Connecting HRM and Change Management: How HR Practices Can Stimulate Change Readiness

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Lars G. Tummers[1,2], Peter M. Kruyen[3], Dominique Vijverberg[4] and Tessa Voesenek[1]

[1] Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

[2] University of California, Berkeley, The United States

[3] Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

[4] Stichting IZZ, The Netherlands

Corresponding author: Dr. Lars Tummers, E-mail: Tummers@fsw.eur.nl

Abstract

Organizations are continuously under pressure to adapt to new developments such as policy changes, budgets cuts, and the introduction of new management ideologies. To adjust successfully to changing conditions, it is important that employees feel vital and are pro-active so that they can help implementing proposed organizational changes. However, how job proactivity and vitality is achieved is still unclear. This study connect HRM literature with change management literature to analyze how HR practices can increase proactivity and vitality at work. We used data collected in three large public healthcare organizations in the Netherlands (n = 1,507). SEM results shows that three HR practices are particularly effective for improving proactivity and vitality: 1) autonomy, 2) participation in decision-making, and 3) teamwork. Based on these results, we discuss the possibilities of using HRM to stimulate employees' readiness for organizational change.

Keywords

Human Resources Management, Change Management, Job Proactivity, Vitality, High Performance Work Practices

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Organizations are continuously under pressure to adapt to new developments such as policy changes, budgets cuts, and the introduction of new management ideologies. To adjust successfully to changing conditions, it is important that employees feel vital at work and are pro-active so that they can help implementing proposed changes, as is evident by the latest psychological approaches in change management (Hornung & Rousseau, 2007; Oreg, Michel, & By, 2013; Frese & Fay, 2001). Proactivity in work refers to people who have an interest in, and are engaged with, their work environment and take action themselves (Warr, 1990). Vitality— related to concepts such as vigor or zest (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009)—is defined as one's conscious experience of possessing energy and liveliness (Ryan and Frederick, 1997).

Several authors (e.g., Appelbaum, 2000; Combs, Hall & Ketchen, 2006; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005) showed that certain human resource practices — often labeled as High Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005) — such as training and development, feedback, and teamwork are strongly related to both individual and organizational performance. Hence, organizations could possibly enhance proactivity and vitality (and thus readiness for organizational changes) using specific HR instruments. In this article, our goal is to analyze the influence of five of the most important HPWPs on employee pro-activeness and vitality, and thus developing an environment that is suitable for organizational changes.

This study is innovative in two ways. First, we focus on the effects of HPWPs on active job behavior, thereby connecting HRM with change management. To date, most HRM research has studied the effects of HPWPs on passive job attitudes and behavior, such as

satisfaction and organizational commitment (Bauer, 2004; Meyer & Smith, 2000). Much less research has connected HRM with active job behavior, such as pro-activeness or vitality. Related to this, Kark & Carmeli (2009, p. 786) noted that employee vitality has been "the subject of limited studies in organizational settings". However, someone can be very satisfied with his job, but be quite inactive (starting at 10.00 AM, having a very long lunch, leaving at 3.00 PM, not helping colleagues etcetera). He will possibly not show much initiative to help make changes a success.

The second innovation is that we analyze perceived High Performance Work Practices. Nishii and Wright (2007) made a distinction between intended, actual and perceived HRM. The idea behind this is that there may be differences within organizations between the HR policy designed by the HR department (intended HRM), the HR practices implemented by line managers (actual HRM) and the perceptions of employees (perceived HRM). This study focuses on perceived HRM, given that perceived HRM is are often directly linked to performance (Den Hartog et al. 2013). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledge that more research is needed concerning perceived HRM. For instance, Macky and Boxall (2007, p.538) note that this is: "an area where it is recognized that more research is needed."

The outline of this article is as follows. First, we develop a theoretical framework in which we connect the literature on HPWPs on the one hand and the literature on job proactivity and vitality on the other hand. From the theoretical framework, we develop a number of hypotheses. Next, we describe our research methods. We performed structural equation modeling to test our hypotheses using data from a three large-scale independent surveys in Dutch public healthcare. After describing the results of the analyses, we discuss the possibilities of using HPWPs for stimulating employees to be ready for organizational change.

Theoretical Framework

The importance of active job behaviour for organizational change

In line with the resource based view of organizations (Barney, 1991), HRM scholars and work and organizational psychologists have studied how various HR practices have an impact on employee attitudes and behavior (e.g. Appelbaum et al. 2000; Kooij, Jansen, Dikkers & De Lange, 2009; Macky & Boxall, 2007; Ramsey, Scholarios, & Harley 2000). In turn, scholars have examined how these have an effect on both individual performance and organizational performance (Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995).

Most studies have focused on passive employees' attitudes and behavior (Frese & Fay, 2001; Kooij, Jansen, Dikkers, & De Lange, 2010). Examples of passive job outcomes include organizational commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), job satisfaction (Nagy, 2002), and employee loyalty (Niehoff, Moorman, Blakely, & Fuller, 2001). Enhancing passive job outcomes is of crucial value for organizational success. For example, employee satisfaction can be an important indicator of the experienced quality of the conducted work (George & Jones, 1996). Moreover, high organizational commitment, satisfaction and loyalty are negatively related to turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

However, it is questionable whether stimulating passive job outcomes is sufficient to achieve organizational changes. Here, active job performance seems to be more important (Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997; Frese & Fay, 2001; Sonnentag & Frese, 2002), which is also evident in studies on related topics like innovation studies (Laursen & Foss, 2003; Van de Vrande et al., 2010). In particular, research showed that employee proactive behavior and vitality are beneficial in such situations (Ghitulescu, forthcoming; Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

According to Grant and Ashford (2008), proactivity has two distinctive features compared to other types of behavior. Firstly, to say that an employee shows proactive

behavior implies that the person is thinking, deliberating, planning, calculating and acting to anticipate possible future events. Second, proactive behavior is change oriented. A proactive employee intends to alter the self, co-workers, or the work context to adapt to the anticipated changing conditions. Hornung & Rousseau (2007) showed that proactive behavior enhanced employee support for organizational change, in particular because proactivity enhances confidence to behave in novel and innovative ways as required when confronted with changing circumstances.

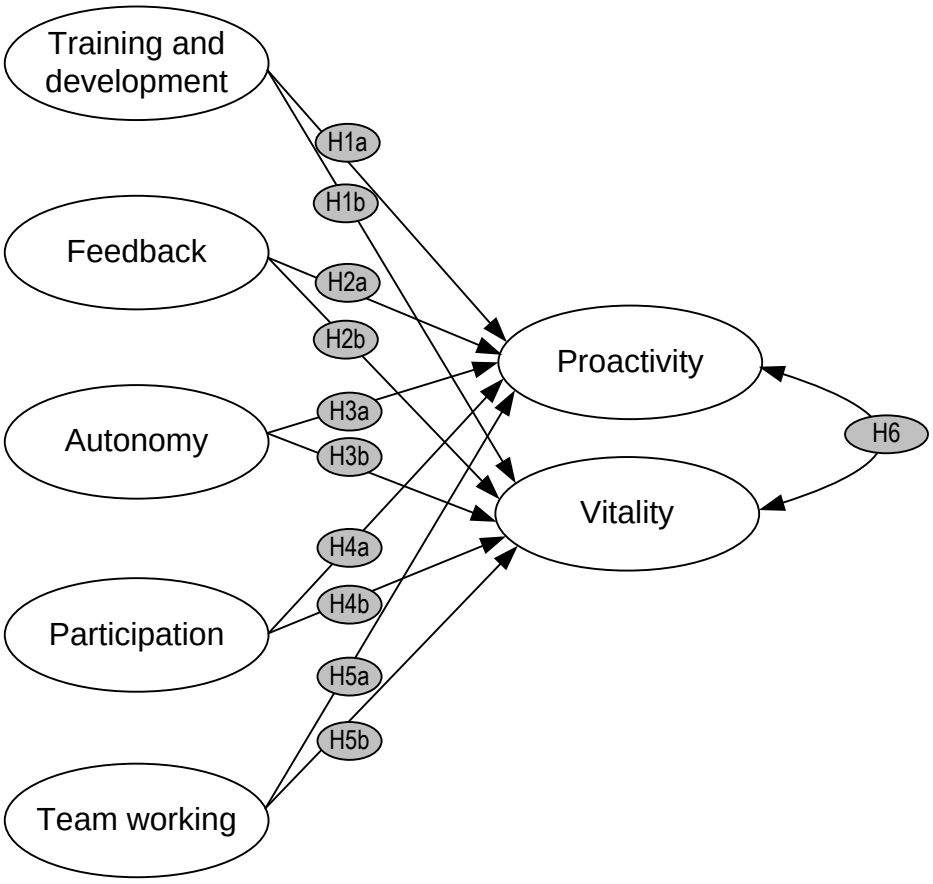
A vital person approaches work with positive energy and excitement. Vital employees believe that their behavior contributes to a meaningful purpose (Ryan & Bernstein, 2004). A vital person does not do "things halfway or halfheartedly" (Karl & Carmeli, 2009 p.789). As such, the degree of vitality affects the time and effort employees are willing to invest in particular activities. Jansen (2004) concluded that a high amount of vitality was required from employees to deal with organizational change, especially because proposed changes often have to be implemented next to the regular work.

Connecting HPWPs and active job behaviour

We can now link the HRM literature – specifically focusing on High Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) - with active job performance. We selected relevant HPWPs using the overview article of Boselie et al. (2005), who examined more than one hundred articles that linked HRM practices to performance. Based heron, they developed a list of 26 often-used HRM practices, ranked based on their prevalence in the studies. Specifically, we investigated the effects of the following five HPWPs, which are all in the top 10 of the list of Boselie et al. (2005): training and development, feedback, autonomy, participation in decision-making and teamwork. These were chosen given that they a) were important HR-practices, b) we expected them to influence pro-activeness and vitality, c) they could be measured on the employee level and d) well-validated measures for the concepts exist (see also Judge, Thoresen, Pucik,

& Welbourne, 1999; Tummers, Steijn, & Bekkers, 2012). The hypothesized model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *Hypothesized model*.



Training. We firstly expect that when employees experience that they receive high quality training opportunities, they will be more proactive and vital. For instance, Frese and Fay (2001) argue that employee training enhances employees' job pro-activeness, which they term personal initiative and defined as "work behavior defined as self-starting and proactive that overcomes barriers to achieve a goal" (Frese & Fay, 2001: p.133). Training and proactivity are believed to be connected via employees' perceived level of control. Employees who feel that they are capable to influence decisions show more personal initiative than employees who believe that they are not in control of their work situation (Spector, 1986). In a similar

vein, we expect training to enhance employee vitality as this concept also implies a form of personal initiative. Furthermore, training and development can (intellectually) stimulate employees, making them more vital at work (Dolle, 2012).

H1a: Perceived training is positively related to job proactivity.

H1b: Perceived training is positively related to vitality.

Feedback from supervisors and coworkers. Similar to perceived training opportunities, we expect that perceived work-related feedback from supervisors and co-workers enhances vitality and job proactivity. Feedback enhances proactivity as it provides suggestions to employees to take better control over their own work conditions (Crant, 2000). Moreover, in a qualitative study, Shagra and Shirom (2009; cf., Shirom 2011) identified several antecedents of employee vitality. Respondents often mentioned factors related to performance-related feedback from supervisors when describing situations in which they experienced high levels of vitality. Respondents stated that they felt appreciated or acknowledged when receiving feedback from their supervisor regardless of the content of the message. Feeling appreciated, in turn, increased their level of vitality (c.f., Carmeli, 2009). Hence, we expect that perceived feedback is also positively related to employee vitality.

H2a: Perceived feedback is positively related to job proactivity.

H2b: Perceived feedback is positively related to vitality.

Autonomy. We hypothesize that higher levels of perceived autonomy is positively related to job proactivity. If employees have influence over a broad range of work-related decisions, they develop ownership for these decisions and, in turn, are stimulated to take action themselves to improve their work situation (Spector, 1986; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Furthermore, we expect that perceived autonomy is positively

related to vitality. Several researchers found that autonomy or perceived self-control is a basic human need which, once achieved, stimulates vitality (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2011)**.** For example, Ryan and Frederick (1997) explored conditions and attributes associated with variations in levels of vitality of patients and found that participants reported higher levels of vitality when they completed autonomously motivated actions but lower levels of vitality when they perceived themselves as controlled by external forces.

H3a: Perceived autonomy is positively related to job proactivity.

H3b: Perceived autonomy is positively related to vitality.

Participation in decision-making. Several studies showed that engaging employees in decision-making procedures also enhances their work involvement and perceived level of self-control (e.g., Driscoll, 1978; Jackson, 1983; Siegel & Ruh, 1973; Shirom, 2011). Hence, we also hypothesize that higher levels of perceived participation in decision-making stimulates proactive behavior and vitality. Moreover, similar to the positive consequences of perceived degree of feedback from co-workers and supervisors on employees' feelings of appreciation, we believe that employees experience such positive feelings when their opinion is taking into consideration by their supervisor. Feelings of being recognized by superiors, in turn, are expected to increase employees' degree of vitality (Carmeli, 2009).

H4a: Perceived participation in decision-making is positively related to job proactivity.

H4b: Perceived participation in decision-making is positively related to vitality.

Teamwork. Teamwork may also increase both employee involvement and perceived level of self-control, and thus we predict that higher levels of perceived team working enhances job

proactivity too (Frese & Fay, 2001). Moreover, various authors found that teamwork resulted in improved relationships with colleagues (e.g., Van Mierlo, Rutte, Seinen, & Komper, 2010; Carmeli, 2009; Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995). Teamwork fosters mutual interdependencies between team members as a consequence of the created shared responsibilities. In turn, these interdependencies result in "a social structure of equal and good relationships" (Van Mierlo et al., 2010: p.294). Next, other authors have shown that having good connections with co-workers is an important aspect of establishing a positive work climate (e.g., Edmondson, 2004; Kark & Carmelli, 2009). In such a work environment, employees feel able to express their own thoughts and feelings without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990: p.708). A positive work climate invites employees to show 'risky' behavior such as asking colleagues for advice and support but also to engage in pro-active behavior, like reporting mistakes or proposing new ideas (Cannon & Edmondson, 2001; Edmondsons, 2004; Kark & Carmelli, 2009). Furthermore, researchers found a positive relationship between the perceived quality of the relationship with coworkers and employee vitality (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003: Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Because having high-quality inter-personal connections is believed to be a basic human need (Maslow, 1959), we expect that feeling part of a team gives employees positive energy.

H5a: Perceived teamwork is positively related to job proactivity.

H5b: Perceived teamwork is positively related to vitality.

Relationship between proactivity and vitality. We expect proactivity and vitality, the two main effects in this study, to be related. Employees who behave proactively are likely to experience higher levels of vitality—and *vice versa*—employees who feel more vital are more likely to show proactive behavior. We expect that proactive employees feel energized by observing the positive outcomes of their proactive behavior (Shirom, 2011). Simultaneously, we expect that

employees who experience higher levels of vitality are more likely to take action themselves to improve their work conditions or adjust to changing circumstances (e.g., Dorenbosch, 2013, p. 166; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Sonnentag & Niessen, 2008).

H6: Proactivity and vitality are positively related.

Method

Procedure and participants

Data were collected between 2010 and 2011 in three large public healthcare organizations in the Netherlands. In total, 2,876 people received the survey (developed by Stichting IZZ) of which 1,507 responded. This leads to an average response of 52%. The response rates were comparable across the organizations: organization A = 871 respondents, 52% response rate; organization B = 351 respondents, 53% response rate; organization C = 285 respondents, 53% response rate. Of all respondents, 91.1% were female which is representative for the number of females (91.4%) working in the Dutch healthcare sector (Vernet, 2010). Respondents' average age was 42, which is also similar to the average age of workers in the Dutch health sector.

Measures

All measures were administered in Dutch. Scales originally published in English were translated into Dutch by the first author and back-translated by the second author who was not familiar with the content original measurement instruments. No inconsistencies were found between both scale versions. All items were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Scales showed high reliabilities: coefficient alpha were all highly adequate, ranging from .79 (team working) to .90 (training and development).

Training. We used the five-item training scale developed by Van den Berg et al. (1999) to measure formal training employed by organizations. An example item was "I receive ongoing training, which enables me to do my job better".

Feedback from supervisors and coworkers. Feedback was measured by the three items of the original four-item scale of Wright (2004). An example item was "I receive ongoing training, which enables me to do my job better". The four items in the original scale were measured in the questionnaire. However, given that CFA test is often more stringent than the Cronbach's alpha reliability measure (Kline 2010), one item was taken out in order to improve the fit, more specifically the item item "I receive useful evaluations of my strengths and weaknesses at work" to improve the fit of the structural equation model".

Autonomy. To measure the level of freedom that employees experience on their way of working, we used the four of the five-item autonomy scale derived from Reychav & Sharkie (2010). One of the items was "I have freedom to adopt my own approach to the job". The items The item "I have control over how quickly or slowly I work" was removed to improve the fit of the model.

Participation in decision-making. We used three items of the four-item scale developed by Reychav & Sharkie (2010) to measure participation. A sample item was "I am able to influence the decisions made in my organization". The item "I am given an opportunity to express my views before my supervisor makes a decision" was removed to improve the fit of the model.

Team work. In order to measure teamwork, we employed two items of the often-used three-item scale of regarding communication and cooperation between teams (Campion & Medsker, 1993). One item was "Members of my team cooperate to get the work done". The item "Members of my team cooperate to get the work done" was removed to improve the fit of the model.

Pro-active behavior. Pro-active behavior was measured using the seven-item self-reported self-initiative scale of Frese et al. (1997). A sample item was "Whenever there is a chance to be actively involved, I take it".

Vitality. In order to measure vitality, we used the five-item scale of Kark & Carmeli (2009), one item being "I am full of positive energy when I am at work".

Control variables. We also included the following control variables: gender (male; female), age (ten categories used, ranging from 25 years or younger, 26-30 years… to 61-65 years, and 66 years or older), highest obtained educational degree (seven categories used, ranging from primary school to MBA), organizational unit, and two organizational dummies.

Statistical analysis

We performed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypotheses. SEM analyses were carried out using M*plus* (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010). SEM has several advantages over exploratory factor analysis and regression analyses including more stringent psychometric criteria for testing model fit, thereby improving validity and reliability (Brown, 2006). We tested our research model with standardized coefficients obtained using maximum likelihood estimation. We used the comparative fit index (CFI, acceptable values >.90), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI, acceptable values >.90), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, acceptable values <. 08) to determine model fit (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006). Because of the large sample size, we decided to test the hypotheses at the 1% significance level.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Organizational unit effects. We computed the interclass correlation coefficient (ICC) to investigate whether employees' degree of proactivity and vitality varied across

organizational units. In case respondents' scores on a dependent variable differ substantially across organizational units, a multilevel effect should be included. We found ICC values < .04 which implies that at most 4% of the variance in both dependent variables could be explained by differences in organizational unit membership. Hence, we decided not to include a possible organizational unit effect in our research model.

Measurement model. The results of the analyses confirm the existence of the factor structure as described in the measures subsection. The standardized factor loadings were adequate: between .43 and .87. General a minimum of .30 (better: >.40) is recommended (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998). The measurement model provided a good fit to the data (CFI=.94, TLI=.93, RMSEA=.04).

Testing the hypothesized model

After the measurement model, a structural model was constructing, relating the five HPWPs to job proactivity and vitality. The structural model proved to fit the data quite well (CFI=.92; TLI=.91; RMSEA=.05). The results are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: *Final model with significant standardized path coefficients (p< .01).*

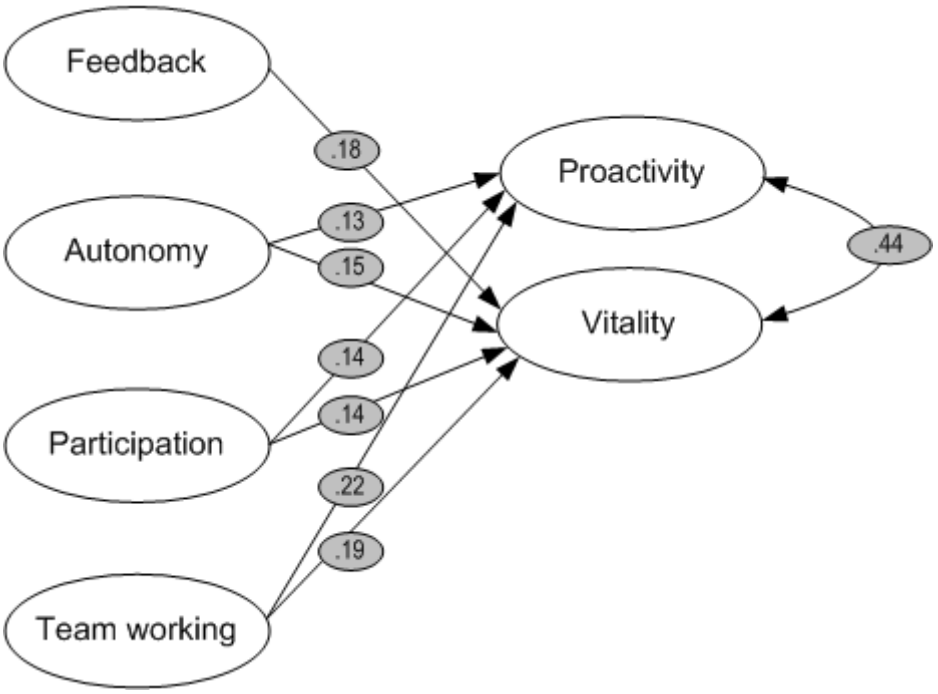


Figure 2 shows the final model with significant standardized path coefficients β (p< .01). Interestingly, three of the studied HPWPs showed a positive relationship with self-reported level of proactivity and vitality. Specifically, increased levels of perceived autonomy, participation in decision-making, and team working were related to higher levels of proactivity and vitality (i.e., H3a, H3b, H4a, H4b, H5a, and H5b). Standardized path coefficients of these HPWPs varied from .14 to .22 with an average of .16. Moreover, the results show that our last hypothesis (H6) was also accepted. That is, proactivity and vitality were positively related (correlation = .44). In contrast, the first two hypotheses (H1a and H1b) had to be rejected. We found no significant relationship between perceived level of training and development on the one hand and degree of proactivity and vitality on the other hand. Also our third hypothesis (H2a) had to be rejected. The data showed no relationship between perceived feedback and level of proactivity.

The control variables (not shown due to space limitations) showed no significant relationship with proactive behavior. That is, reported employee proactivity did not vary with

gender, age as well as education, and did not differ across the three surveyed health care organizations. With respect to effects of the control variables on employee vitality, the results show that vitality did not differ between male and female employees. However, older employees were generally more vital ($\beta = .07$), the level of vitality decreased with education ($\beta = -.11$), and the average degree of vitality was around .10 standard deviations lower for employees of both health care organization B and organization C compared to employees of organization A.

Discussion

Organizations are faced with a turbulent environment due to factors like the economic crisis, altered demands of clients, and changing demographics (Kuipers et al., 2013; By & Macleod, 2009; Lember, Kalvet & Kattel, 2011). To cope with changing conditions, organizations require their employees to be ready for organizational change. This study shows that certain experienced HPWPs are related to proactivity and vitality and, thus, readiness for organizational change. Three perceived HR practices are particularly effective for improving proactivity and vitality: 1) autonomy, 2) participation in decision-making, and 3) teamwork. These practices are connected to increased levels in employee involvement, perceived self-control, and feelings of being recognized or appreciated by supervisors and co-workers. In turn, these factors seem to be of key importance for stimulating pro-activity and vitality (e.g., Grant & Ashford, Kark & Carmeli, 2009)

Interestingly, the studied HPWPs are aimed at increasing employees' self-control which proves a challenge to managers who try to implement organizational changes top down given that top-down implementation implies a reduced level of employees' self-control. Related studied also show that increasing autonomy can be beneficial for organizational change (Lines, 2004; Tummers, 2011). Moreover, several studies showed that readiness for

change is enhanced by showing management support for the proposed change and capabilities to clearly communicate the content of the proposed change (e.g., Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Cinite, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2009). Our research suggest that readiness for change can also be achieved by approaching employees more actively by means of HR instruments.

The lack of relationship between perceived level of training and development on the one hand and proactivity and vitality on the other hand may be explained by the specific content of the offered trainings programs. We speculate that if trainings are not directed at increasing perceived level of self-control, they may not stimulate proactive behavior and employee vitality. In a similar vein, feedback from supervisors and colleagues may not enhance proactivity if not directed at increasing self-control (c.f., Parker et al., 2006). Interestingly, we found a positive relationship between perceived feedback and self-reported vitality from which we conclude that feedback stimulated feelings of recognition and, hence, vitality, regardless of whether the feedback is directed at enhancing self-control or not.

Because of the importance of self-control in linking perceived HPWPs, vitality, and proactive behavior we will conduct additional analyses in which we will use the autonomy scale as a proxy measure of self-control to test the potential mediating effect of self-control on the other relationship between perceived HPWPs, proactive behavior and vitality. Moreover, additional analyses will be conducted to investigate the potential effect of work-related stress on proactivity and vitality.

The proof of the pudding is the eating. Further research may conduct field experiments to find out whether increased experienced or perceived levels of HPWPs cause higher levels of proactive behavior and vitality and thus readiness for organizational change. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to investigate if organizations whose employees experience higher levels of proactivity and vitality are indeed able to adept more successfully to changing environmental

conditions compared to organizations whose employees are less proactive and feel less vital. Lastly, it could be analyzed whether the impact of High Performance Work Practices varies between organizations. For instance, the impact of team working might be more important in some organizations than in others.

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