

## 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.

@@ > Two streams or approaches to the classification of organizational level entrepreneurship can be identified. The first stream, which can be labeled the entrepreneurial orientation approach, is based on Miller and Friesen's (1983) categorization of innovative strategy making. Covin and Slevin (1986, 1991) have expanded on this concept, renamed it entrepreneurial posture, and retained three now widely-accepted characteristics of firm level entrepreneurship: innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) have named the concept the entrepreneurial orientation and further extended the concept by identifying two additional dimensions: autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. Instead of talking about characteristics of organizational level entrepreneurship and considering entrepreneurial orientation a uni-dimensional concept, as evident in studies of Covin and Slevin (1986, 1991), Lumpkin and Dess (1996) consider entrepreneurial orientation a multi-dimensional concept. Knight (1997) also favors this multidimensional concept but has reduced Covin and Slevin's (1986, 1991) categorization to two dimensions (innovativeness and proactiveness) on the basis of his empirical findings. Access rights validated

As intrapreneurship is a bottom-up approach it can only be achieved if employees display intrapreneurial

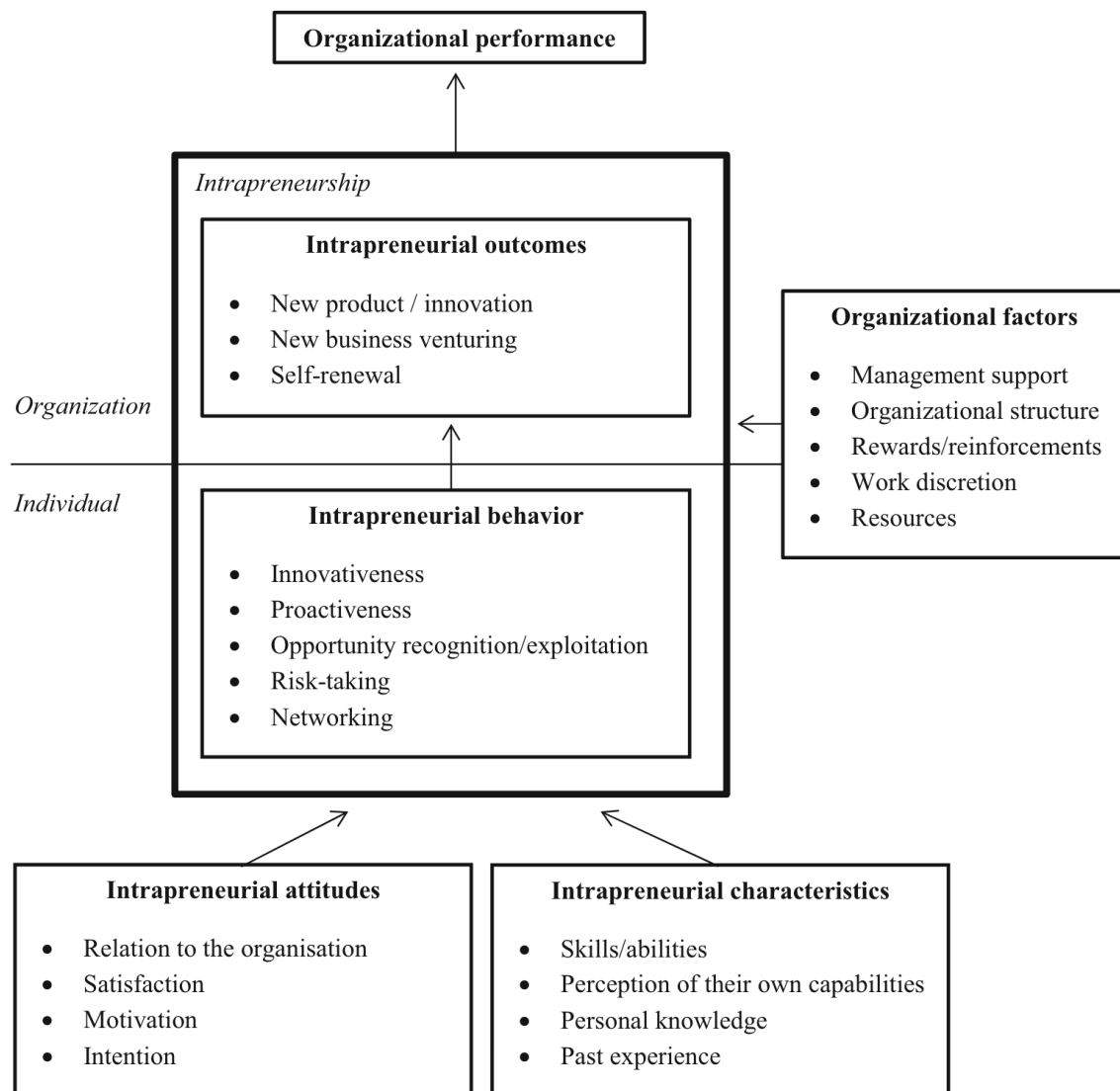


Figure 1: Framework of intrapreneurship by Neessen et al. (2019)

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 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. Person-environment fit theory examines how job attitudes are explained by the fit between individuals and their work situation (Jong & Ford, 2021).

Key assumption of person-environment fit theory is that people have an innate need to fit their environments (van Vianen, 2018). Having a fit allows individuals to better understand the behaviours of others and facilitates interpersonal interactions. They compare themselves with other people in their social environment (van Vianen, 2018). Perfect fit, however, is a rare circumstance (van Vianen, 2018). People make suboptimal choices, and individuals and their environments change over time (van Vianen, 2018). A dominant model in current person-environment fit theory is (**schneiders1987?**) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model (Simmering et al., 2003). This model posits that employees are attracted to organisations that provide a high level of fit, are selected by organisations that recognise this fit, and leave the organisation when misfit occurs. This deemphasises the possibility that individuals might change themselves rather than just leave the organisation (Simmering et al., 2003). Although individuals and organisations might strive for fit during attraction and selection, researching misfits might provide organisations with more tangible advice and insights to change their selection strategies.

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 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.

However, Gerards et al. (2021) states that the positive relation between autonomy and intrapreneurial behaviour is unambiguous. On one hand autonomy has shown to influence intrapreneurial behaviour thru the mediating effect of a transformational leadership style (Gerards et al., 2021). On the other hand, employees will be reluctant to show initiative when organisations and leaders emphasise efficiency and flawlessness, even when given autonomy @@ juiste verwijzing uit Gerards et al. (2021).

Much of the existing literature researches autonomy from the provisioning aspect of an organisation (e.g. de Jong et al., 2015). @@ check -> As such a large body literature sees the relation thru the lens of job design (see de Jong et al., 2015; Gawke et al., 2019; Rigtering & Weitzel, 2013). Although the organisation can offer autonomy, whether the autonomy will be taken will depend on the individual. Likewise, Jong & Ford (2021) argues that it is critical to not only examine job autonomy on its own, but to examine the congruence between autonomy and preference for autonomy. The person-environment theory offers a perspective to research this congruence. Seen in simple terms, the needs and supplies of autonomy can be either a fit or a misfit.

### **2.3.1 When needs & supplies of autonomy are a fit**

A fit between the autonomy needs and supplies can be viewed from the existing literature that treats autonomy as a job resource or job design perspective. Although the person-environment fit is not directly used in this research, it does display the effects when needs and supplies of autonomy are a fit.

de Jong et al. (2015) found that job autonomy was directly related to the intrapreneurial dimensions of innovativeness and proactiveness. Job autonomy in this research made a difference towards entrepreneurial behaviour. Job performance is also affected by job autonomy. Muecke & Iseke (2019) found that job autonomy leads to better performance as it enhance work motivation and reduces mental strain. In conjunction with high-quality leader-member exchange, job autonomy strengthens the effect of this exchange on creative work. Summarising, job autonomy has been found to numerous positive outcomes on a variety of perspectives.

Nevertheless, the nature of this research discards the desire to have autonomy in contract to the autonomy supplied by the organisation. de Jong et al. (2015) for example, already mentioned the limitation that highly entrepreneurial employees may be the ones that obtain high-autonomy functions. This potentially skews it findings. Investigating the effects of job autonomy on intrapreneurship warrants a person-environment fit view.

### **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).

Although people have a need to fit their environments (van Vianen, 2018), academic literature holds powerful examples of beneficial misfits. For example, in a study that examines autonomy fit and personal development, Simmering et al. (2003) found that autonomy misfit is essential to create the need for personal development by the individual. Autonomy misfit for newcomers has shown to lead to higher levels of proactive behaviour (Yu & Davis, 2016).

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; van Vianen, 2018; Yu & Davis, 2016). An excess of misfit will do less harm then a deficient misfit (van Vianen, 2018). Additionally Lambert et al. (2003) showed that not all experienced misfits is of importance for the individual.

That excess of misfit does less harm is shown by Yu & Davis (2016). Their research investigated the level of proactivity for newcomers in an organisation, based on their personal needs for autonomy and what



was supplied by the organisation. Here, the authors found that an excess of autonomy misfit lead to higher levels of proactivity compared to fit and deficient misfit. This shows that in case of an excess misfit, more autonomy provided then desired, leads to stronger adoption of the individual to belong (Yu & Davis, 2016).

Stiglbauer & Kovacs (2018) found that an excess of autonomy misfit on a person's well-being only decreased when the misfit was substantial. For deficient misfit the effect was linear, meaning that any increase from a deficient misfit to fit leads to an equal improvement on well-being. Important to note here is that the portion of people that experienced an excess misfit was very small in the study (Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018).

Summarising, autonomy is an influencing organisational factor to stimulate intrapreneurial behaviour (Neessen et al., 2019). Similarly, Autonomy misfit has proven to contribute to dimensions of intrapreneurial behaviour (fig. 1). As such I hypothesise that a misfit of the needs-supplies regarding autonomy will influence intrapreneurial behaviour depending on the type of misfit.

Hypothesis 1a: An excess of autonomy misfit ( $P < E$ ) is positively related to intrapreneurial behaviour

Hypothesis 1b: A deficiency of autonomy misfit ( $P > E$ ) is negatively 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

Individual elements of the intrapreneurial behaviour construct has been linked to psychological safety. Risk-taking, for example, is enhanced by psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017). Likewise, enhancements of creative thinking, innovation, process improvements are outcomes of teams that have a high level of psychological safety (Newman et al., 2017). Members of a team in a psychologically safe climate share more information, speak up with suggestion for organisational improvements, and are found to take initiative to develop new products and services (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Summarising, psychological safety has been found to effect components of intrapreneurial behaviour and intrapreneurial outcomes 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 complete construct of intrapreneurial behaviour. To my knowledge there has not been any distinctive research that linked psychological safety to the complete construct of intrapreneurial behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological safety is positively related to intrapreneurial behaviour

## 2.6 Psychological safety to influence the effects of autonomy misfit

Getting to intrapreneurial outcomes like new products or self-renewal isn't an individual effort, but a team effort. As today's work is mostly accomplished in collaboration (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017), the effects of an individual autonomy misfit can be influenced by others in the collaboration. As individuals work in teams, it's the reaction of those team members to the individual that potentially impacts its attitude to the job. As such, the team can be influential in supporting an individual towards intrapreneurial behaviour. Whether or not the psychological safety in a team influences an individuals intrapreneurial behaviour answers a call for further research by Neessen et al. (2019).

### 2.6.1 Getting more then I want: An excess of autonomy misfit

An excess of misfit has shown to lead individuals to adapt to the situation. Yu & Davis (2016) discovered that an excess of misfit lead to higher levels of proactive behaviour by the individual. 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. Especially information seeking and feedback seeking has been found to be influenced by psychological safety (De Stobbeleir et al., 2020; van Vianen, 2018). Feedback seeking may be beneficial for individuals to cope with the misfit of autonomy (van Vianen, 2018). Teams with high levels of psychological safety ensure that information will be sought within the team, where in teams with low levels of psychological safety information will be sought 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.

Given that an excess of autonomy misfit leads to higher levels of proactivity, proactivity being a key behavioural dimension of intrapreneurship, and acknowledging the existing literature on the influencing effect psychological safety has on proactivity, I hypothesise:

Hypothesis 3a: Psychological safety strengthens the positive effect of an excess autonomy misfit towards intrapreneurial behaviour

### 2.6.2 Getting less than I want: Deficient autonomy misfit

Hypothesis 3b: Psychological safety strengthens the positive effect of an excess autonomy misfit towards intrapreneurial behaviour

### 2.6.3 When autonomy fits

@@ the positive effects of psychological safety -> learning behaviour, information sharing etc. are essential for intrapreneurial behaviour and as such strengthened in case of an autonomy fit.

Hypothesis 3c: Psychological safety strengthens the positive effect of an excess autonomy misfit towards intrapreneurial behaviour

## Conceptual model

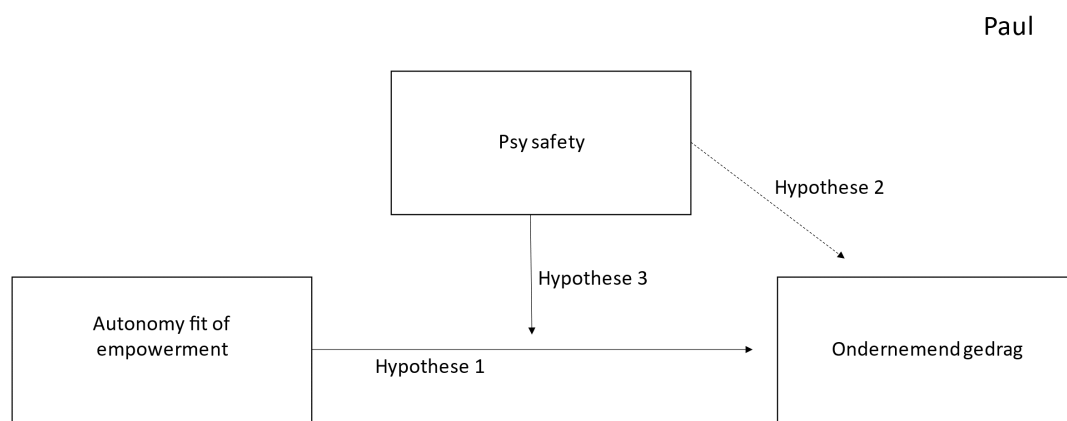


Figure 2: Conceptual model

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