# PROACTIVE PERSONALITY WITHIN SOCIAL AND TASK CONTEXTS

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# SUMMARY

In the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in employee proactivity among organizational behavior scholars, partly due to the increasing uncertainty and dynamics in the business and work environments. Bateman and Crant (1993) proposed the construct of proactive personality as an individual difference predictor of employee proactive work behavior. Meta-analytic reviews revealed that proactive personality was positively related to several important work outcomes (e.g., Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010). In this dissertation, I intend to advance the understanding of the mediating and moderating mechanisms that underlie proactive personality's effects by adopting an interactionist perspective through two field studies.

The first study examined associations between proactive personality and employee helping behavior and task performance within the social context of exchange relationships with supervisors and coworkers. Based on a two-themed interactionist perspective, I proposed that proactive personality may affect both the creation of and reactivity to the quality of exchange relationships and that both processes help explain the associations between proactive personality and employee helping behavior and task performance. I tested the proposed relationships with a sample of 204 employees through moderated mediation analyses. Results were consistent with the hypothesized conceptual model. Specifically, proactive personality was positively related to exchange relationships quality, which in turn was positively associated with helping behavior and task performance. More importantly, proactive personality was found to negatively interact with exchange relationships quality in affecting helping behavior and task performance. Moderated mediation analyses showed that the mediating role of exchange relationship quality worked more for less proactive, reactive employees than more proactive employees. On the basis of these findings, I concluded that

the role of exchange relationship quality in the association between proactive personality and performance is more complex than what was previously believed

The second study attempted to replicate the first study's findings with job autonomy as the situation factor, and learning behavior and job performance as the focal outcomes. Based on a two-themed interactionist perspective, I proposed that proactive personality may affect both the creation of and reactivity to the level of job autonomy and that both processes help explain the associations between proactive personality and employee learning behavior and job performance. I tested the proposed relationships with a sample of 225 employees through moderated mediation analyses. Results were, however, only partially consistent with the hypothesized conceptual model. Specifically, consistent with the original hypotheses, proactive personality was positively related to job autonomy. However, opposite to what was predicted, proactive personality was found to positively rather than negatively moderate the relationship of proactive personality to learning behavior and job performance.

The two studies advance understanding of proactive personality along an interactionist perspective. Research implications and future research directions are discussed.

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

Personality research has a long history in psychology. Given its practical implications on various managerial practices, personality has always struck a chord with management researchers (Barrick & Ryan, 2003; Schneider & Smith, 2004). In recent years, organizational behaviour scholars have renewed their interests in a specific compound trait-*proactive personality*, which is an individual difference proclivity to take initiatives to influence environments (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999). The interest in proactivity reflects some fundamental characteristics of the current business environments and workplace arrangements such as uncertainty associated with turbulent economies, pressure for innovation, and adoption of decentralized organizational structures (Crant, 2000; Frese, 2008; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Grant & Parker, 2009).

## A Review of Proactive Personality Research

### The Concept of Proactive Personality

Compared with the long history of personality research, proactive personality is rather a newcomer. Just twenty years ago, in 1993, Bateman and Crant introduced the concept of proactive personality as a vehicle to understand individual differences in people's disposition toward proactive behaviour, considering the increasing significance of employee proactivity in the turbulent, uncertain, and dynamic business and work environments. Proactive personality is defined as a relatively stable tendency to take initiatives to effect environmental changes (Bateman & Crant, 1993). As Crant (2000) reviewed, the concept of proactivity is not another management fad, but is useful in predicting important work outcomes and was proposed based on the holistic view of the person-situation relationship taken by the

interactionist perspective (Bandura, 1978; Bowers, 1973; Schneider, 1983), which considers the possibility that individuals create situations in the mutual influence process between person and situation.

**Conceptual Foundation: Interactionism.**

The interactionist paradigm studies the dynamic transaction between person (P), environment (E), and behaviour (B) (Bandura, 1997; Bowers, 1973; Buss, 2009). According to Ekehammar (1974), this perspective dates back to Lewin (1936) and Murray (1938). Lewin's (1936) classic mathematical equation for analyzing social behaviour, $B = f (P, E)$, is one of the leading formulation of interaction. Murray's (1938) need-press (environment) model assumes that organisms have needs, and the environment (press) interacts with the organism in terms of either gratifying the needs or obstructing the satisfaction of them.

In the 1950s-1970s, there were hot debates between individual difference or personologism approach (which advocates stable individual difference constructs such as traits, values, and attitudes as the major determinants of behaviour) and situationism approach (which advocates environmental or situational factors as the main determinants of behaviour) (c.f., Ekeharnmar, 1974). The initial question that underlies the debates thus concerns whether person variables or situation variables account for more variance in human behaviour variation. With the increasing application of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) methods, more appropriate observation was made by Bowers (1973, p. 307), who stated that "Although it is undoubtedly true that behavior is more situation specific than trait theory acknowledged, it is herein argued that situations are more person specific than is commonly recognized." In this influential paper, Bowers (1973) reviewed a body of evidence which consistently showed that the interaction between person and situation accounted for more variance in behaviour

than either one alone, and thus forwarded an interactionist perspective as an alternative to both a personologist (e.g., trait) and a situationist (e.g. behaviourism ) position.

During this time, several other similar review papers (Ekehammar, 1974; Endler & Magnusson, 1976a) and edited books were published (Endler & Magnusson, 1976b; Magnusson & Endler, 1977). These book chapters and review papers discussed the meaning of interactionism from each author's perspective. Buss (1977) summarized the various perspectives and proposed two major types of interactionist formulations. This was accomplished by considering mathematical equations advocated by four different theoretical positions regarding relationships among P, E, and B. The *situationist perspective* asserts behaviour is an outcome of the environment, B= f (E). The *trait perspective* advocates that behaviour is a function of the personality traits, B = f (P). The *cognitive perspective* argues that the environment is a cognitive construction by the person, E = f (P). The *social learning perspective* advocates individual differences are an outcome of environment or social learning history, P = f (E). Buss (1977) noted that the first major type of interactionist perspective is a synthesis between trait approach and situationism, asserting behaviour as a joint function of both the person and environment, B = f (P, E).  The second major type of interactionist perspective is a synthesis between the cognitive and social learning perspective, there is reciprocal or bidirectional relationship between person and environment, E ↔ P.

Later studies continued to develop the interactionist account of personality in various empirical contexts (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Emmons, Diener, & Larsen, 1986; Schneider, 1983; Terborg, 1981). Mischel and Shoda (1995) summarized them and concluded again with the two themes of interactionism. Likewise, Buss (2009, p.242) concluded that "Person-situation interactions come in two well-defined forms: (1) the ways in which person variables, through processes such as selection, evocation, and manipulation influence non-

random exposure to different suites of adaptive problems, and (2) adaptive individual differences in the strategies that people deploy toward solving the adaptive problems to which they are non-randomly exposed." To sum, interactionism perspective holds that (1) people partly enact their social environments, and (2) people react differently to these environments or behaviour is a joint function of person and situation. The two-themed conceptualizations of person-situation interaction constitute the primary theoretical foundation of the current dissertation.

**Outcomes of Proactive Personality**

A presumption underlying the proactive personality research is that proactive employees will be more effective and successful in the current dynamic workplace. Crant and colleagues conducted a set of studies to examine the associations between proactive personality and important work and career outcomes. For example, proactive personality was found to predict real estate agents' objective performance as indexed by the number of houses sold, number of listings obtained, and commission income over a 9-month period (Crant, 1995). In a second study, it was shown that proactive personality positively associated with entrepreneurial intention (Crant, 1996). In a third study, Seibert et al. (1999) found that proactive personality was positively associated with various indicators of career success such as promotion, salary level, and career satisfaction. Interestingly, based on their estimated regression equation after controlling various career-related variables, Seibert et al. estimated that a 1-point increase in the proactive personality scale was associated with an $8, 677 increase in yearly salary. Lastly, managers' proactive personality was positively associated with their immediate supervisors' ratings of their charismatic leadership (Crant & Bateman, 2000).

Other scholars applied the proactive personality construct into specific research domains and found support for its predictive validity. In a job search study, it was found that proactive personality significantly predicted college graduates' job search success (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006). In the socialization literature, organizational newcomers' proactive personality predicted their organizational and task adjustment (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). In a systematic study on workplace proactivity, Parker and Collins (2010) found that proactive personality predicted various proactive work behaviours such as taking charge, individual innovation, voice, and problem prevention. Lastly, in a team level study, proactive personality predicted team customer service, organizational and team commitment (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999).

In sum, proactive personality has been linked with task performance, citizenship behaviour, charismatic leadership, entrepreneurship, career success and team level outcomes, which were confirmed by meta-analytic reviews (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas, et al., 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013).

**Mediators of Proactive Personality's Effects**

Given the significance of proactive personality on work outcomes, Crant (2000) called for research to uncover the mediating mechanisms that help explain the bivariate associations between proactive personality and various individual and organizationally relevant outcomes. Several studies help us understand the mediating mechanisms that underlie the various bivariate associations (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010; Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010; Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006; Seibert Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Thompson, 2005).

In Crant's (1995) study, he argued that real estate agents achieved higher sales performance because they engaged in proactive behaviours which could change markets,

clients, and marketplace perceptions of the real estate agents. This explanation is consistent with the first theme of an interactionist perspective as noted earlier, which basically suggests that people actively select and create situations that are conducive to effective performance and success. Indeed, later studies largely followed this line of thinking in explaining the effects of proactive personality. For example, Seibert et al. (2001) tried to explain the associations between proactive personality and career success indicators that Seibert et al. (1999) found. They found that proactive employees achieved greater career success because they engaged in a set of proactive behaviours such as individual innovation, gaining political knowledge and engaging in career initiative. Thompson (2005) focused on the association between proactive personality and task performance and found that proactive employees achieved higher performance partly because they actively built social networks with influential contacts in the organization. In a similar vein, Li, et al. (2010) recognized the importance of workplace relationships, especially relationships with one's supervisors, and found that proactive employees were more satisfied with their job and displayed more citizenship behaviour because they actively managed and created functional relationships with their immediate supervisors.

An important characteristic of this set of research is that they all focused on the mediating role of situations or behavioural mediators that will create those functional situations. Conceptually, this is consistent with the first theme of interactionism that emphasizes the effects of person on situation. However, there are problems associated with the existing studies. Specifically, although it was informative to study the effects of proactive personality on situation, it largely dismissed the role of situational influence on the proactive personality process or the joint influence of proactive personality and situational factors, another key theme of an interactionist perspective. For example, it has been underscored that proactive employees will actively build and manage workplace relationships or networks that

will help them achieve higher performance and success (Li et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005), while the ways that these relationships will affect how proactive employees to perform is still unclear. Thus, one purpose of the present dissertation is to address the joint effects of proactive personality and situational factors on employee behaviour and performance, stated in another ways, how proactive and less proactive employees react to workplace environments.

**Boundary Conditions of Proactive Personality's Effects**

In parallel with studies that tried to understand the mediating mechanisms underlying proactive personality's effects, another research stream in the proactive personality literature is to examine the boundary conditions of proactive personality's effects (Chan, 2006; Cunningham & De La Rosa, 2008; Erdogan & Bauer, 2005; Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011, Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009). This set of studies on boundary conditions are largely motivated by questions that whether employee's proactivity will be valued or appreciated and the possibility that supervisors may even punish employees for engaging in proactive behaviour. Morrison and Milliken (2000. p. 708) noted that many supervisors "feel a strong need to avoid embarrassment, threat, and feelings of vulnerability or incompetence. Hence, they will tend to avoid any information that might suggest weakness or that might raise questions about current courses of action." Similarly, Frese and Fay (2001, p. 141) pointed out that personal initiative (PI), a form of proactive behavior, is not always appreciated by supervisors: "Often high-PI people are perceived by their environment as being tiring and strenuous. Every initiative 'rocks the boat' and makes changes. Since people tend not to like changes, they often greet initiative with skepticism."

Chan (2006) examined proactive personality in conjunction with situational judgement effectiveness, which reflects individuals' effectiveness in judging or responding to

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work-relevant situations. He found that proactive personality predicted work perceptions (procedural justice perception, perceived supervisor support, and social integration) and work outcomes (job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and job performance) positively among individuals with high situational judgment effectiveness but negatively among those with low situational judgement effectiveness. Erdogan and Bauer (2005) examined and showed the moderating roles of person-organization fit (P-O fit) and person-job fit (P-J fit) on some of the relationships between proactive personality and wellbeing outcomes and productivity. Grant et al. (2009) hypothesized that supervisors' attribution about the underlying motives that lead to employee's proactive behaviours would moderate the relationships between employees' proactive behaviours (voice, issue selling, taking charge, and helping) and performance evaluations. Consistent with their hypotheses, they found that proactive behaviours were more likely to give rise to higher supervisor performance evaluations when employees express strong prosocial values or low negative affect. In another study, Grant, et al., (2011) found that employees' proactive personality lead to effective team performance only when the team leaders were less extraverted but not when they were more extraverted. They reasoned that extraverted leaders were less receptive to proactivity. More recently, Zhang, Wang, and Shi (2012) focused on leader-member exchange relationships (LMX) and employee work outcomes (job satisfaction, affective commitment, and job performance), and found that subordinates had lower-quality LMX and poorer work outcomes when their proactive personality was lower than their leaders' as compared with when their proactive personality was higher.

The above reviewed studies on the moderators of proactive personality's effects fit into the interactionist framework. Specifically, performance outcomes can be viewed as a joint influence of both situation and personality. There are two major approaches to understand the joint effects of person and situation (Pervin, 1987, 1989). One approach is to

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emphasize the person's social intelligence in understanding the social appropriateness of one's behaviour. The lack of this competence will lead to poor outcomes (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1985). The other approach is to understand the relations between the person's goals and the opportunities and constraints afforded by the environments that the person resides in (Pervin, 1982). Thus, this set of research on boundary conditions of proactive personality's effects can be understood from the social intelligence approach to person-situation interaction. That is, proactive employees achieved poor outcomes when they lack the social intelligence in understanding appropriately the situations they reside in and/or lack the skills for handling relevant situations, as indicated by social judgement effectiveness, P-O fit, P-J fit, displaying inappropriate affect, engaging in misguided behaviour, lacking congruence with supervisors.

**Summary**

In summary, in its inception, proactive personality was proposed based on the interactionist perspective. Three closely related research streams have been progressing well: in studying the effects of proactive personality on important work outcomes, studying the mediating mechanism that help explain the effects of proactive personality, and examining the moderating conditions under which proactive personality will lead to positive/negative outcomes. This set of studies can be construed according to the theoretical underpinning of proactive personality---the interactionist perspective as reviewed. The above reviews also identified issues that existing research paid insufficient attention and are thus open for further investigation, which the present dissertation will make. Below, I will give an overview of the guiding theoretical frameworks and research questions that drive the dissertation.

## Guiding Theoretical Frameworks and Guiding Research Questions

The present dissertation contains two studies, addressing the mediating and moderating mechanisms that help explain proactive personality's effects. Both studies draw heavily on the interactionist perspective, on which the proactive personality construct is based on. Both studies intend to address the open question that I identified throughout the literature review process. Specifically, the two studies focus on the largely dismissed role of situational influence on the proactive personality effects on employee work behavior and outcomes, or the joint influence of situational factors and proactive personality on employee work outcomes. Overall, the two studies intend to shape the conversation on proactive personality from an overly outward-looking focus on proactive personality's effects on environment, to a more adequate account of proactive personality's effect by considering the joint or interacting effects of situations and proactive personality.

The present dissertation focuses on two sources of situational influences. One reflects social or interpersonal environment: workplace exchange relationships. The other reflects non-interpersonal, task environment: job autonomy. Several reasons drive this choice. First, in the interaction psychology, there is a lack of taxonomy of situations. Correspondingly, in organizational behaviour research, we also lack a well agreed-upon taxonomy of workplace situations. Thus, the choice of situations should reflect the most important workplace situations that have been well defined and well-accepted in the organizational behaviour literature. This is because those situational factors represent our current understanding of the most significant contextual factors in the workplace setting. Both social relationships and task characteristics are important and salient proximal work environment where employees function in their everyday life (Barrick & Ryan, 2003; Eisenberg, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007;

Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). Thus, I chose the two as the key situational variables to study in the present dissertation.

Second, workplace exchange relationships (especially, leader-member exchange relationships) have been examined as mediator of proactive personality's effect based on the first theme of interactionist perspective (Li et al., 2010). However, studies have not examined its influence on proactive personality's effects on performance, which is consistent with the second theme of an interactionist perspective. Thus, I proffer a contribution by testing a two – themed interactionist account of exchange relationships' roles in the proactive personality process. This is addressed in Essay 1 in Chapter 2.

Third, job autonomy has been tested both as independent contributor of workplace proactive behaviour in addition to proactive personality (Parker et al., 2006), and as well as a moderator of proactive personality's effect on job performance (Fuller, Hester, & Cox, 2010). However, studies have not examined whether it is a mediator of proactive personality's influence on performance, which is consistent with the first theme of an interactionist perspective. Thus, again I proffer a contribution by testing a two –themed interactionist account of job autonomy's roles in the proactive personality process. This is addressed in Essay 2 in Chapter 2.

In sum, both the first study and the second study were set to address the largely dismissed role of situational influence on proactive personality processes based on a two-themed interactionsit perspective. The first study constitutes the primary study that tests the interationist explanation of situational factor in the proactive personality process. The second study is initiated to replicate the first study's finding within the situational context of job autonomy. At the end of this dissertation in Chapter 4, I will focus on the key messages that

the two studies generated and discuss their theoretical implications and point out some future

research directions.

# CHAPTER TWO

## ESSAY 1

## RE-CONCEPTUALIZING THE ROLE OF EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK IN THE PROACTIVE PERSONALITY PROCESS: AN INTERACTIONIST PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction

A presumption underlying proactive personality research is that proactive employees will be more effective and successful in the current dynamic workplace (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas et al., 2010). As reviewed in the Introduction section in Chapter 1, proactive personality has previously been linked to various individual and organizational outcome variables (Crant, 1995, 1996; Crant & Bateman, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001; Thompson, 2005). The explanations of such relationships are often based on an interactional perspective (Crant, 1995; Li et al., 2010; Seibert et al., 1999). Specifically, it is suggested that highly proactive employees will do more to select, influence and shape work environments, which make effective performance and successful career more likely.

Several scholars underscored the importance of social environments or interpersonal networks, which are presumably a salient aspect of work contexts (Li et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005). They also examined behavioural tactics that act as mechanisms through which functional social environments are created. For example, they found that proactive employees actively engaged in network building behaviours, gained more political knowledge (Lambert, Eby, & Reeves, 2006; Seibert et al., 2001; Thompson, 2005), and created high-quality social exchange relationships with supervisors (Li et al., 2010).

This stream of research is informative and understandable, as the theoretical underpinning of proactive personality is rooted in the interactionist perspective, "which considers the possibility that individuals create their environments" (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p. 103). However, they overlooked another theme of an interactionist perspective- "individuals vary in their sensitivity to different stimuli and in the nature of their responses to these stimuli" (Pervin, 1968, p. 56). Such oversight, as we show below, can affect the conclusion drawn about the role of situation (here, social relationships) in the proactive personality process.

As mentioned in the introduction section, in the psychology and organizational behaviour literatures, there are two well-defined themes of interactionism (Bolger, & Zuckerman, 1995; Buss, 1977; Emmons, et al., 1986; Schneider, 1983; Terborg, 1981). Mischel and Shoda (1995, p.260) summarized nicely the two themes: "They include selective exposure to (and construction of) particular types of situations as individuals construct their own life space, and also the individual's characteristic ways of reacting to those situations, cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally."

Careful reading of the Bateman and Crant's (1993) original conceptualization of proactive personality reveals that it captures both processes. Specifically, Bateman and Crant (1993, p. 105) states that the prototypic proactive personality is one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces, and who effects environmental change. Presumably, the former reflects the differential reaction aspect: compared with less proactive employees, highly proactive employees are less affected by negative situational influences. On the other hand, the latter -who effects environmental change-reflects situation creation aspect.

However, existing research on proactive personality process inadequately examined the interactionist conceptualization: while the situation creation part has been extensively

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tested, the differential reaction part has been overlooked. As such, one of the key assumption regarding proactive personality, i.e., "relatively unconstrained by situational forces", has not been verified. Indeed, the relationship creation model assumes that proactive personality produces functional exchange relationships, which, once created, will affect proactive and less proactive employees in the same way. Facing poor relationships, the task and citizenship performance of proactive employees will suffer or decrease as that of less proactive employees. This is, however, inconsistent with Bateman & Crant's conceptualization of proactive personality, which suggests that proactive employees, compared with less proactive employees, should be relatively unconstrained by social situations. That is, facing the same poor quality of social relationships, proactive and less proactive employees are expected to react differently such that proactive employees' task and citizenship performance should be relatively unaffected. This suggests the need to test a differential reaction model, as informed by the interactionist perspective, to complement the existing relationship creation model in order to reach a more confident conclusion regarding the role of relationship quality in the proactive personality to task and to citizenship performance relationships. Such testing is important theoretically to evaluate the defining assumption regarding proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993) and the conceptualization of proactive personality as a strong personality (Fuller, et al., 2010; Locke & Latham, 2004).

Moreover, the oversight of differential effects of exchange relationship across proactive versus less proactive employees can lead to inaccurate conclusions regarding the role of exchange relationships in the proactive personality process. Specifically, the theoretical underpinning of social relationships' roles in the proactive personality process was based on the social exchange perspective (Li et al., 2010). Several scholars, however, has pointed out that a reactive social exchange perspective fails to adequately capture the

motivational basis of task performance (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002) and citizenship behavior (Dovidio & Penner, 2001; Penner, Midili, & Kegelmeyer, 1997; Rioux & Penner, 2001). For example, a group of scholars has discussed that helping behavior (a major form of citizenship behavior) can be both proactively initiated and reactively offered (see Penner et al., 1997; Rioux & Penner, 2001; Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2012). Proactive helping is self-initiated, nonobligatory, and to satisfy personal needs and goals. It originates within the self, independent of social context (Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2012). Thus, for proactive employees, their helping should be relatively immune to changes in existing relationship quality: it persists as long as these helping can help them accomplish their personal needs, goals, or value standards. By contrast, reactive helping, which is normative, in response to prior exchanges based on the norm of reciprocity, should vacillate in response to the relationship quality (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Penner et al., 1997). These analyses suggest that relationship quality may more powerfully explain the helping behavior of reactive, less proactive employees than that of highly proactive employees, which this study will be able to address.

This research is thus initiated to advance the interactionist conceptualization of proactive personality by adding the overlooked differential relationship reaction model into the current dominant differential relationship creation model. By doing so, we offer a contribution to the interactionist view of proactive personality with a complete testing of two-themed interactionism (Buss, 1977; Buss, 2009; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). We posit that such an integrative interactionist model allows more nuanced examination of the role of relationships quality in the proactive personality process. Specifically, the proposed integrated model (Figure 2-1), conceptually a moderated mediation model (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007), allows the examination of the role of the mediator (i.e., exchange

relationship quality) at different levels of the independent variable (i.e., proactive personality). This will allow examining the usefulness of social exchange relationships quality in explaining the performance and helping behavior of proactive versus less proactive employees.

Another contribution that we intend to offer is to extend the relational mediators currently studied in the proactive personality literature from LMX to coworker-exchange relationship (CWX) in order to more fully capture relational linkages in the workplace. LMX is one of a whole set of networks of workplace exchange relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Seers, 1989). As the continuing trend of adopting decentralized organizational structure, coworker coordination becomes more and more important. Recent work, for example, has underscored the importance of employee-coworker exchanges (Ozer, 2011; Raabe & Beehr, 2003; Sherony & Green, 2002), recognizing that in many organizational settings employees increasingly need to coordinate with and even depend on coworkers to fulfil their job duties (Colquitt, LePine, Zapata, & Wild, 2011). Thus, from an interactionist perspective, it is imperative to examine whether proactive employees enact functional relationships with their coworkers, in addition to with their supervisors.

To sum up, the current study extends the relational mediator of proactive personality to include both LMX and CWX, and examine both relationship creation and relationship reactivity aspects of an interactionist account of proactive personality's effects on task performance and helping behavior.  By doing so, we offer a contribution along a systematic testing of interactionist perspective (Crant, 1995; Li et al., 2010; Seibert et al., 1999; Thompson, 2005) through adding the overlooked differential reactivity model, provide a nuanced examination of the role of exchange relationships for both proactive and less

proactive employees, and ultimately clarify the usefulness of social exchange perspective in explaining task and citizenship performance for proactive and less proactive employees.

<center>**Hypotheses Development**</center>

**Relationship Creation**

An interactionist perspective accords individuals an agentic role, actively selecting and shaping situations (Bandura, 1997; Schneider, 1983, 1987; Snyder, 1983). As noted, Bateman and Crant proposed the proactive personality construct from an interactionist perspective. It is presumed that "Individuals can intentionally and directly influence their situations, thereby making successful job performance more likely."(Crant, 1995, p. 532; Seibert et al., 1999).

Social relationships with supervisors and coworkers are highly salient aspect of organizational environment (Li et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005). Thus, it is expected that proactive employee will enact their social environments by actively creating and managing social exchange relationship with their supervisors and coworkers. Researchers has recorded extensively that proactive employees actively shape their workplace interpersonal relationships. For example, Kammeyer-Mueller and colleagues found that proactive personality predicted newcomers' group integration through proactive socialization in a set of longitudinal studies ( e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Song, 2012; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Thompson (2005) reported that highly proactive employees actively build network ties with influential organizational members. Lambert et al. (2006) found proactive individuals actively build social networks with various social contacts. Graen (1976) has explicitly suggested that employees can be active rather than be passive in the role-making process. As a result,

proactive employees are likely to develop high-quality workplace relationships which are beneficial to their own success on the job. Li et al. (2010) showed that proactive employees develop high-quality relationships with their immediate supervisors. Following this logic, and given the increasing dependence on coworker coordination in the current workplace, proactive employees presumably will actively manage exchange relationships with coworkers, and will ultimately develop high-quality relationships with them, which will make their work smoother. Taken together, existing evidence strongly supports the first aspects of interactionism perspective- proactive employees will develop high-quality workplace relationships with their supervisors and coworkers. We thus offer the proposition:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Proactive personality will be positively related to the quality of social exchange relationships with supervisors and coworkers.

**Relationship Reactivity**

Though the first theme of an interactionist perspective suggests that proactive employees will more likely have high-quality relationships than less proactive employees through intentional relationship creation processes, an interactionist perspective, however, also suggests that the quality of relationships will depend on a number of other personal and situational factors (Diener, Larsen, & Emmons, 1984; Emmons & Diener, 1986; Pervin, 1987). For example, as reviewed earlier in the Introduction section in Chapter 1, several scholars suggested that proactive employees' behavior can be devalued by and arouse negative feeling from supervisors and coworkers (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001). Empirical evidence also showed that proactive employees can receive negative appraisals from supervisors and be less likely to have career success, particularly when they lack fit with the organization and the job (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005), lack situational judgment capability (Chan, 2006), or have an ego-centric motives as judged by their supervisors (Grant et al.,

2009). By extension, it is reasonable to assume that proactive employees can sometimes have poor-quality relationships with supervisors and coworkers, as well as that less proactive employees can have high-quality relationships with supervisors and coworkers.

Indeed, Li et al. (2010) found a moderate relationship between proactive personality and LMX (i.e., r=.36, p<.01). The above studies suggest other variables (fit, situational judgment effectiveness, and motive) may substantially moderate the effect of proactive personality on relationship quality. The question that intrigues us here, however, is not the potential moderators, but how proactive and less proactive employees will respond when facing the same quality of relationships. For example, will the task and citizenship performance of both the proactive and less proactive employees equally decrease when they all have poor-quality relationships with supervisors and coworkers, as the social exchange perspective suggests?

The second theme of an interactionist perspective can help address this question. It posits that people deals with the same situation in characteristically different ways (Buss, 2009; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Pervin, 1989). This form of interactionist is among the most common, and implicitly assumed by many researchers (Argyle, 1977). In fact, in his systematic review of person-situation interaction, Bowers (1973) spent a substantial portion of the paper to review articles that show the importance of Person $\times$ Situation interaction. However, it is the least studied in the extant proactive personality literature. Nonetheless, Bateman and Crant (1993) originally posited that proactive employees are relatively unconstrained by negative situations, compared with less proactive employees. Next, we will proffer arguments to support this proposition.

**Task performance.** First, proactive employees' task performance may be relatively unaffected by poor quality relationships, while less proactive employees' task performance

may vacillate corresponding to the quality of relationships with supervisors and coworkers. Scholars suggested that proactive employees are goal-directed, plannful, action-oriented, and persistent (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker & Sprigg, 1999). For example, Frese and Fay (2001) suggested that proactive employees tend to envision future opportunities and barriers, monitor their work environment to obtain information, develop plans to deal with difficulties and scare resources, and make alternative arrangements such as back-up plans to stay on track of goals. Grant & Ashford (2008) argued that highly proactive employees tend to care about doing well in a wide range of situations, and are willing to anticipate, plan, and expend additional effort in order to achieve future goals. They are also persistent in overcoming difficulties that arise in the pursuit of goals (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Frese & Fay, 2001). Major et al. (2006, p. 929) found that proactive employees are less vulnerable and more assertive, and concluded that proactive personality captures "the willingness and determination to pursue a course of action." Thus, proactive employees, facing low-quality social exchange relationships, may anticipate, plan and expend additional effort in advance in order to prevent undesired outcomes and promote desired outcomes. Indeed, research shows that highly proactive employees are likely to engage in a variety of functional behaviors such as attending training programs to increase skills (Major et al., 2006; Seibert et al., 2001) and taking charge to improve work procedures and methods (Thompson, 2005). In situations with low-quality relationships, taking charge of the situation, planning in advance rather than passively waiting to be instructed, should have performance benefits (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Thus, it is expected the highly proactive employees' task performance will be less likely to suffer due to simply a lack of high-quality relationships.

Less proactive employees, on the other hand, tend to live in the moment, and reactive and passive. They fail to identify opportunities and barriers, fail to collect information from

the environment and develop plans to deal with future difficulties, and give up easily in face of difficulties (Frese & Fay, 2001; Major, et al., 2006). As a result, facing low-quality relationships, their task performance may suffer from inadequate preparation on their own side and lack of support from their supervisors and coworkers.

*Hypothesis 2:* Proactive personality moderates the effect of social exchange relationship quality on task performance, such that highly proactive employees perform at high level irrespective of social exchange relationship quality, whereas less proactive employees will perform poorly under low-quality social exchange relationships.

**Helping behavior.** Second, proactive employees' helping behavior may be relatively unaffected by the quality of relationships with supervisors and coworkers, while less proactive employees' helping behavior will vacillate corresponding to the level of relationship quality with supervisors and coworkers. Helping is an intentional action that has the outcome of benefiting another person (Dovidio & Penner, 2001). Previous research tends to treat helping behavior as passive, reactive behavior (Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2012). This conceptualization is based on the dominant social exchange theory perspective in the organizational citizenship literature (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960), which posits that helping behavior is normative, contingent upon the quality of exchange relationships. Thus, it is expected that helping behavior increase or decrease with the quality of social exchange relationships (Penner et al., 1997; Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2012). As less proactive employees tend to live in the moment, passive, and reactive to existing relationships, a reactive social exchange process will likely to play for less proactive, reactive employees. As such, their helping should be highly responsive to the quality of existing relationships. Specifically, they will likely reciprocate by displaying more helping behavior in response to

high-quality relationships, and feel no obligation to help when their relationship quality is low.

However, there is a growing consensus that there is no need to confine helping behavior to the domain of reactive behaviors (e.g., Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010; Penner et al., 1997; Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2012). Grant and Ashford (2008, p. 9.) suggests that "proactivity is a process that can be applied to any set of actions …. Proactivity is not a noun, but an adverb: any behavior can be carried out reactively or proactively." Moreover, Frese and Fay (2001, p.167) explicitly discussed a reactive form of helping behavior and a proactive form of helping behavior by evaluating whether helping is self-started or in response to others' request.

The proactive form of helping behavior is usually explained from a functional approach (Penner et al., 1997; Rioux & Penner, 2001; Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2012). A functional approach assume that, "different people can and do engage in the same behaviors for different reasons, in pursuit of different ends, and to serve different psychological functions" (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p.673; also see Pervin, 1968). Thus, the same helping behavior may emanate from following a reactive social exchange norm, as well as equally possible from a wide variety of personal needs and goals. These needs could be, for example, gaining social reputation, increasing one's self-worth and superiority, expressing one's prosocial value, and gaining skills, information and resources (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Penner et al., 1997; Rioux & Penner, 2001). From this perspective, helping can be proactive, planned, non-obligatory, and self-initiated. It comes from one's basic needs, goals, and values, is driven by the within-person motivational forces, and is thus independent of social contexts (Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2012). Thus, as proactive employees who are internally regulated by future long-term goals and plans (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001), their helping

should be relatively immune to existing relationships, as long as these helping can help them accomplish their personal needs, goals, or valued standards.

As a result, highly proactive employees are less likely to vary their proactive helping behavior as a function of relationship quality. Indeed, proactive employees are persistent in making impactful constructive changes and will not stop until they reach closure (Bateman and Crant, 1993). Furthermore, while personal needs and goals may serve the initial motivational basis of helping behavior that is initiated to bring constructive changes to the work situation, the behavior will also foster a role identity 'being proactive and helpful" which will sustain these behaviors (Penner, et al., 1997). Similarly, Frese and Fay (2001) called this role identity "meta-goals": which is to remain active, being active even they do not gain rewards form the activity itself. Parker, et al. (2006) suggested that proactive employees have a flexible role orientation, which reflects broader definition of one's job and "that's my job" attitude. In sum, proactive employees are more likely to sustain helping irrespective of relationship quality, because of certain personal needs, goals, role identity, meta-goal of being proactive, flexile role orientation and/or a combination of those.

> *Hypothesis 3:* Proactive personality moderates the effect of social exchange
> relationship quality on helping behavior, such that highly proactive employees display
> consistent level of helping behavior at relatively higher level irrespective of social
> exchange relationship quality, whereas less proactive employees will display more
> helping behavior under high-quality social exchange relationships, but display less
> helping behavior under low-quality social exchange relationships.

**Moderated Mediation**

Till now, we have detailed the two-themed interactionist perspective regarding the role of relationships quality in the proactive personality process. The two interactionist form altogether creates a complementary, coherent model of human-situation interaction, clearly delineating the role of relationship quality in the proactive personality-outcome relationship. As shown in Figure 2-1, this integrative interactionist model posits that proactive employees more likely to have high-quality exchange relationships, and proactive and less proactive employees react to existing relationship differently, and these two processes in combination explain the task and citizenship performance differences between proactive and less proactive employees.

Conceptually, this integrative model is a form of conditional indirect effect model, or a moderated mediation model (Preacher, et al., 2007). As the exchange relationship quality-to-outcome relationship is contingent on proactive personality, the indirect effect of proactive personality on outcomes through exchange relationship quality is also contingent on proactive personality. This model thus has the advantage of allowing a more nuanced examination of relational mechanism in the proactive personality process at different levels of proactive personality.

Through the discussions of the above 3 hypotheses, a point now can be made that social exchange process can well explain the performance level and helping behavior for less proactive employees, but will not adequately explain that for the proactive employees, which requires a functional approach. Thus, we offer the below hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4:* Proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on task performance through social exchange relationships, such that the

indirect effect will be stronger for less proactive employees than highly proactive employees.

*Hypothesis 5:* Proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on helping behavior through social exchange relationships, such that the indirect effect will be stronger for less proactive employees than highly proactive employees.

## Method

**Participants and Procedures**

Participants in our study were employees of 15 companies located in a major city in mid-western China. These companies operated in various industries, including manufacturing, information technology, telecommunications, and financial services. After speaking with their human resource managers about our aim, content, and procedure, with their permission, we selected one or two HR department employees from each company to help us administer the survey. Respondents were told that a research university, independent of the company, would administer the survey, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. They were assured that their responses would be confidential.

We administered separate questionnaires to supervisors and subordinates. Eighty supervisors who agreed to participate were asked to nominate three of their immediate subordinates and rate helping behaviors and job performance of these subordinates. We distributed subordinate questionnaires to the 240 subordinates who were listed by their immediate supervisors and asked them questions that indicated their proactive personality, the quality of exchange relationships with their leader and coworkers, and demographic information.

Completed surveys were directly returned to us. Seventy-four supervisor and 220 subordinate questionnaires were returned, for response rates of 92.5% and 91.7%, respectively. After we deleted records with unmatched supervisor-subordinate pairs, a total of 204 supervisor-subordinate dyads (204 subordinates and 70 supervisors) remained, and this constituted the final sample.

Of the 204 respondents, 58.6% were male, averaged 29.83-years-old ($SD = 6.62$) and averaged organizational tenure of 2.93 years ($SD = 3.10$). They represented diverse occupational backgrounds, including sales, production, accounting, engineering, consumer services, human resources management, and research and development.

**Measures**

All measures used in the current study were originally written in English, so we performed a standard translation and back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). The Chinese version was subsequently pilot-tested on 15 employees from the participating organizations; these employees were not included in the final sample. The feedback prompted us to slightly rephrase several items to ensure clarity and appropriateness. Unless otherwise indicated, response options ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Supervisors reported their immediate subordinates' helping behavior and job performance, and subordinates reported their proactive personality, leader-member exchange (LMX), coworker exchange (CWX), and demographic data.

**Proactive personality.** We used a 10-item scale (Seibert, et al., 1999) to measure subordinates' proactive personality. Based on Bateman and Crant's (1993) 17-item proactive personality scale (PPS), Seibert and his colleagues created this shortened scale by selecting the 10 items with the highest average factor loadings across the three studies reported by

Bateman and Crant (1993). Sample items are, "wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change"; "if I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen"; and "if I see something I don't like, I fix it." The scale's reliability was .86, which was the same as that reported by Seibert et al. (1999).

**Exchange relationships with supervisor and coworkers.** Workplace exchange relationships occur mainly with supervisors and coworkers. LMX reflects the quality of exchange relationships between subordinates and their immediate supervisor, whereas CWX portrays exchange relationships between subordinates and their coworkers who report to the same supervisor.

We measured subordinates' leader-member exchange relationship with the LMX-7 scale recommended by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). This seven-item scale captures the three important dimensions of LMX: trust, respect, and obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and has been widely used in previous research (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Responses were rated on five-point Likert-type scales. Sample items are, "I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/ her decision if he/she were not present to do so"; and "how would you characterize your working relationship with your leader?" The scale's reliability was .86.

We used Sherony and Green's (2002) six-item scale to measure the quality of subordinates' CWX. Those authors conceptualized CWX as a construct sharing similar dimensions with LMX: respect, trust, and mutual obligation. Thus, they developed the six-item measure of CWX by adapting the LMX-7 scale (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Sherony and Green eliminated one item that seemed inappropriate for coworker relations — "how well does your leader recognize your potential?" and reworded the remaining six items to fit respondents' assessments of their relationship with coworkers; we followed these authors as

well. Sample items are, "how well do your coworkers understand your job problems and needs?" and "how would you characterize your working relationship with your coworkers?" Responses were rated on five-point Likert-type scales. The scale's reliability was .83.

**Helping behavior.** We measured subordinates' helping behaviors in the workplace with a five-item scale developed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990). Several studies have shown this scale to have adequate scale reliability (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Sample items are, "this person helps others who have work-related problems" and "this person helps others who have heavy loads." The reliability of this scale was .91.

**Job performance.** We measured subordinates' job performance with the four positively worded items from Williams and Anderson (1991) scale. Van Dyne and LePine (1998) have used these four items and have shown that they have good reliability. Sample items include, "this person adequately completes responsibilities," and "this person meets performance expectations." The reliability of this scale was .92.

**Control variables.** We controlled for three demographic variables — age, gender, and tenure — that could potentially confound the results (e.g., Grant, et al., 2009). Age and organizational tenure were measured in years. We coded gender 1 for male and 0 for female.

## Analyses

We performed a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to assess the discriminant validity of measures of our study variables before hypotheses testing. Given our relatively small sample size, we followed previous studies in constructing three to four item parcels as composite indicators for each construct in all confirmatory factor analyses (Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007; Landis, Beal, & Tesluk, 2000; Li et al., 2010).

We compared five theoretically plausible competing models (see Table 2-1). The results indicated that Model 5 — four-factor model with LMX and CWX subsumed under a higher-order factor of social exchange relationships quality, was the simplest model with the best fit ($\chi^2$(82, N=204) = 185.12; $\chi^2/df$ = 2.26; CFI = .94; SRMR = .05). The last column of Table 1 shows chi square difference tests between all alternative models with Model 1 baseline. Only the chi square difference test between Model 1 and the chosen Model 5 is nonsignicant ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 3.8; $\Delta$df = 2; $p$ = .20, $ns$); nevertheless, Model 5 is a simpler model that fits the data as well as Model 1, so we chose Model 5 based on the principle of parsimony.

Because LMX and CWX were subsumed under a single higher-order factor and were highly correlated ($r$ = .65, $p$ <.001. see Table 2), we calculated a single score of workplace social exchange relationships by averaging LMX and CWX. This is consistent with our primary focus on social exchange relationships in general. Nonetheless, for hypotheses associated with social exchange relationships, we also conducted separate tests for LMX and CWX. The same significance patterns emerged. For the simplicity of presenting the results, we focus on social-exchange relationships as a higher-order construct.

Because of the hierarchical data structure (i.e., employees nested within supervisors), we tested all hypotheses using two-level path analyses to avoid the potential problems associatated with the nonindependence of observations (Bliese & Hanges, 2004). All the non-categorical variables were grand-mean centered in the path analytic tests (Hox, 2010).

**Results**

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and zero-order correlations among study variables.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that proactive personality will be positively associated with exchange relationship quality with supervisors and coworkers. Consistent with the prediction, we found that proactive personality was positively and significantly associated with exchange relationship quality with supervisors and coworkers ($\gamma = 0.35$, p < .01), as summarized in Table 2-3. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Note that the coefficient was moderate, which is similar to that found in the Li, et al.'s (2010) study.

Hypothesis 2 suggests that proactive personality moderates the effect of social exchange relationship quality on task performance. We found such a significant moderating effect ($\gamma = -0.32$, p < .01), as shown in the second column in Table 3 and shown in Figure 2-2. To understand the interaction pattern, we graphed the interaction in Figure 2-4. Following Aiken, West, and Reno (1991), we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, respectively. Simple slope tests showed that exchange relationship quality was unrelated to task performance among highly proactive employees ($\gamma = 0.03$, *p* = .87, *ns*); a significant and positive relationship occurred between social exchange relationship quality and job performance among less proactive employees ($\gamma = 0.63$, *p* < .01). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 suggests that proactive personality moderates the effect of social exchange relationship quality on helping behavior. We found such a significant moderating effect ($\gamma = -0.24$, p < .01), as shown in the third column in Table 3 and shown in Figure 2-3. To understand the interaction pattern, we graphed the interaction in Figure 2-5. Again, we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, respectively. Simple slope tests showed that exchange relationship quality was unrelated to helping behavior among highly proactive employees ($\gamma = 0.03$, *p* = .84, *ns*); a significantly positive relationship occurred between proactive personality and helping

behavior among employees who were less proactive ($\gamma = 0.52$, $p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 suggests that proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on task performance through social exchange relationships. Results testing this hypothesis were summarized in the path analytic model in Figure 2-2. The model fit indices were $\chi^2$ (19, N=203) = 1.24; CFI = 1.00; SRMR = .01. Again, we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, and calculated conditional indirect effect at high versus low level of proactive personality. Table 2-4 summarized these results. Results showed that when proactive personality was low, there was a significant indirect effect of proactive personality on task performance through exchange relationship quality (0.25, p < .01); when proactive personality was high, however, there was no significant indirect effect through exchange relationship quality (0.03, p > .05). The differences between indirect effects at high versus low level of proactive personality was significant (-0.22, p < .05). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5 suggests that proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on helping behaviour through social exchange relationships. Results testing this hypothesis were summarized in the path analytic model in Figure 2-3. The model fit indices were $\chi^2$ (19, N=203) = 1.51; CFI = .99; SRMR = .01. Again, we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, and calculated conditional indirect effect at high versus low level of proactive personality. Table 2-4 summarized these results. Results showed that when proactive personality was low, there was a significant indirect effect of proactive personality on helping behavior through exchange relationship quality (0.25, p < .01); when proactive personality was high, however, there was no significant indirect effect through exchange relationship quality (0.03, p > .05).

The differences between indirect effects at high versus low level of proactive personality was significant (-0.18, p < .05). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

## Discussion

This study intends to advance the interactionist perspective on proactive personality by testing a two-themed conceptualization of interaction: relationship creation and relationship reactivity. Results support such an interactionist conceptualization of proactive personality's effects on task performance and helping behavior. Specifically, we found that proactive personality was positively associated with exchange relationship quality with supervisors and coworkers. Moreover, proactive personality interacted with exchange relationship quality such that proactive employees performed consistently at high level regardless of relationship quality, less proactive employees' task performance and helping behavior depended on exchange relationship quality. These results altogether means that proactive personality's effects on task performance and helping behavior through relationship quality is contingent on the level of proactive personality. We discuss the meaning and significance of these findings to proactive personality research below.

### Theoretical Implications

First, we found that proactive employees were more likely to have high-quality exchange relationship with supervisors and coworkers. This finding replicates Li, et al.'s (2010) finding, and extends it from focusing solely on leader-member exchange to including coworker-exchange. Conceptually, this finding supports Bateman and Crant's (1993) assumption that proactive employees will create functional work environments. It is also consistent with the first theme of an interactionist perspective that people are not merely products of the environment, but also active producers of environment (Bandura, 1997).

Second, we found proactive personality interacted with exchange relationship quality in affecting task performance and helping behavior, such that proactive employees' task performance and helping behavior were relatively unaffected by poor exchange relationship quality, whereas less proactive employees' task performance and helping behavior were strongly and negatively affected. This finding is novel and important. It is the first empirical finding supporting one of the core assumptions of proactive personality-prototypic proactivity is one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Indeed, less proactive employees are reactive, passive, and live in the moment, and thus have performance and helping behavior in response to the quality of exchange relationships that they currently have; proactive employees have long-term goals, plans and persistent in their actions which are directed towards their goals (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001), and thus their performance and helping behavior are relatively unaffected by the immediate quality of exchange relationships. Such a finding is consistent with the second theme of an interactionist perspective that people differ in their sensitivity to situational stimuli and react to them in characteristically different ways (Bowers, 1973; Buss, 2009; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Pervin, 1987).

More importantly, we integrated the two themes of an interactionist perspective, which allowed us to examine more clearly the role of exchange relationship quality in the proactive personality process. Specifically, we found that the indirect effect of proactive personality on task performance and helping behavior through exchange relationship quality was contingent on the level of proactive personality. For highly proactive employees, the indirect effect was nonsignificant, whereas for less proactive employees, the indirect effect was significant. This finding is theoretically important. Most of the proactive personality research focused on the first theme of interactionism, while overlooked the second theme of

interactionism. The inadequate conceptualization of an interactionist perspective can leads to the incomplete conclusion. For example, Li et al. (2010) concluded that the exchange relationship between an employee and her or his supervisor played a central role in the process by which proactive employees exhibited citizenship behaviors.

We indeed found proactive employees developed high-quality relationships, but they obtained higher task performance and helping behavior ratings regardless the level of exchange relationship quality. A direct implication of this finding suggests that exchange relationship quality is not central to the process by which proactive employees achieved higher task and citizenship performance. Instead, we found that the exchange relationship quality is more central to less proactive employees than for more proactive employees. Conceptually, our results lead to the conclusion that there is some restriction in the usefulness of social exchange theory to explain the task performance and helping behavior for highly proactive employees. This restriction does not appear to operate for less proactive, reactive employees. Taken together, it suggests that proactive employees seem highly internally regulated, whereas less proactive employees tend to be sensitive to situation and reactive to them accordingly.

**Practical Implications**

Our results also have important practical implications. First, the positive effects of proactive personality on helping behavior and job performance support the conventional recommendation to recruit and select organizational members who show proactive personalities.

Second, our results show that less proactive employees have higher performance and displayed more helping behavior only when they have high-quality social exchange relationships. This has important practical implications suggesting that managers should help

less-proactive employees develop high-quality workplace relationships, which will enhance their helping behavior and job performance. Third, our results demonstrate that proactive people tend to develop high-quality relationships, and engage in helping behavior and perform rather reliably even when they lack high-quality social exchange relationships. Thus, managers might consider placing proactive employees into work groups that have weak workplace social exchange relationships, because proactive employees may help "break the ice" by initiating more helping behavior and may shape future exchanges towards the better.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Despite our contributions and the strength of our multisource design, our study has several limitations. First, the nonexperimental nature of the study design prevents us from drawing strong causal inferences. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal or controlled experimental studies in both field and laboratory to replicate and extend our findings. Nonetheless, with respect to the direction of the causal effects, since proactive personality is a stable individual difference trait, it is unlikely that helping behavior and job performance influenced proactive personality in a short study time.

Another limitation is associated with common method variance. However, there are reasons to believe that common-method variance is not a serious problem in the current study. First, the effects of proactive personality on helping and job performance cannot be explained by common-method bias. This is because, for these relationships, employees and their supervisors separately rated the independent and dependent variables (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Second, common-method bias does not compellingly explain our key research findings regarding social exchange relationships' moderating effects on proactive personality–job performance relationships and on proactive personality–helping behavior relationships, because common-method bias would attenuate the interaction effects

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(Evans, 1985). Nonetheless, the common-method bias may be relevant to the helping–job performance relationship, as supervisors rated both variables. Therefore, future research might consider including coworker-rated helping behavior.

Another area for future research is to understand the moderators that moderate the relationship between proactive personality and exchange relationship quality. In this study, we have mentioned that although proactive employees actively manage and create high-quality exchange relationships with supervisors and coworkers, proactive employees may also fail to do so. This is consistent with the general idea that proactivity may not always welcomed by managers and coworkers (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Thus, future research may use the social intelligence approach to person-situation interaction (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1985) as a guiding framework to explore moderators. Specifically, it is reasonable to suggest that employees' political skills may potentially moderate the relationship between proactive personality and exchange relationships quality at the workplace. Political skill has been defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004, p. 311). Consistent with the social intelligence approach, it is reasonable to suggest that proactive employees with political skills may more likely develop high-quality workplace relationships because they can understand the needs of others, and can self-initiate actions to build relationships.

**Conclusion**

An interactionist perspective has two well-defined themes: situation creation and differential reactivity. The original conceptualization of proactive personality is based on the two themes. However, the current proactive personality literature overlooked the second

theme. Such oversight leads to inaccurate conclusion regarding the role of situation in the proactive personality process. Integrating the two themes, the present study clarifies the role of exchange relationship quality in the association between proactive personality and task and citizenship performance. Conceptually, results indicate that social exchange theory better explain the task and citizenship performance of less proactive employees, but not of proactive employees.

Table 2- 1. *Comparison of Measurement Models of Study Variables*

| Model | Description | $\chi^2$ | *df* | $\chi^2/df$ | CFI | SRMR | $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1 | 5-factor[a] | 181.32 | 80 | 2.27 | .94 | .05 | baseline |
| Model 2 | 1-factor | 1108.03 | 90 | 12.31 | .44 | .21 | 926.71(10)** |
| Model 3 | 2-factor[b] | 663.76 | 89 | 7.46 | .68 | .14 | 482.44(9)** |
| Model 4 | 4-factor[c] | 207.80 | 84 | 2.47 | .93 | .05 | 26.48(4)** |
| Model 5 | 4-factor with higher-order factor[d] | 185.12 | 82 | 2.26 | .94 | .05 | 3.8(2) |

*Note*. CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. ** *p* < .01.

[a] 5-factor: proactive personality, LMX, CWX, helping behavior and job performance.

[b] 2-factor: employee-rated versus supervisor-rated constructs.

[c] 4-facror: LMX and CWX combined into one factor, proactive personality, helping behavior and job performance

[d] 4-factor with higher-order factor: LMX and CWX subsumed under a higher-order factor of workplace social exchange relationships, proactive personality, helping behavior and job performance.

Table 2-2. *Descriptive and Zero-Order Correlations of Study Variables*

| Variables | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1  Age | 29.83 | 6.62 | --- | | | | | | | | |
| 2  Gender | 0.59 | 0.50 | .07 | --- | | | | | | | |
| 3  Tenure | 2.93 | 3.10 | .66** | -.04 | --- | | | | | | |
| 4  Proactive personality | 5.15 | 0.86 | -.10 | .01 | -.04 | *.86* | | | | | |
| 5  LMX | 3.33 | 0.73 | .07 | .09 | .05 | .39** | *.86* | | | | |
| 6  CWX | 3.37 | 0.68 | .15* | .08 | .10 | .44** | .65** | *.83* | | | |
| 7  Social exchange relationships | 3.35 | 0.64 | .12 | .09 | .08 | .45** | .93** | .89** | *.90* | | |
| 8  Helping behavior | 4.63 | 1.21 | -.11 | -.14* | -.01 | .16* | .11 | .10 | .11 | *.91* | |
| 9  Job performance | 5.07 | 1.24 | .005 | -.10 | .10 | .26** | .23** | .16* | .22** | .62** | *.92* |

*Note.* N of subordinates = 203; N of supervisors = 70. Reliability coefficients are in the diagonal. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2-3. *Summary of Multilevel Path Analyses Results for Task Performance and Helping Behavior*

| Variables | Social Exchange Relationship | Task Performance | Helping behavior |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 3.28** | 5.29** | 4.88** |
| **Main effects** | | | |
| Proactive personality | 0.35** | 0.08 | 0.05 |
| Social Exchange Relationship | | 0.39** | 0.23 |
| **Interactive effects** | | | |
| Proactive personality × Social Exchange Relationship | | -0.32** | -0.24* |

*Note.* N of subordinates = 203; N of supervisors = 70. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Coefficients for demographic control variables were omitted for clarity.

Table 2- 4. *Analysis of Simple Effects for the Moderated Mediation Model for Helping Behavior and Task Performance*

| Model | Moderator level | Indirect effects | 95% Confidence interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower bound | Higher bound |
| DV: Task performance | Proactive personality: Low | 0.25** | 0.07 | 0.43 |
| | Proactive personality: High | 0.03 | -0.08 | 0.13 |
| | Differences (High versus low) | -0.22* | -0.41 | -0.04 |
| DV: Helping behavior | Proactive personality: Low | 0.21* | 0.05 | 0.37 |
| | Proactive personality: High | 0.03 | -0.08 | 0.13 |
| | Differences (High versus low) | -0.18* | -0.35 | -0.01 |

*Note.* $* p < .05$; $** p < .01$. DV: dependent variable

*Figure 2- 1.* Conceptual Model

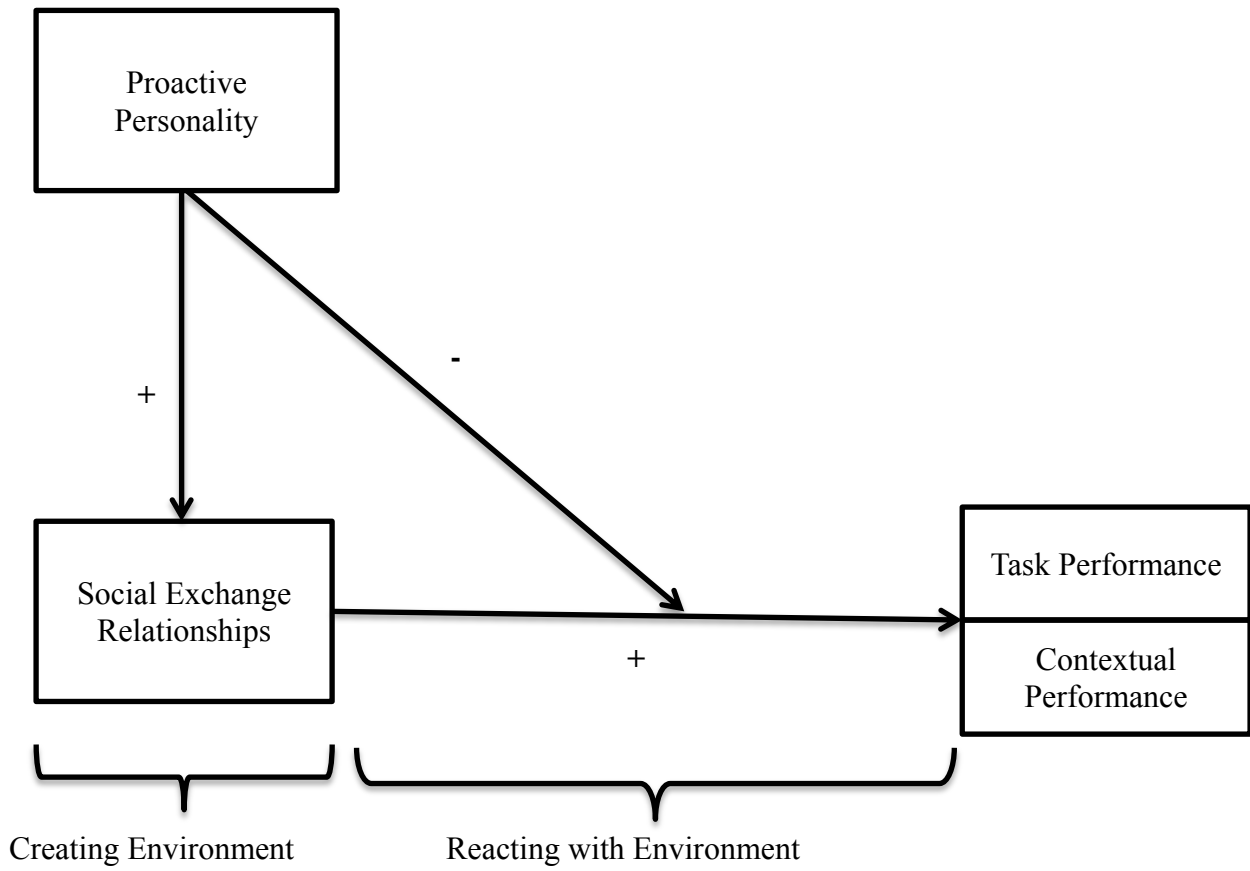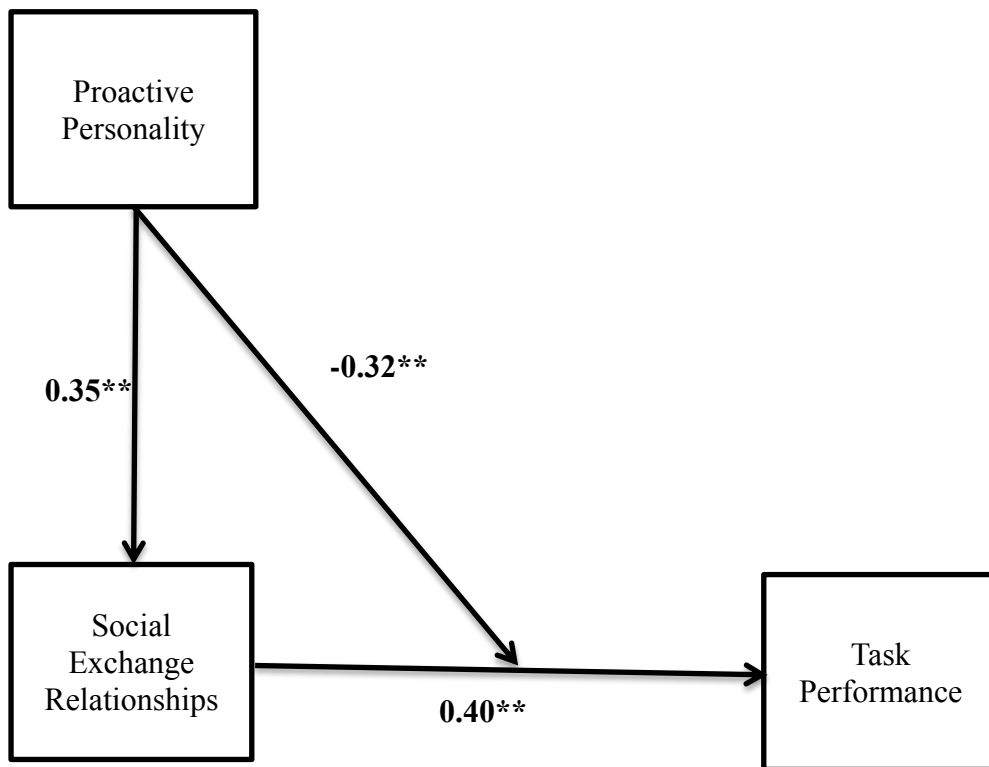*Figure 2- 2.* Summary of Multilevel Path Analyses Results for Task Performance

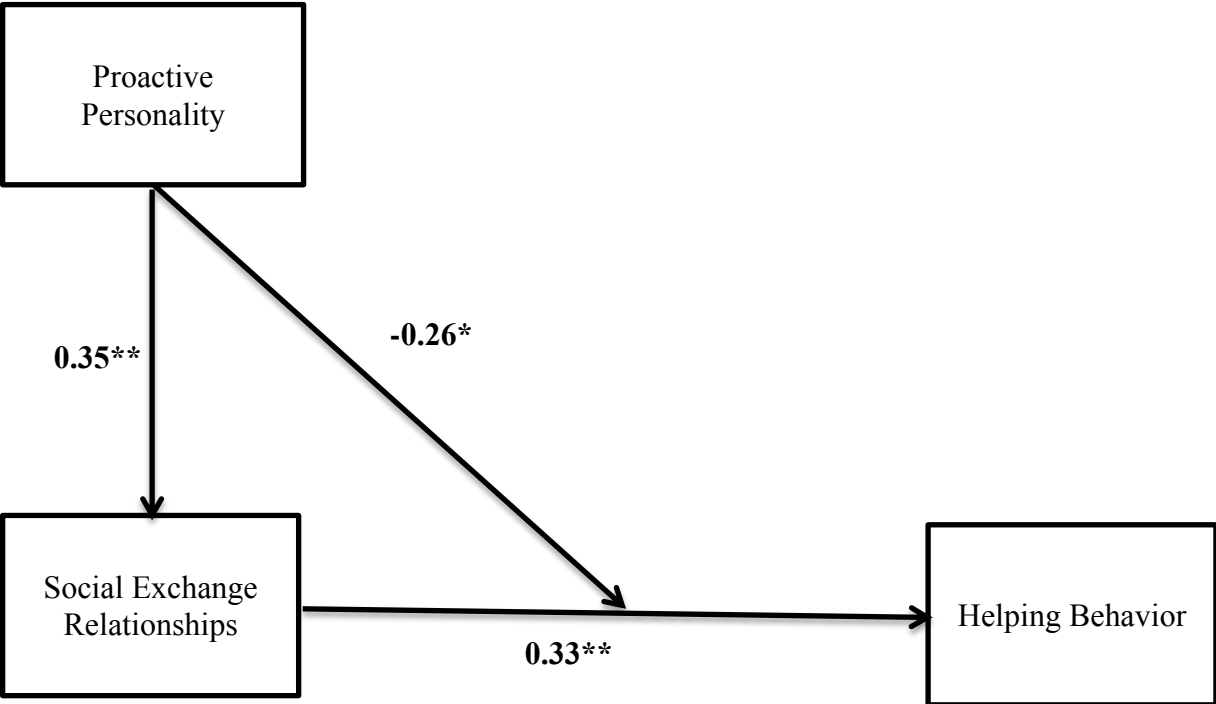*Figure 2- 3.* Summary of Multilevel Path Analyses Results for Helping Behavior

*Figure 2- 4.* Proactive personality as a moderator of the relationship between social exchange relationships and task performance
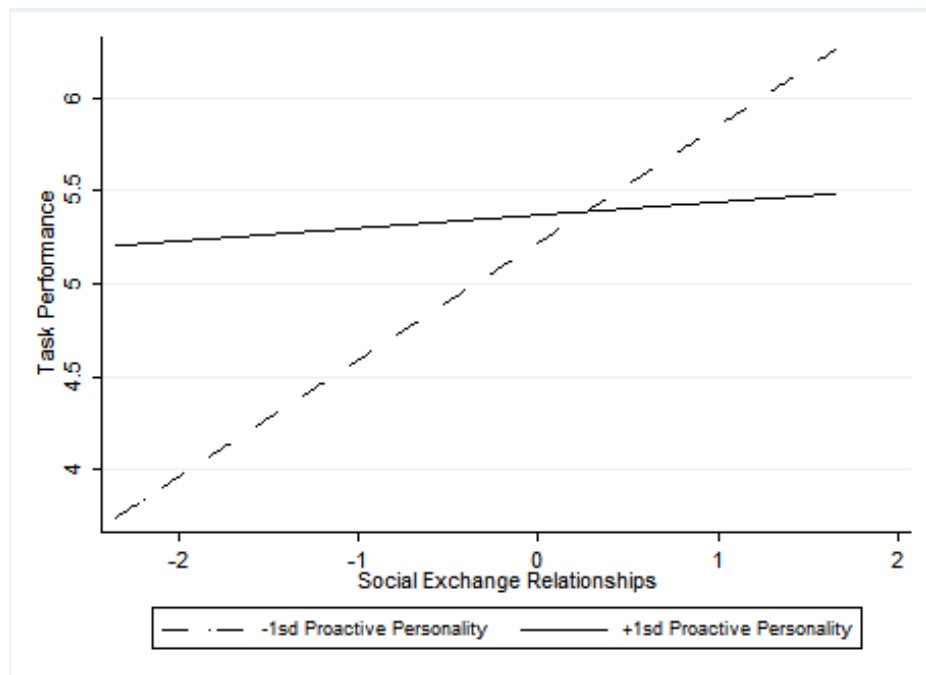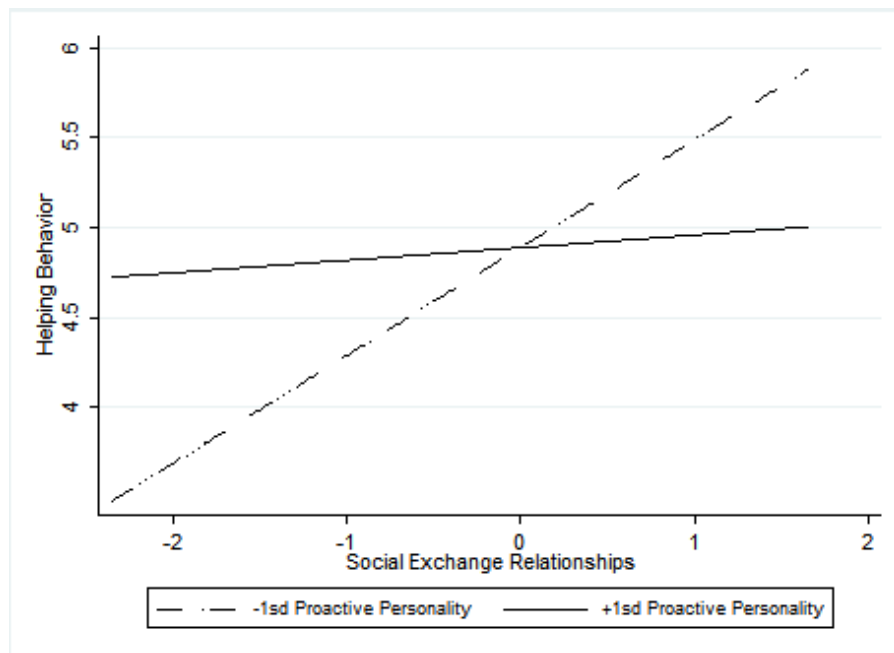
*Figure 2- 5*. Proactive personality as a moderator of the relationship between social exchange relationships and helping behavior

**CHAPTER THREE**

**ESSAY 2**

**PROACTIVE PERSONALITY'S EFFECTS ON LEARNING BEHAVIOR AND JOB**

**PERFORMANCE: THE ROLES OF JOB AUTONOMY**

**Introduction**

The second study is to replicate the dual roles of situational factors in the proactive personality process that have been found in the first study. To recap for the purpose of this chapter, Bateman and Crant (1993) conceptualized the proactive personality construct based on a two-themed interactionist perspective (Buss, 2009; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). An interactionist perspective examines the interaction between person, situation and behavior. It posits that (1) there is a reciprocal causation between person, situation, and behavior, and that (2) behavior/performance is an outcome of Person X Situation interaction (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Emmons, et al., 1986; Pervin, 1989; Schneider, 1983; Terborg, 1981). Meta-analytic reviews indicate that proactive personality is related to a variety of desirable individual and organizational outcomes (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas, et al., 2010). These studies also speak that highly proactive employees will do more to select, influence and shape work environments, which make effective performance and successful career more likely (Crant, 1996; Li, et al., 2010; Seibert et al., 1999; Thompson, 2005). We also have better understanding of the behavioral tactics that act as mechanisms through which functional environments are created, among them, for example, social networking, taking charge, and individual innovation (Thompson, 2005; Seibert, et al., 2001).

Despite promising progress in the proactive personality literature along the interactionist perspective, several questions are open to further investigation. First, prior

proactive personality empirical research predominantly focused on the first form of interactionism-the impact of proactive personality on situation through active selection and creation ( Li, et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005), while it largely dismissed the second form of Person X Situation interaction- situational influences on proactive personality's effects on behavior and performance. Indeed, several scholars have called for situational moderators of proactive personality's effects (Crant, 1995; Major et al., 2006; Seibert, et al., 1999; Thompson, 2005). Clearly, a better understanding of situational conditions under which proactive personality affects job performance has implications for managers who wish to facilitate the behavioural expression of this trait in their employees (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005; Grant & Ashford, 2008).

Moreover, although a broad range of proactive personality outcomes have been examined, some significant change-oriented work behaviours have received insufficient attention, among them, learning new skills to cope with future demands (Bindl & Parker, 2011). Learning behavior has been defined as a form of inward-looking change-oriented proactive behavior (Bindl & Parker, 2011). Katz (1964, p. 133) noted the importance of employee learning behavior in that "the organization which has men spending their own time to master knowledge and skills for more responsible jobs in the system has an additional resource for effective functioning". The importance of learning for organizational effectiveness is especially highlighted under the current era with high uncertainty, speedy change, and greater need for innovation (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Again, the insufficient attention to learning behavior in the existing proactive personality literature might be due to the fact that prior research's primary focus on outward-looking behaviors directed toward directly changing the situation.

Consistent with the theoretical orientation of Study 1, the present study intends to extend the interactionist account of proactive personality's effects by addressing the above important open questions via testing the roles of situational factor in linking proactive personality to job performance and learning behavior (Figure 3-1). In study 2, we focus on a non-interpersonal, task factor---job autonomy as the situational factor of concern. Several studies adopting Mischel's (1977) situational strength argument have used job autonomy as an indicator of situational constraint. In this article, we take a similar approach, namely, we want to examine whether the effects of proactive personality on work outcomes depend on the level of autonomy that individuals' job affords. However, we differ from past research in two ways. First, we rely on a relatively new personality concept-proactive personality. In a recent review in the proactivity literature (Bindl & Parker, 2011), job autonomy has been conceptualized to interact with proactive personality in generating proactive work behavior and work performance. Second, we differed from past research in that we not only evaluate the moderating role of job autonomy but also its mediating role based on a two-themed interactionist perspective (Fuller et al., 2010).

**Model Description and Contribution**

Based on the two-themed interactionist perspective (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Buss, 1977, 2009; Emmons, et al., 1986; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Schneider, 1983; Terborg, 1981), the proposed model (Figure 3-1) that we tested contains two processes: situation (i.e., job autonomy) creation and differential reaction to the situational factor. Specifically, the proposed model posits relationships among proactive personality, job autonomy, learning behaviour and job performance. By definition, proactive employees tend to engage in constructive, change-oriented behaviour and create functional situations that will facilitate effective performance (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). We thus expected that

proactive employees would be more likely to have more job autonomy, which in turn

generate more learning behavior that directed toward future problems and higher job

performance; we also expect that proactive personality interacts with job autonomy in

affecting learning behavior and job performance, such that compared with less proactive

employees, proactive employees' learning behavior and job performance should be relatively

unconstrained by low job autonomy. This latter prediction is consistent with Bateman and

Crant's (1993, p.105) original conceptualization that proactive personality is "relatively

unconstrained by situational forces". As a whole, we were examining a moderated mediation

model (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Preacher et al., 2007) in which the effect of proactive

personality on learning behavior and job performance through job autonomy depends on the

level of proactive personality (Figure 3-1).

Thus, in study 2 of the present dissertation, the two-themed interactionist

conceptualization of proactive personality, "The prototypic proactive personality, as we

conceive it, is one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces, and who effects

environmental change." (Bateman & Crant, 1993, p.105), will be examined with job

autonomy as the situational factor.  The proposed model (Figure 3-1) is the same with study

1's conceptual model with the exception that social exchange relationships are replaced with

job autonomy. I thus attempt to replicate the first study's finding with a new situational factor

of job autonomy. Because of the theoretical similarity, I will not elaborate again the

arguments in addition to the basic theoretical frameworks that I draw upon. Thus, five

hypotheses are proposed in correspondence to the first study of the dissertation.

The first hypothesis corresponds to the first theme of the interactionist perspective

that people partly enact their environment (Bowers, 1973; Buss, 2009). More specific to the

proactive personality literature, proactive employees would more likely to take initiatives to

create functional situations that will facilitate their effective functioning in the workplace (Bateman & Crant, 1993). For example, Parker and Collins (2010) showed that proactive employees engaged in a set of proactive work behaviours directed to make constructive changes in their jobs and work environment such as taking charge and voice. In the first study, I have shown that proactive employees tend to have high-quality relationships. Thus, I propose that,

> *Hypothesis 1:* Proactive personality will be positively related to job autonomy.

The next two hypotheses were based on the second theme of interactionist perspective that people react to situation differently or behaviour and performance outcomes are the joint influence of situational factor and personality. More specific to the proactive personality literature, Bateman and Crant (1993) conceptualized that proactive employees are relatively unconstrained by situational factors. For example, in the first study, I have shown that proactive employees' task and contextual performance were relatively unconstrained by the low-quality social exchange relationships, while less proactive employees' performance was negatively affected. Thus, I propose that,

> *Hypothesis 2:* Proactive personality moderates the effect of job autonomy on job
> performance, such that highly proactive employees perform at high level irrespective
> of job autonomy, whereas less proactive employees will perform poorly under low job
> autonomy.

> *Hypothesis 3:* Proactive personality moderates the effect of job autonomy on learning
> behavior, such that highly proactive employees' learning behavior is at relatively
> higher level irrespective of job autonomy, whereas less proactive employees will

display more learning behavior under high job autonomy, but display less learning behavior under low job autonomy.

The last two hypotheses suggested that both situation creation (Hypothesis 1) and differential reactivity to situational influences (Hypothesis 2 and 3) could play a role in explaining the association between proactive personality and employee outcomes. Combining the two processes lead to a moderated mediation model. Thus, I hypothesize that,

*Hypothesis 4:* Proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on job performance through job autonomy, such that the indirect effect will be stronger for less proactive employees than highly proactive employees.

*Hypothesis 5:* Proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on learning behavior through job autonomy, such that the indirect effect will be stronger for less proactive employees than highly proactive employees.

This study extends previous research in several ways. First and foremost, the study extends an interactionist account of proactive personality's effects by examining the largely dismissed joint influence of both situational strength as indicated by job autonomy and proactive personality on learning behavior and job performance. Addressing the prior oversight advances our understanding along an interactionist perspective on proactive personality's effects, and also informs managers how to better structure work arrangements to bring out the best of employees with certain traits. Second, examining employees' learning for future work problems also extends prior proactive personality research which tended to focus on outward-looking proactive behavior and paid to insufficient attention to inward-looking changing behavior. It adds learning to cope with future work problems as a new outcome variable of proactive personality. For practical concerns, the present model also

informs the dispositional and situational predictors of learning behavior, which should be of interests for managers. Lastly, moderated mediation analyses of proactive personality process advance our knowledge of the person-situation interaction mechanisms that underlie employees' job performance and learning behavior in greater detail, as moderated mediation analyses explain both how and when a given effect occurs (Preacher et al., 2007).

## Method

### Participants and Procedures

Participants in our study were employees of 12 companies operating in various industries including banking, education, mass media, real estate, and pharmaceuticals industry. The companies were located in a capital city of a northeastern province in China. Key leaders with administrative responsibilities (e.g., Directors of Human Resources and Chief Executive Officers) were asked for assistance in identifying and recruiting participants within their organizations.

After speaking with the key leaders about the aim, procedure, and content of the surveys, we finalized with them a list of participating employees and the employees' immediate supervisors who will provide ratings of the employees' learning behavior and job performance.  Then, a local contact, who has a master degree in applied psychology, took the role of liaising with each of the participating employees and their immediate supervisors and administering the surveys. All participants were told that a research university, independent of the company, would administer the survey, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. They were assured that their responses would be confidential.

Completed surveys were directly returned to our local contact. In total, seventy-five supervisor and 225 subordinate questionnaires were returned, for response rates of 94 % and 90%, respectively. On average, each supervisor had several subordinates participating in the survey.

Of the 225 employee respondents, 41.7% were male, averaged 32.23-years-old ($SD = 8.59$) and averaged organizational tenure of 6.15 years ($SD = 7.61$). They represented diverse occupational backgrounds, including sales, accounting, administration, human resources management, and research and development.

**Measures**

All measures used in the current study were originally written in English, so we performed a standard translation and back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). Employees reported their proactive personality, goal setting, and job autonomy, demographic information, and a set of other measures which were not related to the current study. Employees' immediate supervisors rated the employees' learning behavior and job performance, and also reported a set of other measures which were not related to the current study. Aside from job performance measure, a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) was used for all other study measures.

**Proactive personality.** We used a 10-item scale (Seibert, et al., 1999) to measure employees' proactive personality. Based on Bateman and Crant's (1993) 17-item proactive personality scale (PPS), Seibert and his colleagues created this shortened scale by selecting the 10 items with the highest average factor loadings across the three studies reported by Bateman and Crant (1993). Sample items are, "wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change"; "if I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from

making it happen"; and "if I see something I don't like, I fix it." The scale's reliability was .85.

**Job autonomy.** We measured employees' job autonomy with Spreitzer's (1995) three-item scale. Sample items include "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job"; and "I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work". Spreitzer (1995) adapted the three items from Hackman and Oldham's (1980) scale. The three-item scale has been widely used (Fuller et al., 2010; Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger, & Hemingway, 2005). The scale's reliability was .88.

**Learning behavior.** Employees' learning behavior was assessed by the employees' immediate supervisors, with a three-item scale developed by Daniels, Boocock, Glover, Hartly, and Holland (2009). Sample items include "This employee often learns things that help his/her work performance"; and "This employee often learns things that help him/her solve work problems more quickly." The scale's reliability was .93.

**Job performance.** Employees' job performance was assessed by the employees' immediate supervisors, with a four-item scale developed by Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell (1993). Sample items with response scale include: "Rate the overall level of performance that you observe for this subordinate" (1 = *unacceptable* to 7 = *outstanding*); "This subordinate is superior (so far) to other subordinates that I've supervised before (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*); and "What is your personal view of this subordinate in terms of his or her overall effectiveness?"(1 = *very ineffectiveness* to 7 = *very effective*). The scale's reliability was .93.

**Control variables.** We controlled for demographic variables — age, gender, and tenure — that could potentially confound the results in the data analyses (e.g., Grant, et al.,

2009). Age and organizational tenure were measured in years. We coded gender 0 for male and 1 for female.

**Analyses**

We performed a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to assess the discriminant validity of measures of our study variables before hypotheses testing. Given our relatively small sample size, we followed previous studies in constructing three to four item parcels as composite indicators for each construct in all confirmatory factor analyses (Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007; Landis, et al., 2000; Li et al., 2010).

We compared three theoretically plausible competing models (see Table 3-1). The results indicated that Model 1 — four factor model, was the model with the best fit ($\chi^2$ (59, N=225) = 96.15; $\chi^2/df$ = 1.63; CFI = .99; SRMR = .03). The last column of Table 1 shows the chi square difference tests between all alternative models with Model 1 baseline. As the chi square difference test between Model 1 and each of the alternative models shows, Model 1 fit the data best, indicating the discriminant validity of our study measures.

Because of the hierarchical data structure (i.e., employees nested within supervisors), we tested all hypotheses using two-level path analyses to avoid the potential problems associatated with the nonindependence of observations (Bliese & Hanges, 2004). All the non-categorical variables were grand-mean centered in the path analytic tests (Hox, 2010).

## Results

Table 3-2 presents the descriptive statistics for the key study variables and correlations among them.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that proactive personality will be positively associated with job autonomy. Consistent with the prediction, we found that proactive personality was positively and significantly associated with job autonomy ($\gamma = 0.70$, p < .01), as summarized in Table 3-3. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 suggests that proactive personality moderates the effect of job autonomy on job performance. We found a significant moderating effect ($\gamma = 21$, p < .01). However, the sign of the moderating effect is just opposite to what was predicted. The results are shown in the second column in Table 3-3 and shown in Figure 3-2. To understand the interaction pattern, we graphed the interaction in Figure 3-4. Following Aiken, West, and Reno (1991), we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, respectively. Simple slope tests showed that job autonomy was marginally related to job performance among highly proactive employees ($\gamma = 0.25$, *p* = .08, *ns*); a significant and negative relationship occurred between job autonomy and job performance among less proactive employees ($\gamma = -0.17$, *p* < .05). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 suggests that proactive personality moderates the effect of job autonomy on learning behavior. We found a significant moderating effect ($\gamma = 0.23$, p < .01), as shown in the third column in Table 3-3 and shown in Figure 3-3. However, the sign of the moderating effect was just opposite to what was predicted. To understand the interaction pattern, we graphed the interaction in Figure 3-5. Again, we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, respectively. Simple slope tests showed that job autonomy was significantly and positively related to learning behavior among highly proactive employees ($\gamma = 0.26$, *p* < .05); the relationship between job autonomy and learning behavior was not significant among employees who were less proactive ($\gamma = -10$, *p* = .13). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 suggests that proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on job performance through job autonomy. Results testing this hypothesis were summarized in the path analytic model in Figure 3-2. The model fit indices were $\chi^2$ (16, N=225) = 6.67; CFI = 0.94; SRMR = .03. Again, we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, and calculated conditional indirect effect at high versus low level of proactive personality. Table 3-4 summarized these results. Results showed that when proactive personality was low, there was a significant and negative indirect effect of proactive personality on job performance through job autonomy (-0.12, p < .05); when proactive personality was high, however, there was no significant indirect effect through job autonomy (0.18, p = .10). The difference between indirect effects at high versus low level of proactive personality was significant (0.29, p < .05). Thus, the indirect effect of proactive personality on job performance through job autonomy was moderated by the level of proactive personality: the indirect effect was negative and significant for less proactive employees, but was nonsignficant for proactive employees. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 suggests that proactive personality moderates the indirect effect of proactive personality on learning behavior through job autonomy. Results testing this hypothesis were summarized in the path analytic model in Figure 3-3. The model fit indices were $\chi^2$ (16, N=225) = 6.85; CFI = .93; SRMR = .03. Again, we chose high and low moderator levels as one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator, and calculated conditional indirect effect at high versus low level of proactive personality. Table 3-4 summarized these results. Results showed that when proactive personality was low, there was no significant indirect effect of proactive personality on learning behavior through job autonomy (-0.07, p = .12); when proactive personality was high, however, there was a

significant and positive indirect effect through job autonomy (0.18, $p < .05$). The difference between indirect effects at high versus low level of proactive personality was significant (0.25, $p < .01$). Thus, the indirect effect of proactive personality on learning behavior through job autonomy was moderated by the level of proactive personality: the indirect effect was non significant for less proactive employees, but was positive and signficant for proactive employees. This was contrary to what was expected. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

## Discussion

Turbulent economies and the changing and dynamic nature of work in this era calls attention to employee proactivity. Proactive personality, which is an individual difference in people's inclinations to take initiatives and have an impact, has been shown to relate to a range of individual success and organizational effectiveness criterion. The present study aimed to enhance our understanding of the mediating and moderating mechanisms linking proactive personality to learning behavior and job performance. Drawing on the two-themed Person X Situation interaction formulation, we examined a moderated mediation model. Specifically, our model explained the linkage between proactive personality and learning behavior and job performance by considering the role of job autonomy. This study is a direct extension of study 1, continuing to test the original conceptualization of proactive personality, as "one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces, and who effects environmental change.", and attempting to replicate the first study. The difference between this study and the second study is that we used different situational factors, i.e., social exchange relationships versus job autonomy. What was discovered through this study, however, was only partly consistent with the prediction of Bateman and Crant's original conceptualization. This was different from study 1 of the current dissertation, which found full support for their original conceptualization. I will first discuss this specific study's findings below, and leave

more integrated discussion of inconsistent findings in the two studies in the general discussion section.

**Theoretical Implications**

First, we found that proactive employees were more likely to have job autonomy. Conceptually, this finding is consistent with Bateman and Crant's (1993) assumption that proactive employees will create functional work environments. It extends Parker et al. (2006) in which proactive personality and job autonomy was examined as independent sources of proactive work behavior. It is also consistent with the first theme of an interactionist perspective that people partly enact their environment (Bandura, 1997, Buss, 2009).

Second, we found proactive personality interacted with job autonomy in affecting job performance and learning behavior. Specifically, we found job autonomy positively moderates the proactive personality- learning behavior/job performance relationships. The interaction patterns, however, were inconsistent with Bateman and Crant's (1993) assumption that proactive personality is "relatively unconstrained by situational forces". Specifically, we found that for proactive employees, there is a positive relationship between job autonomy and learning behavior and job performance, while for less proactive employees, there is a negative relationship between job autonomy and outcomes. Such findings actually reflect a "person-situation fit or congruence" story (Pervin, 1968; 1982; 1987 1989). Specifically, these findings suggest that there seems a greater fit or congruence between proactive employees and jobs with high job autonomy and a greater fit between less proactive employees and jobs with low job autonomy. This explanation and the findings are also consistent with job characteristics theory, which posits jobs with higher autonomy only fits

certain population of employees, among them, those with higher growth need strength (Kulik, Oldham, & Hackman, 1987). By definition, proactive employees have strong growth need strength, while less proactive employees have weaker growth need strength (Bateman & Grant, 1993; Major et al, 2006). Our results thus contribute to addressing the questions about environmental boundary conditions of proactive personality's effects (Crant, 1995; Major et al., 2006; Seibert, et al., 1999; Thompson, 2005). It is also consistent with the conceptual model regarding the potential interaction between proactive personality and job autonomy laid down by Bindl and Paker (2011).

One implication of these findings is that low job autonomy can constrain the expression of learning behavior and achievement of high performance of proactive employees. Take these findings a step further, future research might be useful to explore the wellbeing outcomes of those proactive employees who have a strong motivation but have low job autonomy and how they cope with such a situation. Future research might consider whether they engage in such proactive work behavior such as job change negotiation (Ashford & Black, 1996), job crafting (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010), i-deal (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008), and political behavior (Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005).

**Practical Implications**

There are a number of practical implications from the study findings. Our findings first suggest that organizations can select employees based on proactive personality. Findings also further suggest that personnel should be placed into congruent jobs to maximize their values: proactive employees should be better placed into jobs with higher autonomy while less proactive, reactive employees should be better placed into well-structured jobs. These

results speak to the importance of personality in personnel selection and the significance of placing employees to job that they fit.

Our study findings also suggest different staffing strategies or policies that organization may use. Specifically, we found that proactive employees are more likely to engage in learning and produce higher performance when they have job autonomy, while less proactive employees perform and learn at a reasonable level when job is structured. Given that several previous studies showed that proactive employees are expensive to hire as they tend to have a large social capital and prior career successes (Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert, et al, 2001; see Fuller et al., 2009 for meta-analyses), it is reasonable to suggest that organizations can have at least two staffing policies: the first is to design the job well and choose to recruit less proactive but also less expensive personnel; the other is to recruit more proactive but more expensive personnel and give them the freedom to conduct their jobs. This is of course partly depends on the industry of the organizations, which set some limits on the types of jobs available. But our findings do indicate that it is bad idea to select proactive employees and then put them into jobs with little autonomy. Indeed, it would be ironic if companies select proactive employees because they have a strong motivation and then place them into a job with little autonomy, which thwarts the generation and expression of their motivation.

**Limitation and Future Research**

Despite our contributions and the strength of our multisource design, our study has several limitations. First, the nonexperimental nature of the study design prevents us from drawing strong causal inferences. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal or controlled experimental studies in both field and laboratory to replicate and extend our

findings. Nonetheless, with respect to the direction of the causal effects, since proactive personality is a stable individual difference trait, it is unlikely that learning behavior and job performance influenced proactive personality.

Another limitation is associated with common method variance. However, there are reasons to believe that common-method variance is not a serious problem in the current study. First, the effects of proactive personality on learning behavior and job performance cannot be explained by common-method bias. This is because, for these relationships, employees and their supervisors separately rated the independent and dependent variables (Podsakoff, et al., 2003). Second, common-method bias does not compellingly explain our key research findings regarding job autonomy's moderating effects on proactive personality–learning behavior/job performance relationships, because common-method bias would attenuate the interaction effects (Evans, 1985). Nonetheless, future research might consider use lagged designs to further attenuate the possibility of common-method bias.

**Conclusion**

Results show that it is the confluence of individual differences in proactivity and job characteristics of autonomy that drives individuals to engage in proactive learning behavior and produce job performance. It informs that managers who wish to promote employees' self-directed learning behavior and effective performance should pay attention to personnel selection and design jobs congruent with the traits of personnel selected.

Table 3- 1. *Comparison of Measurement Models of Study Variables*

| Model | Description | $\chi^2$ | df | $\chi^2/df$ | CFI | SRMR | $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1 | 4-factor[a] | 96.15 | 59 | 1.63 | .99 | .03 | baseline |
| Model 2 | 2-factor[b] | 1220.23 | 65 | 18.77 | .55 | .21 | 1124.08 (6)** |
| Model 3 | 1-factor[c] | 669.07 | 64 | 10.45 | .76 | .08 | 572.92 (5)** |

*Note.* CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. ** $p < .01$.

[a] 4-factor: proactive personality, job autonomy, learning behavior and job performance.

[b] 2-factor:  employee-rated versus supervisor-rated constructs.

[c] 1-factor:  A single factor.

Table 3- 2. *Descriptive and Zero-Order Correlations of Study Variables*

| | Variables | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Age | 32.23 | 8.59 | --- | | | | | | |
| 2 | Gender | 0.58 | 0.49 | 0.14* | --- | | | | | |
| 3 | Tenure | 2.61 | 0.67 | 0.01 | 0.10 | --- | | | | |
| 4 | Proactive personality | 5.50 | 0.78 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.05 | *0.85* | | | |
| 6 | Job autonomy | 5.35 | 1.10 | 0.13 | 0.16* | 0.11 | 0.51** | *0.88* | | |
| 7 | Learning behavior | 5.37 | 1.15 | -0.08 | 0.00 | 0.10 | 0.16* | 0.11 | *0.93* | |
| 8 | Job performance | 5.39 | 1.06 | 0.03 | -0.06 | 0.01 | 0.10 | 0.05 | 0.73** | *0.93* |

*Note.* N of subordinates = 225; N of supervisors = 75. Reliability coefficients are in the diagonal. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3- 3. *Summary of Multilevel Path Analyses Results for Job Performance and Learning Behavior*

| Variables | Job Autonomy | Job Performance | Learning behavior |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 5.21** | 5.25** | 5.23** |
| **Main effects** | | | |
| Proactive personality | 0.70** | 0.06 | 0.08 |
| Job Autonomy | | 0.04 | 0.08 |
| **Interactive effects** | | | |
| Proactive personality × Job Autonomy | | 0.21** | 0.23** |

*Note.* N of subordinates = 225; N of supervisors = 75. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Coefficients for demographic control variables were omitted for clarity.

Table 3- 4. *Analysis of Simple Effects for the Moderated Mediation Model for Job Performance and Learning Behavior*

| Model | Moderator level | Indirect effects | 95% Confidence interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower bound | Higher bound |
| DV: Job performance | Proactive personality: Low | -0.12* | -0.22 | -0.04 |
| | Proactive personality: High | 0.18 | -0.03 | 0.35 |
| | Differences (High versus low) | 0.29* | 0.06 | 0.49 |
| DV: Learning behavior | Proactive personality: Low | -0.07 | -0.17 | 0.01 |
| | Proactive personality: High | 0.18* | 0.02 | 0.31 |
| | Differences (High versus low) | 0.25** | 0.09 | 0.39 |

*Note.* * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. DV: dependent variable
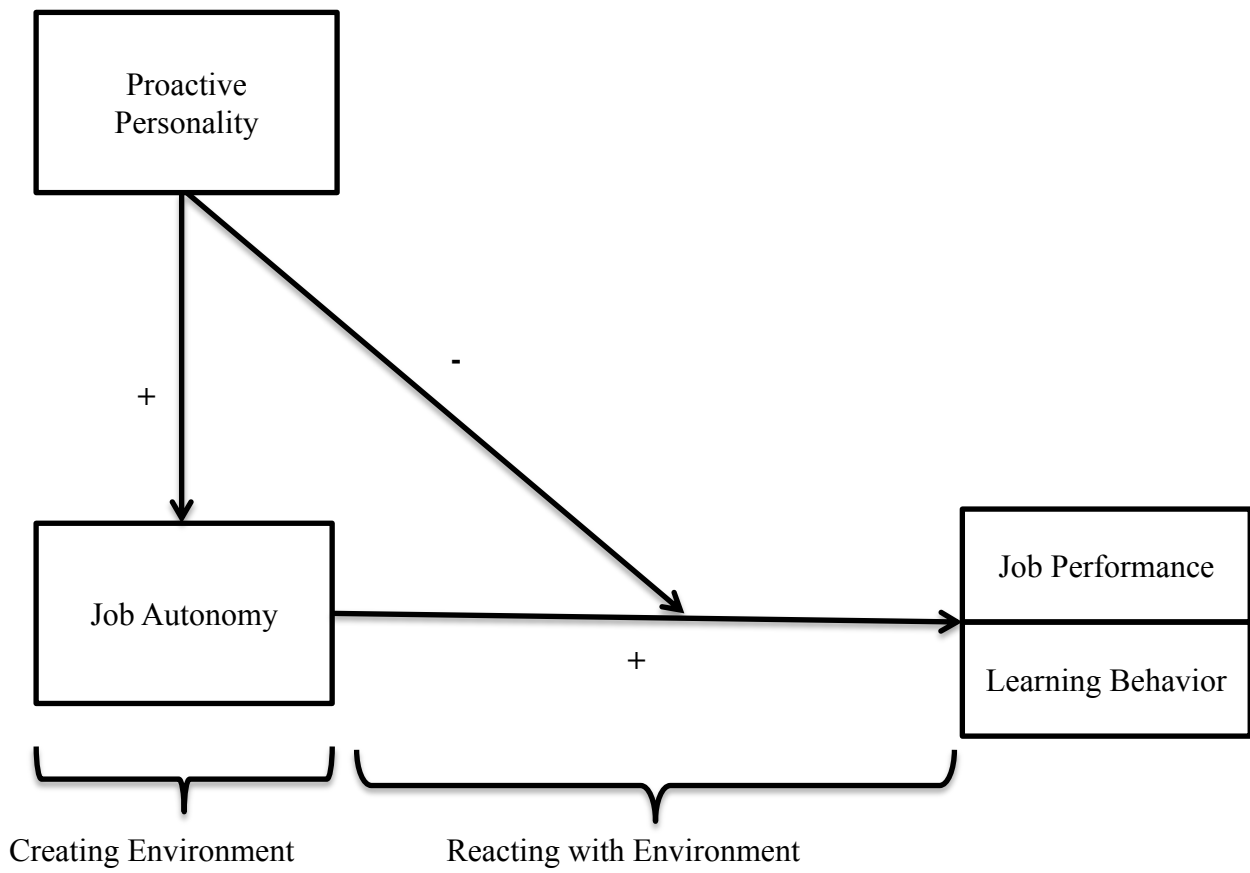
*Figure 3- 1.* Conceptual Model

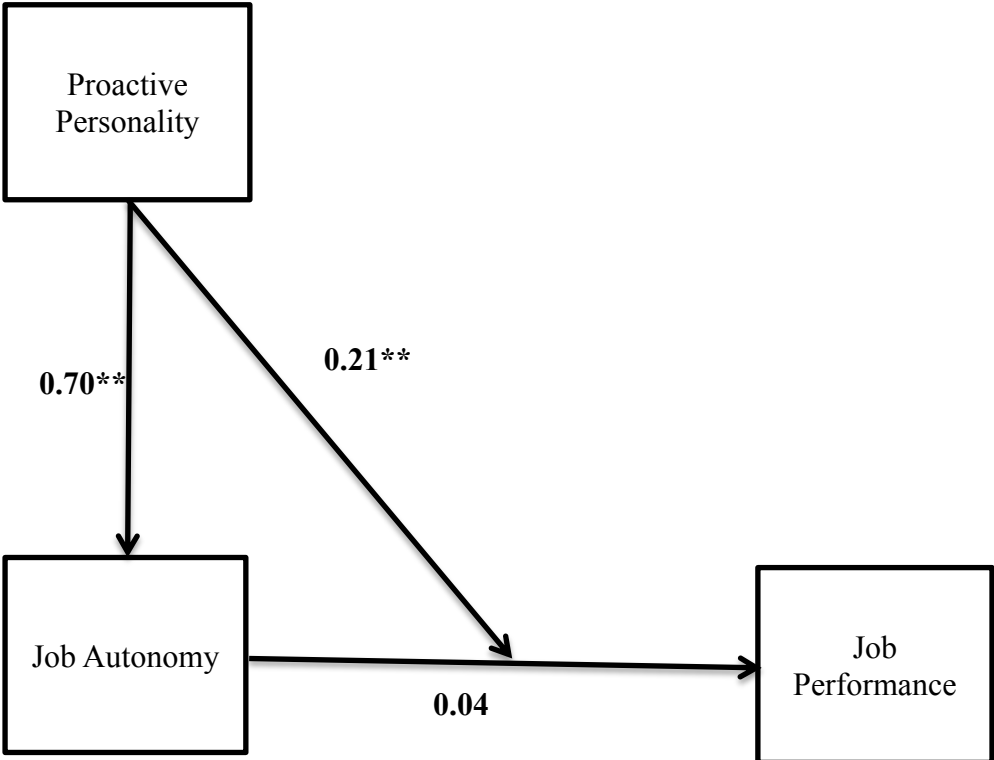Figure 3- 2. Summary of Multilevel Path Analyses Results for Task Performance

*Figure 3- 3.* Summary of Multilevel Path Analyses Results for Helping Behavior
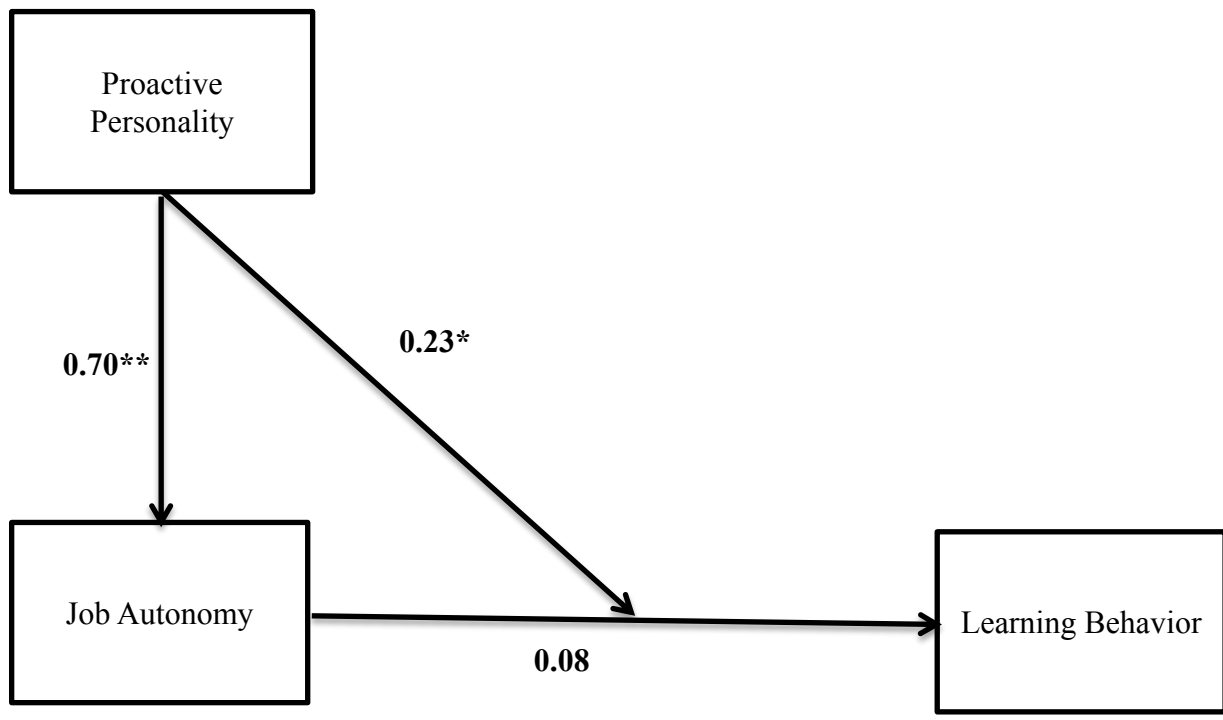
*Figure 3- 4.* Proactive personality as a moderator of the relationship between job autonomy and job performance
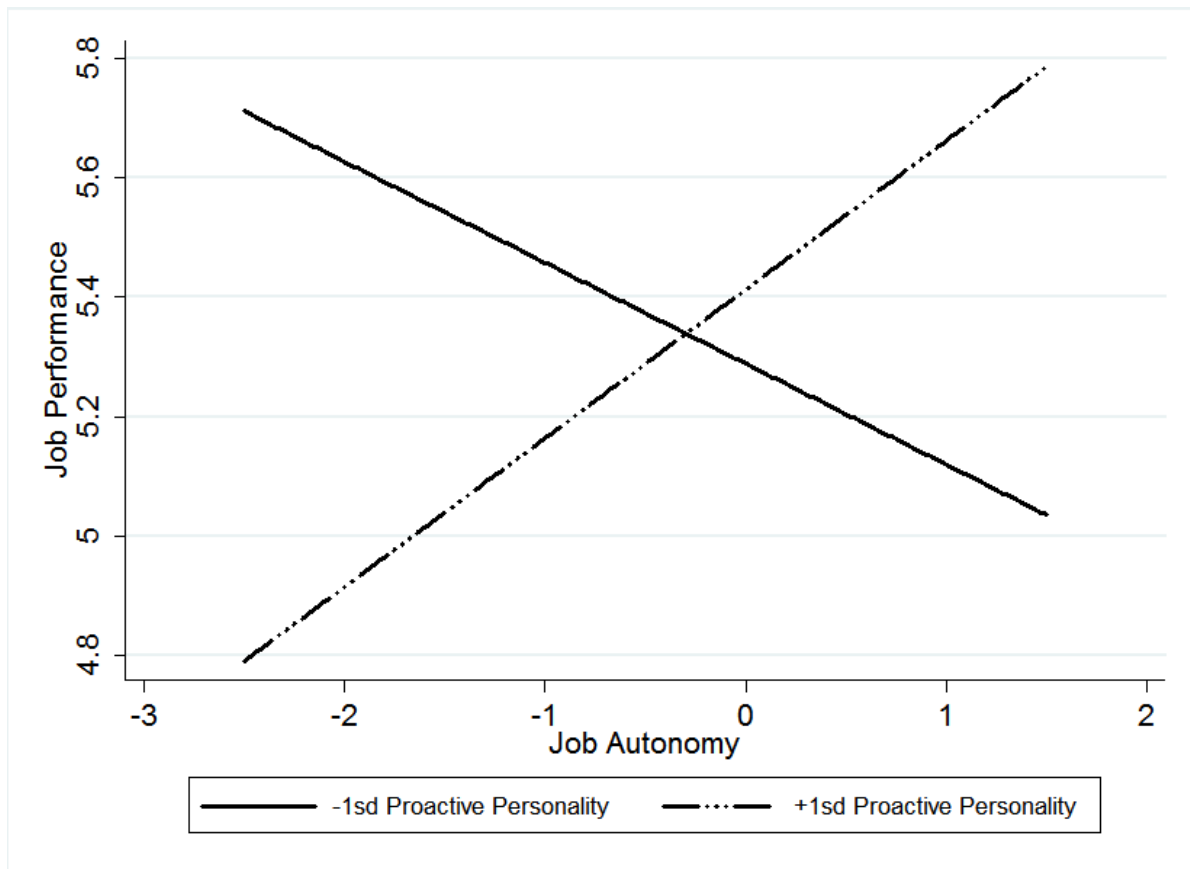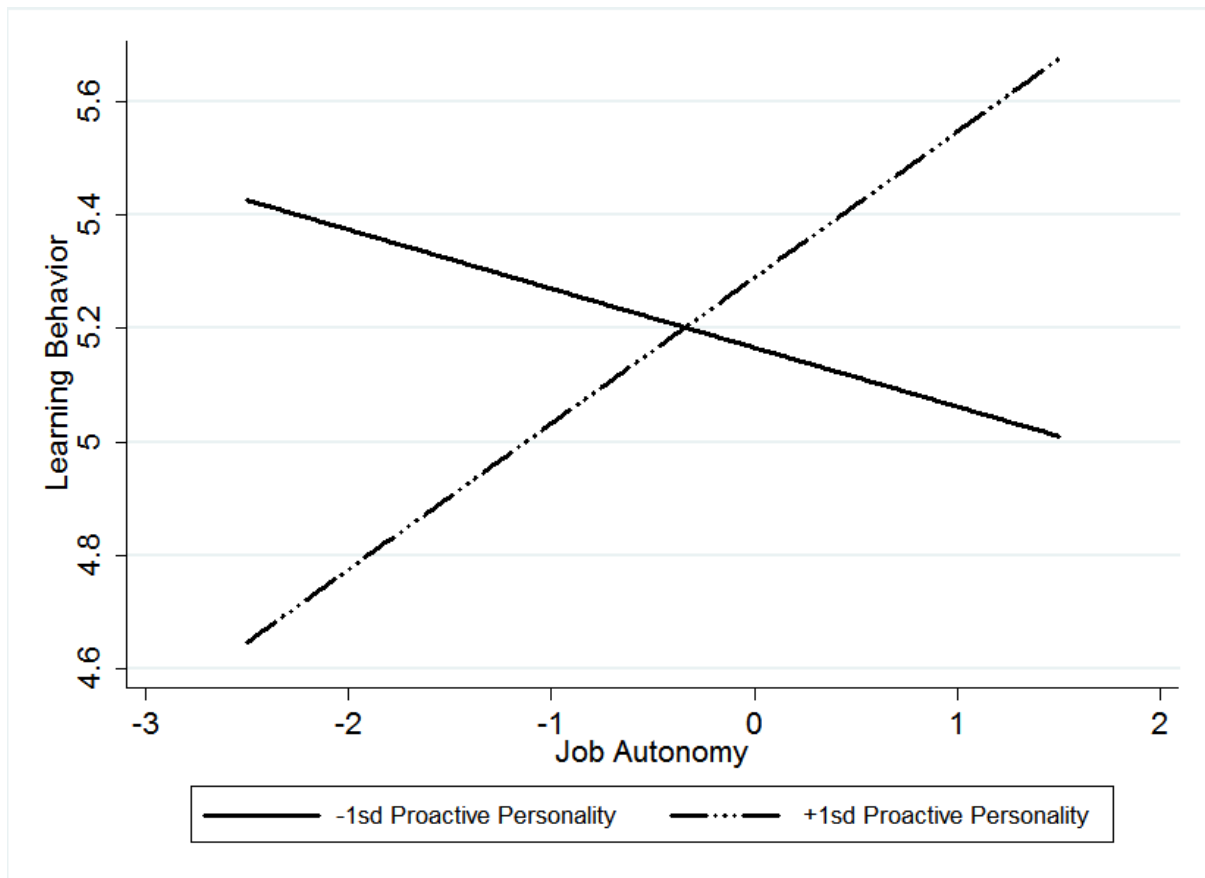
*Figure 3- 5.* Proactive personality as a moderator of the relationship between job autonomy and learning behavior

# CHAPTER FOUR

# OVERALL DISUCSSION

The catalyst that gave rise to the present dissertation is the under-researched situational influence on the proactive personality process in the empirical proactive personality research from the interactionist perspective. Based on existing organizational behaviour research, the dissertation chose two situational influences-workplace exchange relationships with supervisors and coworkers (LMX and CWX), and job characteristics of autonomy. Based on the two-themed interactionist perspective and Bateman and Crant's (1993) original conceptualization of proactive personality, the dissertation examined the dual roles of these two situational factors in the proactive personality processes.

Respective implications of each of the two studies have been discussed in the respective chapters. Overall, across the two studies, it was consistently found that strong proactive personality was associated with positive situations in terms of high-quality social exchange relationships (Study 1) and high job autonomy (Study 2), supporting the first theme of an interactionist perspective. Across the studies, it was also consistently found that proactive personality and situational factors interact with each other in affecting employee performance and behaviour. However, the exact patterns of the interaction differ. In study 1, I found that the relationship between social exchange relationship and employee outcome is stronger for less proactive employees than more proactive employees, attesting to the assumption that more proactive employees will be less bounded by situational influences (Bateman & Crant, 1993). However, study 2 failed to replicate this finding with job autonomy as the situational factor. Specifically, it was found that proactive employees perform at higher level only when they have higher job autonomy. I have discussed these

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findings in terms of person-situation fit (Pervin, 1987) and job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) in the discussion section of the second study.

Nonetheless, the two studies have some implications on the controversies on strong personality and strong situation, as discussed by Fuller, et al. (2010) in the proactive personality literature. Strong versus weak situation was systematically discussed by Mischel (1977).  Strong situations introduce conformity, whereas weak situations allow individuality and idiosyncrasy.  Thus, it is expected the personality does not play a role in strong situation as it will in weak situations.  Strong personality is first proposed by Locke and Latham (2004), who speculated the possibility of existence of strong personality which is relatively unconstrained by situational forces. Thus, it is expected that people with strong personality are relatively consistent regardless of the situational constraints.  According to the defining characteristics of prototypic proactive personality, prototypic proactive employees are relatively unconstrained by situational forces (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Thus, proactive personality should be a strong personality (Fuller, et al., 2010).

This strong personality assumption was supported in Study 1 of the current dissertation. Specifically, we found that proactive employees had higher task performance and showed relatively consistent level of helping behaviour regardless the level of exchange relationships quality.  In the second study, we failed to find the support for strong personality argument. Instead, we found a person-situation fit or congruence explanation can better explain the interaction between proactive personality and job autonomy. These findings suggest that abstracting situational factors into strong versus weak situation may be problematic, which stripped off the uniqueness of the situational variables of concern. Nonetheless, it may be noted that the lack of autonomy in one's job by design is stronger than the low-quality exchange relationships in terms of the constraints placed upon employees.

Thus, these findings will suggest that when situational strength becomes strong enough, the performance of proactive employees will be negatively affected. One implication of these findings thus suggests that proactive employees need to be given more freedom to perform effectively. However, the two studies only focused on the behavioral outcomes. It is important for future research to examine the interaction between proactive personality and situational factors on attitudinal and motivational processes. As such, we will be better informed of whether proactive employees are unconstrained or not in terms of attitudes and motivation. It is plausible that people with strong personality such as proactive personality may be more capable to maintain motivation than maintaining behaviour/performance when constraining situation exists.

## Future Research

An overall implication of the two studies is that an interactionist perspective is a useful overarching framework to study the role of situations and personality in generating workplace behaviours and outcomes. As interactionist emphasizes the constant transaction between person, situation, and behavior, it might be useful for future research to explore more fully the various transactions. For example, to complete the full-cycle interactionism research, future research might consider bottom-up processes towards the identity formation of being proactive. While prior proactive research focused on the effects of proactive personality on situation creation through behavioural mediators, the present dissertation extends them by studying the role of situational influence on proactive personality's effects. It might be useful for future studies to explore how behaviour alters the identity of employees or their "meta-goals" of being proactive as Frese and Fay (2001) called.

Another area for future research is how to define environment in studies based on an interactionist framework. This includes what the most significant environmental conditions

that intervene in the proactive personality process are in the organizational setting, how they work, and whether perceived versus objective measures of the environments should be used. In the present dissertation, consistent with most existing studies, we use self-report method to get environmental indicators of relationship and job autonomy (Fuller et al., 2010; Li, et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2006). It is unclear whether the same findings will emerge when objective measures are used. In fact, in the early interactionist studies, there have been some controversies regarding whether subjective or objective environment variables should be used (Pervin, 1968). A major proposition is that individuals' perceived environment will be more important if the ultimate interest is their behaviour (cf., Pervin, 1968). Scholars also suggested that although the distinctions between objective and subjective situation are important, they are not so often at odds with each other as presumed especially in normal population (Furr & Funder, 2004). Otherwise, these people are subjective to psychological problems of delusion (Funder, 2008). Indeed, severe discrepancies between subjective and objective environments as in delusions are important clinical questions (Murray, 1938; Pervin, 1968). However, given that some studies show only a moderate correlation between supervisor and subordinate perceptions of LMX (Gerstner & Day, 1997), it is thus very useful for future research to include an objective measure of relationship quality.

Lastly, future research might consider using longitudinal designs. Longitudinal and diary designs have many advantages such as stronger inferences about causality than cross-sectional designs, and better capturing the dynamics of transactions in situation (Pitariu & Ployhart, 2010). However, there are presumably also some challenges for studies with these designs to study proactive personality process. For example, one difficulty associated with longitudinal design is the difficulty to define the time lag between a cause and an outcome (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). This may be especially true for proactive employees who

tend to transcend the immediacy of the context and whose actions may be planned weeks even months or years ago before its implementation (Frese & Fay, 2001).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the research reported in the present dissertation addressed two important questions regarding the way by which situational influences affect proactive personality-outcomes relationships. Conceptually, the theoretical underpinning is a two-themed interactionist perspective. Thus, the study shows the usefulness of interactionism as a conceptual framework to understand the joint influences of personality and situational factors on citizenship and proactive work behaviours, and task and job performance. Future research is needed to further our understanding of the dynamic transaction between person and situation.

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**Proactive Personality (Seibert, et al., 1999)**

1.    I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life

2.    Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change

3.    Nothing is more exciting than seeing my ideas turn into reality

4.    If I see something I don't like, I fix it.

5.    No matter what the odds, if I believe in something I will make it happen.

6.    I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition

7.    I excel at identifying opportunities

8.    I am always looking for better ways to do things

9.    If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen

10.    I can spot a good opportunity long before others can

**LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)**

1.    Do you know where you stand with your leader . . do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?

2.    How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?

3.    How well does your leader recognize your potential?

4.    Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work?

5.    Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he/she would "bail you out," at his/her expense?

6.    I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/her

      decision if he/she were not present to do so?

7.    How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader?

**CWX (Sherony & Green, 2002)**

1.    Do you know where you stand with your coworkers . . do you usually know how

      satisfied your coworkers are with what you do?

2.    How well do your coworkers understand your job problems and needs?

3.    Regardless of how much formal authority they have built into their position, what are

      the chances that your coworkers would use their power to help you solve problems in

      your work?

4.    Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your coworkers have, what are

      the chances that they would "bail you out," at their expense?

5.    I have enough confidence in my coworkers that I would defend and justify their

      decision if they were not present to do so?

6.    How would you characterize your working relationship with your coworkers?

**Job Autonomy (Spreitzer, 1995)**

1.    I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.

2.    I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.

3.    I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job

**Learning Behavior (Daniels, et al., 2009)**

1.    This employee often learns things that help his/her work performance

2.      This employee often learns things that help him/her deal with difficult issues more efficiently?

3.      This employee often learns things that help him/her solve work problems more quickly

**Helping behavior (Podsakoff, et al., 1990)**

1.      This subordinate helps others who have been absent.

2.      This subordinate helps orient new people even though it is not required.

3.      This subordinate helps others who have work-related problems

4.      This subordinate helps others who have heavy loads

5.      This subordinate is always ready to lead a helping hand to those around him/her

**Task performance (Williams & Anderson, 1991)**

1.      This subordinate adequately completes responsibilities.

2.      This subordinate meets performance expectations.

3.      This subordinate performs the tasks that are expected as part of the job.

4.      This subordinate fulfills the responsibilities specified in his/her job description.

**Job performance (Liden, et al., 1993)**

1.      This subordinate is superior (so far) to other new subordinates that I've supervised before.

2.      Rate the overall level of performance that you observe for this subordinate

3.      What is your personal view of your subordinate in terms of his or her overall effectiveness

4. Overall, to what extent do you feel your subordinate has been effectively fulfilling his or her roles and responsibilities?