THE PEOPLE MAKE THE PLACE: A MULTI LEVEL STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE WORK RELATIONSHIPS ON PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR

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What is Proactive Behaviour

“Self-initiated and future-oriented action that aims to change and improve the situation or oneself.” (Parker, Williams & Turner 2006: 636).

Proactivity often involves interpersonal risk, requires effort and determination and can defy norms. Relational contexts which support or inhibit proactive behavior can influence the motivation to be proactive.
Our Research

We adopt a positive relationships lens (Dutton and Ragins 2007) to understand the ways in which relationships at different levels with the organization contribute proactive behavior. We asked:

1. What is the role of positive work relationships between colleagues in engendering proactive behavior?

2. In what ways does the quality of work relationships influence the decision to be more or less proactive – what are the mechanisms?
Why Focus on Relational Context?

• “Relationships are not only the essence of meaning in peoples lives but they also reside deep in the core of organizational life: they are the means by which work is done and meaning is found in organizations” (Ragins & Dutton, 2007)

• In line with Parker’s (2010) framework of proactive motivation, positive work relationships can be viewed as contextual influences that boost individual motivation and capacity for proactive behavior.
What aspects of work relationships are important for proactivity?

• *Individual Subjective Relational Experiences*
  Subjective ‘high quality’ relational experiences are characterized by vitality, positive regard and felt mutuality (Dutton *et al.*, 2006).

• *Relational Coordination Within Work Units*
  “A mutually reinforcing process of interaction between communication and relationship carried out for the purpose of task integration” (Gittell, 2002).

• These aspects of relationships are particularly important in interdependent contexts.
What are the mediating mechanisms?

At the individual level:

Role Breadth Self Efficacy
“One’s perceived capability of carrying out a range of proactive, interpersonal and integrative activities beyond the prescribed technical core” (Parker, 1998).

At the unit level:

Psychological Safety Climate is evidenced in “a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up…and stems from mutual trust and respect among team members” (Edmondson 1999: 354).
Proposed Cross Level Model

Unit level
- Relational Coordination
- Psychological Safety Climate

Individual Level
- Subjective Relational Experiences
- Role Breadth Self Efficacy
- Proactive Work Behavior
Research Design & Method

• Cross-sectional survey of nursing staff working in four independently owned hospitals in Ireland.

• Nurse Managers were asked to comment on the proactivity of their nurse reports.

• The final sample size was 246 matched staff nurse/nurse manager pairs.

• Multi level modelling was used to test for cross level relationships.
Data Preparation

• All measures were subjected to exploratory factor analysis.

• Aggregation of unit level data was justified by calculating $R_{wg}$ and $ICC$ levels and were deemed satisfactory and within guideline ranges recommended by James (1982) and Glick (1985).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>RWG</th>
<th>ICC1</th>
<th>ICC2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational Co-ordination</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Safety Climate</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.63</td>
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</tbody>
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• Controls: proactive personality, tenure, site.
Key Research Findings

• Subjective relational experiences predict proactive behavior at work
• Role Breadth Self Efficacy partially mediates the relationship between subjective relational experiences and proactive behavior
• Relational coordination climate indirectly predicts individual level proactivity via it’s direct impact on psychological safety climate
Final model: Best fit with data

Unit level
- Relational Co-ordination → Psychological Safety Climate
  - 0.82**
  - 0.51**

Individual Level
- Subjective Relational Experiences → Role Breadth Self Efficacy
  - 0.30**
  - 0.30**
  - 0.23*
- Role Breadth Self Efficacy → Proactive Work Behaviour

Note: Although multi-level models are assessed using overall fit statistics, fixed effect parameter estimates and significance levels are presented here as they give an indication of strength of relationships between variables. * p < .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .001
Implications For Practice

• HR function that supports and develops positive relational context
  – HR selection process i.e. select individuals who have the requisite competencies and attitudes to foster and contribute to high quality relations.
  – Provide opportunities to develop relationships in terms of the way work is structured
  – Providing skills-based training and coaching in relationship-building and collaborative practice for leaders and managers

• Leadership styles that develop and role model high quality relationships e.g. relational leadership

• Doing so is likely to yield dividends in terms of proactive performance from employees which has positive implications for the quality of care delivered to patients.
Contribution of the Research

- Highlights the role of positive co-worker relationships in enhancing proactivity.
- Relational co-ordination within work units contributes to individual proactive behaviour by fostering an environment where the perceived risks of proactivity are reduced.
- Builds on existing research on the impact of positive states for proactivity particularly in relation to the role of role breadth self efficacy.

Limitations

- Although the DV and predictors were evaluated by independent participants (thus circumventing CMV-related problems, still only cross-sectional data (future studies should adopt a longitudinal approach).
- We focus on co-workers in general – measuring relationships in different parts of individual networks would be a valuable extension.