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Little is known about the impact of individual characteristics, historical factors, and situational characteristics on youth's proactive work socialization behavior (career planning, skill development, consultation, and networking). Data from a longitudinal cross-national study (Belgium, England, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain) on career starters from two occupational groups, are used to test the hypothesized impact of predictor sets. Results confirm the positive impact of early career experience on the skill development proactive behavior; the dominant impact of the broader socioeconomic political and cultural country context on all four aspects of proactive behavior; and the sporadic effect of occupation, gender, and educational history on some proactive behavior dimensions.

## Keywords

effect, human, employ, work, source, environment, youth, behavior, career, skill, development, education, development, Belgium, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, England

## Disciplines

Human Resources Management

## Comments

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# The Impact of Early Career Experiences on Youth's Proactive Work Socialization Behavior

S. Antonio Ruiz-Quintanilla  
Rita Claes

Working Paper 95 – 16



## **The Impact of Early Career Experiences on Youth's Proactive Work Socialization Behavior**

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This paper has not undergone formal review or approval of the faculty of the ILR School. It is intended to make results of research, conferences, and projects available to others interested in human resource management in preliminary form to encourage discussion and suggestions.

### **Abstract**

Little is known about the impact of individual characteristics, historical factors, and situational characteristics on youth's proactive work socialization behavior (career planning, skill development, consultation, and networking). Data from a longitudinal cross-national study (Belgium, England, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain) on career starters from two occupational groups, are used to test the hypothesized impact of predictor sets. Results confirm the positive impact of early career experience on the skill development proactive behavior; the dominant impact of the broader socioeconomic political and cultural country context on all four aspects of proactive behavior; and the sporadic effect of occupation, gender, and educational history on some proactive behavior dimensions.

Traditional approaches (e.g., Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) saw work socialization mainly involving newcomers as reactive, responding to the environmental requests. Recent literature began to look at the dynamic interaction between socialization and individualization. Some studies addressed the organizational socialization strategies through which organizations socialize newcomers. Other studies focussed on how newcomers individualize their work roles and socialize themselves. This research acknowledges more the proactive role of newcomers in the work socialization processes (e.g., Jones, 1983; Reichers, 1987; Comer, 1991; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Leibowitz, Schlossberg & Shore, 1992; Bullis, 1993). For Fryer & Payne (1984, 273) proactive behavior is present, when a person chooses to initiate, intervene in or perceive situations in a way that allows the person (agent) to act in valued directions rather than respond passively to imposed change.

Work socialization processes are seen as involving four primary tasks (e.g., Feldman, 1976; Fisher, 1986; Reichers, 1987): (a) task mastery, learning how to do the components of one's jobs; (b) role clarification, developing an understanding of one's role in the organization; (c) acculturation, learning about and adjusting to the organization's culture; and (d) social integration, developing relationships with co-workers. Successful work socialization implies mastering all four tasks. The learning is done over various career stages and through various work role transitions cycles (Nicholson, 1990).

The beginning period of employment is named the exploration stage (Super, 1957) or the entering the adult world stage (Levinson, 1978). Other work socialization approaches call it early career stage, early employment stage, organizational entry, or early career experiences. There is overwhelming theoretical and empirical support that the beginning period of employment is crucial for the subsequent development of abilities, skills, attitudes and behaviors. Initial employment is conditional for ultimate work socialization processes' outcomes on the individual, organizational, and broader societal level (e.g., Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Reichers, 1986; Jablin, 1987; Meyer & Allen, 1987; Borman, 1988; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Baum, 1990; Cohen, 1991; Comer, 1991; Dreher, 1991; Poole, Langlan-Fox, Ciavarella & Omodei, 1991).

Among the proactive behaviors relevant during the work socialization processes, the importance of "proactive information seeking" of newcomers, has been stressed. Miller & Jablin's (1991, 96) theoretical model of newcomers' information seeking behaviors during organizational encounters includes the following factors affecting information seeking during organizational entry: information sources (supervisors, co-workers), information content (referent, appraisal, relational), information seeking tactics, individual differences and contextual

factors, and outcomes of newcomers' information seeking. The newcomers' information seeking affects the newcomers' level of role ambiguity and role conflict, which in turn is seen as having an impact on subsequent job satisfaction, productivity and job tenure.

Leibowitz et al (1992) point to the importance of asking questions about the "self" (referring to experiences), the "situation" (referring to expectations), the "support" (referring to interpersonal relations) and the "strategy" (referring to information seeking), when faced with the organizational entry transition. Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992, 1993) advocate the crucial role of information acquisition about task, role, group, and organization during the early socialization experiences for later successful performance and career development. Morrison (1993, 174) proposes that specific types of information are needed for each of the four primary tasks of the work socialization processes. The task mastery requires technical information and performance feedback; the role clarification needs referent information and performance feedback; the acculturation implies normative information and social feedback; the social integration depends on normative information and social feedback. She found that the frequency with which newcomers seek these specific types of information facilitates their socialization process. In summary, newcomers' proactive information seeking during the first six months was related to how well newcomers mastered their job, defined their role, learned about the organization's culture, and became socially integrated.

Therefore, proactive behavior not only eases socialization processes but can be seen as an important condition for successful socialization. Implications of lack of proactive behavior are illustrated by the research on shyness and dysfunction in career development (Philips & Bruch, 1988). Given the crucial impact of the early career for work socialization processes' outcomes, a focus on the impact of early career experience on youth's proactive work socialization behavior is important.

### **MODELS OF PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR**

Person and situational characteristics interact and affect the opportunity for and the occurrence of proactive behavior during the phase of work socialization.

For Reichers (1987) and Miller & Jablin's (1991), person characteristics refer to individual differences in terms of personality and past experiences, while situational characteristics include contextual factors on the organizational level.

In their study of the proactive personality, Bateman & Crant (1993, 103ff) define proactive behavior as the relatively stable tendency to effect environmental change, but recognize that situational, historical, and psychological factors may operate in the manifestation of proactive behavior.

The Work Socialization of Youth (WOSY) research adopts an interactional approach to the work socialization processes by studying the dynamic and reciprocal interactions between work personality, work environment, and work behaviors (WOSY International Research Group, 1989a; Whitely, Peiro & Sarchielli, 1992). The dynamic interaction between socialization and individualization is analyzed in a longitudinal design featuring the first three years of labor market participation, across two occupational groups, and across the socio-historic settings in eight countries. In the WOSY conceptual framework the major constructs are work personality (work related values, norms and competencies); the multidomain work environment (societal conditions, organizational quality and internal labor market conditions, organizational socialization practices, social relations with superiors and co-workers, job and work properties); the person-environment mismatches; work behavior (interpersonal behavior, behavioral enhancing strategies); and outcomes of work socialization processes (career pattern, satisfaction, general health, role ambiguity, role conflict). Youth's proactive work socialization behavior is reflected in their behavioral enhancing strategies.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES**

This paper explores the impact of youth's characteristics, historical factors, and situational characteristics on their proactive work socialization behavior. The person's characteristics include age, gender, and occupation. Historical factors include the work history (or early career experiences) like past (un)employment and mobility experiences, and the education history. Situational characteristics refer to the broad socioeconomic political and cultural country context. We hypothesize that each set of characteristics affects proactive work socialization behavior. To test the hypotheses we relate three years of early career experience data to proactive behavior as measured at the end of the third year of labor market participation. We want to compare the explanatory power of early career experiences to the effect(s) of: (1) socioeconomic political and cultural country background data; (2) personal data; and (3) educational background and experience data.

The interactional approach to work socialization implies the above discussed impact of youth's characteristics, historical factors and situational contexts on their proactive behavior. Thus, our first hypothesis is

*Hypothesis 1: Early career experiences, country context, person's characteristics, and education history, affect youth's proactive work socialization behavior.*



Clearly the employment status (full-time versus part-time, permanent versus temporary, or unemployment) reflects the quantity and quality of employment and creates different opportunities for proactive behavior.

Mobility in the early career, either internal mobility through change in hierarchical position (promotion) or external mobility through change of company, is hypothesized to have a positive impact on proactive behavior. Experiencing a change could encourage youth to perceive the work situation as more under their own control. Further it could be that pre-entry proactive behavior and/or proactive personality, along with other factors, cause a change in position and/or company, which provokes subsequent proactive behavior. Thus,

*Hypothesis 2a: Employment has a positive effect on subsequent proactive behavior, while unemployment has a negative effect on proactive work socialization behavior. Stable full-time employment has a greater effect than other forms of employment (part-time, temporary, combinations of work and education).*

*Hypothesis 2b: Having experienced change (in hierarchical position and/or company) has a positive effect on future proactive behavior.*

Recent research shows that the opportunities for youngsters to ensure initial stable employment depends on a set of variables including personal characteristics, demographics, qualification, job search behavior, and above all the regional or country-specific socioeconomic and socio-political context (Ruiz-Quintanilla & Claes, 1994). Youngsters' own contributions to create themselves the opportunity for early career experiences and subsequent proactive behaviors, are obviously limited to factors under their control (e.g., qualification, job search behavior). Thus,

*Hypothesis 3: The country context, as broader situational characteristic, will affect youth's proactive work socialization behavior.*

From the person's characteristics, age and gender are fixed demographic features while the occupation could be regarded as a personal choice.

Given that our sample uses first-time career starters and therefore is homogenous according to age we do not expect age to have an impact on proactive behavior.

*Hypothesis 4a: In our sample age does not affect proactive work socialization behavior.*

Despite many attempts in most European countries to increase equal opportunities for both genders in all occupational careers, women still have a narrower range of job opportunities open to them (Commission of the European Communities, 1992). Earlier research findings (as reviewed by Burke, 1984) point to the fact that females show less networking behavior at work. This fits with the argumentation of male chauvinism or "the old boys club" at the work place. For White, Cox & Cooper (1994) reasons for women not using the informal organizational networks as much as men, can lie in their childhood socialization, in their lifestyle, in group processes, and in women's distaste for politics. They further mention the negative implications of the neglect of the informal networks for the women's career advancement. Therefore, we hypothesize

*Hypothesis 4b: Female youth will show less proactive work socialization behavior than male youth.*

In this study we included two occupational groups with over country similar positive labor market prospects, but with clearly distinct job characteristics. The office technology group is mainly involved with "data," while the machine operators are primarily busy with "things." We expect the occupation specific situation and experience to have an impact on youth's proactive behavior. Thus,

*Hypothesis 4c: Proactive work socialization behavior will be influenced by occupation.*

Many programs were and are being established in the European Union to help youth in the transfer from school to work and to stimulate youth employment (European Communities, 1994). Among them are programs primarily aiming at technical skill development directly related to job performance. These are systems of vocational education at the secondary school level, and programs combining education (dominant) and work. Social partners jointly design, execute and evaluate such programs. General education at the secondary school level is traditionally more oriented toward the total personal development and often leads to further studies to reach a higher educational level.

*Hypothesis 5: All forms of education will positively affect youth's proactive behavior.*

## METHODS

### Sample and Data Collection

Data are collected from two occupational groups in Belgium, England, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, as part of the international WOSY research project (WOSY, 1989a).

The two occupational groups included are the office technology group and the machine operators' group. In the office technology group we find male and female workers in positions operating automated office equipment. These positions involve substantial activity with data like entry, collating, manipulation and organization of information. Positions include word processing operators, micro or personal computer (PC) operators and data entry workers. Machine operators are male employees in production/manufacturing in the metal industry. They work primarily with things such as metal parts. Positions include lathe and milling machine operators, machine tool operators and welders.

Data gathering is through individual standardized interviews (WOSY International research group, 1989b) on three measurement points: between nine months and maximum 12 months in the first job (T1, 1988-89); one year later (T2, 1989-90); and an additional year later (T3, 1990-91). All data are based on self reports.

Analysis of the first data wave results in a description of the starting phase of the work socialization process in the participating countries (WOSY International Research Team, 1992). The study of the actual process of work socialization commences when the second and third data waves become available (Ruiz-Quintanilla & Claes, 1992).

This paper deals with the total longitudinal study covering the first three years of labor market participation (from T1 through T3). The number of respondents per country aggregated over target groups included in this paper amounts to 1205. Table 1 describes characteristics of the sample at T1.

Characteristic	Belgium N=192	England N=267	Israel N=144	Italy N=218	Netherlands N=143	Spain N=241	Total N=1205
Age							
M	20.95	16.72	24.13	20.99	19.39	21.84	20.41
SD	2.00	0.66	3.52	1.82	1.32	2.70	3.12
%Males	64.6	63.7	55.6	62.8	81.7	53.5	62.8
%Office technology group	50.5	51.3	46.5	65.6	48.3	61.8	54.9
% Not married	92.2	100	51.7	97.7	97.9	95.0	91.3
% Living alone	90.1	94.7	no data	95.0	93.0	93.4	93.4
If partner:							
% Partner employed	93.3	100.0	77.6	100.0	29.7	75.0	61.8
% Zero children	99.0	98.9	67.4	99.5	100.0	95.8	94.8

**Dependent variables**

Proactive Work Socialization Behavior. Informal conversations with Belgian youth exemplify initiatives and activities undertaken to get employed. Frequently mentioned initiatives include reading newspapers, exploring "hints" from family and friends or systematic consultation of the database of the employment services. Once employed, they keep up to date and try to make progress by means of books and journal articles, language and technical skill training courses or seeking advice from experienced coworkers.

From the range of behaviors studied by WOSY, the behavioral enhancing strategies reflect "proactive work socialization behavior" by which youth actively construct and produce their own work role development.

The WOSY question on career enhancing strategies (WOSY, 1989a, b; Whitely, Peiro & Sarchielli, 1992) combines items from Backman et al (1978) and from the Career Strategies Inventory (Penley & Gould, 1981). Eleven items are used to operationalize the concept proactive behavior. Besides sharing high content face validity, the items focus on broader perspectives of the future career rather than on the present job or work. Items are phrased as relative independent from specific organizational policies or career stages, encouraging youth to focus on proactive behavior in general.

Three classes of behavioral enhancing strategies or proactive behaviors can be distinguished: (1) career oriented strategies focussing on future opportunities, like

attempts to gain employment or to develop future opportunities such as job search and career planning; (2) competence oriented strategies, including knowledge and skill development efforts; and (3) social strategies, like consultation (seeking information, advice or help from others) and networking. Further, as shown in Figure 1, these items combine the information content and information sources proposed by Miller & Jablin (1991), the questions Leibowitz et al (1992) suggested asking at organizational entry, and the types of information necessary for successful work socialization (Morrison, 1993). Still, as mentioned above our items focus on career development overall rather than adjustments to a specific (first) job and (first) organization.

**FIGURE 1: Measurement of Proactive Work Socialization Behavior**

<p>WOSY (1989b) Proactive work socialization behavior:</p>	<p>Miller &amp; Jablin (1991) Information sources Information content</p>	<p>Leibowitz et al (1992) Question on:</p>	<p>Morrison (1993) Information for: Task mastery Role clarification Acculturation Social integration</p>
<p><b>To share future: career planning</b></p> <p>"I have a well developed plan for the next few years of my work future."                      "I have begun to think more about the kind of work for which I am best suited since I began working in my present job."                      "I have recently begun to think more about what I would like to accomplish in my work during the next year or two."</p>		<p>Situation and strategy</p>	
<p><b>Competence based strategies: skill development</b></p> <p>"I have developed skills which may be needed in future positions."                      I have gained experience in a variety of work assignments to increase my knowledge and skills."                      "I have developed more knowledge and skill in tasks critical to my work unit's operation."</p>	<p>Supervisors and co-workers  Appraisal information</p>	<p>Self and strategy</p>	<p>Technical information  Performance feedback</p>
<p><b>Social strategies: consultation</b></p> <p>"I have recently sought advice from my coworkers, family or other people about additional training or experience I need to improve my future work prospects."                      "Since I have worked here I have initiated talks with my supervisor about training or work assignments I need to develop skills that will help my future work chances."                      "I have made my supervisor aware of my work aspirations and goals."</p>	<p>Supervisors and coworkers  Referent and relational information</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>Referent and normative  Information social feedback</p>
<p><b>Social strategies: networking</b></p> <p>"I have built a network of contacts or friendships with other employees to obtain information about how to do my work or to determine what is expected of me."                      "I have built a network of contacts or friendships with coworkers or other people to provide me with help or advice that will further my work chances."</p>	<p>Supervisors and coworkers  Referent and relational information</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>Referent and normative  Information social feedback</p>

Principal components analysis of the 11 items with varimax rotation of factors with eigenvalues larger than 1 results in four factors explaining 69% of the total variance. For all four factors item loadings higher than .55 were found on the hypothesized dimensions and loadings mostly in the teens on the alternative factors. Thus, the results confirm that our items can be used to represent the hypothesized dimensions: "skill development" (36% of the variance), "career planning" (12% of the variance), "consultation" (11 % of the variance) and "networking" (10% of the variance). Four indices of proactive behavior are calculated by adding the responses on the composing items and dividing the result by the number of composing items. This leads to a theoretical range from 1 to 5 for each index. Given the few items per scale, the internal consistencies, as expressed by Cronbach's alpha, are satisfactory. The three item Career planning index has an alpha of .65, the three item Consultation index an alpha of .74, and the three item Skill development index an alpha of .76. The two items of the Networking scale have a zero-order correlation of .66 with  $p < .01$ . The exact wording of the composing items for each index is included in Figure 1.

#### Predictor variables

Early Career Experiences. Information was collected at the occasion of three interviews, each of which covered the period back to leaving school or the last interview respectively. Cumulated over the three interviews (from T1 to T3) the first three years of labor market experience are covered using a retrospective tracing procedure (see Fig. 2). The respondents self-reported activities by indicating to the interviewer which one out of ten possible activities best characterizes each past three-month interval. The ten alternatives offered are: regular full-time employment, regular part-time employment, temporary employment, vocational education, general education, combination education (dominant) and work, combination work (dominant) and education, unemployed looking for work, unemployed not looking for work, and finally military or civil service. In addition, information is gathered on changes in job title, hierarchical position, company and industry. Figure 2 shows the format used for the retrospective tracing procedure.

**FIGURE 2: Scheme for the Retrospective Tracing of Activities**

T1: I would like to know what you have been doing over the past couple of years. Please choose with me for every three month period what you were doing for most of the time (ACTIVITY).

T2 and T3: Please choose with me for every three month period what you were doing for most of the time (ACTIVITY) since our last conversation. Check with me also the changes that have occurred since then (EVENTS).

Calendar	ACTIVITY	EVENTS: Changes occurred in:			
		Job title?	Hierarchical position?	Company?	Industry?
Trimester 1					
Trimester 2					
Trimester 3					
Trimester 4					
Trimester 5					
Trimester 6					
Trimester 7					
Trimester 8 with T1					
Trimester 9					
Trimester 10					
Trimester 11					
Trimester 12 with T2					
Trimester 13					
Trimester 14					
Trimester 15					
Trimester 16 with T3					

Categories for ACTIVITY: regular full-time work; regular part-time work; temporary work; vocational education; general education; education (dominant) + work; work (dominant) + education; unemployment looking for work; unemployed not looking for work; military or civil service.

Changes in job title, hierarchical position, company, industry: yes or no.

Employment experience. For the employment experience, indices are constructed by counting the occurrence of an activity over all trimesters. The result is multiplied by three to have it expressed in months. We distinguish five different kinds of "employment experience": months of full-time employment, months of part-time employment, months of temporary employment, months in combination work (dominant) and education, and months of unemployment looking for work. The activities "unemployed not looking for work" and "military or civil service" are excluded because in both situations respondents are not available for the labor market (respectively voluntary and involuntary).

Mobility experience. For the mobility experience, indices are constructed by counting the frequency of the changes in hierarchical position (promotion, upward internal or external mobility) over the studied period and of the change of company affiliation (external mobility). Changes in job title have not been considered because of the difficulty to interpret them unless controlled for by job content (which is beyond the scope of this paper). In addition job changes would need to be debugged for relations with changes in hierarchical position, changes in company and changes in industry. Similarly, change in industry is neglected because of its relation with change of company ( $r=.71$   $p < .01$ ). Therefore, we include two variables representing "mobility experience": frequency of change in hierarchical position and frequency of change in company affiliation.

Other predictors. The relative impact of early career experiences on youth's proactive behavior is compared with the effect of the country context (socioeconomic political and cultural background), of personal data such as age, gender, and occupational group, and of educational background and experience. All these variables are based on data collected during the first interview (T1).

For the six countries, five dummy variables are calculated using 1 and 0. Spain serves as reference country. The variable age expresses the respondent's age at T1. For gender a dummy variable is calculated with 0 for male, and 1 for female. For the variable occupational group a dummy variable is calculated with 0 for the office technology group and 1 for the machine operators. For educational background and experience, the months spent in three educational activities are used. These activities are also reported by the respondents by retrospective tracing of their first three years on the labor market (see Figure 2). The educational background and experience indices are again constructed by counting activities over all trimesters and multiplying them by three to have them expressed in months. The three variables dealing with "educational background and experience" are "months of vocational education," "months of general education," and "months of combination education (dominant) with work."

### Analysis

Multiple regression analysis using the statistical package SPSS-X is done to explore the relations between the dependent variables (the four dimensions of proactive behavior at T3) and the independent variables. To estimate the relative importance of the five sets of predictor variables (the country context; the personal data such as age, gender, occupational group; the educational experiences; the employment experiences; and the mobility experiences), each set's  $R^2$  contribution in the regression is studied. To estimate the direct effect of each single



independent variable, we examine its beta weight. Because of the absence of an ordered hypothesis, we use a simultaneous approach and the test function to estimate the effects of each set on the dependent variable. This has the advantage that the effects of each set are based on all other variables (sets) being partialled out. Thus the variables included in the regression remain the same for all sets (Cohen and Cohen, 1983, 148ff).

## **RESULTS**

Table 2 presents the means, the standard deviations, and the zero-order correlations of all variables. Higher correlations found among some independent variables can be attributed to ipsative scoring (variable 10 through 17), dummy coding (variable 4 to 9), and sample standardization (variable 2 and 3). Further no evidence of multicollinearity exists.

Significant correlations are found between: age and country; age and months in general education; country and forms of education and employment experience; frequency of change in hierarchical position and frequency of change of company. The correlations involving age, country, and educational experiences, confirm the country specific preparatory patterns (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1994). In summary, English respondents are younger and have a general educational background, while most Dutch had a vocational education. Full-time employment is more frequent in England and Israel, part-time employment and temporary employment is found more often in Spain, unemployment is occurring more often in Italy and Belgium.

TABLE 2  
Summary Statistics of and Correlations between all Measures

Measures	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
<i>Personal data</i>																								
1. Age	20.41	5.12	—																					
2. Gender	.37	.48	.01	—																				
3. Occupation	.45	.50	-.06	-.64	—																			
<i>Country</i>																								
4. Belgium	.16	.37	.08	-.02	.04	—																		
5. England	.22	.42	-.62	-.01	.04	-.23	—																	
6. Israel	.12	.32	.44	.06	.06	-.16	-.20	—																
7. Italy	.18	.39	.09	-.00	-.10	-.20	-.25	-.17	—															
8. Netherlands	.12	.32	-.12	-.14	.05	-.16	-.20	-.14	-.17	—														
9. Spain	.20	.40	.23	.10	-.07	-.22	-.27	-.18	-.24	-.18	—													
<i>Educational experiences</i>																								
10. Months vocational education	4.81	6.97	-.11	.03	.03	.06	-.26	-.20	-.02	.42	.06	—												
11. Months general education	4.36	7.11	-.51	.04	-.06	-.27	.75	-.17	-.21	-.07	-.13	-.28	—											
12. Months education + work	2.22	5.23	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.18	-.02	-.07	.17	-.11	.16	-.14	-.16	—										

Table continues

Measures	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22		
Employment experiences																										
13. Months full-time	24.26	11.74	.05	-.08	.13	-.10	.27	-.40	-.21	-.05	-.28	-.26	.12	-.15	—											
14. Months part-time	1.06	3.69	.11	.02	.01	-.09	-.06	.00	-.02	-.06	.20	-.06	-.08	.04	-.14	—										
15. Months temporary	3.04	5.98	.14	.13	-.14	.07	-.24	-.12	-.02	.07	.26	.03	-.17	-.02	-.42	.02	—									
16. Months work + education	4.09	7.36	-.01	.07	-.13	-.10	-.10	-.18	.32	-.07	.08	-.01	-.02	.01	-.51	-.10	-.10	—								
17. Months unemployment	2.38	4.49	.19	.08	-.09	.16	-.18	-.02	.16	-.14	-.01	-.20	-.17	-.10	-.18	-.01	.08	.02	—							
Mobility experiences																										
18. Freq. change hier. position	.56	.83	.03	.03	-.10	-.21	.03	.13	.09	.08	-.01	-.06	.06	.05	.05	.03	-.02	.03	-.04	—						
19. Freq. change company	.44	.82	-.11	.01	.02	-.01	.10	-.03	-.09	.10	-.03	.04	.06	-.02	-.11	.06	.13	-.06	-.03	.23	—					
Proactive behavior																										
20. T3 Career planning	3.20	.84	-.05	.02	-.05	-.08	.09	.06	-.10	.00	.03	.01	.08	-.01	.06	-.03	-.04	.01	-.10	.10	.03	—				
21. T3 Consultation	2.72	1.02	.04	.01	-.06	-.09	-.05	.14	-.13	.17	.01	.07	-.01	-.03	.07	-.03	-.03	.01	-.10	.11	.02	.46	—			
22. T3 Skill development	3.62	.81	.00	.04	-.09	-.03	-.01	.02	-.17	.19	.03	.08	.01	-.00	.07	-.03	.02	-.01	-.13	.07	.04	.35	.41	—		
23. T3 Networking	2.99	1.03	-.15	-.10	.07	-.13	.13	-.06	-.13	.17	.07	.04	.11	.01	.03	-.06	.01	-.04	-.09	.05	.09	.32	.38	.32	—	

Note. Decimals in r's have been omitted. N = 1205. r's > .06 are significant at p < .05; r's > .08 are significant at p < .01.

Tables 3 through 6 report the results of the multiple regression analysis.

#### Career Planning Proactive Behavior

For the career planning proactive behavior at T3 (see Table 3) we see that all variables included, only 3 percent of the total variance is explained.

When comparing the  $R^2$  contributions that the different sets of variables explain, we find that the variance explained by the country variable is about 2 percent of the total variance or 67 percent of the explained variance. This is about twice as much as is contributed by the sets next in importance, concerned with employment experience and with mobility experience. Thus in explaining the career planning proactive behavior at T3, the societal context is more powerful as compared with the early career experiences. Personal data and educational background and experience do not explain an additional variance.

Studying the beta weights shows that the career planning proactive behavior at T3 is affected negatively by the Belgian and the Italian socioeconomic political and cultural background. Hierarchical position (being promoted) has a positive impact on the career planning proactive behavior at T3. Finally, machine operators show less career planning proactive behavior compared with the office technology group.

**Table 3**  
**Results of Regression Analysis for the Career Planning Proactive Behavior (N = 1189)**

Variables	Career planning behav.			$\Delta R^2$	Test F
	B	$\beta$	t		
Employment experience				.01	2.25*
Months in full-time employment	.00		.01	.23	
Months in part-time employment	-.01		-.06	-1.74	
Months in temporary employment	-.00		-.03	-.72	
Months in work + education	.00		.04	.75	
Months in unemployment	-.01		-.07	-1.92	
Mobility experience				.01	3.88*
Freq. change in hierarchical position	.08	.08	2.47*		
Frequency change company	.02	.02	.51		
Country				.02	3.81**
Belgium	-.21	-.09	-2.29*		
England	-.01	.00	.06		
Israel	.05	.02	.48		
Italy	-.29	-.13	-3.47***		
Netherlands	-.15	-.06	-1.44		
Spain			reference		
Personal data				.00	1.54
Age	-.01	-.03	-.74		
Gender (1=female)	-.06	-.04	-.92		
Occupation (1=machine operators)	-.13	-.08	-2.03*		
Education background and experience				.00	.31
Months in vocational education	.00	.02	.52		
Months in general education	-.00	-.01	-.26		
Months in education + work	-.00	-.02	-.42		
Total R = .22					3.20***
R <sup>2</sup> = .05 Adj R <sup>2</sup> = .03					

\* p<.05    \*\* p<.01    \*\*\* p<.001

**Skill Development Proactive Behavior**

For the skill development proactive behavior at T3 (see Table 4) we see that all variables included, 8 percent of the total variance is explained.

Comparing the  $R^2$  contributions that the different sets of variables explain, we find that the variance explained by the country variable is about 5 percent of the total variance or 63 percent of the explained variance. This is about 2.5 times as much as is contributed by the set next in importance, concerned with employment experience, and about five times as large as the variance explaining contributions of mobility experience and personal data. Thus in explaining the skill development proactive behavior at T3, the country context is more powerful compared with personal data and experiences made in the domains of employment and mobility.

Studying the beta weights shows that the skill development proactive behavior at T3 is affected negatively by the Italian socioeconomic political and cultural background. It is positively influenced by the Dutch country context. Further, respondents who spent more time in educational systems combining education with work, show greater skill development proactive behavior at T3. Having spent more time in full-time employment, in temporary employment and in systems that combine work with education, positively affect the skill development proactive behavior at T3. Again, experienced hierarchical mobility (past promotion) has a positive influence on the skill development proactive behavior at T3. Finally, skill development proactive behavior is hindered among respondents belonging to the machine operator group.

**Table 4**  
**Results of Regression Analysis for the Skill Development Proactive Behavior (N = 1189)**

Variables	Skill development			Test	
	B	$\beta$	t	$\Delta R^2$	F
Employment experience				.02	4.76***
Months in full-time employment	.01	.19	3.38***		
Months in part-time employment	.00	.01	.25		
Months in temporary employment	.01	.08	1.99*		
Months in work + education	.01	.13	3.06**		
Months in unemployment	-.01	-.05	-1.43		
Mobility experience				.01	4.11*
Freq. change in hierarchical position	.08	.08	2.67**		
Frequency change company	.01	.01	.22		
Country				.05	11.98***
Belgium	.04	.02	.40		
England	-.04		-.02	-.32	
Israel	-.10		-.04	-.96	
Italy	-.36		-.17	-4.52***	
Netherlands	.38	.15	4.00***		
Spain	reference				
Personal data				.01	4.86**
Age	.01	.04	.95		
Gender (1=female)	-.03	-.02	-.46		
Occupation (1=machine operators)	-.19	-.12	-3.04**		
Education background and experience				.00	1.95
Months in vocational education	.01	.07	1.65		
Months in general education	.00	.02	.42		
Months in education + work	.01	.18	2.09*		
Total R = .31 R <sup>2</sup> =.10 Adj R <sup>2</sup> =.08					6.95***
* p<.05      ** p<.01      *** p<.001					

**Consultation Proactive Behavior**

For the consultation proactive behavior at T3 (see Table 5) we see that all variables included, 8 percent of the total variance is explained.

Comparing the  $R^2$  contributions that the different sets of variables explain, we find that the variance explained by the country variable is about 5 percent of the total variance or 63 percent of the explained variance. This is about five times as much as is contributed by the sets next in importance, concerned with employment and mobility experiences, and personal data. Thus in explaining the overall proactive behavior at T3, the societal characteristics are more powerful as compared to early career experiences and to personal data. The other set included in the equation (educational background and experience) does not significantly add to the explained variance.

Examining the beta weights shows that the consultation proactive behavior at T3 is affected negatively for machine operators and by the Italian socioeconomic political and cultural background. It is enhanced by the Dutch and the Israeli country context. Further, time spent in systems combining work and education, effects positively the consultation proactive behavior at T3. Finally, we find a positive impact of hierarchical position changes (being promoted) on consultation proactive behavior at T3.



**Table 5**  
**Results of Regression Analysis for the Consultation Proactive Behavior (N = 1189)**

Variables	Consultation behavior			Test	
	B	$\beta$	t	$\Delta R^2$	F
Employment experience				.01	2.35**
Months in full-time employment	.01	.09	1.53		
Months in part-time employment	-.00	-.01	-.27		
Months in temporary employment	-.00	-.00	-.07		
Months in work + education	.01	.10	2.19*		
Months in unemployment	-.01	-.03	-.97		
Mobility experience				.01	5.47**
Freq. change in hierarchical position	.12	.10	3.16**		
Frequency change company	.00	.00	.00		
Country				.05	12.37***
Belgium	-.11	-.04	-1.05		
England	-.22	-.09	-1.47		
Israel	.33	.11	2.65**		
Italy	-.36	-.13	-3.62***		
Netherlands	.41	.13	3.38***		
Spain			reference		
Personal data				.01	2.92*
Age	-.00		-.00	-.11	
Gender (1=female)	-.12		-.06	-1.46	
Occupation (1=machine operators)	-.23		-.11	-2.90**	
Education background and experience				.00	.54
Months in vocational education	.01	.05	1.23		
Months in general education	.01	.04	.75		
Months in education + work	.00	.01	.35		
Total R = .30 R <sup>2</sup> = .09 Adj R <sup>2</sup> = .08					6.62***
*p<.05    ** p<.01    *** p<.001					

**Networking Proactive Behavior**

For the networking proactive behavior at T3 (see Table 6) we see that all variables included, 8 percent of the total variance is explained.

Comparing the  $R^2$  contributions that the different sets of variables explain, we find that the variance explained by the country variable is about 3 percent of the total variance or 38 percent of the explained variance. This is about three times as much as is contributed by the sets next in importance, concerned with employment experience, mobility experience, and personal data. Thus in explaining the networking proactive behavior at T3, the societal context is more powerful compared with personal characteristics, and by early career experiences.

The beta weights reflect that networking proactive behavior at T3 is affected positively by the Dutch country context and negatively by the Italian (and Belgian) country context. Being female, has a negative impact on the T3 networking behavior.

**Table 6**  
**Results of Regression Analysis for the Networking Proactive Behavior (N = 1189)**

Variables	Networking behavior			$\Delta R^2$	Test F
	B	$\beta$	t		
Employment experience				.01	1.69
Months in full-time employment	.01	.07	1.27		
Months in part-time employment	-.01	-.04	-1.31		
Months in temporary employment	.01	.07	1.86		
Months in work + education	.01	.04	.88		
Months in unemployment	-.00	-.01	-.20		
Mobility experience				.01	3.11*
Freq. change in hierarchical position	.06	.05		1.66	
Frequency change company	.05	.04		1.30	
Country				.03	8.52***
Belgium	-.29	-.10	-2.63**		
England	.26	.11	1.77		
Israel	-.15	-.05	-1.22		
Italy	-.31	-.12	-3.15**		
Netherlands	.39	.12	3.20**		
Spain			reference		
Personal data				.01	2.90*
Age	-.02	-.05	-1.21		
Gender (1=female)	-.17	-.08	-2.10*		
Occupation (1=machine operators)	.00	-.00		.02	
Education background and experience				.00	.81
Months in vocational education	.00	.01	.31		
Months in general education	-.01	-.04		-.75	
Months in education + work	.01	.03		.83	
Total R = .31 R <sup>2</sup> = .09 Adj R <sup>2</sup> = .08					6.66***

\* p<.05      \*\* p<.01      \*\*\* p<.001

## DISCUSSION

At the level of the five sets of predictor variables, we can confirm Hypothesis 1 for the employment and mobility experience; the situational factor as expressed by the country context; and the set of personal characteristics. As a whole, the set of education history does not affect proactive work socialization behavior.

Employment experience, mobility experience, country context, and personal data explain between 3% (for career planning behavior) and 8% (for skill development, consultation, and networking behavior) of the total variance. These results suggest that some predictors for proactive work socialization behavior were covered in our study, while some important others may be still missing. Among the missing predictors on the person's side may be personality traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion, need for achievement, need for dominance, seen by Bateman & Crant (1993) as correlates of the "proactive personality"; the internal-external locus of control provided it can be measured in a valid way (Renn & Vandenberg, 1991); some attitudes toward work such as involvement (Bauer & Green, 1993); and/or cognitive abilities. Among the missing situational predictors may be the mismatch between prior expectations and work entry, and the supportive behavior of the supervisor as Depolo, Fraccaroli, and Sarchielli (1994) found on the Italian WOSY data; and/or the specific "mentoring function" (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). Further, other, perhaps non-work related, significant life events, might draw away the person's attention/focus from the work related proactive behavior. Future research is necessary to get more insight in the development of the "proactive personality". This research should concentrate on (pre-entry) anticipatory work socialization, and relate proactive behavior with the salience of various roles and values during certain phases in the individual's life.

In the following discussion we are talking about levels of proactive behavior at T3. For illustrative purposes we include in Table 7 the means and the standard deviations of the T1 and the T3 proactive behaviors per country and for the total sample.

**Table 7**  
**Means and Standard Deviations for T3 Proactive Behavior**  
**or per Country and for the Total Sample**

Proactive behavior		Belgium N=192	England N=267	Israel N=144	Italy N=218	Netherlands N=143	Spain N=241	Total N=1205
Career planning	M	3.03	3.34	3.33	3.02	3.21	3.25	3.20
	SD	.89	.89	.96	.72	.73	.77	.84
Skill development	M	3.56	3.61	3.66	3.33	4.03	3.67	3.62
	SD	.74	.81	.98	.82	.63	.75	.81
Consultation	M	2.51	2.61	3.10	2.44	3.19	2.72	2.72
	SD	1.10	1.02	1.16	.90	.81	.92	1.02
Networking	M	2.70	3.28	2.82	2.71	3.48	.98	2.99
	SD	1.00	.94	1.17	.95	.89	1.03	1.03

Given the results on employment experience versus unemployment experience, Hypothesis 2a is partially confirmed.

Any kind of employment experience but part-time employment, seems to lead to (subjective/objective) skill experience. The positive impact of the Israeli country context where preparatory and initial careers are characterized by full-time employment reflects in yet another way the positive influence full-time employment has on proactive work socialization behavior (Claes, Ruiz-Quintanilla & Whitely, 1992; Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1994). Still, employment experience does not influence youth's proactive career planning and networking behavior at T3.

In our study we did not find any effect of unemployment. This could be because we only include in our sample those employed all the time and those unemployed at a certain point between T1 and T3, but who managed to be employed again at T3. We expect unemployment negatively to affect proactive behavior of those who dropped out of our sample. For those who managed to be employed again at T3, the unemployment did not change their proactive behavior very much. However, the negative impact of the Italian and Belgian country context where preparatory and initial career patterns are characterized by unemployment might reflect a negative influence of the unemployment experience (Claes, Ruiz-Quintanilla & Whitely, 1992; Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1994).

Hypothesis 2b is confirmed for the internal mobility. We find a consistent effect of promotional experience on all proactive behavior scales except networking. One possible explanation is that promotional experience increases the probability that proactive behavior is shown. Experiencing a (hierarchical) job change might encourage youth to perceive the work

situation as more under their own control. It might even be that this is objectively the case. The higher position (and status) might allow for better planning, consulting, and skill development activities. Thus, promotion could cause proactive behavior. Another explanation could be that pre-entry proactive behavior and/or proactive personality, along with other factors, cause a change in hierarchical position that provokes subsequent proactive behavior. Thus, proactive personality and early proactive behavior are seen as causing both later promotions and proactive behavior. Given our measurement of the mobility experiences referring to the time between T2 and T3, and our measure of proactive behavior referring to T3, this question cannot be answered in this paper. Further study of the data is necessary to give insight in what causes contribute to change in position between T2 and T3.

External mobility without promotion, thus change in company affiliation without change in hierarchical position, does not affect subsequent proactive behavior.

Hypothesis 3 on the differential effect of the global country situation on youth's proactive work socialization behavior is confirmed.

Compared with other countries, proactive behavior is higher at T3 in the Netherlands and in Israel than in other countries and especially than in Italy and Belgium. International comparative studies always involve the danger to use culturally biased measurements. For example, our instrument might emphasize proactive behavior statements that are mainly found in the Netherlands and to some extent in Israel, while omitting those emic statements used by Italians and to some extent Belgians. This could explain the country differences in proactive behavior. To avoid these problems, the WOSY study is organized as a decentralized collective research in which the researchers from the various countries jointly participate in the design, development, carrying out and analysis of the project. This approach optimizes the enculturation of the measurement instrument to different country circumstances (Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1994).

Another possibility could be that the Italians and Belgians are really less proactive in work related matters as compared with the Dutch and Israeli. Perhaps senior people (like supervisors, older colleagues, parents) take over the active roles in the youngsters' early career in Italy and Belgium. In these countries it might not be expected of youth to take an initiative and come forward. In the Netherlands and Israel youth might be given a more independent role once they have left school. This might encourage everybody to take initiative for him/herself. To clarify this issue, we need dimensions that systematically vary over countries and that express degree of "independence of youth from the respective authorities to allow for proactive behavior." These dimensions need to go beyond the traditional key labor market indicators and could include for example youth employment policy, career education and guidance approach,

youth's living/family situation. One of these dimensions could be the country-specific preparation for careers and the country specific initial career patterns. Earlier research on the WOSY longitudinal data (Claes, Ruiz-Quintanilla & Whitely, 1992; Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1994) reveals that in Italy and Belgium the entry in the world of work is preceded by high unemployment; that in the Netherlands the major route into work is via vocational education; and that in Israel the initial career is characterized by a high level of full-time employment. Another relevant dimension is governmental strategies and policies toward the promotion of "permanent adult education for personal consumption" (Commission of the European Communities, 1994). This policy is fully established in the Netherlands while it is lacking completely in Italy. Another aspect of country background is seen in deeply rooted value patterns (Ester and others, 1994). Ester et al describe the Netherlands as a more secularized country characterized by values such as individualization and more democratic parent-child relations. Italy is sketched as more traditional and religious characterized by traditional family patterns and conformity as pedagogical value.

As expected for our sample of young career starters, age does not predict proactive work socialization behavior (Hypothesis 4a).

Hypothesis 4b is only confirmed for the dimension "networking" of proactive work socialization behavior. Females' networking behavior is lower as compared with males in the initial years of labor market experience. Females, during the beginning career starting stage, are less encouraged to show networking behavior at the work place in all the countries studied.

Perhaps our gender related results are not surprising given that we have only self-reported data. Thus, if it is true, that as much research has shown females see social behavior as more important than males, then certain behaviors categorized as networking by males, might not fall in that category for females. Pearson & Kahn (1989) found a higher impact of the immediate social environment as compared with early socialization on work-related attitudes (networking) and values for female clerical workers. Finally, one should keep in mind, that in our samples only the office technology group included males and females.

In as far networking could be related to mentoring, the finding of Ragins & Cotton (1991) that women reported more restricted access to mentors, could be relevant too. The office environment (secretary tasks) may not offer many opportunities for social work related conversations (single work places, interaction with computers only, perhaps even still typing from tape). Thus, the question rises whether the work places of our male and female office group respondents are systematically different?

Except the networking proactive behavior, being a machine operator has a negative impact on proactive work socialization behavior (Hypothesis 4c). Machine operators' career planning, skill development, and consulting behavior, is lower as compared to the office technology group. It may feed the old prejudice that the machine operator group is less socially competent from the start (self-selection). Another explanation is that the machine operators' work situation might less stimulate skill development activities than is the case for the office technology group (Bainbridge & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1989). Finally, it might be that proactive behaviors play a less important role for machine operators because for this occupational group the career is more clearly laid out and specified, and thus less active career planning and consultation are needed. This last explanation invites following up the career paths of the two occupational groups far beyond the first three career years.

Finally, concerning the impact of education background and history, hypothesis 5 is only confirmed for one form of education on one dimension of proactive behavior. Experiences with combinations of work and education lead to proactive skill development and consultation behavior. For the former, this was expected because that is what these programs are meant to do, thus help youth to improve their skills in a work situation by adding theoretical reflections. In addition, our results suggest that these programs help the youth actively to consult with their supervisors.

Educational background such as pre-entry vocational or general education does not influence youth's proactive work socialization behavior at T3. However, the positive impact of the Dutch country context where one major route to work entry is characterized by vocational education, might reflect a positive effect of the pre-entry vocational education.

The limitations of our study are threefold: the use of single source data (only self-reports), the deletion of respondents not employed at the third measurement point, and the focus on only two occupational panels. Nevertheless, our results are relevant for further theory formation on proactive work socialization behavior and for the practice of human resource management. They emphasize the important role of youth's (pre-entry) career preparation for their future proactive behavior; by stressing the positive effect of gaining employment experience for the development of proactive behavior; by illustrating the reinforcing effect of hierarchical position change on proactive behavior; by showing the similarity of effects on proactive behavior for male and female youngsters; and by controlling for country differences over time in a cross-national longitudinal design.

Our suggestions for future research include the continuation of the study of the proactive personality; the development of descriptive dimensions to grasp the countries' background; the



linking of various proactive behaviors with successful work socialization; and the follow-up of the actual work environment changes over time. Clearly for such a research agenda we encourage attempts to use multiple source data with a broad variety of occupational groups, while we would like to see the universality of constructs, methods and findings promoted through cross-national designs.

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