Proactivity routines: The role of social processes in how employees self-initiate change

Heather C Vough
University of Cincinnati, USA

Uta K Bindl
London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), UK

Sharon K Parker
University of Western Australia, Australia

Abstract

Proactive work behaviors are self-initiated, future-focused actions aimed at bringing about changes to work processes in organizations. Such behaviors occur within the social context of work. The extant literature that has focused on the role of social context for proactivity has focused on social context as an overall input or output of proactivity. However, in this article we argue that the process of engaging in proactive work behavior (proactive goal-striving) may also be a function of the social context in which it occurs. Based on qualitative data from 39 call center employees in an energy-supply company, we find that in a context characterized by standardized work procedures, proactive goal-striving can occur through a *proactivity routine* – a socially constructed and accepted pattern of action by which employees initiate and achieve changes to work processes, with the support of managers and colleagues. Our findings point to the need to view proactive work behaviors at a higher level of analysis than the individual in order to identify shared routines for engaging in proactivity, as well as how multiple actors coordinate their efforts in the process of achieving individually-generated proactive goals.

Corresponding author:
Heather C Vough, Carl H Linder College of Business, Department of Management, University of Cincinnati, 509 Lindner Hall, PO Box 210165, Cincinnati, OH 45221, USA.
Email: heather.vough@uc.edu

Keywords

> Anybody that tries to bring in anything new sort of has to go about it the right way.
> (Philip, Customer Service Agent)

Proactive work behavior is a process (e.g. Bindl et al., 2012; Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015) whereby individuals recognize potential problems or opportunities in their work environment and self-initiate change to bring about a better future work situation (Parker and Collins, 2010: 636). Proactive work behavior has generally been conceptualized as a relatively autonomous set of actions performed by individuals and is promoted by individual or job characteristics (e.g. Bindl and Parker, 2010; Frese et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2010; Tornau and Frese, 2013). However, as the opening quote by Phillip indicates, individuals in organizations do not act in a vacuum. Their work is often interdependent with the work of others, meaning that to engage in proactive work behaviors individuals need to be attuned to the broader social context, including who to involve in the proactivity process and how to go about the process.

However, although employees, like Phillip, recognize that the social context shapes how employees engage in the process of bringing about proactive change, this issue is not clearly explained by extant theory on proactive work behaviors. Although research has focused on social determinants that motivate employees to engage in proactive actions (Baer and Frese, 2003; de Jong and de Ruyter, 2004; Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Fay et al., 2004; Griffin et al., 2010; Rank et al., 2007; Strauss et al., 2009) as well as how proactive work behavior may lead to a variety of social outcomes (Gong et al., 2012; Griffin et al., 2007; Li et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005), we have little insight on how the social context influences the way in which individuals actually go about making change. Without such theory, our understanding of the proactivity process does not reflect organizational realities. For example, an employee working on an assembly line who identifies and makes changes to any inefficiencies in their work processes would likely also bring about change for other employees who complete the same, or interdependent, work. As such, s/he may need to involve others in the process of making the change in order to avoid resistance or even downright refusal to implement such changes. Thus, there is a social component to the process of proactivity that has been unrecognized. Further, there may be contextually appropriate ways of going about making proactive changes. Campbell (2000), for instance, suggests that managers often encourage proactive behaviors, but expect them to be carried out the same way the manager would carry them out. The implication here is that the process through which employees bring about proactive behavior may become somewhat standardized. Accordingly, we suggest that our understanding of proactive work behavior can be meaningfully advanced by focusing on the role that social context plays in the process of engaging in proactive work behavior, as well as routines that support and enable proactivity within the organization. In order to do so, we must shift our analytic focus

from the individual actor to the broader system of interactions during an episode of proactive work behavior.

To better understand the role of the social context in the proactivity process, we performed a qualitative study of 39 employees in the call center of a multinational energy supplier based in the UK. In order to sustain organizational efficiencies, the work of the call center employees was highly standardized across individuals, meaning that any changes one person made to their work needed to be adopted by others as well. Our analysis led to two key findings. First, we found that proactivity at the call center was fostered by a 'proactivity routine': a socially constructed and accepted process by which individual employees could initiate team- or unit-level changes in their work processes. Once individuals identified changes that they felt needed to be made in their work and decided to take action to make such changes, they followed a specific pattern of action to implement the change. We refer to this process as a proactivity routine because it was shared across organizational members, enabling proactive work behaviors even in a low autonomy setting. Second, in this context, employees did not enact proactivity alone, but, rather, coordinated with colleagues and managers in their efforts to bring about change in their work contexts. We draw on organizational routines research to elaborate theory on how the social context influences the process of proactivity, and suggest the value of viewing proactivity as a social phenomenon.

We believe that our findings have significant implications for our understanding of proactivity in organizations. First, our findings point to the need to re-frame how we view proactivity in organizations. By viewing individual proactivity as embedded in more macro-level processes in the organization, we see that proactive work behaviors can occur via a more uniform process (i.e. a routine) than has been previously considered, especially in standardized or interdependent work settings. Second, we suggest that interpersonal interactions play a larger role in proactivity at work than is often recognized. We find that individuals interact with and rely on others in order to accomplish their own proactive goals. Our findings, thus, expand beyond the notion that interpersonal interactions are inputs or outputs to employee proactivity by describing how multiple actors are engaged throughout the proactivity process. Finally, our findings challenge the conventional wisdom that proactivity is limited to high-autonomy contexts (see, for instance, Frese et al., 1996; Fuller et al., 2006). We demonstrate that even in low-autonomy environments, such as call centers, individuals may engage in proactive work behaviors, provided there is a clear routine that supports such behaviors. Although it may seem counterintuitive, the development of a proactivity routine to ensure that work processes remain consistent across individuals actually provides greater opportunity for individual agency because it reassures employees that it is possible and acceptable to initiate change.

Social context in the proactivity process

Proactivity has been conceptualized in a number of ways including using personal initiative to improve situations (Frese and Fay, 2001; Frese et al., 1996), taking charge (Morrison and Phelps, 1999), expressing voice (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998), and revising tasks or jobs (Staw and Boettger, 1990; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). These

behaviors have been argued to share a number of features that define them as proactive: first, they are *future-focused*, involving actions to achieve future goals or to prevent problems in the future; second, they emphasize *taking control and aiming for change*; and third, they involve *self-initiation*, or the individual taking self-starting action rather than being instructed to act (e.g. Grant and Ashford, 2008; Parker and Collins, 2010; Parker et al., 2010). In contrast to proactive strategic or career behavior, proactive *work* behavior, our focus here involves self-initiated action aimed at changing and improving the working situation (Parker and Collins, 2010). Although proactive actions may be taken in response to existing problems (e.g. Frese and Fay, 2001), the aim of proactive work behaviors is to improve work processes for the future.

An emerging literature has started to investigate the role of the broader social context and its impact on proactive work behavior. Leadership and group climate are two elements of the social context that have been argued to influence the likelihood of employees engaging in proactive behavior. Transformational leaders encourage proactivity via increasing followers' role-based self-efficacy and organizational commitment (Griffin et al., 2010; Strauss et al., 2009). The relationship between transformational leadership and proactivity is strongest in contexts where both autonomy and self-efficacy are both high or both low (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012). Further, participative leadership increases the likelihood of employee proactivity in customer service contexts because of increased employee involvement in work (Rank et al., 2007). Finally, leader support has a stronger impact on proactivity amongst individuals with insecure rather than secure attachment styles (Wu and Parker, 2016). Thus, leaders may play a strong role in determining if individuals are willing to act proactively.

In addition, a proactive organizational climate, defined as the shared perceptions that working practices involve self-starting actions, work innovation and error management (Fay et al., 2004), has been linked to increased process innovations as well as performance (Baer and Frese, 2003). For instance, Fay et al. (2004) found that an organizational climate that promotes proactive behaviors may compensate for a lack of personal initiative on the part of managers. Similarly, de Jong and de Ruyter (2004) found that, in the context of service recovery, group-level perceptions of empowerment, customer complaint management and inter/intra-team support fostered proactive recovery behavior. Thus, there is evidence that an organizational climate that supports proactivity increases employee proactivity.

There is also evidence that acting proactively, in turn, shapes an individual's social context. The relationships that individuals build through their proactive behaviors, especially with their managers, can result in increased job performance and organizational citizenship behavior. In particular, Thompson (2005) found that network-building and initiative-taking were important mediators between employee's proactive personality and job performance. Similarly, Li et al. (2010) found that employees with proactive personalities were more likely to establish high-quality exchange relationships with their supervisors which, in turn, led to greater job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors. Gong et al. (2012) extend this logic to argue that proactive employees prepare themselves to make changes by exchanging informational resources with others which, in turn, builds the trust that is needed in order to pursue potentially risky creative ideas. Taken together, the theme underlying these studies is that

proactive individuals build relationships with others that have future benefits for both the individual and the organization.

Although the research reviewed above addresses how the social context encourages or discourages proactivity and how proactivity can shape the social context, research has not addressed the role of the social context in determining how proactive work behaviors are carried out. Recently, scholars have recognized that behaving proactively is rarely a one-off action but, rather, it typically involves a goal regulation process. Specifically, Bindl et al. (2012) have conceptualized and found empirical support for proactivity as progressing through four phases: envisioning, planning, enacting and reflecting. Envisioning involves looking for a different future, planning involves preparing to take steps to achieve this future, enacting involves self-starting action to bring about this future, and reflecting involves thinking about the success or failure of those actions. Grant and Ashford (2008) proposed three similar phases. Parker et al. (2010) drew on goal regulation theory to synthesize the four phases into two overarching goal processes. First, in proactive goal generation, under one's own volition, one creates a goal to bring about a new and different future by changing the self and/or the environment. Second, proactive goal-striving involves the behavioral and psychological mechanisms by which individuals seek to accomplish proactive goals and reflect on their outcomes (see also Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015, who similarly distinguish between issue identification and issue implementation).

In viewing proactivity as a process, we can begin to investigate the ways in which social context shapes how proactive action unfolds, that is, the *goal-striving* element of proactivity. There is some initial evidence that individuals may modify the way in which they engage in proactive work behavior based on the organizational context. Specifically, in their work on issue-selling – a form of strategic proactive behavior (Parker and Collins, 2010) – Dutton et al. (2001) argued that individuals need to have contextual knowledge in order to sell important issues to upper management. The authors found that women were highly attuned to social cues as they determined how to sell gender-equity issues (Dutton et al., 2002). This research indicates that there are important insights to be gained by taking into consideration how proactivity is enacted within a particular social context. Although there are certainly many ways in which social context can vary, here we focus on how proactivity occurs within a social context with highly standardized work practices that mean that changes to work processes must be made uniformly rather than idiosyncratically. This provides the opportunity to gain new insights into proactive work behaviors in low autonomy contexts, which have traditionally been argued to be lacking in proactivity (e.g. Frese et al., 1996; Fuller et al., 2006).

Method

In order to elaborate theory (Lee et al., 1999; Vaughan, 1992) on the role of social context in the proactivity process, we performed a qualitative study of call center employees using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). We used an emergent strategy, allowing the words of informants rather than previous theorizing to provide the basis for our model (Shah and Corley, 2006). In particular, our research question evolved through the analysis of our data. We entered into data collection interested in how

employees acted proactively in the highly constrained setting of a call center. As we analyzed the data, the importance of the social context and the proactivity routine emerged as important drivers of the proactivity process, leading us to focus our study on elaborating these themes.

Research context and informants

The context of this study was a call center in a large energy company based in the UK, which we label BigPower. BigPower's call center, like a typical call center, was highly centralized and formalized, restricting autonomous actions on the part of frontline employees (Holman, 2005). The clearest indication of the impact of standardization on autonomy was the use of process maps. Process maps were outlines of each step an employee should take when completing a specific task, such as answering a call. Further, nearly all of the agents' daily work activities occurred within their computer system, so they were confined to what the system allowed them to do. Such constraints on autonomy make a call center a particularly interesting context for understanding how social context impacts proactive work behavior.

Thirty-nine employees from three locations of BigPower served as informants. Eighteen of the informants were customer service agents ('agent' or 'CSA' from here on) who spent their time addressing customer issues, including inquiries about billing issues, reporting meter problems, or setting up new services. For some agents, answering in-bound calls was their primary duty, and they did it for 10 hours a day, four days a week. On the other hand, there were a small number of agents who worked in the 'back office' and were only occasionally responsible for answering customer calls. Instead, they worked from task lists to address problems in particular accounts. The CSAs we spoke with ranged from age 21 to 56, had mean organizational tenure of three years, and were 71% female.

We also interviewed three levels of management. Ten of the informants were team managers (TMs), who served as immediate managers to 8–15 agents. The TMs spent their time overseeing the work of the agents by observing their behaviors, listening in to phone calls and evaluating performance. These informants were also responsible for taking escalated calls when their agents were unable to resolve issues with customers. Eight of the informants were section managers (SMs) who served as direct supervisors to 3–5 TMs and managed specific divisions such as *Customer Transfers*, *Credit Management* or *Prepayments*. Finally, we conducted interviews with three customer service managers (CSM) who served as direct supervisors to the SMs, but were also responsible for strategic planning of their division. For the three levels of management, ranging in age from 24 to 55, the mean tenure was eight years, and 71% were female. These figures resembled the percentages in the entire organization at the time of the investigation.

Data collection

Our primary source of data consisted of audio-recorded face-to-face interviews with each of the informants. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol in which the questions were pre-determined but the interviewers also asked follow-up questions in order to probe deeper into the experiences of employees (see Appendix A, available

online, for the interview protocol). After a brief warm-up, we asked employees: 'Have you ever used your initiative to try to change or improve a situation at work?' followed by probes such as 'What was the situation?' and 'Could you describe the process from when you had the idea to when you actually engaged in the action?' Thirty-eight of the 39 informants produced examples in response to one or more of these prompts. As we progressed through the interviews we refined the protocol to delve deeper into emerging issues. The updated protocols were then used in the subsequent set of interviews.

Twenty-one of the informants were interviewed a second time (including 10 of the 18 agents) one to two months after the first set of interviews. In these interviews, we followed up on proactive behaviors mentioned in the first interview by verifying our understanding of them, probing with more in-depth questions, and asking for updates. The informants were additionally asked to report any new accounts of proactivity that had occurred since the first interview. The multi-interview approach provided the opportunity to develop greater rapport with the informants and gain deeper insight into the processes under investigation (Seidman, 1991). Typically, the interviews in round 1 lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and in round 2 between 30 and 45 minutes. When reporting quotations, we provide informants' pseudonym, position and whether the quotation came from the first or second interview.

Additionally, at the outset of the study we conducted overt, non-participant observations (Whyte, 1979) with the two lower levels of employees. These observations helped familiarize us with work procedures in the call center, technical terms used and the culture and norms of the organization. In particular, we were given the opportunity to shadow 15 agents and their managers for about two hours each while they carried out their work, which included listening into customer calls and watching informants manipulate the screens on their computers in order to address customer concerns. Although notes from observations were not systematically analyzed, the observations served as an important point of entry into the work lives of the informants.

Data analysis

Although we asked each informant about their proactive work behaviors, in our analysis, we focused specifically on the proactivity of agents as they were the group in the study doing the primary work of the call center and their work differed substantially from the work of managers. However, we did also analyze managers' transcripts for evidence to support or contradict the emerging themes from the agents' accounts of proactive work behavior. We use the managers' words to verify and add nuance to the processes reported by agents.

We followed an iterative pattern of moving between data collection and analysis as well as moving back and forth from our emergent findings to the previous literature (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). After interviews began, each interview was transcribed verbatim. We then sought to identify specific instances of proactive work behavior by locating each of an informant's responses to our questions concerning proactive behavior then assessing whether or not they included each of the key elements of proactive work behavior (Grant and Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010). In particular, we asked: were the individuals' actions (i) self-initiated, (ii) focused on changing work processes and (iii)

future-focused? In order to increase our confidence that these episodes were indeed evidence of proactive work behavior, the first author and a graduate student, who was trained on the definition of proactive work behavior, independently categorized 60 responses to the proactivity questions as either proactive work behavior or not. The Krippendorf alpha for interrelater reliability for this process was .88, indicating that there was good reliability across raters in identifying proactive work behavior. When informants' responses did not meet the criteria for proactive work behavior, it was usually because either the employee was not the primary instigator of the change or because the change was not aimed at the work itself (e.g. career or benefits related changes). Accounts in which individuals went beyond their basic task requirements to help customers – but did not initiate changes in how the work was performed in order to achieve better outcomes in the future – were not considered proactive work behavior. For example, if an employee merely spent longer than normal in assisting or serving a customer, we did not consider this an example of proactive work behavior unless they set out to challenge the underlying work processes that led to the customer's problem. Likewise, if an employee responded to a problem by simply solving it in the moment, we identified this as effective problem-solving rather than proactive work behavior. For an account to be considered as proactive, it needed to have a future-focused element in which the individual went beyond reacting to the immediate issue and, instead, made changes to the work to prevent future re-occurrence of the problem, and/or address longer-term repercussions. The modal number of accounts of proactive work behavior per interview was 1 but varied from 0 to 3.

The first two authors coded the data using NVivo software. We began with very broad categories based on the existing literature, for example 'phases of proactive behavior,' then went to the data to identify first-order codes – or codes that came directly from the words of informants – in order to populate these as well as other emergent categories (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). After independently coding the first interview, we met to discuss the similarities and differences between our coding and to agree on standardized labels for the codes. We then individually coded two more interviews and again met to agree on codes. After going through the process of coding and meeting to discuss codes three times, we began to code separate interviews. However, when new codes emerged in later interviews we discussed them to maintain consistency and avoid redundancy. We kept track of the codes through code lists that included the code, its definition and a color-coded representation of when it was identified.

Once we had coded a number of interviews, our discussions began including new groupings for codes – or second-order codes (Van Maanen, 1979) – that provided categories for the first-order codes. For example, we coded excerpts about identifying problems as first-order codes then grouped them via the second-order code 'problem recognition and ownership.' Over time, a number of these second-order codes emerged and we began to interpret them in relation to one another via a constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The result of this analysis was that some second-order codes could be grouped into larger aggregate dimensions. Although some of these aggregate dimensions were pre-existing, others emerged from the data. For example, 'phases of proactivity' was used from the beginning and was populated with a number of codes through our coding process. This code eventually became the basis for the

aggregate code 'proactivity routine.' In contrast, the aggregate dimension 'practices supporting the proactivity routine' emerged through the coding process. Our data structure is depicted in Figure A (available online).

Findings

Employees who engage in proactive work behavior generate goals for and strive toward future-focused change at work (Parker and Collins, 2010). At BigPower, there was a clear pattern in how employees strived toward their proactive goals which were enacted across individuals and supported by enabling practices executed by management (see Figure 1). In the next sections, we provide evidence for employees' proactive goal generation, then articulate the phases of the proactivity goal-striving process they used to reach these goals. In each section related to the goal-striving process, we also identify practices that supported that phase. To illustrate the uniformity of proactivity episodes at BigPower, in Table 1 we include quotes from three agents at BigPower that address each phase of the proactive goal-striving process. Later, we draw on these findings to introduce *proactivity routines*.

Proactive goal generation

Problem recognition and ownership.　Similar to anticipation (Grant and Ashford, 2008), issue identification (Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015) and envisioning of a better future (Bindl et al., 2012; Parker et al., 2010), employees at BigPower identified problems that had implications for ongoing work processes and decided to take action to address them (depicted on the left side of Figure 1). Importantly, these problems were not one-off incidents but rather long-standing, perpetuated patterns that represented concerns to work processes in general. Informants reported that their proactive behaviors were often initiated when they recognized that a process at BigPower was not working in ways that the informant identified as desirable. Instead of working around or ignoring issues, informants took ownership over the issue and decided to do something to make improvements. Although the problems sometimes originated from the processes used to assist customers, they were also prompted by a number of other, more internal, circumstances. For example, Marie (CSA, 1) explained that other departments were inputting incorrect information into accounts, restricting her ability to do her job, prompting her to take ownership of the issue so it is no longer a hindrance on her work:

> When there's a meter exchange they are not putting the dates right so we can't bill their account and I've noticed they keep doing it. It is one of those things where you think they've done it again and I've got to the stage where I need to do something about this.

Similarly, Phillip (CSA, 1) identified an issue with his interactions with another department that he felt needed to be permanently changed: 'It is a training issue, but [this other department] is not reading half the stuff that they should be. And they're phoning through for what we think are really stupid things and it's a waste of our time.' Phillip also provided an example relating to future software requirements:
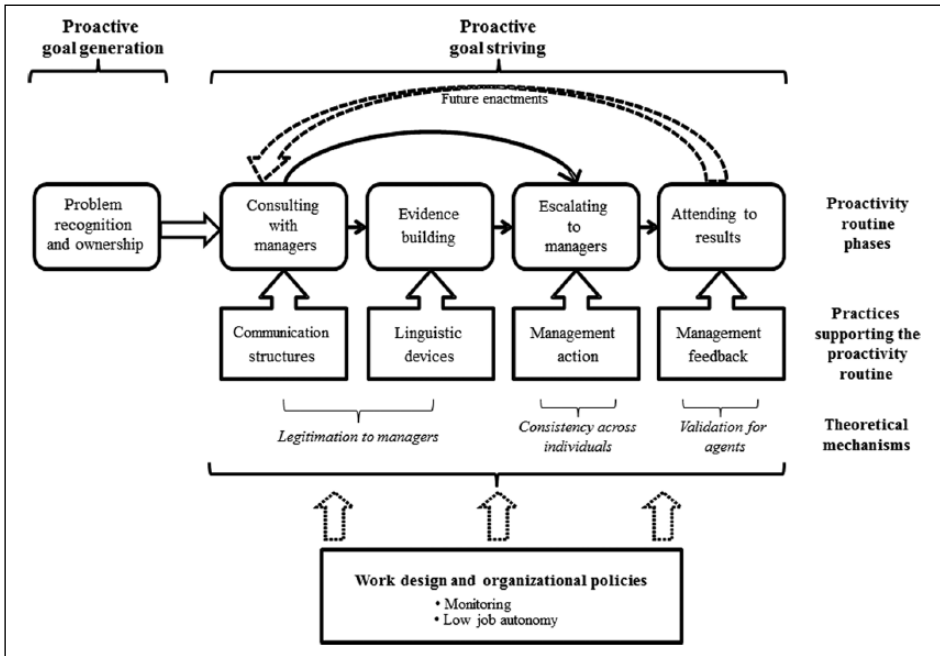
Figure 1. The proactivity routine and enabling practices at BigPower.

> Our Outlook is changing from Microsoft 2003 to 2007 and by the looks of it it's going to take time to do, and I brought up the fact that in 2007 Excel is slightly different to 2003 and you can't open it up if you've still got 2003. If someone sends you an Excel spread sheet in 2007, you can't open it up in 2003 … So I brought that up.

Thus, the proactivity process was initiated by the recognition that there was either a current process-related problem or anticipating a problem in a given work process in the future. Such recognition was then followed by the agent's decision to take charge of improving the situation.

Proactive goal-striving at BigPower: Proactivity phases and proactivity enabling practices

Consulting with managers. Once an agent identified an issue that could be improved in their work process, they reported taking action to address the issue, or, in other words, striving to reach their proactive goals (Grant and Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010; Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015). This process commenced for informants at BigPower by consulting with their TM or SM about the issue: 'I would probably ask the Manager before or I would ask somebody else. I would say, 'Do you think I could do this or this?' I would get their advice first' (Teresa, CSA, 1). This initial consultation served multiple purposes. First, it served to inform the manager that there was a problem in a particular

Table 1. Narrative accounts of the proactivity routine in the call center.

		Phillip, CSA, 1	Pamela, CSA, 1	Teresa, CSA, 1
Proactive goal generation	Problem recognition and ownership	'It is a training issue, but [this other department] is not reading half of the stuff that they should be. They're phoning through for what we think are really stupid things and it's a waste of our time.'	'It's a fact that at the time my team were identifying several issues.'	'We started the trial and we gave it a go and gave it a couple of days and then approached our manager and said, "We don't feel very confident with it, we don't like it."'
	Consulting with managers	'We went to the team managers and went "Look, we're getting stupid calls and they're stopping us from actually doing our work."'	'So I took it to my manager and said "This is an issue that we're identifying."'	'Our manager put it to us, "I understand and that's great but also what you need to do is find a solution for it as well."'
Proactive goal-striving	Evidence-building	'So our team managers got their heads together and said "Okay, log every call that you think is stupid. Log the time it actually takes you to do it, complete it – start to finish." … And we've estimated it to be over a 100 hours worth of wasted time.'	'We collate examples, so we'll take screen prints of particular accounts.'	'So me and my colleague had a think about it … You need to find out what the issue is first, why people's wraps are so high and then go from there.'
	Escalating to managers	'That's when [we handed this over to the] section managers and it's been progressed through and through, filtered through.'	'Collate examples and pass them on and say, "This is what we would recommend as a fix, this process should be taken out."'	'We voiced our opinions first of all to her verbally and then put it all in an email constructively and forwarded it on to her and then she took that into a meeting with her manager.'
	Attending to results	'They're now giving [the other department] external numbers and the numbers to ring.'	'It was resolved in several small processes being changed.'	'I think I feel more enthusiastic now that the trial has gone. What I said has been taken on board and is being listened to.'

area and to solicit their support. Second, it provided agents with information on whether the issue was worth pursuing further. Third, it gave agents information on how to appropriately move forward with rectifying the problem. Although this phase was initiated by agents, it did rely upon feedback from managers.

There were three key communication structures through which individuals initially confronted their managers with issues. First, as evident in the preceding quotation, they could speak to their managers on an impromptu basis and voice their concerns. The other two forms of consultation were more formalized. Each team had weekly meetings, labeled 'Team Time Outs' or 'scrums' in which agents were encouraged to bring up problems or suggest changes:

> We also have what we call TTO's – 'Team Time Outs' – they happen at least once a week …
> And anyone who has got any gripes, or if there are any issues to be brought up that can wait
> until then, then that is when they're brought up. (Phillip, CSA, 1)

These team meetings served as a time and a place that was appropriate for speaking up about any particular issues the team was experiencing: 'We have like a weekly team meeting where we go in and our Manager asks if we have any issues that want resolving and stuff like that so we generally raise [any issues] then' (Anne, CSA, 2).

A further avenue for consulting management consisted of a physical space in the call center where employees could bring up their concerns, labeled 'Issue Boards.' Employees could voice suggestions on a wide variety of topics (holidays, cafeteria food, etc.) on these boards, but it was also a place to post potential problems with work processes:

> What we have in Pre-Payment are issue boards so each team has a board and they log their
> issues on that board and then the Team Managers collate the issues for each Section Manager
> area sort of ad hoc. Then we will pull out the top three issues and put it on another board for the
> Department and start working through those. (Janet, SM, 1)

Unlike the other two communication structures, when individuals placed their concerns on issue boards, they were passing the issue on to management, with the assumption that a manager would take on the issue and try to resolve it or to escalate it to a higher manager. If that was the case, then the consulting with and escalating to managers phases (described below) occurred simultaneously. More often, however, this initial consultation led agents to continue to have ownership of the issue and strive to reach their proactive goal through evidence-building.

Evidence-building.   In this third phase, informants set out to enhance their case for why an issue was worth the manager's time and effort. Although individuals could have given up at this phase, our informants reported collecting examples of instances in which a relevant event occurred or in which work was inhibited by an existing process:

> I've been taking it upon myself to speak to our team and say, 'If you have an example of this
> please pass it to myself and when we have enough examples, say 20 examples, to say it is a
> common problem, we'll bring it to the manager.' (Marie, CSA, 1)

I thought there was no point in [sending out letters and making phone calls] at the same time. So I created examples, asked other people whether it was right, whether they wasted time too and if they agreed with what I was saying. If they did, I got a bit of evidence together and I went into a [management meeting]. (Kevin, CSA, 1)

As is clear in these examples, evidence-building required individuals to work closely with other team members in order to collect examples. Typically, informants brought their team's attention to the issue and gave them a specific time period in which to report back any instances in which the issue occurred. Collecting examples demonstrated that the issue at hand was not idiosyncratic to the individual but was systemic. By supplying concrete numbers that transcended the individuals' own experience with an issue, the problem became elevated in importance and could be deemed worthy of efforts to resolve. Further, it facilitated the TM's ability to argue the case for change to the SM.

In order to encourage evidence-building, team leaders used the linguistic device 'observe/analyze/act.' 'Observe/analyze/act' was passed down to team members such that they were expected to use it when bringing up issues. Miranda (CSA, 2) drew on this device as she thought about how to proceed with her proactive action:

I observed, I analyzed and then I acted. They use that method in the call center a lot: observe, analyze and act. So you're observing to find out what's happening, then you analyze and try to build up evidence with it and then you act on it.

In many cases, the 'analyze' component of observe/analyze/act was translated by managers into collecting examples. Lucy (TM, 1) describes the importance of her team working together in order to produce examples:

We do say to [team members] if it's just one incident, it may just be just the one. So we ask them to just get examples. So what my team do, and I'm sure all teams do this because team managers do encourage them to do this, is they mail out to the rest of the team and they'll say 'This is an example of what I've come across where this is happening, can you get me more examples?' Then when we've got more examples we can take the issue forward.

Pamela (CSA, 1) vividly explains how it was made clear to agents that issues would only be taken seriously if they were accompanied with evidence in the form of examples:

[Managers are] usually open to it just as long as you've got examples. I think if you find that you go to a manager with a situation and you don't have an example of it, they're just going to turn you away so it's best to get your evidence first.

In sum, evidence-building relied on team members in addition to the focal agent and was reinforced via linguistic devices that reminded employees that legitimating their claims through examples was necessary for initiating change.

Escalating to managers. Owing to technological constraints on their system and the collective nature of their process maps, once the evidence was collected, issues usually required escalation to TMs and, in some cases, SMs. Only rarely did agents conclude the

process of implementing change solely with their own actions. Instead, the hierarchy and structure of the organization required that management implement the final change. Marie and Philip both described the importance of having a manager take on their issues:

> Sometimes it is a case of, 'You're not a manager so you've not got the authority, I'm not going to listen to you.' That is sometimes the case where you're speaking to a department and they're not doing what you want them to do and you know that you're right, so you need to take it to a manager to get that resolved really. (Marie, CSA, 1)

> If you think it's on a priority scale then you go and approach somebody straight away. Even section managers sit within the area, so if your team manager is not about you can approach another team manager. (Phillip, CSA, 1)

The process of management escalation was particularly important at BigPower because the way in which the work was structured meant that if agents or even TMs made changes to a process without escalation, it would cause undesirable inconsistencies in the ways in which agents did their work. This variance, if protracted over time, could lead to a pro-liferation of ways of doing work which would be difficult to train and to monitor.

The result of escalating to managers was that managers had to address and take on the issues that were raised. As a Customer Service Manager explained:

> I'm a big believer in action follow-up. I feel very much that if you are going to get an action then you should at least follow it up because otherwise, what's the point in setting it in the first place? Because someone may work on that, do a lot of work towards it and then you not follow it up and them think, 'Have I wasted my time doing this because you didn't really want it anyway?' There's a consequence there. (Natalie, CSM, 1)

Ultimately, the escalating to managers phase was a two-sided process in which employees first brought up issues that they had identified and found evidence for. However, because the employees were often unable to carry through with the changes themselves because of policies or technological constraints, managers had to get involved in actually completing the change.

Attending to results. Escalating to managers meant the conclusion of the active involve-ment in bringing about change for most agents. However, similar to the reflecting phase suggested by Bindl et al. (2012), agents attended to whether their proposed change was successfully implemented. Accordingly, the proactivity process did not finish for a spe-cific issue until the agent had some knowledge of the results of the issue, communicated through feedback from a manager. For instance, Phillip (CSA, 1) believed that his man-ager was obligated to provide him updates on issues he had raised: 'I brought up [a poten-tial software problem], and that's been passed to my team manager to escalate. If you do bring up anything like that, they have to come back to you with an answer.' Marie (CSA, 1) explained that, through interactions with her manager, she has learned that issues she brings up will be taken care of, unlike her experiences with a previous manager:

> My previous Manager, if I was bringing an issue up now, I don't think he would ask me about it. I don't think he would follow it up and chase it up for me if I asked him to. Whereas my Manager now, I know he will.

Employees did not just move on once they had escalated a problem to management. They waited for information on whether the problem had been addressed and, if so, what specific changes were made. This feedback either took the form of a change to the process or an explanation for why the process could not be changed. Gretchen (TM, 1) elaborated on the importance of management in responding to employee suggestions:

> Even if it is a suggestion that might not go anywhere I am always, 'Yes, brilliant, fantastic idea but it may not work because …' If I'm telling someone they can't do it I always give them an explanation and say this is why.

Although the need to provide feedback on the status of proposed changes was widely acknowledged by managers, a number of agents and managers explained that this was the phase in which proactive actions often got derailed. Whether managers took action and failed to notify employees or did not take action at all, a number of agents noted that suggested changes tended to fall on deaf ears. Thus, despite being encouraged to raise issues, there was sometimes little done to address issues. Accordingly, some agents admitted that they, or their colleagues, were now hesitant to raise issues because they felt it was a waste of their time and effort:

> I think some people just think what's the point [in bringing forth issues]? … Maybe they have voiced things before and still not got a resolution from it so they can't be bothered raising it because nothing is going to happen if they do. (Teresa, CSA, 2)

This breakdown of the process was also recognized by management. Christine (SM, 2), for instance, recognized the importance of feedback but also saw that not all of the managers were providing the feedback that supported proactive action:

> I think something we have fallen down on in the past is we want people to think about things and come up with things, but management will sometimes not feedback on them very quickly or they won't do anything with the suggestion or lots of things won't happen for whatever reason, which isn't then very positive for the people coming up with ideas.

Such breakdowns were discouraging for employees at BigPower. Under such circumstances, informants in our study reported being less inclined to act proactively in the future.

Proactivity routines

What is striking about proactive work behaviors at BigPower is the degree of similarity across proactivity accounts. Based on this similarity, we suggest that a routine was in place at BigPower that prescribed the appropriate ways to make change to work processes. Routines are sets of 'repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors' (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 95; see also Pentland and Reuter, 1994) and stored in procedural memory (Cohen and Bacdayan, 1994). Here, we see that once agents determined that they wanted to pursue a proactive goal, they went through a specific pattern of actions that involved the participation of other individuals such as managers and colleagues in order to reach their proactive goal. Accordingly, we

suggest that a proactivity routine has been developed at BigPower: a socially constructed and recognized pattern of how one should go about making changes to work processes in the organization. Proactive work behavior was not a required element of agents' jobs. However, if they did decide to initiate changes to work processes, the proactivity routine depicted the steps employees should take in order to initiate such changes.

Routines include both ostensive and performative aspects (Becker, 2008; Feldman and Pentland, 2003) that speak to top-down and bottom-up multi-level processes within organizations (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000). The ostensive aspect of routines is the ideal or schematic form of a routine that is viewed as a standard operating procedure or norm. Here, the ostensive element operates in a top-down manner, depicting how the routine should be performed across individuals. In contrast, the performative aspect is the specific actions taken by employees during the enactment of the routine. This aspect is more bottom-up, in that it focuses on individual performances of the routine. Whereas the ostensive aspect constrains possible actions during the enactment of the routine, the performative aspect indicates that individuals still have room for improvisation in how the routine is enacted.

Like other routines, proactivity routines are comprised of both ostensive and performative aspects. The ostensive aspect of the routine at BigPower is represented in Figure 1 and includes the set of actions that organizational members believe were necessary to achieve their proactive goal. The performative aspect, in contrast, is the actual steps taken by employees in order to engage in this process. Table 1 provides examples of three different performances of the routine. The ostensive and performative aspects are mutually dependent: without the normative pattern of the routine, the employees would not know how to appropriately engage in proactive actions, and without employees actually following the phases of the proactive routine in their proactivity performances, the routine would cease to exist.

One of the hallmarks of routines is that they require coordination between multiple participants (Feldman and Rafaeli, 2002). An important characteristic of the proactivity routine at BigPower was that it involved coordinated action by multiple actors and, in so doing, managed the interdependencies between the actors. The proactivity routine was able to manage these interdependencies because it included mechanisms for *legitimation* to managers and *consistency* across individuals. Further, the routine was able to be sustained over time owing to a mechanism of *validation* for agents. These theoretical mechanisms are associated with particular phases in the proactivity routine, as indicated at the bottom of Figure 1. Here, we define these mechanisms and describe the role they played in supporting and sustaining the proactivity routine.

Drawing on Suchman's (1995) work on legitimacy, we define a *mechanism of legitimation* as agreed upon ways in which individuals can convince their managers that acting upon their issue is desirable, proper and appropriate. More specifically, members of BigPower developed a consensual process through which agents could 'prove' that there was an issue that needed solving. First, informants consulted their managers about the problem in order to construct together the need for the problem to be addressed. Second, the evidence-building process involved agents collecting examples in which work processes were impaired. Once a certain threshold of examples was reached, the agent could escalate the issue to management with the expectation that management would implement changes to address the issue.

The second type of mechanism is a *mechanism of consistency*. Mechanisms of consistency allow any changes that are made in the system to be implemented throughout the system rather than to be made only locally, thereby addressing horizontal interdependencies in the work. Without mechanisms of consistency, the work processes of one individual could vary dramatically from the work processes of the individual sitting at the next desk, compromising the system as a whole. At BigPower, mechanisms of consistency were included in the routine via the strong role played by managers in the escalating to management phase. By requiring changes to go through TMs, and often section or customer service managers, before implementation, BigPower was able to ensure that changes were initiated across employees and teams. Ultimately, the mechanism for consistency relies on the organizational hierarchy in order to address managers' concerns about changes being implemented systematically.

The *mechanism of validation* provides employees with information and feedback on the functioning of the proactivity routine, which promotes future investment in the routine. At BigPower, in the final phase of the routine, attending to results, agents indicated that their managers were obligated to report back on the status of an issue they had initiated. Further, agents were able to observe whether changes were actually being made because the changes would directly impact their work processes. Being told about changes was necessary because some changes may be sufficiently subtle that agents may not initially notice them without them being brought to their attention. Furthermore, simply communicating to the agents how the change was progressing signaled to the agent that their concern was being taken seriously. Information about the progress of a change gave agents insight into the utility of the proactivity routine and helped determine their future engagement with the routine.

Discussion

By drawing on accounts of 39 employees, we have described the social context within which proactive work behavior occurred at BigPower. In particular, the call center routinized employee proactivity such that there were specific steps employees followed to initiate work-related change at the team or unit level, including the involvement of management and colleagues at different phases of the process. As such, through this study, we gain a new perspective on how employee proactivity is embedded in a social context that complements the extant proactivity research focused on the social context as input or output to proactivity.

A central question that one might ask in response to these findings is: can proactivity that follows a routine be truly considered proactivity? The actions taken by agents were highly consistent with previous definitions of proactive work behavior: self-initiated, future-focused actions that involve taking charge in order to make changes to work processes (e.g. Parker and Collins, 2010). Proactive work behavior at BigPower was self-initiated in that agents recognized that there were issues at work that needed to be addressed, and decided to address them to prevent the future recurrence of such problems. Although proactive work behavior was certainly encouraged at BigPower, it was not required nor directly incentivized, meaning it was self-initiated rather than coerced by management. Further, these actions were future-focused. Similar to problem prevention

(Frese and Fay, 2001; Parker and Collins, 2010), a specific form of proactivity previously identified, informants at BigPower identified root causes of problems and sought ways to address those issues in the long term. Finally, in order to make these changes to work processes, agents had to take charge of the issue and push it through a multi-stage process before handing it over to managers to resolve. Put differently, the episodes of proactivity followed a goal regulation process, similar to previous depictions of proactivity (Parker et al., 2010) in which individuals generated proactive goals (problem recognition and ownership) (Bindl et al., 2012; Grant and Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010; Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015) and strived to attain those goals via consulting with managers, evidence-building and escalating to managers.

The fact that the way in which these proactive behaviors were implemented followed a routine does not diminish the fact that they represented goal-directed action to achieve a proactive work goal. Although the proactivity routine specified *the way* in which employees should enact proactive change, it neither required employees to be proactive, nor did it dictate which issues to bring up, when to bring them up, or whether to pursue action on them. Whether or not to engage in proactivity and which issues to be proactive about were decisions made by employees. In sum, whereas proactivity refers to future-focused and self-initiated change, proactive routines are the standardized processes individuals use to achieve such change. In the following section, we highlight the theoretical contributions of our findings.

Theoretical implications

Although the proactive process we found does share many similarities to how proactivity has previously been conceptualized, there are also important differences that represent theoretical advancement. First, we found that when individuals decide to engage in proactive work behavior, they follow socially mandated norms for how proactive work behavior should occur. The notion of a proactivity routine shifts our attention away from the individual characteristics that have dominated research on proactivity (e.g. self-efficacy beliefs, individual motivation, proactive personality and attachment styles: Bakker et al., 2012; Crant, 2000; Ohly and Fritz, 2007; Parker, 2000; Parker et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2014) and toward a higher-level perspective in which organizational structures and practices shape how proactivity occurs. Although the proactivity routine we describe is only one way in which the social context shapes proactivity, it brings to the fore that in many organizations there are likely ways of acting proactively that are encouraged while others are discouraged (Campbell, 2000). In low-autonomy settings, in particular, socially constructed ways in which to appropriately engage in proactivity may be essential for proactivity, owing to sparse opportunities for idiosyncratic change.

Second, much of the existing research on proactivity depicts an individual bringing about change with relatively little attention to how that individual engages others in the proactivity process. In contrast, because the work performed by individuals in our study required high degrees of consistency across individuals, making change required coordinating with managers and colleagues. Employees were required to discuss ideas with managers as well as rely on managers in order for the change to be implemented. Further, individuals relied on their peers to help them support and legitimate their proposed

changes. Thus, the proactivity routine was an inherently social process (see Figure B, available online, for an illustration of the role of other individuals beyond the focal employee, in the proactivity routine). Previous research on interpersonal interactions and proactivity has shown that the relationships that individuals build, especially with their managers, influence the impact of proactivity on outcomes such as performance, creativity and citizenship behavior (Fuller et al., 2015; Gong et al., 2012; Li et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005). The theory underlying these relationships is that proactive individuals are more likely to build networks that will help them in the future. Our findings advance our understanding of the interpersonal aspects of proactivity by arguing that individuals rely on others as *part of* the proactivity process.

Our findings also indicate that the role managers play in the proactive process evolves over the course of a performance of the routine. Specifically, managers become more actively involved as a performance continues. In the problem recognition and ownership phase, managers were not actively involved. Managers then moved on to play the role of advisor in the consulting with managers phase, providing both instrumental support in terms of instructing the employee on how to proceed, and emotional support, in terms of encouraging employees that they can be successful (Ibarra, 1993; Kaufmann and Beehr, 1989; McIntosh, 1991). However, at this point, managers were generally not actively engaged in addressing the issue. Only in the fourth phase, escalating to managers, did managers become actively involved in the implementation process, by beginning to bring about the suggested changes. Finally, managers provided feedback to their employees on the progress of implementation in the final phase. In sum, although performances of the proactivity routine involved interactions between managers and employees over time, the nature of those interactions shifted as the process of proactivity progressed.

Another contribution of our work is to question the importance of autonomy for proactivity. It has been argued that autonomy is a key determinant of proactivity because individuals with autonomy are more likely to feel responsible for their work and to develop self-efficacy and a sense of self-determination over their work (Fuller et al., 2006; Parker, 1998). In contrast, low levels of control at work are predicted to inhibit proactivity because employees will not feel empowered or efficacious, will ruminate rather than act, will be unlikely to persevere in the face of setbacks, and will have a passive approach to work (Frese et al., 1996). In a summary of this literature, Fuller et al. (2006: 1095) assert that autonomy is 'necessary but insufficient to promote a proactive orientation.' However, we find that employees working in a low-autonomy context with a proactivity routine in place may act proactively as well. By providing a clear and legitimate way in which one can act proactively, a proactivity routine allows individuals to feel safe that they are engaging in appropriate behaviors, boosting their self-efficacy for proactivity. The standardization of proactivity through practices and norms also provided a powerful signal that such behaviors were desired and important for the organization, thereby promoting identified self-regulation (Parker et al., 2010; Ryan and Deci, 2000) in which individuals 'take on' external values and accept them as their own. For example, the organization's statements about the importance of process improvement, combined with investment in issue boards (both the establishment of the boards and the weekly allocation of time for discussing the boards) and training, shows agents and managers that the organization was serious about individuals' improving work processes,

which, in turn, likely facilitated the individual's internalization of these organizational values. Thus, a proactivity routine may be at least a partial substitute for autonomy in terms of inducing proactive work behaviors.

It is worth noting that previous research has associated routine work and proactivity. In particular, Ohly et al. (2006) demonstrated that the routinization of employee's work may encourage proactive behaviors owing to the freeing up of cognitive resources as well as increased time to focus on proactive behaviors. In their study, the degree to which work is routinized was a core characteristic of employees' jobs that predicted individuals' creative and innovative work behaviors. Our study differs from theirs in that we did not address how routine an individual's job is but, rather, we focus on a particular type of routine that is used for making proactive change. Whereas the work of Ohly et al. (2006) focused on the routinization of the work itself, we are focused on the routinization of how to act proactively.

Practical implications, limitations and future research

In order to address the practical implications and limitations of our research it is important to first be clear on the type of organizations where our findings may be most relevant. Proactivity routines are likely to develop in organizations with what Batt and Moynihan (2002: 20) referred to as a mass customization model that incorporates 'the efficiency gains of mechanization and the attention to service quality found in the professional services model.' By combining mass production and professional service models, mass customization models are forced into reconciling the competing demands of quality and quantity (Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008). Although scholars have suggested a variety of methods of coping with these tensions (see Parker, 2014), through proactivity routines, organizations can maintain standardized work procedures but can also capitalize on individual innovations to update and optimize procedures.

The mechanisms theorized to underpin the proactivity routine provide guidance on *how* managers can effectively initiate a proactivity routine. Although the specifics of the routine will likely be different, incorporating mechanisms for legitimacy, consistency and validation are each important. Mechanisms for legitimacy and consistency allow for control and standardization over the proactivity process. Changes that are made are done so across individuals rather than within, and are only implemented once they have reached a particular threshold of importance. Mechanisms of validation ensure that employees gain feedback on their efforts, thereby further building their self-efficacy and identified motivation, and, in turn, sustaining their engagement in contributing ideas for improving the organization. In this way, the organization can remain flexible and adapt to changing customer needs.

There are limitations and boundary conditions to this study. First, our findings come from a case study of one organization. However, we do believe that our findings can generalize to theory (Stake, 1978). In particular, we believe that specific routines develop in organizations that dictate correct and incorrect ways in which proactivity may occur, thus enabling proactive work behavior, albeit in a limited manner. Although there is evidence of other versions of routines that promote proactivity in other contexts (such as total quality management practices and suggestion schemes (Frese et al., 1999; Hackman

and Wageman, 1995; Hill, 1991), we must be careful not to generalize our specific findings. In fact, one of the major implications of our research is the necessity of taking contextual characteristics into consideration when attempting to understand proactivity in organizations. In particular, we do not anticipate that other organizations would employ the exact same routine as we discovered at BigPower. Although the problem recognition and attending to results phases are likely universal because proactivity requires individuals to identify issues at work and employees want to understand the outcomes of their actions, the questions of when and how individuals will consult their managers and colleagues and the degree to which they will escalate their concerns to managers are likely to vary. Further, the kind of evidence that is necessary for such escalation may be different than the evidence-building reported here. A related limitation is that we have focused exclusively on proactive work behavior and not on other forms of proactive behavior such as proactive customer service (Rank et al., 2007) or proactive strategic behavior (Parker and Collins, 2010). It is worth investigating in future research which types of proactive behavior are likely to be routinized and which types are not.

One avenue for future research that our findings point us toward is a more practice-based perspective on proactivity. A practice perspective shifts the focus away from individuals or organizations and toward the patterns of actions that occur within organizations (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). According to Niccolini (2012: 5), in a practice perspective 'The focus is thus not on the action of the individual but on the practice, and the horizon of intelligible action that it makes available to the agents.' Our call to view proactivity at a higher level of analysis in order to gain new insights on how proactivity occurs within a context is one step toward such a perspective. We believe that more fully conceptualizing and operationalizing proactivity routines as a practice would uncover additional insights about proactivity in its broad social context.

A related avenue for future research is to look more closely at the multi-level nature of proactivity. In our data, we see that routines, a collective-level phenomenon, shape how individuals engage in proactive behaviors. Further, similar to Kozlowski and Klein's (2000: 55) notion of emergence in which behaviors originated by individuals lead to collective phenomenon, as individuals engage in proactive behaviors, they make changes that impact themselves as well as those around them. While our findings concerning proactivity routines point to the existence of multi-level effects, future research should investigate further how collective and individual actions interrelate in the proactivity process.

Finally, up to this point, we have taken a relatively non-critical perspective on the formation and use of a proactivity routine. Although a proactivity routine can be viewed as a form of a high-involvement practice (Batt, 2002; Workman and Bommer, 2004), from a more critical perspective, such routines may represent 'the application of Taylorism by the workers themselves' (Hodgson, 2002; Sewell, 1998). Literature on call centers, in particular, has argued that despite the apparent domination of supervisory power in these organizational contexts (Metcalf and Fernie, 1998), employees may deliberately choose to resist such domination (Bain and Taylor, 2000). What these critiques bring to light is that we do not currently know what the downsides of this more constrained form of proactivity are, as well as what forms of proactivity, if any, it may curtail. We hope our findings will inspire future research to address these issues.

In sum, although our findings originate from one organizational setting, we suspect that in many organizations there are ways of acting proactively that are supported and encouraged, and ways that are frowned upon, by other organizational members. As such, it is important to understand how the broader social context shapes the proactivity process. We suggest a new understanding of proactivity in which it is possible for proactivity to occur through a standardized, collective process rather than the more frequently depicted individual process.

Acknowledgements

Funding

References

Baer M and Frese M (2003) Innovation is not enough: Climates for initiation and psychological safety, process innocations, and firm performance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 24(1): 45–68.

Bain P and Taylor P (2000) Entrapped by the 'electronic panopticon'? Worker resistance in the call centre. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 15(1): 2–18.

Bakker A, Tims M and Derks D (2012) Proactive personality and job performance: The role of job crafting and work engagement. *Human Relations* 65(10): 1359–1378.

Batt R (2002) Managing customer services: Human resource practices, quit rates, and sales growth. *Academy of Management Journal* 45(3): 587–597.

Batt R and Moynihan L (2002) The viability of alternative call centre production models. *Human Resource Management Journal* 12(4): 14–34.

Becker MC (ed.) (2008) *Handbook of Organizational Routines*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bindl UK and Parker SK (2010) Proactive work behavior: Forward-thinking and change-oriented action in organizations. In: Zedeck S (ed.) *APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 567–598.

Bindl UK, Parker SK, Totterdell P and Hagger-Johnson G (2012). Fuel of the self-starter: How mood relates to proactive goal regulation. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 97(1): 134–150.

Campbell DJ (2000) The proactive employee: Managing workplace initiative. *Academy of Management Executive* 14(3): 52–66.

Cohen MD and Bacdayan P (1994) Organizational routines are stored as procedural memory: Evidence from a laboratory study. *Organization Science* 5(4): 554–568.

Crant JM (2000) Proactive behavior in organizations. *Journal of Management* 26(3): 435–462.

de Jong A and De Ruyter K (2004) Adaptive versus proactive behavior in service recovery: The role of self-managing teams. *Decision Sciences* 35(3): 457–491.

Den Hartog DN and Belschak FD (2012) When does transformational leadership enhance employee proactive behavior? The role of autonomy and role breadth self-efficacy. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 97(1): 194–202.

Dutton JE, Ashford SJ, O'Neill RM and Lawrence KA (2001) Moves that matter: Issue selling and organizational change. *Academy of Management Journal* 44(4): 716–736.

Dutton JE, Ashford SJ, Lawrence KA and Miner-Rubino K (2002) Red light, green light: Making sense of the organizational context for issue selling. *Organization Science* 13(4): 353–369.

Fay D, Lührmann H and Kohl C (2004) Proactive climate in a post-reorganization setting: When staff compensate managers weakness. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 13(2): 241–267.

Feldman MS and Orlikowski WJ (2011) Theorizing practice and practing theory. *Organization Science* 22(5): 1240–1253.

Feldman MS and Pentland BT (2003) Reconceptualizing organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 48(1): 94–118.

Feldman MS and Rafaeli A (2002) Organizational routines as sources of connections and understandings. *Journal of Management Studies* 39(3): 309–331.

Frese M and Fay D (2001) Personal initiative (PI): An active performance concept for work in the 21st century. In: Staw BM and Sutton RM (eds) *Research in Organizational Behavior, Vol. 23*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 133–187.

Frese M, Kring W, Soose A and Zempel J (1996) Personal initiative at work: Differences between East and West Germany. *Academy of Management Journal* 39(1): 37–63.

Frese M, Teng E and Wijnen CJD (1999) Helping to improve suggestion systems: Predictors of making suggestions in companies. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 20(7): 1139–1155.

Frese M, Garst H and Fay D (2007) Making things happen: Reciprocal relationships between work characteristics and personal initiative in a four-wave longitudinal structural equation model. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92(4): 1084–1102.

Fuller JB, Marler LE and Hester K (2006) Promoting felt responsibility for constructive change and proactive behavior: Exploring aspects of an elaborated model of work design. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 27(8): 1089–1120.

Fuller JB, Marler LE, Hester K and Otondo RF (2015) Leader reaction to follower proactive behavior: Giving credit when credit is due. *Human Relations* 68(6): 879–898.

Glaser BG and Strauss AL (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Gong Y, Cheung S-Y, Wang M and Huang J-C (2012) Unfolding the proactive process for creativity: Integration of the employee proactivity, information exchange, and psychological safety perspectives. *Journal of Management* 38(5): 1611–1633.

Grant AM and Ashford SJ (2008) The dynamics of proactivity at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior* 28: 3–34.

Griffin MA, Neal A and Parker SK (2007) A new model of work role performance: Positive behavior in uncertain and interdependent contexts. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(2): 327–347.

Griffin MA, Parker SK and Mason CM (2010) Leader vision and the development of adaptive and proactive performance: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95(1): 174–182.

Hackman JR and Wageman R (1995) Total quality management: Empirical, conceptual, and practical issues. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40: 309–342.

Hill S (1991) Why quality circles failed but total quality management might succeed. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 29(4): 541–568.

Hodgson D (2002) Disciplining the professional: The case of project management. *Journal of Management Studies* 39(6): 803–821.

Holman DJ (2005) Call centres. In: Holman DJ, Wall TD, Clegg CW, et al. (eds) *The Essentials of the New Workplace: A Guide to the Human Impact of Modern Working Practices*. Chichester: Wiley, 111–131.

Ibarra H (1993) Network centrality, power, and innovation involvement: Determinants of techni-
cal and administrative roles. *Academy of Management Journal* 36(3): 471–501.

Kaufmann GM and Beehr TA (1989) Occupational stressors, individual strains, and social sup-
ports among police officers. *Human Relations* 42(2): 185–197.

Kozlowski SWJ and Klein KJ (2000) A multilevel approach to theory and research in organiza-
tions: Contextual, temporal, and emergent processes. In: Klein KJ and Kozlowski SWJ (eds)
*Multilevel Theory, Research, and Methods in Organizations: Foundations, Extensions, and
New Directions*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 3–90.

Lee TW, Mitchell TR and Sablynski CJ (1999) Qualitative research in organizational and voca-
tional psychology, 1979–1999. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 55(2): 161–187.

Li N, Liang J and Crant JM (2010) The role of proactive personality in job satisfaction and organi-
zational citizenship behavior: A relational perspective. *Journal of Applied Pscyhology* 95(2):
395–404.

McIntosh NJ (1991) Identification and investigation of properties of social support. *Journal of
Organizational Behavior* 12(3): 201–217.

Metcalf D and Fernie S (1998) (Not) hanging on the telephone: Payment systems in the new sweat-
shops. *Centrepiece* 3: 7–11.

Miles M and Huberman M (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd edn).
Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Morrison EW and Phelps C (1999) Taking charge: Extra-role efforts to initiate workplace change.
Academy of Management Journal 42(4): 403–419.

Niccolini D (2012) *Practice Theory, Work, and Organization: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford
University Press.

Ohly S and Fritz C (2007) Challenging the status quo: What motivates proactive behaviour?
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology 80(4): 623–629.

Ohly S, Sonnentag S and Pluntke F (2006) Routinization, work characteristics and their rela-
tionship with creative and proactive behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 27(3):
257–279.

Parker SK (1998) Enhancing role breadth self-efficacy: The roles of job enrichment and other
organizational interventions. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 83(6): 835–852.

Parker SK (2000) From passive to proactive motivation: The importance of flexible role orienta-
tions and role breadth self-efficacy. *Applied Psychology* 49(3): 447–469.

Parker SK (2014) Beyond motivation: Job and work design for development, health, ambidexter-
ity, and more. *Annual Review of Psychology* 65: 661–691.

Parker SK and Collins CG (2010) Taking stock: Integrating and differentiating multiple proactive
behaviors. *Journal of Management* 36(3): 633–662.

Parker SK, Williams HM and Turner N (2006) Modeling the antecedents of proactive behavior at
work. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 91(3): 636–652.

Parker SK, Bindl UK and Strauss K (2010) Making things happen: A model of proactive motiva-
tion. *Journal of Management* 36(4): 827–856.

Pentland BT and Reuter HH (1994) Organizational routines as grammars of action. *Administrative
Science Quarterly* 39: 484–510.

Raisch S and Birkinshaw J (2008) Organizational ambidexterity: Antecedents, outcomes, and
moderators. *Journal of Management* 34(3): 375–409.

Rank J, Carsten JM, Unger JM and Spector PE (2007) Proactive customer service performance:
Relationships with individual, task, and leadership variables. *Human Performance* 20(4):
363–390.

Ryan RM and Deci EL (2000) Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motiva-
tion, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist* 55(1): 68–78.

Seidman IE (1991) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Sewell G (1998) The discipline of teams: The control of team-based industrial work through electronic and peer surveillance. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 43: 397–428.

Shah SK and Corley KG (2006) Building better theory by bridging the quantitative-qualitative divide. *Journal of Management Studies* 43(8): 1821–1835.

Sonnentag S and Starzyk A (2015) Perceived prosocial impact, perceived situational constraints, and proactive work behavior: Looking at two distinct affective pathways. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 36(6): 806–824.

Stake RE (1978) The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher* 7(2): 5–8.

Staw BM and Boettger RD (1990) Task revision: A neglected from of work performance. *Academy of Management Review* 33(3): 534–559.

Strauss A and Corbin J (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Strauss K, Griffin MA and Rafferty AE (2009) Proactivity directed toward the team and organization: The role of leadership, commitment and role-breadth self-efficacy. *British Journal of Management* 20(3): 279–291.

Suchman MC (1995) Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review* 20(3): 571–610.

Thomas JP, Whitman DS and Viswesvaran C (2010) Employee proactivity in organizations: A comparative meta-analysis of emergent proactive constructs. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 83(2): 275–300.

Thompson JA (2005) Proactive personality and job performance: A social capital perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 90(5): 1011–1017.

Tornau K and Frese M (2013) Construct clean-up in proactivity research: A meta-analysis on the nomological net of work-related proactivity concepts and their incremental validities. *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 62(1): 44–96.

Van Dyne L and LePine JA (1998) Helping and voice extra-role behaviors: Evidence of construct and predictive validity. *Academy of Management Journal* 41(1): 108–119.

Van Maanen J (1979) The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24: 539–550.

Vaughan D (1992) Theory elaboration: The heuristics of case analysis. In: Becker H and Ragin C (eds) *What is a Case?* New York: Cambridge University Press, 173–202.

Whyte WF (1979) On making the most of participant observation. *The American Sociologist* 14(1): 56–66.

Workman M and Bommer W (2004) Redesigning computer call center work: A longitudinal field experiment. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 25(3): 317–337.

Wrzesniewski A and Dutton JE (2001) Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *Academy of Management Review* 26(2): 179–201.

Wu C and Parker SK (2016) The role of leader support in facilitating proactive work behavior: A perspective from attachment theory. *Journal of Management*. DOI: 10.1177/0149206314544745.

Wu C, Parker S and de Jong J (2014) Feedback seeking from peers: A positive strategy for insecurely attached team-workers. *Human Relations* 67(4): 441–464.

Heather C Vough is an assistant professor of management in the Carl H Lindner College of Business at the University of Cincinnati, USA. She earned her PhD from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Heather's research interests revolve around how individuals construct meaning and identity within their organizational and professional contexts. In her research, she primarily uses qualitative methods and has performed research in a variety of settings including an architecture firm, a call center, an international security organization and a radio station. Her research

has been published in journals including *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Management Studies* and *Organization Science*. She is a member of the Academy of Management and is currently serving on the executive committee for the Managerial and Organizational Cognition Division. She serves on the editorial board of five journals, including *Human Relations*.

Uta K Bindl is an Assistant Professor of Management at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), UK. She earned her PhD from the Institute of Work Psychology at the University of Sheffield (UK). Uta's research interests include motivation and positive work behaviors, particularly employee proactivity and job crafting, as well as affective well-being in organizations. She has published her research in peer-reviewed journals, such as the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and the *Journal of Management*, as well as in high-profile volumes, such as the *APA Handbook of I/O Psychology*. She is a member of the Academy of Management and currently serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. Uta has co-edited (with Sharon Parker) the first, comprehensive book volume on *Proactivity at Work*, in the esteemed *Routledge Organization and Management Series*.

Sharon K Parker is an ARC Laureate Fellow, a Professor of Organizational Behavior at the UWA Business School, University of Western Australia, and an Honorary Professor at the University of Sheffield, UK, where she was previously Director at the Institute of Work Psychology. She is a recipient of the ARC's Kathleen Fitzpatrick Award, and the Academy of Management OB Division Mentoring Award. Her research focuses particularly on job and work design, employee performance, employee development, proactive behaviour, perspective-taking, job stress and well-being. She has published more than 80 internationally refereed articles on these topics, including publications in top-tier journals such as the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review* and the *Annual Review of Psychology*. Sharon is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences, and a Fellow of the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology. She is an Associate Editor for *Academy of Management Annals*, a past Associate Editor of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and she has served on numerous editorial boards. Sharon is the current chair of the Society for Organizational Behavior in Australia, and has worked as a researcher and consultant in a wide range of public and private organizations.