Change-oriented behavior: A meta-analysis of individual and job design predictors

Sophia V. Marinova [a],[*], Chunyan Peng [b], Natalia Lorinkova [c], Linn Van Dyne [d], Dan Chiaburu [e]

[a] University of Alabama in Huntsville, 323 Business Administration Building (BAB), 301 Sparkman Drive, Huntsville, AL 35899, USA
[b] Ivey School of Business, Western University, 1255 Western Road, Ivey-New Building 2334, London, Ontario N6G 0N1, Canada
[c] Department of Management, McDonough School of Business, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057, USA
[d] Michigan State University, N424 North Business Complex, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA
[e] Texas A&M University, Department of Management, Mays Business School, College Station, TX 77843, USA

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ABSTRACT

We propose and meta-analytically test a theoretical model of individual and job-based predictors of change-oriented behaviors. Meta-analytic tests (106 effect sizes, N = 28,402) demonstrate that employee's proactive personality is a stronger predictor of change-oriented behavior than the five-factor model (FFM) personality traits of openness and extraversion. Also, enriched job characteristics (autonomy, complexity, and task significance) are more important in predicting change-oriented behavior, than un-enriched job characteristics (routinization and formalization). Finally, we establish work engagement as a mediator that provides an explanation for how and why proactive personality and enriched job characteristics predict change-oriented behavior. We provide both theoretical and empirical integration of the literature with practical implications for managing change-oriented behaviors, which are increasingly recognized as important to both organizational effectiveness and employee career management.

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For half-a-century, conceptions of organizational effectiveness have emphasized the importance of employee behaviors that sustain stability as well as those that promote innovation (Katz, 1964). In today's fast-paced, highly competitive work contexts, the second behavior identified by Katz – change-oriented employee behavior that proactively aims to promote organizational innovation – is increasingly important because ongoing organizational success is contingent on innovative employee ideas that help the organization respond to dynamic situations and meet changing customer expectations (Bettencourt, 2004; Choi, 2007; Crant, 2000; Marinova, Moon, & Van Dyne, 2010; Nemeth & Staw, 1989).

Highlighting the importance of employee behaviors that support stability as well as behaviors that are directly aimed at facilitating organizational innovation, the organizational citizenship behavior literature (OCB; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006) includes conceptual models of similarities and differences in the nomological networks of these two behaviors (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995). Empirical research demonstrates convergence and divergence in the predictors of affiliative behaviors, such as compliant rule following and helping behaviors which enhance smooth functioning, and change-oriented behaviors such as taking charge and voice that enhance innovation (e.g. Kim, Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Johnson, 2013; McAllister, Kamdar, Morrison, & Turban, 2007; Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008).

While narrative and quantitative reviews have provided cumulative insights into citizenship behavior in general and affiliative behaviors specifically (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Organ et al., 2006), the field lacks an integrated

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: sophia.marinova@uah.edu (S.V. Marinova), apeng@ivey.uwo.ca (C. Peng), Nataly.Lorinkova@georgetown.edu (N. Lorinkova), vandyne@msu.edu (L. Van Dyne), dchiaburu@mays.tamu.edu (D. Chiaburu).

quantitative review of individual and contextual predictors of change-oriented behaviors. This is problematic because research on change-oriented behaviors has increased in recent years (see Bindl & Parker, 2010 for a review), but the literature is fragmented. Different research teams use different terms and do not always draw on each other's work to provide a more integrated perspective. For instance, Parker, Bindl, and Strauss (2010) called for research that establishes potential communalities between such behaviors. Thus although employee change-oriented behaviors are frequently emphasized as important to organizational effectiveness and advantage (Barney, 1995; Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008; Jex, 2002), the fragmented state of the literature makes it difficult to ascertain if results converge to provide a systematic perspective on individual and contextual predictors of change-oriented employee behavior. Moreover, change-oriented behaviors have become more prominent in how employees manage their careers (Crant, 2000). Therefore, our study can provide insights on how individual and job design features influence *specifically* the propensity of employees to engage in proactive, change-oriented work behaviors.

Responding to this problem, we focused on individual and situational predictors of change-oriented behavior, defined as positively-intended proactive employee actions that aim to enhance work effectiveness based on initiative and changes to the work situation- for example, in work processes, services, and products. Consistent with this conceptual definition, we include proactive work behaviors (Bindl & Parker, 2010; Parker & Collins, 2010), taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), voice (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), change-oriented citizenship (Bettencourt, 2004; Bettencourt, Gwinner, & Meuter, 2001; Choi, 2007; Seppälä, Lipponen, Bardi, & Pirttilä-Backman, 2012; Van Dyne et al., 2008), personal initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001), and creative performance (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003; Zhou & George, 2001) as examples of change-oriented employee behaviors.

Going beyond other meta-analyses that have examined the Big Five and change-oriented citizenship (Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011), workplace stress and voice behavior (Ng & Feldman, 2012), and employee proactivity and job performance (Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2013), we examine two factors highlighted in Bindl and Parker's (2010) model of change-oriented behaviors: individual differences in personality and situational differences in job design. Thus, we focus our meta-analysis on *person-centered agentic traits* (e.g., proactive personality) and *situation-based work characteristics* (e.g., job autonomy) as predictors of change-oriented behavior. Extending prior meta-analytic research (Chiaburu et al., 2011), our approach allows for comparison of different individual differences (e.g., proactive personality vs. Big Five traits) as well as a comparison of different job design characteristics. Whereas personality characteristics can have implications for selection, training, and development (Organ, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2010), job design is "a foundational influence on the actions and experiences of employees" and an "actionable feature" of work (Grant, Fried, & Juillerat, 2011, p. 419).

We aim to make three distinct key contributions to the literature. First, responding to recommendations of Parker et al. (2010), we strive to gain a deeper and more integrated understanding of personal and situational predictors of change-oriented behavior. We draw on the agency and communion distinction (Bakan, 1966; Helgeson & Fritz, 1999) and on bandwidth-fidelity arguments (Hampson, John, & Golberg, 1986; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996) to establish the relative importance of proactive personality versus other individual traits. We also consider both enriched and un-enriched job design characteristics. Second, we consider work engagement – defined as the extent to which an employee feels fully connected and involved with her or his work activities (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011) – as a key mediating process that sheds light on one psychological mechanism that motivates change-oriented behavior. Thus we respond to calls to study the proactive motivational process more holistically (Parker et al., 2010). This is because engagement includes perceptions of cognitive, physical, and emotional connectedness to a job, capturing the multifaceted nature of proactive motivation more directly (Hakanen et al., 2008) compared to other traditional employee attitudes (such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment; Newman & Harrison, 2008). Finally, our study integrates the literature on change-oriented behavior by clarifying the conceptualization of change-oriented behavior (Schwab, 1980), based on both theory and expert ratings.

1. Theoretical model

Agentic tendencies include status seeking, autonomy, independence, and control over the environment (e.g. Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1996), while communal tendencies emphasize warm and harmonious relationships with others. Contrasts of agentic and communal orientations provide a useful theoretical lens for thinking about the role of personality in work contexts (e.g. Plutchik & Conte, 1997). Theoretically, agentic traits have direct relevance to change-oriented behavior because they indicate employee's tendencies to generate change in their social environment (Bandura, 1989; Elder, 1994) and "To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning or life circumstances" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). In this study, agentic traits include proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Fuller & Marler, 2009) and the Five-Factor traits of openness to experience and extraversion (Digman, 1997). Going beyond previous meta-analytic work on the Five-Factor model (Chiaburu et al., 2011), we develop relative impact arguments for proactive personality compared to more global personality traits.

Grant and Parker (2009) expanded the traditional view of job design and proposed a proactive perspective that includes autonomy, accountability, job complexity, routinization, and ambiguity (or low formalization) as important job characteristics that should be related to proactive behavior. Three of these (autonomy, accountability, and job complexity) represent high motivating potential. In contrast, two job characteristics (routinization and formalization) represent low motivating potential. We predict a generally positive influence for enriched and a negative effect for un-enriched job characteristics on change-oriented behavior. We also compare their relative strength in predicting employee change-oriented behavior.

Going beyond distal predictors, we also propose and test the extent to which feeling engaged with the work mediates relationships with change-oriented behavior. Figs. 1a and b summarize our model.