

Higher levels of intrapreneurial behaviour in a team due to an imperfect fit of autonomy.

How does autonomy misfit, together with psychological safety in a team, contribute to intrapreneurial behaviour?

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Introduction

Background & context

In today's world organisations need to stay ahead of their competition. In order to do so they need to remain and gain a competitive advantage over their competition. Tushman & Nadler (1986) stressed that "organisations can gain competitive advantage only by managing effectively for today while simultaneously creating innovation for tomorrow" (p. 19). Being innovative is a key differentiator for organisation to thrive in this competitive world. A pressing problem for managers is to ensure sustained innovation (Tushman & Nadler, 1986). Employees in an organisation are increasingly required to be innovative and to contribute to the ever changing goals of the organisations. These intrapreneurs are more and more deemed as an important factor to innovation and economic growth (Elert & Stenkula, 2020; Gawke et al., 2019).

Intrapreneurs contribute to the competitive advantage of the organisation. Organisations uphold different expectations of their employees. Bowen (2016) states that employees should not be passive recipients of changing jobs and products, they need to adopt roles as *innovators* and *differentiators*. Adopting a more intrapreneurial way of working is required for employees to deal with or even initiate changing requirements and impact the strategic direction of a firm (Peters & Waterman, 1984).

Organisations benefit from higher levels of intrapreneurship. Intrapreneurship is a process of recognising and exploiting opportunities by being innovative, proactive and taking risks (de Jong et al., 2015; Gawke et al., 2019; Neessen et al., 2019). Rather than being driven from the top - like corporate entrepreneurship - intrapreneurship is a bottom-up multilevel construct (Neessen et al., 2019). Being innovative, proactive, and risk-taking describe the behavioural dimensions of intrapreneurship (de Jong et al., 2015; Neessen et al., 2019). Gawke et al. (2019) introduced three approaches to intrapreneurship: 1) entrepreneurial orientation, 2) intrapreneurial outcomes approach, and 3) behaviour-based approach. The behaviours of innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking matches the entrepreneurial orientation.

Problem statement

In an organisation not all employees will behave as intrapreneurs. Neessen et al. (2019) stated in their systematic literature review that "employee autonomy is one of various dimensions that influence the intrapreneur. On that same note de Jong et al. (2015) found that *job autonomy* is directly related to innovative and proactive behaviour. Underlying premise in the research of de Jong is that job autonomy is provided by the organisation. Although true, this is only part of the story. Although an environment provides a certain level of characteristics, it can be questionable whether this matches the needs of the employee. Autonomy, for example, can be given by an organisation, but some employees will thrive in it and other will be unhappy. A fit should exist between the characteristics desired by an employee and provided by an organisation. In this context of intrapreneurship and job autonomy we are looking specifically to *autonomy (mis)fit*.

@@ uitbreiden met standaard blik op fit, maar waarom misfit het centrale vraagstuk is in het onderzoek

Regarding the topic of job autonomy many perspectives have been researched (Jong & Ford, 2021; Simmering et al., 2003; Sørli et al., 2022; Yu & Davis, 2016). However, no prior research has been done on the topic of autonomy (mis)fit and its influences on intrapreneurial behaviour. A gap in academic literature

that this research attempts to fill. I am going to investigate and research the effects of autonomy (mis)fit on intrapreneurial behaviour.

@@ referentie zoeken naar team effect intrapreneurship

- Je mist hier het brugje dat intrapreneurship vaak een team effort is en dat het vaak nodig is in het proces om bv met verschillende mensen te werken, etc. en dan pas moet je naar psy safe gaan. Want nu is dat wat een te grote sprong opnieuw
- Innovation and process improvements have been found at teams that have high levels of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Newman et al., 2017).
- Psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999).
- If a team feels safe, they will share more information and as such learn more than teams with lower levels of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017).

Academic & practical relevance

In the current academic literature not much is known about the relation and effects of autonomy (mis)fit, psychological safety, and intrapreneurial behaviour. Although the elements on their own have been subject of many researches, the trilogy of these elements have not been examined. The contribution of this research as such is multifold.

Academic relevance

- Not much is known on the relationship between autonomy misfit, psychological safety and intrapreneurial behaviour
- van Vianen (2018) raised the question “Which environmental and individual factors mitigate experienced misfits?” This research aims to shed a light on the question if psychological safety moderates an experienced misfit of autonomy
- Academics: het stukje uit je mail hieronder was inzichtvoller en relevanter wat er momenteel in de tekst staat. Denk nog eens heel goed na hoe je aan de literatuur toevoegt, op wiens vragen of theorieën je toevoegt, etc. bv. als je toch met polys werkt dan zou het best kunnen dat je bijdraagt aan het idee dat misfit niet perse slecht hoeft te zijn (zoals Vogel ook) etc.

Practical relevance

Organisations has shown to benefit from innovation and other means of gaining competitive advantage (Elert & Stenkula, 2020; Peters & Waterman, 1984). Ensuring sustained innovation is a pressing problem for managers (Tushman & Nadler, 1986). Attracting, retaining, and growing intrapreneurs in the organisation is a vivid question for organisation. This research aims to show whether or not autonomy (mis)fit and/or psychological safety is beneficial to increase intrapreneurial behaviour of employees. Especially for organisations that are active in the field of software development, the context of this research. These insights could lead to adoption of recruitment strategies by selecting adaptable minds that can cope with misfit between levels of needs and supplies of autonomy (van Vianen, 2018; Yu & Davis, 2016). @@

- De link naar selectie is een goede. Maar organisaties kunnen hopelijk ook iets veranderen. Stel dat je effectief poly's gaat doen, dan kan je zien of te veel of te weinig autonomie goed of slecht is en/of als er een fit is in het feit dat er weinig of veel autonomie is wat dat doet met mensen. Dat is op zich wel boeiend. Stel dat bv. een te hoge fit aanbieden toch goed is, dan heeft dat niet enkel implicaties voor selectie maar ook voor organisatie design en training.

Method of research

Following a quantitative study this research will find an answer on its hypothesis. ...

Literature research

2.1 What is intrapreneurship & intrapreneurial behaviour?

“Intrapreneurship is a process whereby employee(s) recognise and exploit opportunities by being innovative, proactive and by taking risks, in order for the organisation to create new products, processes and services, initiate self-renewal or venture new businesses to enhance the competitiveness and performance of the organisation.” (Neessen et al., 2019, p. 7). In academic literature “intrapreneurship” usually refers to individual workers rather than organisations or boardroom-level decision makers (de Jong et al, 2011). This paper adopts this points of view that intrapreneurship is a bottom-up approach (de Jong et al, 2011; Neessen et al., 2019). A common label of intrapreneurship is *corporate entrepreneurship* (de Jong et al, 2011). In line with de Jong et al (2011) this paper regards corporate entrepreneurship as a top-down process that can be used by business owners and general managers to foster new ventures, innovation, and strategic renewal (de Jong et al, 2011).

Intrapreneurship is not an attitude or a behaviour that an employee has, it has to be seen as a process. Rather it “is about a set of activities of an individual or an organisation to get from point A to point B in time, with an increased competitiveness and performance of the organisation as the end goal.” (Neessen et al., 2019, p. 8). Neessen et al. (2019) created an integrative framework of intrapreneurship (fig. 1) that displays the various constructs that together constitute intrapreneurship. The framework makes a clear distinction between organisational and individual constructs. For example the support of management or how the organisation is structured influences intrapreneurship on the organisation. Attitudes and characteristics of individuals likewise influence intrapreneurship by impacting the behaviour of individuals. When individuals behave intrapreneurially it will lead to outcomes as new product / innovation, new business venturing, or self-renewal (Neessen et al., 2019).

de Jong et al (2011) describes *intrapreneurial behaviour* “as the identification and exploitation of opportunities by individual workers that (also) advance the organisation. (p. 4).” Intrapreneurial behaviour is commonly defined by the dimensions of *proactivity*, *innovativeness*, and *risk-taking* (de Jong et al, 2011; Gawke et al., 2019; Neessen et al., 2019). Additionally Neessen et al. (2019) found *opportunity recognition and exploitation* and *networking* to be characteristic dimensions of intrapreneurial behaviour. Gawke et al. (2019) depicts this as an entrepreneurial orientation towards intrapreneurship.

As intrapreneurship is a bottom-up approach it can only be achieved if employees display intrapreneurial behaviour. Predicting if an individual will engage in certain human behaviour is a core tenet of the person-environment fit theory (van Vianen, 2018). It researches, and emphasises, the compatibility between workers and their work environment (Kristof, 1996). The theory of person-environment fit suggests that individual attitudes, behaviours, and other outcomes result not from the person or environment separately, but from the relationship between the two (Edwards, 1996).

2.2 Person-environment fit perspective

Not all individuals will display the same behaviour, even when they are in the same environment. To find possible reasons for this difference a popular theory is Person-Environment fit theory. “Person-Environment fit is generally defined as the compatibility between individuals and their environment (van Vianen, 2018, p. 76).” The theory suggests that the attitudes, behaviours, and other outcomes, do not

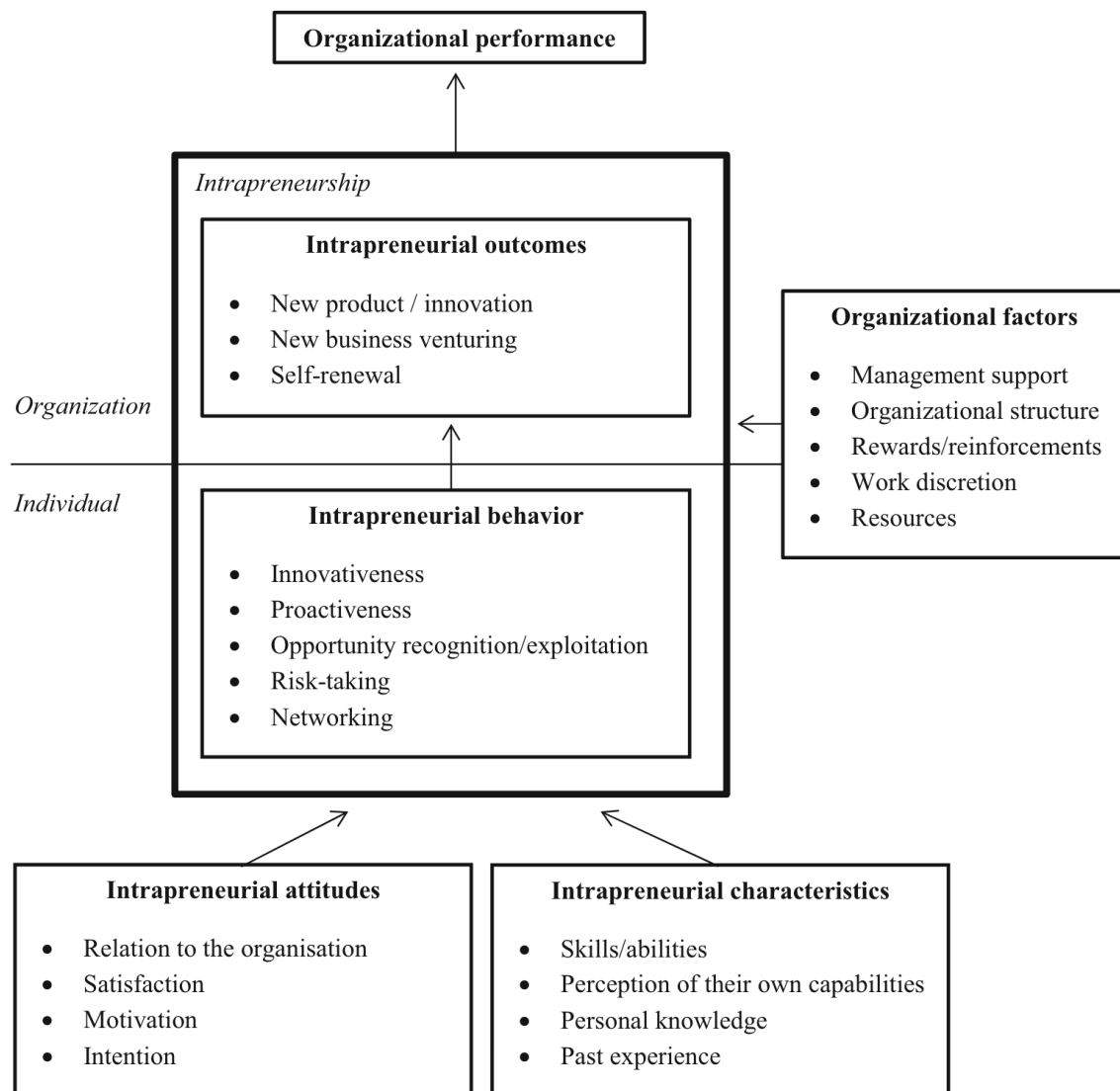


Figure 1: Framework of intrapreneurship by Neessen et al. (2019)

result from the person or environment separately, but rather from the relationship between the two (Jong & Ford, 2021). Meaning, if the characteristics of an individual are aligned with those of the environment, it will lead to a certain outcome in behaviour.

A wide range of fit concepts exist in the context of work. The most prominent fit concepts are “person-job fit (fit between individual abilities and needs and the demands and supplies of the job), person-organisation fit (fit between individual and organisational values), person-team fit (fit between individual attributes and those of the group), and person-supervisor fit (fit between individual attributes and those of the supervisor)” (van Vianen, 2018). Each of these fit concepts investigate a specific congruence between the person and environment.

To answer our main hypothesis in this research the fit concept of needs-supplies is chosen. Needs-supplies fit displays the alignment of the employees needs, desires, or preferences and the supply provided by the job the perform (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) It is a fit that belongs to the person-job concept (van Vianen, 2018). The reason for this is twofold: 1) autonomy is typically researched in the context of person-job fit (van Vianen, 2018), and 2) needs-supplies fit has the greatest impact on job attitudes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). By investigating the fit or misfit regarding autonomy needs and supplies will tell us of this affects the attitude towards intrapreneurial behaviour.

2.3 The role of autonomy

Labor market conditions are changing. Rapid technological progress, increased employee tenure, a rise in high-skilled job, and request for more flexibility all indicate an increased need for autonomy (Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018). Companies are advised to grant employees a greater span of control in order to leverage digital technologies and employee's expertise (Muecke & Iseke, 2019). As autonomy is becoming a more prominent work characteristic it can be of value to further investigate its relationship with intrapreneurial behaviour.

Autonomy is an influencing factor for intrapreneurial behaviour (Neessen et al., 2019). Giving employees the freedom to design its own work and make decisions results into more intrapreneurial activities and higher levels of *self-efficacy* (Neessen et al., 2019). On that same note de Jong et al. (2015) found that job autonomy leads to higher levels of intrapreneurial behaviour, especially on its innovation and proactivity dimensions.

Research on intrapreneurship and job autonomy exists (e.g. de Jong et al., 2015). Much of existing literature however has focussed on autonomy as something provided by the organisation. Like a component of job design. Jong & Ford (2021) argues however that it is critical to not only examine job autonomy on its own, but to examine the congruence between autonomy and preference for autonomy. Applying a needs-supplies perspective provides a framework to examine this congruence.

2.3.1 When needs & supplies of autonomy are a fit

2.3.2 Needs and supplies are not always aligned

The needs of an employee regarding autonomy is not always matched by organisations. In these cases PE-fit literature speaks of a misfit. Experiencing misfit as an individual will lead to adaptation (van Vianen, 2018). Depending on the misfit perception, opportunities to repair the misfit, and environmental and individual mitigating factors it might motivate individuals to leave the job or adapt to the situation (van Vianen, 2018).

Yu & Davis (2016), for example, discovered that an autonomy misfit leads to higher levels of proactive behaviour at newcomers. On that same note, Simmering et al. (2003), found that autonomy misfit leads to higher engagement in employee development.

The exact nature of misfit might yield to different outcomes. Misfit can either due to an excess of supply or due to a deficiency between needs and supplies. Which type of misfit experiences will make a difference on their impact (Lambert et al., 2003; Yu & Davis, 2016). Additionally Lambert et al. (2003) showed that not all experienced misfits is of importance for the individual.

In the case of autonomy misfit Yu & Davis (2016) discovered that a misfit due to a higher supply of autonomy than needed, leads to higher levels of proactive behaviour. Proactive behaviour being one of the key dimensions of intrapreneurial behaviour (Neessen et al., 2019).

Summarising, autonomy is an influencing organisational factor to stimulate intrapreneurial behaviour (Neessen et al., 2019). Autonomy misfit has proven to contribute to dimensions of intrapreneurial behaviour. As such I hypothesise that a misfit of the needs-supplies regarding autonomy will positively influence intrapreneurial behaviour.

Hypothesis 1: Autonomy misfit is positively related to intrapreneurial behaviour

2.4 Psychological safety

Today's business environment accomplishes much of its work in collaboration (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017). Rather than individuals at work, multi-disciplined teams are working collectively to accomplish their goals. Product design, patient care, strategy development, and rescue operations are a few examples that call for collaborative work (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). The field of organisational research has identified psychological safety as an important factor in how people collaborate to achieve a shared outcome (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Psychological safety is the shared belief by members of the team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017). Individuals that feel psychologically safe in a team will be less concerned with the way others might react when introducing a new idea or when voicing a concern. High levels of psychological safety has been linked to higher levels of creative thinking and risk-taking, innovation in R&D teams, process improvements in manufacturing, knowledge creation, and successful implementation of technology (Newman et al., 2017). Frazier et al. (2017) recognises that psychological safety is a key factor in facilitating the process of learning, collaborating, and employee engagement.

The performance enabling role of psychological safety has consistently been found in numerous studies (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Especially when organisational learning is of importance psychological safety is relevant (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Much of today's organisational learning happens between the interactions of interdependent individuals. Individual's concerns about interpersonal risk or consequences could limit the learning behaviours of these individuals. High levels of psychological safety can reduce these concerns and as such contribute to organisational learning.

Psychological safety is both an individual-level and team level construct (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Frazier et al., 2017). However, Edmondson & Lei (2014) argues that the group is the appropriate level to measure psychological safety. "Starting with Edmondson (1999), studies have found statistically significant variance in psychological safety between groups within organisations; that is, people working closely together tend to have similar perceptions of psychological safety, which vary across groups within the same organisation. This body of work thereby supports the idea that psychological safety in organisational life can best be considered a phenomenon that lives at the group level. (Edmondson & Lei, 2014)."

2.5 Psychological safety impacting intrapreneurial behaviour

Psychological safety has been found to enhance risk-taking, information sharing and learning behaviour of team members (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017).

@@ work in progress

Summarising, psychological safety has been found to effect intrapreneurial behaviour components as described in the framework (fig. 1) of Neessen et al. (2019). Given the impact on these isolated components I hypothesise that there is a relation between psychological safety and the entire construct of intrapreneurial behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological safety is positively related to intrapreneurial behaviour

2.6 Autonomy misfit, proactive behaviour & psychological safety

- Yu & Davis (2016) & Simmering et al. (2003) identified that an autonomy misfit leads to higher levels of proactive behaviour.
- Ashford & Black (1996) identified seven key types of change-oriented proactive behaviours:
 - feedback seeking; information seeking; job change negotiation; positive framing; general socialising; building relationships with the boss; and networking
- From these behaviours information seeking and feedback seeking have been found to be moderated by psychological safety
- De Stobbeleir et al. (2020) showed that higher levels of psychological safety increases the amount of feedback seeking
- feedback seeking may be beneficial for individuals to cope with the misfit of autonomy (van Vianen, 2018)
- High levels of psychological safety has shown that information will be sought within the team, where lower levels of psychological safety will lead to information seeking outside the team (Safdar et al., 2017)
- These forms of proactive behaviours all embed a form of risk-taking. It requires confidence and trust to engage in voice behaviour and start to ask for feedback and information.
- As higher levels of psychological safety reduces the barrier to engage in proactive behaviours I hypothesise that the level of psychological safety will influence the effect of autonomy misfit towards intrapreneurial behaviour
- Meaning that high levels of autonomy misfit and high levels of psychological safety will lead to higher levels of psychological safety.

Hypothesis 3: Psychological safety moderates the positive effect of autonomy misfit towards intrapreneurial behaviour

Conceptual model

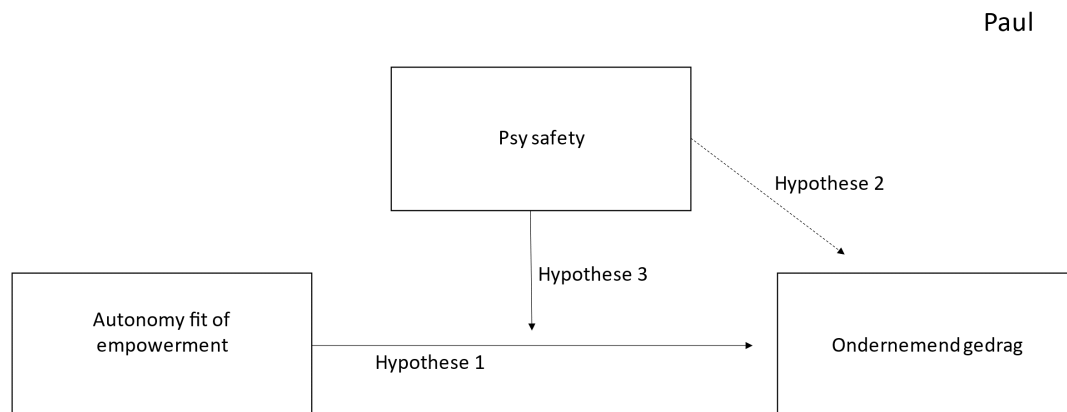


Figure 2: Conceptual model

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