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The role of trait extraversion in shaping proactive behavior: A multilevel examination of the impact of high-activated positive affect

Ying Wang^{a,*}, Christian Ang^b, Zhou Jiang^c, Chia-Huei Wu^d

^a School of Management, RMIT University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

^b School of Psychology, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA, Australia

^c Department of Management, Deakin University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

^d Department of Management, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This daily diary study examines the different functions of personality trait extraversion in shaping proactive behavior at both between-person and within-person levels. Building on the affect-as-resources perspective, the authors propose that personality trait extraversion is positively related to higher levels of high-activated PA, and consequently more proactive behavior at the between-person level. However, it mitigates the positive relationship between daily high-activated PA and daily proactive behavior at the within-person level. Results of a multilevel path model using data collected from 122 individuals for 10 consecutive working days support the hypotheses. This study advances our understanding of the role of personality trait extraversion in shaping individual proactive behavior at different levels.

1. Introduction

Proactive behavior, which refers to self-initiated, future-oriented behaviors directed at bringing about change to situations or/and oneself, has attracted increasing scholarly attention over recent years (e.g., Crant, 2000; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). Typically studied proactive behaviors include using one's initiative, taking charge of situations, actively anticipating and solving problems, and implementing new work methods, among others (Parker & Collins, 2010). Since proactive behaviors play a significant role in shaping individuals' work, career, and quality of life (e.g., Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Parker et al., 2010), it is important to understand how such behavior is fostered.

Consolidating the broad literature on proactivity, Parker et al. (2010) proposed an integrated framework, which posits that personal and situational factors exert influence on proactive behaviors by affecting an individual's motivational states. They identified three motivational pathways towards proactive behavior: a *can-do* motivation, which concerns individuals' self-perceived ability in engaging in proactive behavior; a *reason-to* motivation, which concerns individuals' perceived importance of proactive behavior in fulfilling their goals; and an *energized-to* motivation, which posits that individuals' affective experiences provide an 'energizing' motivation that fuels proactive behavior.

While the first two motivational processes, which tend to focus on

cognitive-motivational pathways, have been extensively studied, the *energized-to* pathway is relatively new and under-explored (Parker et al., 2010). In line with the affect-as-resources perspective (e.g., Aspinwall, 1998), Parker et al. (2010) conceptualized that among different forms of affect, high-activated positive affect (PA) (e.g., feeling excited, enthusiastic) is most important in promoting proactivity. Empirical studies supports this proposition, showing that individuals with higher levels of high-activated PA are more likely to engage in different phases (e.g., Bindl, Parker, Totterdell, & Hagger-Johnson, 2012) and forms (e.g., Warr, Bindl, Parker, & Inceoglu, 2014) of proactive behavior. The same effect is also observed at the team level, wherein teams having a strong positive affective tone are more proactive in completing teamwork (Wu & Wang, 2015). Although these studies focus mainly on between-person or team differences, the same affect-as-resources perspective can also be applied at a within-person level. Given that high-activated PA has an energizing potential, experiencing this affect on a given day could equip individuals with high levels of energy, spirit, and enthusiasm, providing energy resources for them to engage in approach-oriented behaviors and become proactive. Empirical evidence supports this theoretical inference. For instance, focusing on PA in general, Fritz and Sonnentag (2009) reported that daily PA is positively associated with proactive behavior on the same and the following workday. Focusing on high-activated PA specifically, diary studies have revealed that when an individual experiences high-activated PA, the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: lena.wang@rmit.edu.au (Y. Wang).

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individual is more likely to be innovative (Madrid, Patterson, Birdi, Leiva, & Kausel, 2014) or to actively direct efforts at investing activities (Seo, Bartunek, & Barrett, 2010).

Although research so far supports the role of high-activated PA in sustaining individual proactive behavior at the between- and within-person levels, such multilevel effects have not been examined simultaneously. As associations among psychological constructs may not necessarily be ergodic (e.g., Molenaar, 2004), it is worth examining the multilevel association between high-activated PA and proactive behavior together to provide cogent evidence. Moreover, how personality can shape the multilevel effects of high-activated PA and subsequent proactive behavior has not been examined. Although personality has been studied and linked to proactive behavior at the between-person level (see Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010 for a meta-analysis), it has been rarely investigated in studies focusing on proactive behavior at the within-person level (except Madrid et al., 2014) and has not been linked to the *energized-to* pathway at different levels in a multilevel examination.

The aim of this study is thus to explore how individual differences in stable personality traits could influence the multilevel effects of high-activated PA in shaping proactive behavior at both between- and within-person levels. As elaborated shortly, we focus on personality trait extraversion, which refers to the extent to which an individual has a need for stimulation, activity, assertiveness, and interpersonal interaction (Digman, 1990). We propose that those high in personality trait extraversion tend to feel high-activated PA more frequently and thus engage in more proactive behavior, which can be summarized as a mediation mechanism at the between-person level. This proposition is in line with recent advances in the motivational perspective towards personality such that extraversion is understood as individuals' sensitivity to experience rewards from social interactions (Denissen & Penke, 2008). For proactive behavior at the within-person level, we hypothesize that due to the relative lack of energy-enabling psychosocial resources to be proactive, which are typically possessed by extraverts, introverts might particularly rely on the energizing force provided by daily high-activated PA to become proactive on that day. This reflects a cross-level interaction effect of personality trait extraversion on the within-person association between daily high-activated PA and daily proactive behavior. Overall, this study seeks to extend research on an affective motivational pathway in shaping proactive behavior at both between- and within-person levels, and to provide a complete picture about the motivational and individual antecedents underpinning proactive behavior at different levels.

2. Literature and hypotheses

2.1. High-activated PA and proactive behavior at the between- and within-person levels

In studying affect, researchers have shown the existence of two orthogonal dimensions: *valance*, which represents the experience of pleasure ranging from unpleasant (negative affect - NA) to pleasant (PA); and *arousal*, which denotes one's sense of energy and readiness for action, and the extent ranges from low-activated to high-activated (e.g., Russell, 1980; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). In modeling the psychological mechanisms of proactive behavior, Parker et al. (2010) contended that PA facilitates individuals' forward thinking and future orientation, and activates and promotes an approach tendency towards goals (i.e., proactivity). They further specified that strong motivational forces originate from high-activated PA, which is characterized by feeling energized, inspired and enthusiastic, as this affect provides the energizing resource that promotes individuals to put effort into behaviors for attaining goals or avoiding particular outcomes (Parker et al., 2010). In contrast, low-activated PA, such as feeling calm and contented, tends to facilitate reflection rather than forward-thinking, thus making it less likely to generate an *energized-to* state to foster

proactivity (Parker et al., 2010). This reasoning is in line with the affect-as-resource perspective (e.g., Aspinwall, 1998; Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), which suggests that affect provides an individual energy resources that motivate proactive behaviors. According to this perspective, the presence of high-activated PA provides the individual the information that these resources are adequate to compensate for potential costs involved in being proactive at a particular time.

As mentioned earlier, the between- and within-person levels of the energized-to pathways are empirically supported, as demonstrated by the positive association between high-activated PA and proactive behavior at different levels. Studies focusing on the between-person relationship revealed that individuals with high-activated PA, but not low-activated PA, tend to engage in all phases of the behavioral process of proactivity (e.g., envisioning, planning, enacting, and reflecting; Bindl et al., 2012) and in different forms of proactive behavior (e.g., voice, taking charge, problem prevention, and strategic scanning; Warr et al., 2014). Studies focusing on the within-person relationship revealed that experiencing high-activated PA in a week is positively related to innovative behavior in that week (Madrid et al., 2014). Consistent with this empirical evidence, we expect that at the between-person level, those who experience more high-activated PA will engage in more proactive behavior than those who experience lower high-activated PA; at a within-person level, when an individual experiences high-activated PA, he or she will be more likely to perform proactive behavior. We do not propose these as hypotheses, for both effects have been observed in previous studies, despite never having been examined simultaneously.

2.2. The role of personality trait extraversion

We now turn to how personality traits can shape proactive behavior through influencing the effects of high-activated PA at different levels. We focus on trait extraversion because, among the Big Five personality traits, extraversion has the strongest association with proactivity (e.g., corrected correlation at 0.42 between extraversion and proactive personality, Thomas et al., 2010 for a meta-analysis). Extraverted individuals are usually bold, outgoing, active, and high spirited, while less-extraverted individuals are quiet, passive, and less sociable (Digman, 1990). We propose that at the between-person level, personality trait extraversion fosters proactive behavior via high-activated PA. First, the positive relationship between trait extraversion and general PA is well established at the between-person level (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Underpinning this relationship is the view that extraverts, due to their active participation in social activities for enjoyment and pleasure (e.g., Emmons & Diener, 1986) and their sensitivity to rewards and incentive stimuli (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000), have a greater tendency to experience PA. Specifically for high-activated PA, Yik and Russell (2001) found that extraversion positively related to activated pleasant affect. Second, as previously discussed, the *energized-to* pathway (Parker et al., 2010) indicates that, at the between-person level, those who experience higher levels of high-activated PA are more inclined to engage in proactive behavior. In light of Bindl et al. (2012), this occurs because high-activated PA fuels energy, inspiration, and enthusiasm to facilitate engagement and persistence in activities, which are essential elements of proactivity. Taken together, we hypothesize that at the between-person level, personality trait extraversion will be positively associated with high-activated PA, which in turn will be positively associated with proactive behavior (Hypothesis 1). This proposition is also in line with a recent conceptualization on personality, which posits that personality reflects stable individual differences in people's motivational reactions to situational cues (Denissen & Penke, 2008). According to this view, trait extraversion motivates behaviors by predisposing individuals to experience social interactions as rewarding – that is, to derive positive affect from these situations.

We further propose that personality trait extraversion will have a cross-level moderating effect on the affect-proactivity relationship at

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