engage in proactive behaviors, they calculate the expected upside and downside of the potential action. Expectancies about the efficacy of proactive behaviors play a guiding role in decisions to act in a proactive fashion. People will consider the potential costs and benefits of proactive behavior for their image, job performance, job attitudes, career progression, and other relevant outcomes. Social costs such as self-presentation/impression management concerns are of primary importance. If an individual perceives that engaging in proactive behavior risks harming his or her image in the eyes of significant others in the social environment, he or she will be less likely to engage in proactive behavior. Conversely, an employee might choose to exhibit proactive behavior because of politically oriented ulterior motives; such action is intended to positively influence the images of the self held by other people in the social environment. Future research might specify the extent to which such impression management concerns interact with individual differences to determine one's decision to act in a proactive fashion.

### *Areas of Contention*

A major differentiating factor among the various domains concerns the role of individual characteristics. Some of the areas reviewed—for example, the proactive socialization literature—have found very few significant individual

difference effects. Others, such as proactive personality and personal initiative, focus on dispositions as primary determinants of proactive behaviors. One obvious opportunity for future research would be to examine these in tandem; I am not aware of any research that assesses the effects of proactive personality or personal initiative on the socialization process.

A more basic question that arises from considering the research reviewed here is "have we been studying the right dispositional constructs in proactive research?" Recent work about bandwidth has argued that narrow traits, especially when used in combination and selected because of their theoretical relevance to the dependent measure of interest, can be quite useful in predicting job performance and other work-related criteria (Ashton, 1998; Paunonen, Rothstein, & Jackson, 1999). Therefore, if there are individual differences in one's propensity to be proactive, measures of that disposition should predict subsequent proactive behaviors. Proactive personality, personal initiative, and perhaps other measures and conceptualizations of a proactive disposition might be fruitfully studied in other areas, such as feedback seeking, socialization, and innovation. While the other two general approaches described here—role breadth self-efficacy and taking charge—are more appropriately viewed as situation-specific individual differences rather than traits, they too might be studied as predictors of other proactive behaviors.

In addition to the role of dispositions, there is also disparity across the research streams concerning the role of situational and contextual cues in individuals' decisions about whether or not to engage in proactive behaviors. Many of the research streams have focused on identifying the situational antecedents that elicit proactive behavior, while other areas have paid scant attention to circumstances. When considering these domains together, it seems reasonable to conclude that proactive behaviors are caused by both individual differences and contextual factors. This is not, of course, a new idea—reciprocal causality between person, behavior, and situation is the hallmark of interactional psychology (e.g., Schneider, 1983; Snyder & Ickes, 1985; Terborg, 1981). Future research employing designs that afford the opportunity to assess person-by-situation interaction effects would be particularly useful in fleshing out the antecedents of proactive behaviors.

Another unresolved issue concerns the role of environmental change in proactive behavior. Some (e.g., Bateman and Crant's work on proactive personality) treat a desire to meaningfully change the environment as the defining element of proactive behavior. Others (e.g., Ashford and her colleagues' research on proactive feedback seeking) maintain that a desire for environmental change is not necessary for people to engage in proactive behavior. For example, while some people may proactively engage in feedback seeking, the goal is not necessarily to effect environmental change; rather, it is to modify one's own behavior in response to that feedback.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

As I developed the model and described extant research on proactive behavior in organizations, I made a number of suggestions for future research. In the

interest of clarity and completeness, I will briefly summarize them here before offering some additional ideas. Specific suggestions offered thus far included: 1) create a comprehensive theory and model of the proactive behavior process; 2) use research designs that allow the analysis of both dispositional and situational effects on proactive behavior; 3) employ research designs permitting the comparison of multiple proactive behavior constructs; 4) study proactive behaviors in new contexts; 5) study managerial actions intended to elicit or minimize employee proactive behavior; and 6) examine the extent to which the four individual-difference proactive behavior constructs predict the extent to which employees exhibit the context-specific proactive behaviors.

An additional opportunity for future research is to more fully examine the role of cognitive processes and, in particular, perceptual processes in decisions to engage in proactive behavior. While context is an important antecedent of proactive behavior, ultimately, people act based on how they perceive things, not on how things really are (Jones, 1990). Thus, two individuals could interpret the same context differently. Ultimately, it is one's perception of situational favorability, risk to one's image, organizational norms, and other contextual factors that will influence decisions to act. Future research deconstructing the cognitive processes by which people choose to act or not act in a proactive fashion would be helpful.

The different theoretical approaches and content domains in which proactive behavior has been studied suggest that proactivity is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes and outcomes. The research has primarily focused on main effects, which—while useful in establishing bivariate relationships—does not allow researchers to study the complexity of proactivity. It is the confluence of individual differences, contextual factors, and perceptual sense-making through mediating and moderating processes that ultimately determines one's propensity to engage in proactive behavior. More complex designs that allow researchers to capture this complexity would be a useful step in furthering our understanding of proactive behavior. For example, very few studies have examined moderators of the relationship between proactive behavior and its antecedents and consequences. The potential mediating role of goals might also be examined.

Finally, most of the research streams described in this article have for the most part evolved in isolation from the other streams, with little cross-fertilization. A notable exception is the socialization literature, which has explicitly considered the feedback seeking behaviors of new recruits (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996). But research incorporating the proactive behavior constructs to explain the specific proactive behaviors is rare. Work examining the extent to which proactive personality, personal initiative, role based self-efficacy, and taking charge inform the literatures on specific proactive behaviors (socialization, feedback seeking, issue selling, incremental change, innovation, career management, and stress coping) would be helpful. Research incorporating multiple content areas, such as examining feedback seeking as a proactive stress-coping strategy, may also be informative.

## Conclusion

Research on proactive behavior in organizations has appeared in many different research streams, with little cross-fertilization among the different areas. This review suggests that proactive behavior is a complex, multiply-caused phenomenon that has important personal and organizational consequences. Future theoretical and empirical work should further specify its antecedents and consequences, and uncover the boundary conditions of the process of proactive behavior at work. If we accept arguments that have been made in practitioner outlets that proactive behavior is more crucial than ever because of the changing nature of work as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important for researchers to further specify the process by which people decide whether or not to engage in proactive behaviors, ways to engage in proactive behaviors more effectively, and the relationship between proactive behaviors and organizational outcomes.

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