



# Autonomy's impact on newcomer proactive behaviour and socialization: A needs–supplies fit perspective

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This study investigates newcomer proactive behaviour through the lens of person–environment (PE) fit theory. Two competing theories of autonomy-based needs–supplies (NS) fit were hypothesized to impact both newcomer proactive behaviours and socialization outcomes. Results from two waves of data collected from organizational newcomers indicate support for a self-regulatory form of relationship, where individuals engaged in different types of proactive behaviours most often when organizational supplies for autonomy did not match their personal needs. Specific types of proactive behaviours including feedback seeking, positive framing, general socializing, networking, and information seeking also mediated the impact of NS misfit onto certain socialization outcomes. Much can still be learnt about PE fit and proactive behaviours through further integration of ideas from both fields of research.

## Practitioner points

- Employers need to understand which types of proactive behaviours to encourage in newcomers in order for them to become active contributors in their new organizational settings.
- Employers looking to manage newcomer proactive behaviours through autonomy need to carefully manage the amount of autonomy provided relative to individual needs for autonomy.

Proactive behaviour research has generated considerable interest among organizational researchers and practitioners alike (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). Proactive behaviour is the anticipatory self-initiated effort to bring about change in one's work environment and/or the self (Grant & Ashford, 2008). In today's dynamic and uncertain global economy, more people are beginning to subscribe to the notion that organizations may gain a competitive advantage when they have employees who engage in proactive behaviours (Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010). Similarly, proactive behaviours are widely seen to be a key component of individual career success (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001), where such behaviour is especially crucial for newcomers who are being socialized into their jobs (Ashford & Black, 1996; Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Saks, Gruman, & Cooper-Thomas, 2011).

The increased appreciation for proactive behaviours for organizational newcomers has motivated attempts to investigate factors that encourage such behaviour. Many such attempts have identified the job characteristic of autonomy, or the amount of

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freedom and discretion to determine how one's job is performed, as a key antecedent of proactive behaviours (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). However, it is less clear whether it is the individual need for autonomy on the part of newcomers (Ashford & Black, 1996), or the provision of autonomy through employer job design (Grant & Ashford, 2008) that is crucial to understanding proactive behaviour among these individuals. Unfortunately, individual and environmental factors have seldom been investigated together as joint predictors of proactive behaviour.

The goals of this study were as follows: To address the aforementioned gap in knowledge by first theoretically applying a person–environment (PE) fit framework capable of taking into account both individual and environmental autonomy as predictors of newcomer proactive behaviour. Two competing hypotheses based on PE fit theory are developed and tested, which offers a unique opportunity to test theoretical arguments through strong inference. Secondly, whereas there is significant evidence linking newcomer proactive behaviour to socialization outcomes, it is less clear which particular proactive behaviours are most important for newcomers (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). Therefore, this study also sought to investigate which types of proactive behaviours matter most for successful newcomer socialization. This is done by testing a model linking autonomy-based PE fit to socialization outcomes through different newcomer proactive behaviours, which facilitates the comparing of the relative effects of different forms of proactive behaviour on newcomer socialization (Saks *et al.*, 2011). Overall, developing a more complete understanding of how individual and environmental approaches towards autonomy come together to influence different types of proactive behaviours is an important step towards improving how autonomy is used to motivate proactive behaviour and facilitate newcomer adaptation to their work environments. Pinpointing which types of proactive behaviours matter most for newcomer socialization will also help to improve the precision of current socialization theory, which lays the foundation for more targeted and effective interventions for managing new organizational employees.

### **Hypothesis development**

#### *Newcomer proactivity and PE fit*

Ashford and Black's (1996) influential study identified seven key types of change-oriented proactive behaviours that organizational newcomers engage in. These include feedback seeking, information seeking, job change negotiation, positive framing, general socializing, building relationships with the boss, and networking. Feedback seeking refers to newcomers actively seeking information based on their job performance, whereas information seeking generally refers to newcomers actively looking up organizational policies and procedures. Job change negotiation refers to newcomers negotiating changes in their assignments or roles with their supervisors or co-workers. Positive framing denotes attempts to cognitively reappraise work situations involving the self. General socializing refers to building relationships with their overall social environment within the organization, whereas building relationships with the boss describes attempts to build relationships with one's supervisors. Finally, networking refers specifically to a form of socializing directed towards interdepartmental colleagues. Ashford and Black (1996) reported empirical evidence suggesting that these seven forms of proactive behaviour were distinct but still related to each other.

Ashford and Black's (1996) study also revealed that most of these behaviours were motivated by the newcomer's desire for control. The transition from outsider to employee is often fraught with uncertainty where individuals are faced with numerous task, social, and cultural demands (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Such situations emphasize individuals' generalized desire for mastery and control (Bell & Staw, 1989), which often manifests itself in a felt need for autonomy over what, when, and how one's job should be performed (de Rijk, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & De Jonge, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2007). This need for autonomy motivates proactive behaviours that are designed to gain control over the novel work environment and promote successful coping and adaptation (Ashford & Black, 1996).

An alternative job environment-based view treats autonomy as part of job design and something that is provided by an organization or managers (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Such situational autonomy signals to newcomers that they have the ability and opportunity to act proactively by exerting initiative to manage their jobs and develop their skills (Axtell & Parker, 2003; Morrison, 2006; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Thus, newcomers engage in more proactive behaviours because they experience more efficacy to enact changes in themselves and their work environment when autonomy is provided in their jobs (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Unfortunately, both these individual needs and job environment-based views on how autonomy influences proactive behaviour have seldom been investigated together as joint predictors of proactive behaviour. To guide our current investigation, we thus propose a more comprehensive approach that takes into account not only the unique relationships that both these approaches represent, but also the interactive relationships that may exist where both types of effects come together to jointly influence newcomer proactive behaviour.

Our current approach is based on a PE fit framework because it facilitates enquiry on how the quality of relationships between individuals and their environments (i.e., fit) jointly impacts outcomes such as proactive behaviour (Edwards, 1994). Past research, as described above, tends to focus either on organizational newcomers' personal need for autonomy or the amount of autonomy that the work environment offers as motivators of proactive behaviour (Ashford & Black, 1996; Grant & Ashford, 2008). A PE fit framework integrates these two perspectives by showing how proactive behaviour varies according to the extent to which individual needs are met by organizational supplies for autonomy. Specifically, PE fit theory refers to such relationships focusing on how personal needs are satisfied by job environment supplies as needs-supplies (NS) fit (Kristof, 1996).

Whereas PE fit has been clearly linked to positive outcomes in the form of work attitudes across cultures (Oh *et al.*, 2014), its influence on behaviour is weaker and less obvious due to a general lack of research on behavioural outcomes of fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). There are two opposing views towards the exact nature of how proactive behaviour varies according to the extent of autonomy-based NS fit. According to an affective-consistency-based view, NS fit will lead to more proactive behaviours. This is because NS fit gives rise to positive attitudes which in turn act as motivators for newcomer proactive behaviour. Recent meta-analyses indicate that various types of PE fit are positively linked with job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005; Oh *et al.*, 2014), where satisfaction and commitment result when individual needs for autonomy are met by the nature of the job (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Locke, 1976). The affectively positive attitudes such as satisfaction and commitment felt towards one's job and employer motivate behaviours directed towards

positive change in the workplace (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Such behaviour may be considered proactive because they are both self-initiated and change-oriented (Parker *et al.*, 2010). Thus, experiencing positive feelings towards a job causes one to seek more feedback and information on job tasks as a means to excel at a job that he or she values (Ashford, Blatt, & Walle, 2003; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Similarly, felt commitment towards an organization can motivate efforts to further integrate oneself into the social fabric of the workplace by engaging in behaviours such as general socializing, building relationships with the boss, and networking. Newcomers may also engage in positive framing, thinking of job and employer attributes in a more positive light due to consistency biases stemming from the positive affective experiences of satisfaction and commitment. Hence, due to the innate need to have consistency among self-perceptions and experiences (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995; Lecky, 1968), these positive attitudes activate cognitive frames that bias perceptions of the job to be consistent with one's overall affective experience (James & Tetrick, 1986; Yu, 2009). In all, the affective-consistency view advocates a relationship where levels of the above types of newcomer proactive behaviours are highest when NS fit exists and employers provide a level of autonomy that satisfies individual needs.

*Hypothesis 1:* Feedback seeking, positive framing, general socializing, building relationships with the boss, networking, and information seeking are maximized when NS fit exists.

An alternative relationship is predicted by a self-regulatory view which argues that newcomer proactive behaviours are highest when there is NS *misfit*. Self-regulation describes individuals as active managers of PE fit who are motivated to achieve PE fit through proactive behaviour (Edwards, 1992; Yu, 2009). This view is in line with Parker *et al.*'s (2010) assertion that achieving better fit with one's environment is one of the main goals of proactive behaviour. Such a view implies that the impetus to engage in proactive behaviour is highest when there is misfit and organizational supplies diverge from individual needs. This study investigates two possible ways in which such misfit can exist. Organizations can provide either insufficient autonomy to satisfy individual needs, or too much autonomy so that it exceeds the amount that the individual needs. These scenarios are discussed in more detail below.

Negative affect characterized by feelings of unhappiness and dissatisfaction emerges when individuals receive too little autonomy relative to what they desire (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998; Locke, 1969; Taris & Feij, 2001). Such feelings signal that the current situation is problematic and informs individuals that their current work setting and PE fit is undesirable. As a coping mechanism, newcomers are thus motivated to engage in proactive behaviours to correct the situation of NS misfit. Simmering, Colquitt, Noe, and Porter (2003) found that individuals conscientiously increased participation in proactive career development activities such as asking for special assignments, seeking information on personal/professional development courses, and seeking feedback in skills and weaknesses when there was a misfit between needs and supplies for autonomy. Thus, newcomers may try to negotiate with their superiors for more freedom and discretion over job tasks when they feel that they lack autonomy (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008). Insufficient autonomy also hinders self-learning through exploration and experimentation on the job, which could also cause newcomers to seek out role-related feedback and information from supervisors and co-workers (Ashford, 1986). Similarly, the impetus to socialize, network, and build relationships is also increased when individuals

feel they have to rely on supervisors and co-workers for work-related information (Caska, 1998; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Needs-supplies misfit also exists when there is an *oversupply* of autonomy that exceeds individual needs. Such a situation may be associated with a perceived lack of guidance on the job, which causes newcomers to proactively seek feedback and information regarding job tasks (Ashford, 1986). Likewise, individuals facing such a predicament may also see socializing, networking, and building relationships as a way to cope with job-based uncertainty stemming from the lack of supervision and guidance. Newcomers might also negotiate with superiors for job roles involving less autonomy and more supervision (Black & Ashford, 1995; Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). Lastly, positive framing can also be employed for both situations of NS misfit, where newcomers effectively bias and calibrate their perceptions of the self and the environment to deal with the negative affect accompanying the experience of misfit (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Therefore, in contrast to the affective-consistency perspective, a self-regulatory view argues that newcomer proactive behaviours are highest when NS misfit exists and there is either an under- or oversupply of autonomy relative to individual newcomer needs.

*Hypothesis 2:* Feedback seeking, job change negotiation, positive framing, general socializing, building relationships with the boss, networking, and information seeking are maximized when NS misfit exists.

#### *Newcomer proactive behaviour and socialization outcomes*

It is also important to investigate the impact of proactive behaviours on the successful socialization of newcomers. Past reviews and recent meta-analyses have established that role clarity, self-efficacy, and social integration are key socialization outcomes for newcomers (Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). It is also widely accepted that these outcomes are dependent on certain types of information that newcomers can proactively obtain (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). Perhaps the most complete framework for such information was proposed by Morrison (1995) who integrated several existing typologies to identify the following types of information that are relevant for the successful socialization of newcomers: *Technical* (e.g., how to perform required tasks), *referent* (e.g., requirements and expectations associated with the job role), *appraisal* (e.g., how one's behaviour will be evaluated), *social* (e.g., relationships with and between co-workers), *normative* (e.g., firm culture), *organizational* (e.g., firm's structure, procedures, products and services), and *political* (e.g., distribution of power within the firm). It follows that linking proactive behaviour to socialization outcomes involves understanding the types of information yielded by different types of newcomer proactive behaviours and how such information impacts each type of outcome.

For instance, role clarity is derived from technical, referent, and appraisal information about the job role and how one's performance is being evaluated. These types of information would be directly impacted by proactive behaviours such as feedback and information seeking. Similarly, Hornung *et al.* (2008) discovered that proactive job change negotiation in the form of idiosyncratic deals (i.e., i-deals) can also have a positive impact on such information. Specifically, they observed that government agency employees negotiated i-deals involving additional opportunities for skill and career development, which invariably provide access to additional technical, referent, and even organizational information. Furthermore, it is also possible that socializing, relationship building, and networking behaviours build social networks, which can also be important



sources of technical, referent, and appraisal information. For instance, Cross and Cummings (2004) found that relational networks crossing organizational boundaries and hierarchical levels provide unique information that is especially beneficial for knowledge-intensive work. In contrast to the other behaviours that involve access to information, positive framing impacts how such information is structured and used in the context of work (Harrison, Sluss, & Ashforth, 2011). Such cognitive processes manifest in within role innovations that alter how work is approached and performed (Ibarra, 1999; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). In summary, all the proactive behaviours highlighted can impact various types of newcomer information which brings about role clarity.

Technical, referent, and appraisal-based information should also contribute positively to job self-efficacy because one is likely to feel more confident about undertaking job tasks when such information is at hand. These types of information are positively influenced by feedback seeking, building relationships with the boss, and information seeking. Furthermore, knowledge about the social, normative, organizational, and political aspects about the job and firm would also have newcomers feel more efficacious about their ability to carry about job tasks within their work and organizational environments. Thus, behaviours that provide such information such as building relationships with the boss, socializing, networking, and information seeking should have a positive impact on efficacy. Successful job change negotiation can also provide access to the above types of information by changing one's job environment to be more in line with personal background so that his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities can be more relevant. Moreover, self-efficacy should also be enhanced by one's ability to enact changes in his or her job through successful negotiation. Lastly, positive framing also plays a key role in how social information is interpreted by a newcomer, as well as the implications of such information on an individuals' efficacy to succeed on the job. Therefore, all the different types of newcomer proactive behaviours should have a positive impact on job self-efficacy because they impact different types of information that contribute towards self-belief on the job.

Finally, social, normative, organizational, and political information is typically important for successful socially integration into new organizational environments (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Thus, general socializing, building relationships with the boss, and networking should facilitate integration because they are all instrumental in producing these types of information (Bowler & Brass, 2006; Fang, Duffy, & Shaw, 2011). It is also possible that job-based technical, referent, and appraisal information has a positive impact on social integration because they help individuals perform well on their jobs, which in turn makes them valuable sources of social capital within the organization (Seibert, Kraimer & Liden, 2001). Therefore, behaviours such as feedback and information seeking can also have a positive impact on social integration. Similarly, job change negotiation that results in newcomers performing better in roles that they are more suited to can also have a positive effect on social capital and integration. Lastly, research has also highlighted the importance of positive framing as a facilitator of social integration by allowing individuals to be receptive to organizational efforts to communicate information about norms and values during the socialization process. As a result, positive framing led to social integration because individuals utilizing them were better able to adapt to their firm's values (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005). Overall, all seven types of newcomer proactive behaviours should impact social integration because of their ability to provide varied types of information that are vital for social assimilation.

*Hypothesis 3:* All seven types of newcomer proactive behaviours are positively related to (a) role clarity, (b) job self-efficacy, and (c) social integration.

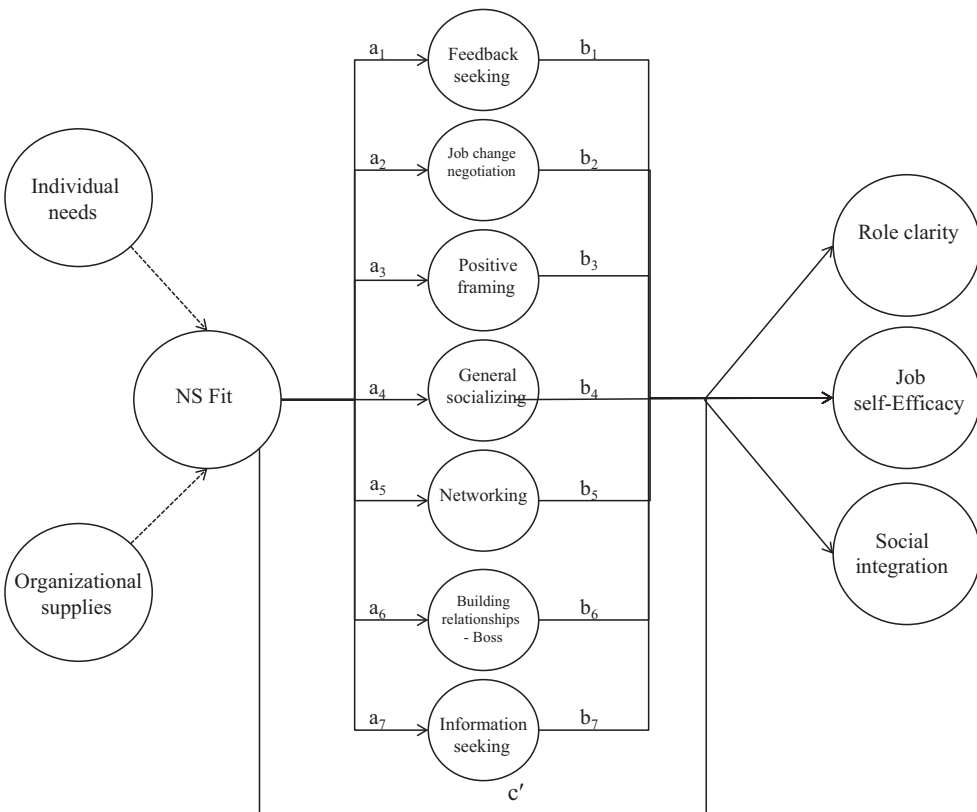
Integrating these proposed links between newcomer proactive behaviour and socialization outcomes and the above hypothesized relationships involving NS fit, we have a relationship where proactive behaviour mediates the relationship between NS fit and newcomer socialization outcomes (Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2006). These relationships are illustrated in Figure 1.

*Hypothesis 4:* Newcomer proactive behaviours mediate the relationship between NS fit and (a) role clarity, (b) job self-efficacy, and (c) social integration.

## Method

### Sample and design

Data were gathered utilizing a predictive design methodology, where two surveys were conducted at two time periods. This process was then repeated across 2 years to improve the sample size. Recently graduated alumni aged 21–25 who graduated within the last year from an undergraduate programme from a business school in Singapore were sent an email invitation to participate in a study of early career work experience. The email contained a link to the first online survey, which assessed demographic variables and PE



**Figure 1.** Multiple-mediator model linking needs-supplies fit on autonomy, newcomer proactive behaviours, and socialization outcomes.

fit. A total of 298 respondents completed the first survey, yielding a response rate of 13.2%. All potential participants were given 4 weeks to complete the survey. Respondents to the first survey were then sent a second online survey 12 weeks after their response to the first was received. This second survey had a response rate of 59.7%, producing 178 matched responses.<sup>1</sup> The length of time of 12 weeks between both surveys was chosen so as to have a reasonable amount of temporal precedence between assessments of PE fit (time 1) and subsequent proactive behaviours and newcomer socialization outcomes (time 2). Participants were paid ten Singapore dollars for participating in both surveys. We ensured that respondents to the time 2 survey still held the same job as the one they had when they took the first survey.

The resulting sample contained 172 females (57.7%) from variety of industries including auditing (31.5%), finance (24.2%), government (14.1%), tourism and hospitality (8.7%), human resources (7.7%), marketing (4.4%), and others (9.4%). The mode salary range was also \$30 to \$40K with 42.3% of respondents reporting earnings within this range. Analyses indicate that the current sample size provided more than adequate statistical power ( $[1 - \beta] > .95$ ) for investigating the hypothesized relationships.<sup>2</sup>

## Measures

### *Autonomy NS fit (T1)*

Hypothesis 2 predicts specific relationships involving PE fit that require investigating how the dependent variable proactive behaviour varies according to specific levels of individual and organizational autonomy (i.e., undersupply and oversupply of autonomy). Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp (2006) have identified three types of PE fit measures: molar, molecular, and atomistic. Past research has shown that molar measures of fit that elicit a direct assessment of fit between person and environment may capture the most proximal predictors of individual outcomes (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). These measures are, however, unsuitable for this study because they do not provide information regarding the direction of misfit that would be required to investigate relationships to do with under- and oversupply of autonomy. Moreover, hypotheses 1 and 2 involve determining the relative levels of person (P) and environment (E) where proactive behaviours are being maximized. Molecular measures that directly assess the degree of discrepancy between the P and E are thus also unsuitable because they yield only one single rating of fit and obfuscate relative levels of P and E. We therefore used atomistic measures of fit that separately measure perceptions of P and E and employed response surface methodology (RSM) to test for the relationships proposed in hypotheses 1 and 2. A more detailed discussion of this methodology is provided in the *analyses* section.

As this study focused on PE fit in the form of NS fit, the Work Values Survey (WVS; Cable & Edwards, 2004) was used to measure both individual psychological needs and organizational supplies for the specific work dimension of autonomy. This instrument was developed based on Schwartz's (1992) circumplex model of human values that represents

<sup>1</sup> As the data were gathered over two batches of alumni, the breakdown in response rates across both years is as follows. Year 1: Time 1 (N = 166) and Time 2 (N = 75). Year 2: Time 1 (N = 132) and Time 2 (N = 103). T-tests conducted indicate that there were no significant differences in the assessed independent variables of personal needs and organizational supplies for autonomy between the respondents and non-respondents to the time 2 survey.

<sup>2</sup> These sample sizes were estimated based on the lowest and highest  $R^2$  values that were reported for models using newcomer proactive behaviours to predict socialization outcomes including role clarity, social integration, and job satisfaction.  $R^2$  values ranged from .20 to .33 and were obtained specifically from Ashford and Black (1996), Gruman *et al.* (2006), and Saks *et al.* (2011).



eight core dimensions of work including pay, variety, and autonomy. Psychological needs were assessed by asking participants to rate each of three items under the autonomy dimension (e.g., 'Determining the way my work is done') according to 'How much is the right amount for you?' Correspondingly, organizational supplies were assessed by asking respondents to rate the same three autonomy-based items according to 'How much is present in your work?' Ratings were based on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (none) to 7 (a very great amount). This measurement approach is consistent with that used in previous research on NS fit, which recommends two separate but commensurate measures of person and environment (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Edwards & Cable, 2009; French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982).

#### *Newcomer proactive behaviours (T2)*

Ashford and Black (1996) identified seven distinct proactive behaviours used by newcomers during their socialization process. These behaviours include feedback seeking (e.g., 'Sought feedback on your performance after assignments'), job change negotiation (e.g., 'Negotiated with others (including your supervisor and/or co-workers) about your task assignments'), positive framing (e.g., 'Tried to see your situation as an opportunity rather than a threat'), general socializing (e.g., 'Attended company social gatherings'), networking (e.g., 'Tried to socialize with people who are not in your department'), building relationships with one's boss (e.g., 'Tried to form a good relationship with your boss'), and information seeking (e.g., 'Tried to learn important policies and procedures in your organization'). Ashford and Black's complete scale was used, where each type of behaviour was measured by three to four items. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they engaged in each behaviour while on the job using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (To no extent) to 7 (To a great extent).<sup>3</sup>

#### *Newcomer socialization outcomes (T2)*

Role clarity was assessed using Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) 6-item measure (e.g., 'Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my job'). Job self-efficacy was measured using the 3-item measure from Wilk and Moynihan (2005; e.g., 'I am confident that I am able to successfully perform my current job'). Lastly, social integration was measured using the 3-item measure developed by Chan and Schmitt (2000; e.g., 'I feel very comfortable around my coworkers'). A 7-point Likert scale was used for these measures.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Results from a CFA indicate support for a measurement model where items for each type of proactive behaviour loaded on a distinct latent factor. The 7-factor structure of this measurement model demonstrated decent overall fit with CFI and TLI indices in the 'good' range (both .97). However, RMSEA (.086) was between 'reasonably approximate fit' and 'poor fit' (O'Boyle & Williams, 2011). Hence, relationships involving each of the seven different types of proactive behaviours were analysed separately. Details of these analyses can be obtained from the first author upon request.

<sup>4</sup> We also conducted a CFA to ensure that respondents discriminated between items from both proactive behaviour and socialization scales as they were assessed at the same time point. Results from these analyses indicate that a model comprising of the original 10 overall latent factors (7 proactivity and 3 socialization outcomes) displayed good fit (CFI = .97, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .07). In contrast, alternative models that included (1) 1 overall latent factor representing both proactive behaviour and socialization and (2) 2 latent factors with proactive behaviours and socialization represented by different factors both demonstrated poor omnibus model fit. Chi-square tests also confirm that the overall fit of the intended model was significantly better than the other 2 (both  $p < .001$ ). Hence, respondents discriminated between proactive behaviours and socialization measures. Details of these analyses can also be obtained from the first author upon request.

### Analysis

Investigating the effects of PE fit involves representing fit in terms of the relationship between the two variables representing person and the environment. The predominant method used to model such effects employs the following polynomial regression model (Edwards, 1994; Edwards & Parry, 1993):

$$Z = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2 \quad (1)$$

where  $Z$  denotes each proactive behaviour as the outcome variable, while  $X$  and  $Y$  represent organizational supplies and individual needs, respectively.

Response surface methodology was used to probe significant effects linking NS fit and proactive behaviours (i.e., hypothesis 1 vs. 2; Edwards, 2002; Edwards & Parry, 1993).

The hypothesized multiple-mediator model in Figure 1 also contains several mediation or indirect effects proposed in hypothesis 4 (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Recent research advocates bootstrap analysis as a rigorous and powerful method for analysing such effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). This method focuses on the significance of the product of the direct effects involving the independent variable on the mediator (paths  $a_1$  to  $a_7$  in Figure 1), and the mediator on the dependent variable (paths  $b_1$  to  $b_7$ ). The current analyses were performed using the SPSS PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012) because it is not only designed to accommodate this computationally intensive approach, but it also facilitated the presentation of results in a way that is consistent with the way our hypotheses have been developed. Using PROCESS and its multiple regression-based approach allowed us to conduct our path analyses in the same step-by-step manner as that which is used in the development of our hypotheses, where hypotheses 1 and 2 focus on the fit-to-proactive behaviour effect, hypothesis 3 on the relationship between proactive behaviour and socialization outcomes, and hypothesis 4 on the indirect effect from fit to socialization through proactive behaviour. The testing of contrasts involving two or more indirect effects also facilitated the comparison of the strength of indirect effects. We interpreted the results in terms of bias-corrected confidence intervals (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993; Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Following Cable and Edwards' (2004) approach, block variables were created to represent the combined NS fit effects modelled in Equation 1 so as to analyse Figure 1's hypothesized path model. Block variables are derived from the predicted value of the dependent variable when it is regressed on a set of independent variables. They are used in path analysis to summarize the effects of a set of conceptually related independent variables (Heise, 1972; Igra, 1979). Such variables have also been used to represent nonlinear and interactive effects in terms of single path coefficients, making them applicable to this study (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Yu, 2014). Illustratively, the block variable for the above NS fit model in Equation 1 would be equal to  $b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2$ , where the regression coefficients are computed from regressing each of the three socialization outcomes (i.e., role clarity, job self-efficacy, and social integration) onto the terms involving individual needs ( $Y$ ) and organizational supplies ( $X$ ). These block variables were then used to derive estimates for the hypothesized direct and indirect (mediating) effects.

### Results

Correlations reported in Table 1 indicate that organizational supplies for autonomy are significantly related to all types of newcomer proactive behaviours as well as socialization

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlations among measures

	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
Needs-Supplies Fit on Autonomy														
1. Individual Needs	5.08	1.06	(.91)											
2. Organizational Supplies	4.31	1.35	.40	(.96)										
Newcomer Proactive Behaviours														
3. Feedback Seeking	4.36	1.45	.16	.28	(.94)									
4. Job Change Negotiation	3.76	1.43	.20	.35	.60	(.92)								
5. Positive Framing	5.00	1.19	.20	.27	.51	.49	(.90)							
6. General Socialization	4.88	1.36	.11	.34	.52	.45	.46	(.92)						
7. Building Relationships with Boss	4.13	1.38	.18	.35	.51	.54	.55	.54	(.92)					
8. Networking	4.21	1.42	.14	.39	.47	.46	.57	.49	.53	(.93)				
9. Information Seeking	4.72	1.32	.17	.29	.45	.48	.61	.53	.62	.58	(.91)			
Newcomer Socialization Outcomes														
10. Role Clarity	5.08	0.93	.15	.40	.49	.42	.51	.39	.43	.34	.42	(.87)		
11. Job Self-efficacy	5.26	1.06	.17	.28	.40	.42	.53	.34	.36	.31	.47	.68	(.94)	
12. Social Integration	5.15	1.16	.14	.39	.47	.40	.45	.56	.37	.41	.38	.64	.59	(.93)

Notes.  $N = 172$ . Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) are reported along the diagonal. Correlations larger than .14 are significant at the  $p < .05$  level; Correlations larger than .19 are significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

outcomes. Individual needs for autonomy was, however, related to all types of socialization outcomes and proactive behaviours except general socialization. Means and standard deviations reported in the same table suggest that there was considerable variation and no ceiling effects for all measured variables. Cronbach's alphas displayed along the diagonal also indicate high interitem consistency across all measures.

$R^2$  results from polynomial regressions displayed in Table 2 suggest that the fit-based model accounted for significant variance in all proactive behaviours. Hypotheses 1 and 2 proposed different forms of relationships linking NS fit on autonomy and proactive behaviours. Hypothesis 1 argues that proactive behaviours will be maximized when NS fit exists, while hypothesis 2 argues for the opposite relationship, where proactive behaviours are maximized when NS misfit exists.

Response surface methodology was used to assess which of the two relationship forms were demonstrated in the current data (Edwards & Parry, 1993). This method involves testing the shapes of three-dimensional surfaces linking individual needs, organization supplies, and proactive behaviours along two key lines of interest: The  $Y = -X$  line that represents the degree of fit between person ( $Y$ ) and organization ( $X$ ), and the  $Y = X$  line that indicates whether the outcome varies according to absolute values of both person and organization. RSM involves testing linear combinations of regression coefficients to analyse the shapes of surface along these lines of interest. These tests were conducted via linear contrasts in the PROC GLM module of SAS version 9.3.

The results from these analyses are displayed in the second and third columns from the right in Table 2. There were significant positive curvatures for the proactive behaviours of feedback seeking, positive framing, building relationships, and information seeking. Positive slopes were observed for all behaviours except for job change negotiation along the  $Y = -X$  line ( $b_1 - b_2$ ), suggesting that most proactive behaviours were higher when organizational supplies exceeded individual needs. Illustrations of these relationships are provided in Figures 2–5, which confirm that proactive behaviour was actually higher at the left and right extremes of the surface (areas representing misfit) and decreased towards the centre of the surface where there was NS fit. Therefore, there was support for hypothesis 2's argument that proactivity was highest when misfit existed between needs and supplies. Furthermore, all forms of proactive behaviours except for job change negotiation were highest when there was too much autonomy, indicating no support for hypothesis 1. This finding also implies that proactive behaviours were generally highest when there was an oversupply of autonomy that exceeded individual needs. It is also worth noting that positive slopes were also observed along the  $Y = X$  line ( $b_1 + b_2$ ), which suggests that proactive behaviours were generally higher for individuals with high needs for autonomy compared to those with lower needs.

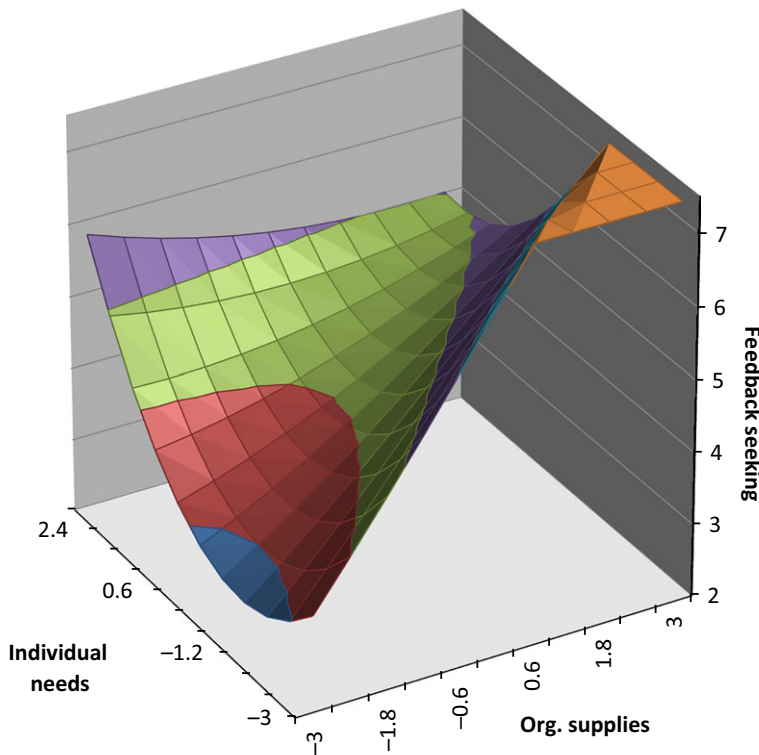
Hypothesis 3 argued for positive relationships between proactive behaviours and socialization outcomes. Based on correlations, proactive behaviours were positively related to all socialization outcomes. In contrast, results from multiple regression analysis suggest that unique effects were observed for feedback seeking and positive framing on role clarity; positive framing and information seeking on job self-efficacy; and positive framing and general socializing on social integration (Table 3). Positive framing was thus the only consistent predictor across all three socialization outcomes. Multiple correlation  $R^2$  values also show that the set of seven proactive behaviours significantly accounted for 35–39% of variance across all three socialization outcomes. Hence, there was some support for hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 argues for mediating relationships linking NS fit and socialization outcomes through proactive behaviours. Results reported in Table 4 indicate that

**Table 2.** Results from polynomial regression modelling linking proactive behaviours to organizational supplies and individual needs for autonomy

Proactive behaviour	Constant $b_0$	$X$ $b_1$	$Y$ $b_2$	$X^2$ $b_3$	$X*Y$ $b_4$	$Y^2$ $b_5$	$Y = X \text{ line}$			$R^2$	
							$b_1 + b_2$	$b_3 + b_4 + b_5$	$b_1 - b_2$ $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$		
Feedback Seeking	4.26**	0.56**	-0.28	0.03	-0.23*	0.19*	0.28	-0.01	0.84**	0.45*	.14**
Job Change	3.60**	0.54**	-0.02	0.10	-0.16	0.01	0.52**	-0.05	0.56	0.27	.15**
Negotiation											
Positive Framing	4.72**	0.44**	-0.25	0.10	-0.21*	0.20**	0.19	0.09	0.69**	0.51**	.13**
General Socializing	4.97**	0.54**	-0.37*	-0.07	-0.12	0.18*	0.17	-0.01	0.91**	0.23	.16**
Building Relationships	4.01**	0.72**	-0.41*	0.07	-0.31**	0.25**	0.31*	0.01	1.13**	0.63**	.18**
with Boss											
Networking	4.15**	0.63**	-0.30	0.06	-0.16	0.12	0.33*	0.02	0.93**	0.34	.17**
Information Seeking	4.51**	0.55**	-0.26	0.13*	-0.26**	0.16	0.29*	0.03	0.81**	0.55**	.13**

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .



**Figure 2.** Response surface linking needs–supplies fit on autonomy and feedback seeking.

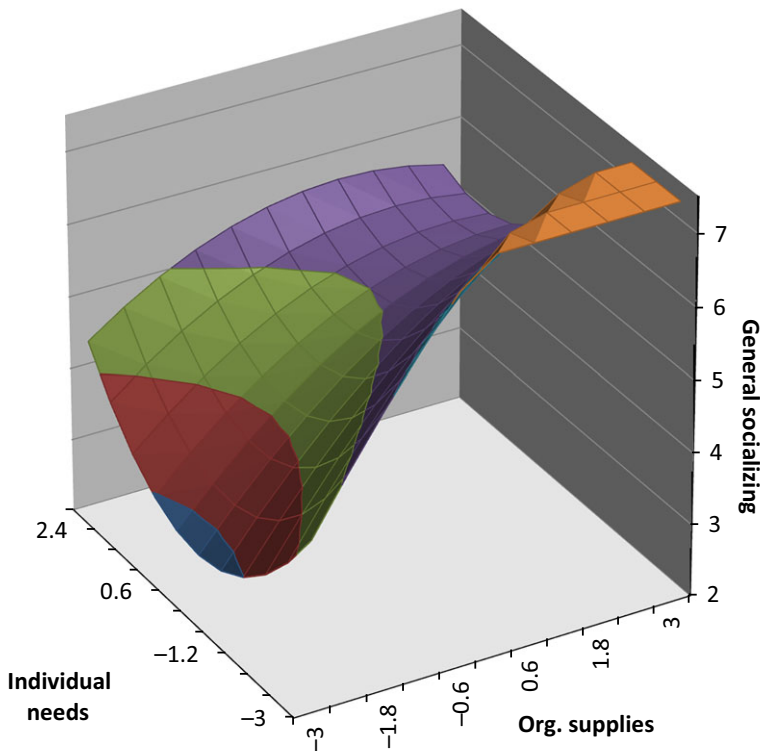
significant indirect effects were obtained for feedback seeking, positive framing, and networking on role clarity. Bootstrap tests of differences between indirect effects indicate that the indirect effects through feedback seeking and positive framing were significantly more than that which was through networking.<sup>5</sup> Thus, newcomers respond by engaging in these three behaviours when the amount of autonomy that they receive does not match the amount of autonomy that they need, which in turn impacts role clarity.

Significant mediation was also detected for the effect of NS fit on job self-efficacy through positive framing and information seeking, where the indirect effects through positive framing were significantly larger than those for general socialization, building relationships with the boss, and networking. The indirect effect for information seeking was also significantly larger than that for networking. Hence, positive framing and information seeking serve to improve self-efficacy when there is NS misfit on autonomy.

Lastly, significant indirect effects were also observed involving feedback seeking, positive framing, and general socializing on social integration. Comparisons of indirect effects indicate that feedback seeking and positive framing were more important proactive behaviours than building relationships with the boss when it comes to impacting social integration.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, general socialization was more effective in translating the effect of misfit onto social integration compared to job change negotiation, building relationships with the boss, networking and information seeking. Therefore,

<sup>5</sup> Details of these results may be obtained from the first author upon request.



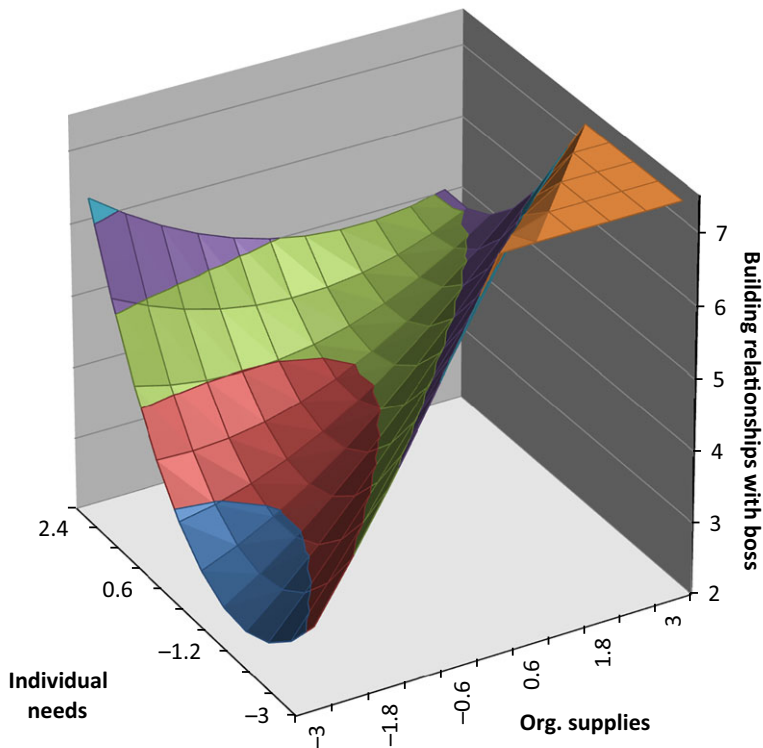


**Figure 3.** Response surface linking needs–supplies fit on autonomy and general socializing.

newcomers engaged in more feedback seeking, positive framing, and general socializing when job autonomy did not fit their individual needs, which in turn led them to feel more socially integrated at work. It is also worth noting that there were also significant residual effects linking NS fit and both role clarity ( $p < .05$ ) and social integration ( $p < .01$ ), suggesting that NS fit still had a direct effect on these socialization outcomes after proactivity had been accounted for (Table 4, second column from the right).

## Discussion

Proactive behaviours are crucial for newcomers' successful transition from inexperienced new hires to active contributors in their new organizational settings. To encourage the enactment of such behaviour among newcomers, employers need to develop a better understanding of why individuals engage in such behaviours in the first place. Whereas previous research has identified autonomy as both a psychological need and as a job resource supplied by organizations and their decision makers as important antecedents to newcomer proactive behaviours, such efforts have tended to be piecemeal where either factor has been linked to distinct proactive behaviours. Therefore, a more systematic and comprehensive approach is needed to develop a more coherent and complete understanding of how autonomy influences newcomer proactive behaviour (Parker *et al.*, 2010). Through its logical and integrative ability to accommodate both individual and environmental factors as predictors of behaviour, the PE fit framework can serve as one of the building blocks of such an approach.

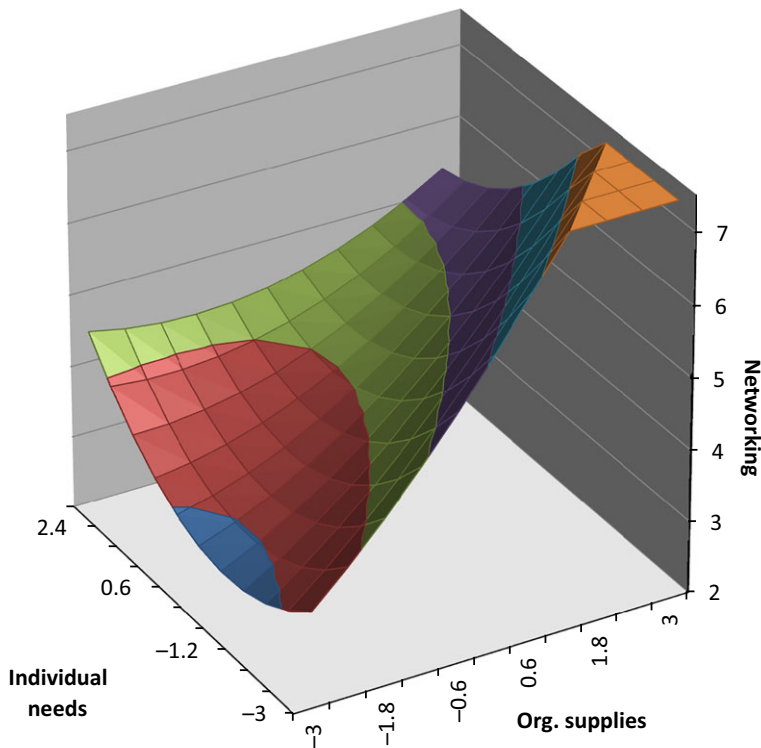


**Figure 4.** Response surface linking needs–supplies fit on autonomy and building relationships with boss.

This study's findings suggest that autonomy-based NS misfit was linked to all forms of newcomer proactive behaviours previously identified by Ashford and Black (1996) except for job change negotiation. Thus, the nature of these relationships followed the form that is explained by a self-regulation perspective, where proactivity was higher when supplies for autonomy did not fit with individual needs. Proactive behaviours were also determined by the form of misfit, where the incidence of such behaviour was higher when there was an oversupply of autonomy with respect to individual needs. Several proactive behaviours such as feedback seeking, positive framing, general socializing, networking, and information seeking proved instrumental in translating the effects of NS fit onto socialization outcomes. However, significant residual direct effects between fit and both role clarity and social integration suggest that fit can impact these outcomes through other mechanisms that have yet to be explored.

### **Implications**

By integrating the latest developments in both PE fit and newcomer proactive behaviours, this study suggests that there is potential in the continued cross-pollination of ideas between these two fields. This study demonstrates that investigating how individuals change with respect to their environments through the lens of PE fit can be a powerful way to understand complex psychological and behavioural processes that unfold during newcomer socialization. Approaching such research in this manner thus moves us closer to understanding how fitting employment relationships develop between specific aspects



**Figure 5.** Response surface linking needs–supplies fit on autonomy and networking.

**Table 3.** Multiple regression of newcomer socialization outcomes onto proactive behaviours

Socialization outcome	Newcomer proactive behaviours							$R^2$
	FBS	JCN	POF	GES	BRB	NET	INS	
Role Clarity	.16**	.04	.22**	.04	.05	-.05	.05	.35**
Job Self-efficacy	.07	.11	.32**	.02	-.05	-.09	.19*	.35**
Social Integration	.12	.06	.17*	.33**	-.06	.06	-.03	.39**

Notes. FBS, feedback seeking; JCN, job change negotiation; POF, positive framing; GES, general socializing; BRB, building relationships with boss; NET, networking; INS, information seeking.

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

of people and their environments, which is a key outcome of newcomer adaptation (Kammeyer-Mueller, Livingston, & Liao, 2011; Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker *et al.*, 2010; Saks *et al.*, 2011; Wang, Zhan, McCune, & Truxillo, 2011).

Our current focus on proactive behaviours not only contributes towards a general lack of research on the behavioural implications of PE fit (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005), but also highlights the importance of self-regulatory processes in the study of fit. While self-regulation occupies a prominent place in the conceptual development of PE fit, its links with PE fit have seldom been documented outside of theoretical work (Edwards, 1992; Yu, 2009). This study demonstrates the power of polynomial regression modelling and

**Table 4.** Bootstrapping results for indirect and residual direct effects of needs–supplies fit on socialization outcomes

	Indirect effect: IV → MED → DV								IV → DV	IV → DV	R <sup>2</sup>
	<i>ab</i>										
	Total	FBS	JCN	POF	GES	BRB	NET	INS			
Role Clarity	.39**	.17**	.03	.20**	.02	.04	-.14*	.06	1.00**	.62*	.40**
Job Self-efficacy	.59**	.09	.15	.37**	.01	-.08	-.18	.23**	1.00**	.41	.36**
Social Integration	.47**	.10**	.03	.10**	.30**	-.07	.02	-.01	1.00**	.53**	.43**

Notes. FBS, feedback seeking; JCN, job change negotiation; POF, positive framing; GES, general socializing; BRB, building relationships with boss; NET, networking; INS, information seeking. *c'* denotes the residual direct effect of NS fit on socialization outcomes after proactive behaviours have been accounted for.

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

response surfaces as a method capable of analysing self-regulatory relationships based on how well environmental supplies match up with individual standards (Carver & Scheier, 1982). This method enabled us to precisely conclude that the levels of newcomer proactive behaviours also varied according to the form of misfit, where proactivity was higher when there was an oversupply of autonomy compared to when there was an undersupply. Such differences highlight the importance of paying closer attention to different forms of misfit. Indeed, recent evidence has even suggested that the experience of misfit can carry very different meanings compared to the experience of fit (Talbot & Billsberry, 2010). Future research adopting a self-regulation perspective should thus investigate the possible varying motivational implications of misfit and the circumstances under which they result in proactive behaviours and even turnover (Wheeler, Gallagher, Brouer, & Sablinski, 2007).

The finding that positive framing was a consistent predictor and mediator across all socialization outcomes highlights the importance of currently overlooked cognitive approaches to proactive behaviours. Indeed researchers need to question whether proactive behaviours lie strictly within the boundaries of action-related behaviours. Such an approach may limit a deeper understanding of the dynamics and multifaceted nature of proactive behaviours as more recent theoretical work has emphasized crucial cognitive processes such as anticipation and planning that may operate prior to and during the engagement of proactive behaviours (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010).

The finding that proactive behaviours displayed curvilinear relationships at relative amounts of under- and oversupply of autonomy suggests that although autonomy is important for proactive behaviour and newcomer socialization, it is likely governed by relatively complex processes that warrant more investigation. This finding is also in conflict with general tenants of theories of job design and self-determination, which argue that behaviour increases instep with only the amount of autonomy provided on the job (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, a more nuanced approach should be adopted, where proactive behaviour is contingent on both the amount of autonomy provided and individual desires for such autonomy.

Practically, these results also imply that employers looking to manage proactive behaviours through the provision of job autonomy need to be aware that NS fit might actually discourage newcomers from engaging in proactive behaviours, which might in turn have an unwanted negative impact on socialization outcomes. Instead of focusing on satisfying individual needs for autonomy, it may be beneficial for employers to create and encourage a job environment in which proactive behaviours can emerge. In this sense, employers may consider other ways of encouraging newcomer adaptation and proactive engagement such as institutionalized socialization tactics (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007), and facilitating socializing and networking opportunities across different organizational groups to improve newcomers' access to social capital that can facilitate their adaptation (Fang *et al.*, 2011). Companies should also consider providing newcomers with training and support systems that can help them learn effective cognitive strategies such as positive framing to cope with their new employment relationships.

### **Limitations and future research**

When interpreting the results of this study, it is important to consider its limitations. First, the reliance on self-reports as a means of data collection exposes current findings to common method variance. However, the temporal separation of NS fit and proactive behaviour variables in a predictive design helps minimize the artificial inflation of relationships observed (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Note, however, that an even more rigorous design would have measured the mediator proactive behaviour and dependent socialization outcomes at separate times. The nonlinear and interactive relationships observed between fit and proactive behaviours are unlikely due to common method variance (Evans, 1985). Nonetheless, future research is still needed to explore how proactive behaviours can be reliably and feasibly assessed through other multisource and observational methods conducted over multiple time points. As proactive behaviours in general can be directed towards a variety of or multiple targets as well as lie beyond the individual's job scope (Grant & Ashford, 2008), more research is also needed to compare the relative merits and validities behind ratings of proactive behaviour obtained from different sources (e.g., self, peer, and supervisors).

Second, this study focused on a particular, albeit prominent and widely researched type of PE fit in NS fit. Such a focus was adopted because we sought to build on past research on proactive behaviour which tended to investigate either individual psychological needs (Ashford & Black, 1996) or environmental supplies (Grant & Ashford, 2008) as motivators of proactive behaviour. More research is needed to investigate whether other important types of fit such as values congruence and demands abilities fit demonstrate similar relationships with proactive behaviour. The latter type of fit may be more predictive of proactive behaviours such as feedback seeking and job change negotiation which target improvement in matching individual capabilities to job challenges. Conversely, it is possible that affective-consistency processes may be more prevalent for similarity-based fit that provides consensual validation for one's attitudes and behaviour, which can encourage individuals to engage in proactive behaviours that are potentially risky both socially and professionally (Davis, 1981; Kammeyer-Mueller *et al.*, 2011).

We also chose to focus on NS fit with respect to autonomy because it is a job characteristic that features prominently in current approaches to understanding proactive behaviour (Morrison, 2006; Parker *et al.*, 2006; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Understanding exactly how autonomy can be used to motivate proactive

behaviour with respect to individual preferences for such freedom and discretion at work is thus an important concern for organizations. However, other job characteristics such as accountability and uncertainty can also be important to understanding proactive behaviour (Grant & Ashford, 2008), and future research is required to assess if fit-based relationships exist for these characteristics.

Given the general lack of understanding of relationships between PE fit and proactive behaviours, future research is also needed to further understand how the present relationships are situated within the larger nomological network of proactivity (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Tornau & Frese, 2013). For instance, proactive personality may impact the present observed relationships by not only encouraging proactive behaviours but also by causing individuals with a more proactive personalities to seek out better fitting jobs that satisfy their needs for autonomy in the first place (Kammeyer-Mueller *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, the variable of time also needs to be modelled more explicitly in future research looking to provide an even more detailed account of how concepts of organizational tenure and work experience influence the self-regulatory processes observed in this study. For instance, relationships between autonomy-based misfit and proactive behaviours may be stronger when individuals have had more time to learn about how to enact change in their work environment. In addition, Kammeyer-Mueller (2007) also highlights the need for more research on changes in fit for newcomers, arguing that the early adjustment period faced by such individuals makes it an ideal context to investigate such changes through the dynamics of interactions between person and environment.

There are also opportunities to further integrate the present findings into the larger field of socialization research where other relevant environmental conditions such as organizational socialization tactics and the quality of supervisor and social support are also taken into account (Bauer *et al.*, 2007). These contextual variables may also play an important role in facilitating the effectiveness of proactive behaviours on socialization outcomes.

The current study is also limited in its singular focus on different types of proactive behaviours playing similar mediating roles linking NS fit and socialization outcomes. As such, possible relationships between different types of proactive behaviours could have been ignored. For instance, information seeking and networking may serve to gather job and organizational information that may subsequently be used as input for job change negotiation. Further research utilizing SEM as a means of comparing various plausible path models is thus needed to illuminate the intricate relationships that could exist between different types of proactive behaviours.

Several limitations also exist in the way that proactive behaviours were conceptualized and measured. For instance, the intended target of several types of proactive behaviours such as positive framing and feedback seeking was not assessed. Positive framing could have been directed at perceptions of the self and/or the organizational supplies. Likewise, feedback seeking can be undertaken with either the intention to enhance one's own image and ego or it could also be meant for the benefit of one's work group or co-workers (Ashford *et al.*, 2003; Grant & Ashford, 2008). The current method of measurement also does not give any insight to the dynamics of newcomer proactive behaviour, or the degree to which such behaviour occurs according to certain moments, events, or phases (Ancona, Okhuysen, & Perlow, 2001; George & Jones, 2000). Such information would allow us to develop a better understanding of *when* newcomers strategically choose to engage in different types of proactive behaviours and whether certain events (e.g., onboarding and performance reviews) encourage or hinder particular forms of proactive behaviours (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Morrison & Bies, 1991).



## Conclusions

With employment relationships becoming more transient and people transiting in and out of organizations at an increasing rate, it is vital to have a good understanding of the experiences that newcomers face. The current study found that newcomers utilize more proactive behaviours when they received more or less autonomy than they currently desired. Of these proactive behaviours, positive framing, feedback seeking, and general socializing proved to be most important for understanding newcomer job self-efficacy and social integration. Overall, these findings have important theoretical implications for organizations hoping to use autonomy as a tool to influence newcomer proactive behaviour and socialization experiences.

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