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## Critical Perspectives

# Internship performance and satisfaction in sports: Application of the proactive motivation model

Wan Chen Lu <sup>a</sup>, Che-Chun Kuo <sup>b,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Athletics, National Taiwan University, Taiwan<sup>b</sup> Department of Recreation and Leisure Industry Management, National Taiwan Sport University, No. 250, Wenhua 1st Rd., Guishan, Taoyuan 33301, Taiwan

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## ABSTRACT

Career-related internships are often promoted as important opportunities for college students to explore their career options and gain valuable experience (Brooks, Cornelius, Greenfield, & Joseph, 1995). Despite a reasonably large body of internships in the sport industry each year, little research has been conducted on college internship programs. The present study used the proactive motivation model (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010) as the framework for identifying the antecedents of internship performance and their satisfaction. A total of 306 college students majoring in sports were recruited as participants in the current study. The researcher gathered data from paper questionnaires and electronic surveys (*e-surveys*) with a two time-point design. The results indicated that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between proactive personality and internship performance as well as satisfaction. In terms of the current findings, the theoretical and practical implications of sport internship and proactivity literature are further discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

With the growing number of college institutions and graduates, career preparation has become a significant concern among university students (Choi & Kim, 2013). As such, an internship serves as an important instrument for students' workplace learning and job searching (Brooks et al., 1995; Liu, Xu, & Weitz, 2011). To assess this resource, cooperating companies who offered internships could receive the benefits of temporary assistance from interns (Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010) and establish the most effective relationships with students and schools for job recruitment (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999; Pianko, 1996).

Successful internship experiences not only improve students' competitive advantage in the job market (Aggett & Busby, 2011) but also ease their transition into the workplace (Liu et al., 2011). They can use the internship as a screening device for future jobs (Narayanan et al., 2010) and receive higher evaluations from college recruiters than those without internship experience would receive (Taylor, 1988). These benefits are becoming increasingly relevant as the number of students engaging in internships has risen dramatically (D'abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009). A survey from Zawel (2005) reported that almost 80% of all college seniors have at least one internship experience—that is 25 times the 3% participation rate in 1980. This may be because the high cost of education is increasing the pressure to find a job; thus, internships have become more popular since real-world experience may enhance recent graduates' employability (Coco, 2000).

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [chechunk@gmail.com](mailto:chechunk@gmail.com) (C.-C. Kuo).

Although internships are becoming more widespread, internship research still requires attention when one compares it to other topics in the literature of education. Given that past studies on internships have focused mainly on business (i.e., marketing and financial; Clark, 2003), hospitality (e.g., Aggett & Busby, 2011; Chen & Shen, 2012; Hsu, 2012; Wang, Chiang, & Lee, 2014), and tourism (e.g., Kim & Park, 2013; Koc, Yumusak, Ulukoy, Kilic, & Toptas, 2014; Ruhanen, Robinson, & Breakey, 2013), little is known about internships in other fields, such as sports. In fact, compared with the attributes of internships such as hospitality and tourism, which mainly train students for service work (e.g., administration, housekeeping; Chen & Shen, 2012; Koc, Yumusak, Ulukoy, Kilic, & Toptas, 2014), sport internships often offer not only training in general services but also physical education or coaching practices involving comprehensive skills (e.g., game strategy) and the pedagogical expertise in sports (Cushion, Armour, & Jones 2003; Demers, Woodburn, & Savard 2006; O'Bryant, O'Sullivan, & Raudensky, 2000). In this regard, sport interns need to have higher self-efficacy (Dieffenbach, Murray, & Zakrajsek, 2011; Weiss, Barber, Sisley, & Ebbeck, 1991). As a consequence, internship plays an important and unique role in the sport field. It deserves more attention from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint, as it is relevant to many real-world learning situations.

Overall, in recent studies on internships, we have found growing studies grounded in conceptual models in order to explain the systematic assessments of internships (D'abate et al., 2009; Narayanan et al., 2010). To date, the role of interns' traits in influencing their job performance has received little scholarly attention. It is believed that career success is the result of individual fit between personality and working environment (Callanan & Benzeng, 2004). As a result, our study attempted to extend prior research on internship performance by adopting the proactive motivation model proposed by Parker, Bindl, and Strauss (2010), which demonstrates the antecedents and motivation process variables to influence proactive outcomes; in particular, we suggested that self-efficacy is a proactive motivational mechanism between proactive disposition and outcomes. Our study contributes to the existing literature in three main aspects. First, we investigated sport internship from the proactivity perspective, which has been recognized as a beneficial approach to explaining individuals' career development because of the rise of nonlinear careers that need people to be proactive to actively change their situations and create ideal futures (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). Second, we introduced a motivational role called self-efficacy, which is a critical indicator in proactivity theory (Bindl & Parker, 2011; Wu & Parker, 2011) as well as in the field of sport internship (Dieffenbach et al., 2011). In addition, the current examination further expanded the external validity of the proactive motivation model in different domains. The below sections further elaborate the proactivity concept, the model of proactive motivation, and the research hypothesis.

## 2. Individual proactivity in career domain

In today's rapidly changing environment, an organization in the sports industry requires rapid responses to a changing external environment. Specifically, in the sport industry, services play a critical role and are receiving growing attention nowadays; sport organizations are required not only to maintain outstanding service quality but also to deliver satisfactory consumption experiences to fulfill consumers' expectations (Chanavata & Bodet, 2014; Robinson, 2006). This would allow these organizations to create and maintain a competitive advantage. In other words, organizations would benefit from employees who actively exert the personal initiative to engage in behaviors described as individual proactivity (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). In this regard, being proactive, rather than passive, might be an essential way to develop a personal career path because proactivity concerns making things happen and aspiring and striving to change one's situation to build an ideal future (Parker et al., 2010). Following the concept of proactivity from a dispositional perspective, proactive personality has been identified as a determinant of individual proactivity (Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Proactive personality is defined as a self-initiated, change-oriented, and future-focused personal trait (Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2010; Parker et al., 2010), which is different from the five-factor model (Crant & Bateman, 2000). For the past two decades, the proactive personality has been widely applied in organizational behavior. A number of studies and meta-analysis reviews support the utility of the proactive personality in predicting work outcomes (Crant, 1995; Fuller & Marler, 2009; Kim, Hon, & Crant, 2009; Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010; Major, Turner, & Fletcher 2006; Parker & Sprigg, 1999; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Researchers have found that proactive personality is associated with beneficial outcomes, such as career success (Seibert et al., 1999), innovation (Seibert et al., 2001), entrepreneurship (Crant, 1996), organizational commitment (Chan, 2006), job satisfaction (Pinguart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2003), and job performance (Crant, 1995; Thompson, 2005). Crant and Bateman (2000) indicated that proactive personality is a stable characteristic attribute across a range of activities and situations in general, including the education setting. As a result, this trait could be captured in diverse fields and be unrelated to context (Lin, Lu, Chen, & Chen, 2014). Yet, surprisingly, little research has investigated how students with proactive traits could influence pre-employment outcomes and its mechanism (Kim et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2014). The evidence of a cross-contextual personality is scarce in empirical studies.

In this regard, we adopted the proactive motivation model as a framework for the current study. The proactive motivation model assumes that individual proactivity is a goal-driven process (Parker et al., 2010). It involves setting goals and aspirations and striving to bring about change to achieve a better future (Grant & Ashford, 2008). It consists of individual differences (i.e., personality and life values), contextual variables, motivation and goal processes (i.e., self-efficacy), and work context and outcomes (i.e., job performance and satisfaction) within this model. Accordingly, we suggested that individual traits such as proactive personality could influence proactive outcomes through motivational processes (Parker et al., 2006, 2010). Specifically, drawing on the theoretical and practical reasons above, we further proposed self-efficacy as a potential motivational indicator in the present study.

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