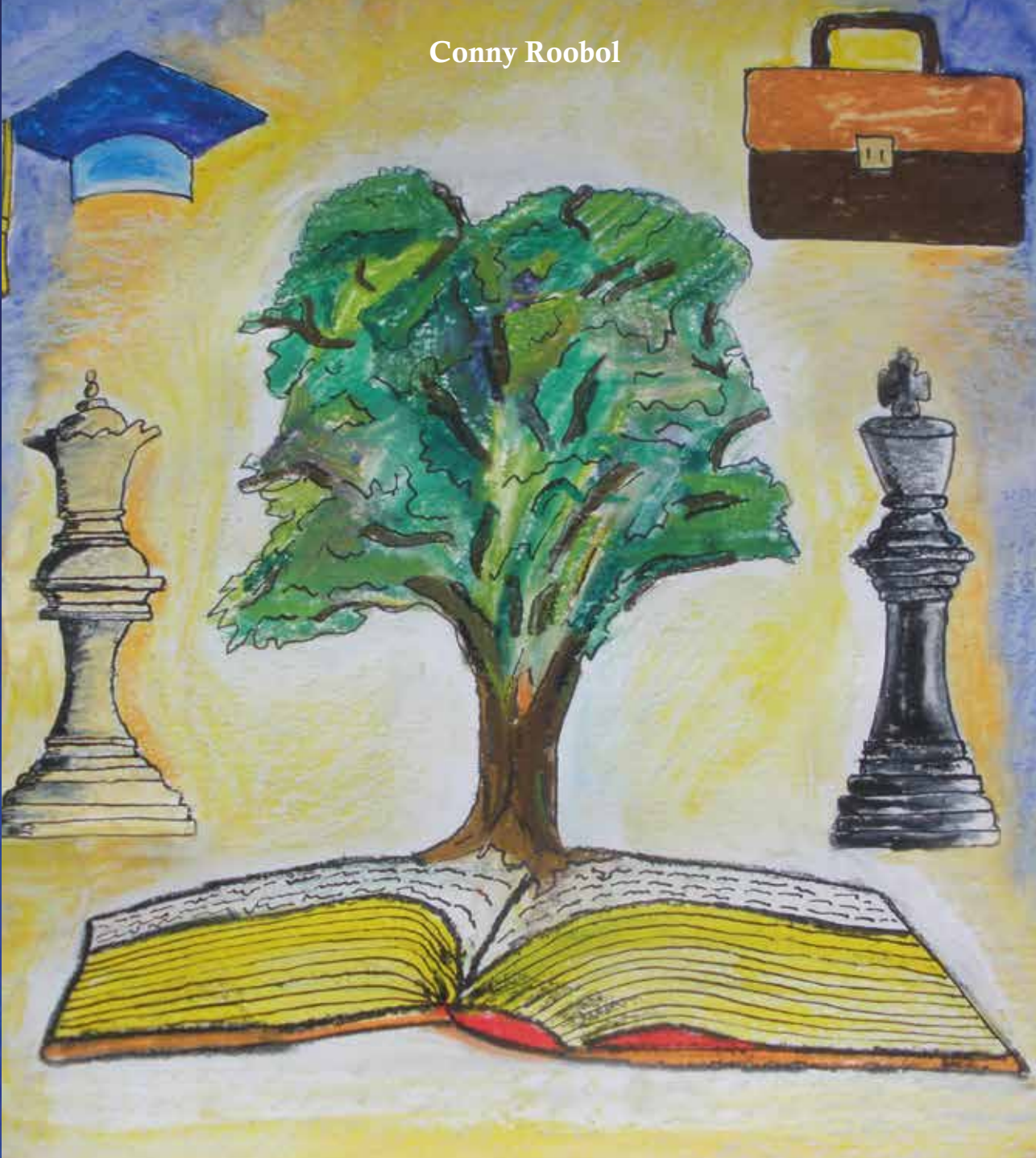
# Employable during mid- and late career:

A quantitative study on the drivers, barriers and outcomes of employability and mentoring in the Netherlands

**Conny Roobol**



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**English editing:** Laura Long, Wordsworth Editorial Services
**Printing and layout design:** Ipskamp Printing
**Cover design:** Ivo Beenakker

**ISBN:** 978-94-6421-123-8

This dissertation was written as part of the NWO-TOP project "Sustaining Employability", grant agreement no. 407-13-021.

# Employable During Mid- and Late Career:

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# Inzetbaar gedurende de middelste en laatste fasen van de loopbaan:

Een kwantitatieve studie naar de aanjagers, barrières en gevolgen van inzetbaarheid en mentoring in Nederland

Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the
Erasmus University Rotterdam
by command of the
rector magnificus

Prof. dr. R.C.M.E. Engels

and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board.

The public defence shall be held on
Thursday December 17th 2020 at 11:30 hours

by

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction and conclusion

## 1.1. Introduction

Senior employees, those roughly aged 45 years and older[1], constitute a vast majority of the Dutch labour force (CBS, 2019e). During this age group's working lives, the Dutch labour market has undergone major transformations. Compared with the last quarter of the 20th century, working life today is less predictable, less tied to a single employer and more transitional, partly as a result of phenomena such as global competition, flexibility in demand and employment shocks. In tandem with these transformations is the heightened awareness that employees should be able and willing to adjust to changing task and skill requirements in their current and future jobs. This employee resilience to fluctuating job requirements is what I, in simple terms, coin employability in this dissertation.

(Scientific) research and public debates have raised concerns regarding ageing of the labour force and employable working lives. Senior employees tend to work in shrinking positions (Bosch and Ter Weel, 2013), are assumed to be averse to change (Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008), receive limited growth opportunities and experience few if any job transitions beyond organisational borders (CBS, 2019b). As a result, senior employees are likely to end up in vulnerable, routine-intensive jobs at a single employer where they remain stuck. This lock-in effect undoubtedly raises the question of how senior employees can succeed in upholding their employability. Indeed, as senior employees confine their energies to fulfilling role-prescribed duties, how can employers assist them to adapt in a timely manner to changes in task and skill requirements? Considering that inter-organisational mobility is low among senior employees, I argue that the answer to this question should be sought in the context of everyday working life: the current job at the current employer, which I refer to as the current work environment. A point of departure is that senior employees are willing and able to keep their job-related skills up to date, despite deep-rooted, age-related prejudices and claims to the contrary (Posthuma and Campion, 2009). In fact, recent figures from Statistics Netherlands show that a significant share of Dutch senior employees participates in job-related courses (average of 50,2% in 2016; CBS, 2019a), though participation rates lag behind those of younger age groups.

The argument that possibilities for employability enhancement are embedded in the current work environment immediately raises three other questions: who should be held responsible for senior employees' employability? Do the investments pay off, and for whom? But also, what kind of investments should be made? As for the first question, I argue that employees and employers carry a shared responsibility for

1 It is noteworthy that scholars use different classifications and labels for the term "senior employee", sometimes also referred to as the "older worker" (e.g., Fleischmann, 2014; Van Harten, 2016). Most scholars define the senior employee as one aged 45 years and over (e.g., De Lange *et al.*, 2010); however, some (e.g., Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009) use 40 as a bottom-line criterion to typify the senior or older employee.

upholding employability, which echoes the work of several prominent employability scholars (e.g., De Grip *et al.*, 2004). As regards the second question, I argue that if senior employees successfully adapt to changing task and skill requirements, they will accrue the benefit for their future employment positions, which follows recent claims about the role of employability in seizing actual and/or self-assessed employment prospects (e.g., Forrier and Sels, 2003; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Claims aside, empirical research is disunified regarding the joint effects of a wide array of individual (i.e., employee) and organisational conditions on employability and scarce regarding the role of employability in understanding employees' future employment positions. As for the third question, I argue that one potentially fruitful measure for employability enhancement is mentoring. In a nutshell, mentoring refers to a hierarchical workplace-based relationship between a more experienced and a less experienced employee, in which the more experienced employee or mentor caters for the (developmental) needs of the less experienced employee or protégé (e.g., Fletcher and Ragins, 2007). The apparent advantages of a mentorship are that it is embedded in the work environment, cost-effective and allows the protégé and mentor to teach and learn informally[2].



In the aforementioned definition of a mentoring relationship, I use the term "experienced employee" to typify the mentor. Although senior employees constitute a significant share of this group of experienced employees (CBS, 2019e), I urge the reader to refrain from using the terms "experienced" and "senior" as synonyms. This is because there is still another age group in the labour market that deserves attention as a potential mentor: midcareer employees, those ages 30 to 45. Indeed, it is likely that age and occupational expertise are currently more loosely connected than they previously have been because of the gradual erosion of linear intra-organisational career trajectories among a substantial portion of the Dutch labour force (an exception being senior employees; CBS, 2019b). In my opinion, this disconnection opens the possibility of identifying midcareer employees as potential mentors, provided that they possess sufficient expert knowledge to fulfil the protégé's developmental needs.

But what about these midcareer employees who also can be considered occupational experts, but for whom it may be less likely that they stay at their current employer for their entire working lives? Are they willing to become mentors? And how could organisations facilitate their taking that role? Equally importantly, what can midcareer employees gain from mentoring? Following Janssen, Van Vuuren and De Jong (2016), I argue that even though a few studies have examined the interaction between the organisation and mentorships (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 1997b; Billett, 2003), systematic research on the organisational conditions that ease or inhibit mentoring is missing. This knowledge deficiency is notable, since mentorships have been portrayed as

2 These features particularly apply to the so-called "informal mentorship", which I define as "a spontaneously developed and informal form of providing support that is not officially mandated within the organisation" (see 1.3.1).

*"prime untapped resources in creating the learning organization"* (Kram and Hall, 1989: 494), which implies that mentoring pays off for the organisation. Limited research attention also has been paid to the benefits mentors accrue from mentoring, and virtually no one has uncovered the mechanisms linking mentoring to mentors' benefits (Janssen *et al.*, 2016). How does mentoring enable mentors to improve their transferable skills (i.e., skills that are utilisable in multiple organisational settings) and their subsequent employment prospects? This knowledge gap, too, is glaring, as mentorships often have been compared with mutually beneficial knowledge-sharing forums (Mullen, 1994) in which mentors can be considered *"co-learners"* (Kram, 1996, as cited in Allen and Eby, 2003: 470).

This dissertation addresses some of the aforementioned pressing questions regarding mentoring and employability enhancement. Starting from the basic premise that employees and employers are the prime actors in charge of mentoring and employability enhancement and arguing that the latter constitute important vehicles for midcareer and senior employees' self-assessed and actual employment prospects, I aim to answer the following research question in this dissertation:

*"To what extent and how are employability and mentoring related to individual and/or organisational conditions and to midcareer and senior employees' self-assessed and actual employment opportunities, positions and transitions?"*

In this chapter, I start with an overview of extant employability approaches in section 1.2. In sections 1.3 and 1.4, I elaborate on five notable gaps in the employability literature and present a concise model showcasing my research foci. I then draw attention to the methods (1.5), core findings (1.6) and overarching discussion (1.7) of the research conducted for this dissertation.

## 1.2. Employability approaches

The term employability, narrowly defined as *"one's ability and willingness to work"* (Froehlich *et al.*, 2015: 2089), entered the research arena in the first half of the 20th century; however, not until the late 1990s and early 2000s did employability capture the interest of a wider, increasingly international community of scholars. Although this tremendous growth in the number of employability studies is commendable, the extant research is highly scattered. As a result, definitions of employability show little cross-fertilisation, and therefore, the exact meaning of the term remains largely unclear.

Most employability studies include characteristics of the individual employee (labelled as "individual conditions" below) in the conceptualisation of employability and concomitant empirical work. A common thread running through these studies is

that employability deals with "an individual's (e.g., employee's) likelihood or chance of a job" (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). There are two approaches to interpreting this definition. The first approach is the so-called "input-based" approach to employability. Proponents of this approach view employability as employees' skills, knowledge, dispositions (Fugate *et al.*, 2004), competencies (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006) and/or attitudes that serve as key inputs to future job chances. Thus, employability is defined in terms of employee characteristics, or *"personal strengths that increase the chance of a job"* (Forrier *et al.*, 2015: 56). Currently, most scholarship in this area sheds light on only a handful of employee characteristics (the exceptions being De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012b; Forrier *et al.*, 2015). The second approach is known as the "output-based" approach to employability. Advocates of this approach define employability as employees' (perceived) chances of another – equal or higher – job on the internal and/or external labour market. Thus, employability is understood as employees' "perceived ease of movement" (March and Simon, 1958) or actual job transitions based on their personal strengths. Forrier, Verbruggen and De Cuyper (2015) referred to this approach as "the appraisal" or "realisation" of the chance of a job.

A few employability studies concentrate on contextual conditions when defining employability. The term "contextual conditions" is an umbrella concept that stands for a host of barriers and opportunities beyond the individual employee's immediate control, such as organisational policies (e.g., recruitment procedures), sectoral and governmental arrangements (e.g., training funds; De Grip *et al.*, 2004) and shock events (e.g., bankruptcy; Forrier and Sels, 2003).

Also, a few scholars direct attention to social capital when studying employability (Forrier *et al.*, 2015; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Social capital is an overarching concept for all kinds of social networks that provide learning and career opportunities. The developmental value inherent in social networks has led some scholars to study mentoring as an indicator of employees' social capital (e.g., Eby *et al.*, 2003). Conceived as a collaborative and supportive relationship between a more experienced "senior" and a less experienced "junior" employee, mentorships are widely acknowledged as providing core developmental experiences for the members involved (Allen and Eby, 2003; Ghosh and Reio, 2013; Janssen *et al.*, 2016). The advantage of studying social capital through the lens of a mentoring relationship is that it underlines the importance of viewing social capital as both an individual and contextual condition, depending on the specific social network or relationship under study. In fact, since social capital adds an interpersonal dimension to employability, I use the term "interpersonal condition" as an overarching label to position social capital in the literature (see 1.2.3).

### *1.2.1. Individual conditions*

In this subsection, I systematically synchronise the employability studies that focus on individual conditions as I draw upon the input- and output-based approaches described above. In 1.2.1.1, I elaborate on the work of several prominent scholars of the input-based approach, and in 1.2.1.2, I examine those whose work fits the output-based approach.

#### *1.2.1.1. Input-based approach*

Most scholars adhering to the input-based approach understand and measure employability as employees' knowledge, skills, abilities (so-called "KSAs") and/or expertise. By and large, employees' KSAs or expertise refer to the ability to perform a given occupation properly (Forrier *et al.*, 2015; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Scholars employ a multitude of concepts to typify this ability. Examples include occupational expertise (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006), up-to-date expertise (Van Harten, 2016), knowing how (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994; Eby *et al.*, 2003), human capital (e.g., Fugate *et al.*, 2004) and technical capabilities (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Some scholars interested in employees' KSAs or expertise assess this employability axis using employees' perceptions of their ability to continue to do their jobs (e.g., Van Harten, 2016). This reliance on self-perceptions has led some scholars to study KSAs, and thus employability, through the lens of self-efficacy (e.g., Daniels *et al.*, 1998). Self-efficacy refers to individuals' perceptions of their ability to successfully perform a certain role or behaviour (Daniels *et al.*, 1998; Forrier and Sels, 2003). At times, however, self-efficacy is separated from employability and treated as an antecedent to it (Nauta *et al.*, 2009).

In addition to KSAs tied to a certain occupation or job (referred to as "job-related skills" in this dissertation), researchers have acknowledged the importance of employees' transferable skills (Hoyt, 1978, as cited in Forrier and Sels, 2003). A distinctive feature of these skills is that they are portable to different occupational, organisational and industry settings. Considered in this way, transferable skills can be studied as part of a boundaryless career attitude (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994), in which employees view employers as contingent and replaceable (e.g., Volmer and Spurk, 2011). Forrier and Sels (2003) used the term "behavioural capabilities" in this regard, which encompass skills as diverse as independence, openness to experience and growth needs. Relational skills such as communication skills form another example of transferable skills (e.g., McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Whereas most scholars regard transferable skills as a core component of employability (e.g., Forrier and Sels, 2003; Forrier *et al.*, 2015; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005), some treat these skills as antecedents of this employee characteristic (Van Dam, 2004). Before discussing other employee characteristics, it is important to note that the term "transferable skills" has several synonyms. Economists, for instance, subsume these skills under "general human

capital" (e.g., De Grip and Sauermann, 2013).

Compared with KSAs, somewhat less attention has been devoted to employees' willingness or attitudinal flexibility (e.g., De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012b). Willingness can be comprehensively defined as receptivity to change, employees' willingness to develop themselves and their readiness to move on the labour market. Scholars examining this employability axis have relied on concepts as diverse as willingness to develop competences (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012b), (pro)active learning motivation (Taris *et al.*, 2003), anticipation and optimization (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006), willingness to participate in training (De Grip *et al.*, 2004), willingness to change (Van Harten, 2016), employability orientation (Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Van Dam, 2004), personal adaptability (Fugate *et al.*, 2004) and protean career attitudes (Hall, 2004). Common to these concepts is the emphasis on individual growth and (pro)active adjustment.



Even fewer scholars have construed employability as (also) comprising employees' self-awareness and labour market knowledge, characteristics that are occasionally portrayed as individual dispositions (e.g., Fugate *et al.*, 2004; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012b). Self-awareness refers to a critical reflection on past and present career accomplishments with the ultimate aim to set new future career targets. It entails a thorough understanding of the self; that is, becoming aware of personal strengths and weaknesses as well as values and desired goals (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). In the careers and employability literature, self-awareness is identified as employees' "career identity" (Fugate *et al.*, 2004) or "knowing why competency" (Eby *et al.*, 2003; Forrier *et al.*, 2015). Labour market knowledge entails an awareness of and active search for suitable vacancies within a current organisation or another work setting and the capacity to present personal strengths and skills to labour market actors, such as writing a motivation letter or introducing oneself to prospective employers (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Kluytmans and Ott, 1999; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Wittekind *et al.*, 2010).

Beyond these employee characteristics, researchers have examined individual conditions that are difficult to classify according to a specific rubric because these characteristics have been studied very little, sometimes even once. Noteworthy examples include Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) corporate sense (participating and performing in various workgroups as well as accepting responsibility for teams and the organisation's mission) and balance (harmonising work and family duties as well as conflicting interests of employers, colleagues and employees).

*1.2.1.2. Output-based approach*

Scholars who study the output-based approach construe employability as the output of employee characteristics. These outputs are generally understood as the aggregate of employees' labour market opportunities, positions and transitions between positions

(De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012a; Forrier *et al.*, 2015). Most scholars in this area define and operationalise employability in terms of employees' perceived labour market opportunities. Such perceptions are often posited to result from a person's assessment of individual and contextual conditions (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). An array of concepts is used to characterise employees' self-perceived opportunities, including employability radius (Thijssen *et al.*, 2008), perceived employability (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007; Wittekind *et al.*, 2010), perceived employment opportunities (Van Harten, 2016) and, during the late 1950s, perceived ease of movement (March and Simon, 1958). Whereas some scholars collapse all opportunities into one global scale (e.g., Van Harten, 2016), others paint a fine-grained picture of employees' labour market opportunities by clearly differentiating between internal and external and/or between vertical (obtain a higher position) and horizontal (obtain an equal position) labour market opportunities (e.g., De Cuyper and De Witte, 2010; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014). Only a few scholars focus on employees' actual job transitions, or *"any change in employment status and any major change in job content"* (Nicholson, 1984: 173). Analogous to the literature on self-perceived employability, actual job moves also can be decomposed into internal versus external and vertical versus horizontal transitions (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). For instance, Raemdonck, Tillema, De Grip, Valcke and Segers (2012) paid attention to low-qualified employees' chances for promotion as an indicator of a vertical job transition.

### *1.2.2. Contextual conditions*

In this subsection, I provide a concise overview of the work of several prominent scholars who (also) understand employability in terms of contextual conditions. Unlike scholarship that highlights individual conditions of employability, these studies cannot be classified according to dominant "approaches". Rather, these scholars employ a wide array of overarching concepts to typify the context surrounding an employee. However, for the sake of a better understanding of this dissertation's research angles (sections 1.3 and 1.4), I make a crude distinction between barriers and opportunities at the organisational level (see 1.2.2.1) and those at the societal level (see 1.2.2.2).

#### *1.2.2.1. Organisational conditions*

First, contextual conditions may be composed of variables at the organisational level. Within the rubric, we can distinguish between scholars who include organisational conditions in their definition of employability and those who analytically separate these conditions from their core conceptualisation.

A multi-cited study that includes organisational conditions in the definition of employability is that of De Grip, Van Loo and Sanders (2004). Based on a concise historical analysis of employability models, they comprehensively defined employability as *"the capacity and willingness of workers to remain attractive for the labour market (supply*

*factors), by reacting to and anticipating changes in tasks and work environment (demand factors), facilitated by the human resource development [HRD] instruments available to them (institutions)"* (De Grip *et al.*, 2004: 216). Thus, employability is considered a collective responsibility of employees (i.e., willingness and capacity, the "employee characteristics" referred to above), employers (i.e., work environment, HRD instruments) and labour market institutions (e.g., sectoral partners who subsidise employers' HRD programs).

An influential study that separates organisational conditions from the definition of employability is the conceptual paper by Forrier and Sels (2003). In an attempt to add clarity to the employability literature, they launched the term "movement capital", which encompasses virtually all the employee characteristics referred to earlier. Despite the centrality of this concept, Forrier and Sels also discuss policies that organisations could offer to enhance employees' movement capital. For conceptual clarity, these policies are subsumed under the heading "opportunities to enhance movement capital", and include, but are not limited to, career policy services and Human Resource (HR) instruments such as training courses and other competency development measures.

In addition to organisational opportunities, scholars have paid attention to organisational barriers such as employers' unfair selection practices. Forrier and Sels (2003) grouped these barriers under the denominator of "context", a term that also includes a wide variety of societal conditions briefly discussed below.

*1.2.2.2. Societal conditions*

A second class of contextual conditions consists of variables at the societal level that transcend interpretations of employability as simply a supply-and-demand phenomenon. Societal conditions in most employability models are macro-economic demand, labour market policy and regulation, the availability of vacancies and conditions of employment (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005).

### *1.2.3. Interpersonal conditions*

Some scholars understand and measure employability in terms of individuals' (e.g., employees') social capital (Forrier *et al.*, 2015; Fugate *et al.*, 2004), which is also referred to as the "knowing whom competency" (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994; Eby *et al.*, 2003). Social capital captures the full range of beneficial social networks inside and outside an organisation, varying from professional contacts to personal relationships (e.g., Eby *et al.*, 2003; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). The term "beneficial" means that the persons within social networks provide useful information and tools for learning and career aspirations.

Although a broad definition of the term "social capital" is needed to do justice to the literature (for a comprehensive, sociological approach, see Conkova, 2019), it also may lead to some confusion as to whether social capital constitutes an individual or contextual (i.e., organisational) condition. Indeed, while a job notification received

from a friend qualifies as an individual condition, access to an organisationally arranged replacement service can best be understood as an organisational condition. A deeper illustration of the difficulty in unambiguously classifying social capital can be seen through the lens of a mentoring relationship. Viewed as an incubator for learning, and thus, a beneficial social network, mentoring traditionally denotes a hierarchical relationship between a more experienced "senior" employee and a less experienced "junior" employee through which the senior employee or mentor helps to satisfy the personal and career needs of the junior employee or protégé (e.g., Fletcher and Ragins, 2007). Most scholars agree that mentorships can be either informal or formal. Informal mentoring refers to a non-institutionalised relationship which the mentor and protégé join wholly volitionally. As these mentorships often develop spontaneously without some form of organisational intervention, informal mentoring is a matter of personal choice, and therefore, best qualifies as an individual condition. In contrast, formal mentoring entails an institutionalised relationship in which the mentor assists a protégé he or she is formally paired with. As formal mentorships are not willingly set in motion by mentors and protégés but exist by organisational mandate, they can best be categorised as an organisational condition.

## 1.3. Research gaps

Having given an overview of extant employability research, I now turn to a delineation of five research gaps in the employability literature and set out how these gaps are addressed in this dissertation.

### *1.3.1. Gap I: Fuzzy conceptualisation of employability*

As I have shown in the former section, the conceptualisation of employability is quite fuzzy. Scholars use the term to denote characteristics bound to employees, such as their ability, skills and willingness (i.e., the input-based approach), and to refer to employees' self-assessed or actual job chances (i.e., the output-based approach). Next to scholars who address individual conditions when defining employability are those who (also) concentrate on contextual conditions. In an attempt to structure the literature, I have subdivided these contextual conditions into organisational and societal barriers and opportunities. In doing so, I observed that some scholars separated contextual conditions from their core conceptualisations of employability (e.g., Forrier and Sels, 2003; Forrier *et al.*, 2015), whereas others assigned these conditions a prominent place in their conceptualisations (e.g., De Grip *et al.*, 2004; Van der Klink *et al.*, 2011). In addition, I noticed a similar conceptual fuzziness in how scholars deal with individual conditions, some (e.g., Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Van Dam, 2004) treating employees' skills or ability as precursors to rather than as core components of employability.

In this dissertation, I seek to solve the fuzziness surrounding the term "employability" by conceptually disentangling the input- and the output-based approaches. To avoid conceptual confusion, I label the inputs "employability" and the outputs "employment prospects". In doing so, I conceptualise employability as comprising three interrelated yet conceptually distinct concepts: professional ability, developmental proactivity and personal learning. Professional ability, or employees' ability to confidently perform their current jobs, serves as a proxy for employees' work ability. Developmental proactivity, or employees' motivation for learning and willingness to develop their job-related skills, represents employees' attitudinal flexibility. Personal learning refers to a set of varied transferable skills (e.g., communication skills) that adds to employees' personal development. My focus on ability, willingness and transferable skills links to the call from several employability scholars that employees should be not only able to perform their present jobs properly, but also should be willing and able to (pro)actively adapt to changes in organisations, job content and job locations (e.g., Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Kluytmans and Ott, 1999; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006).

I conceptualise employment prospects as consisting of two core concepts: employees' perceived employment opportunities and actual employment trajectories. Perceived employment opportunities denote employees' beliefs about their future job chances as well as their perceptions of being able to continue in their current job. Construed in this way, employment opportunities are indicative of employees' "appraisal of the likelihood of a job". Actual employment trajectories signify employees' actual employment positions and transitions in the labour market, and therefore, indicate the "realisation of the likelihood of a job". I argue that a focus on actual employment trajectories is commendable, given the prevalence of shock events (sudden occurrences, often with unforeseen consequences) in today's unpredictable world of work. These shock events may distort the assumed linear link between planned and actual behaviour (e.g., Forrier and Sels, 2003), and therefore, justify a focus on both perceived and actual employment opportunities or trajectories.

In addition to employees' ability, willingness, skills and employment prospects, I pay attention to employees' social capital in the form of mentoring. In this dissertation, I define mentoring as *"a workplace-based relationship between a midcareer or senior employee (the mentor) and a junior employee (the protégé) aimed at providing support to the protégé, with consideration of mentors' own needs"*. Consistent with extant mentoring research, I distinguish between informal and formal mentorships. I define an informal mentorship as *"a spontaneously developed and informal form of providing support that is not officially mandated within the organisation"*. What can be inferred from this definition, is that informal mentorships arise naturally without organisational intervention or coercion, meaning that mentors and protégés act according to their personal will. That is, mentors

and protégés join a mentorship volitionally without being forced to do so. With this reasoning, I conclude that informal mentoring reflects an employee characteristic, and therefore, treat it as an individual condition throughout this dissertation.

I define a formal mentorship as *"an externally arranged and formal form of providing support that is organisationally mandated and regulated"*. An inbuilt feature of this definition is that formal mentorships require organisational intervention and control, meaning that mentors and protégés are formally appointed and paired together. In almost any case, mentors and protégés fulfil an external (i.e., organisational) request not fully endorsed by themselves. With this reasoning, I conclude that formal mentoring represents an organisational characteristic, and therefore, treat it as an organisational condition throughout this dissertation.

Two arguments guided my decision to focus on mentoring. First, several scholars have argued more or less explicitly that mentorships serve as ideal vehicles for employee learning and skill development (Allen and Eby, 2003; Janssen *et al.*, 2016). As such, my focus on mentoring relates to the skills- and learning-based approach to employability I have adopted throughout this dissertation. In essence, defining employability as a set of abilities, skills and positive attitudes towards learning allows me to regard mentoring as an excellent HR policy measure for upholding an employable labour force, provided that the claim holds true that employability is malleable (see gap II, 1.3.2). Second, this dissertation concentrates on midcareer and senior employees, those aged 30 years and older. A substantial share of this age group – those roughly aged 45 years and beyond – faces the risk of being trapped in shrinking, routine-intensive jobs with few opportunities for personal growth (see also 1.1). Although the conventional and better-researched formal training route may be an ideal and easy measure to remedy this risk, I argue that the job redesign route of mentoring is a more effective strategy. This contention has support from career and life stage theories (Super, 1957, as cited in Aryee *et al.*, 1994) as well as research showing that Dutch employees are highly motivated to become mentors as they get older (Schreiner, 2001). This finding contrasts with Dutch employees' declining interest in formal training courses as they age (CBS, 2019a; Pleijers and De Winden, 2014[3]), not to mention Dutch employers' reluctance to invest in the talent of their elderly staff members[4] (Fleischmann, 2014).

3 Although studies consistently show that employees' participation in formal (job-)related training courses decreases with age, they disagree on when this decline begins. Some found the decline to start at age 55 (Pleijers and De Winden, 2014); others evinced that it was more gradual, beginning at 45 (CBS, 2019a) or even 40 (De Grip *et al.*, 2018).

4 Recent research shows that this reluctance comes into play when employees reach age 60 (De Grip *et al.*, 2018).

### *1.3.2. Gap II: A dynamic examination of the combined effects of individual and organisational conditions on employability is missing*

Most studies on employability, defined as employees' KSAs and/or willingness, were completed in the late 1990s and early 2000s when working lives were becoming less secure and unpredictable. In that context, awareness arose that certain investments could enhance employees' employability. Inspired by the idea that employability is mouldable, a significant number of scholars began examining the antecedents of employees' KSAs and/or willingness (e.g., Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Van Dam, 2004; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012; Van Harten, 2016). Although studies on these specific employability axes yielded interesting findings, they suffered from two noteworthy limitations. First, the vast majority of studies treated employees' KSAs and/or willingness as static employee characteristics. Second, studies that examined the determinants of employability often developed parallel to one another, a limitation most clearly visible in the literature on employees' motivation for learning or willingness to develop skills. In essence, some studies focussed on work characteristics and others included human resource variables and/or concentrated on individual (employee) characteristics.

Studies highlighting the role of work characteristics have shown that job resources such as job autonomy (De Witte *et al.*, 2007; Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012; Van Harten, 2016), decision authority (De Lange *et al.*, 2010; Taris *et al.*, 2003) and task or skill variety (De Lange *et al.*, 2010; Van Dam, 2004; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012) are positively related to employees' motivation for (pro)active learning or willingness to develop skills. Some scholars have examined the link between (perceived) supervisor or social support and employees' proactive learning motivation or willingness (De Lange *et al.*, 2010; Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009; Van Dam, 2004; Van Harten, 2016), though results were rather mixed. In addition to organisational opportunities or job resources, researchers have examined the effect of organisational barriers or job demands such as workload on (pro)active employee learning and willingness. With a few exceptions (e.g., Taris *et al.*, 2003), positive associations were reported (De Lange *et al.*, 2010; De Witte *et al.*, 2007; Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009; Van Harten, 2016). Only two of the studies cited here utilised a longitudinal design, and only one study assessed the effect of changes in work characteristics on changes in learning (Taris *et al.*, 2003); however, the generalisability of the findings was limited.

As for the human resource variables, researchers have quite consistently found that (perceived) – supervisor – support for career and competency development is positively associated with (pro)active employee learning and willingness (De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Van Harten, 2016; Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008). At the level of individual conditions, researchers have reported positive linkages between employee willingness and characteristics of openness, initiative (Van Dam, 2004) and self-efficacy (Nauta *et al.*, 2009). Yet all of these studies were cross-sectional, and

thus, failed to examine the developmental nature of (pro)active employee learning or willingness.

To address this fragmentation, I relate a broad category of employee and organisational conditions to employees' willingness to develop their job-related skills, established as developmental proactivity. I define organisational conditions as the aggregate of work characteristics and human resource variables. As I link a wide array of employee and organisational conditions to employability, I thus am able to examine empirically the long-held, yet understudied claim that employability can best be understood from a combination of the individual (employee) and contextual (organisational) perspectives (e.g., De Grip *et al.*, 2004; De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Forrier and Sels, 2003; Nauta *et al.*, 2009). As I clarify in chapter 2, I tested the associations between conditions and developmental proactivity on a sample of senior employees only.

In addition to taking a comprehensive perspective, I adopt a dynamic approach *vis-à-vis* employability by studying longitudinally the link between conditions and developmental proactivity. In this way, I address the first gap in the literature, namely the lack of scientific knowledge about the changing nature of employability. I argue that it is crucial to obtain insights into employability's changing nature, which sheds new light on the often unfounded claim that employability – in so far as it is defined in terms of willingness to develop skills – is *"amenable to substantial enhancement by investing in it"* (Pruijt, 2013: 1614).

*1.3.2.1. Theory*

I combine the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model with the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory to examine the conditions under which senior employees display developmental proactivity. I use the JD-R model as a heuristic tool to decompose conditions into a coherent set of job (challenge) demands and resources. Thus, I investigate workload and mental load as job (challenge) demands; job autonomy, social support and development opportunities as job and human resources; and self-efficacy and active coping as individual (personal) resources. I base my decision to focus on these demands and resources on previous work on the antecedents of (pro)active employee learning as well as on prior job redesign studies (e.g., De Lange *et al.*, 2010; Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009; Taris *et al.*, 2003; Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008).

I use COR to theorise on the mechanisms linking demands and resources to developmental proactivity. I start from the contention that developmental proactivity represents a crucial resource in contemporary working life. I then draw upon COR's corollary that "resources beget resources" to propose that job (challenge) demands and resources are positively related to developmental proactivity. In addition to positive main effects, I expect two positive interaction effects. The first is based on COR's premise that (job and human) resources are particularly salient under the condition of

high challenge demands (so-called "additive or interactive active learning hypothesis" in the JD-R literature[5]). The second rests on COR's premise that effects of resources are multiplicative, which I translate into the hypothesis that the positive impact of self-efficacy on developmental proactivity is more profound under the condition of high human resources.

To date, very few studies on employee motivation or learning have used COR as a theoretical guide (the exceptions being Dorenbosch, 2014 (COR and proactive employee learning) and Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009 (COR and employee motivation)). The JD-R model has been more frequently used to probe the relationship between job (challenge) demands, resources and (pro)active learning or skill development (e.g., Taris *et al.*, 2003; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012). In line with my expectations, the majority of these studies posited that job (challenge) demands and resources sort a positive main as well as positive interaction effect on learning. (I am referring here to the interactive active learning hypothesis only). With a few exceptions, studies have provided abundant evidence to support a positive main effect of job (challenge) demands and/or resources on (pro)active learning or skill development (e.g., De Lange *et al.*, 2010; De Witte *et al.*, 2007; Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012; Van Harten, 2016). Results for the interaction effect were rather mixed: while some studies found a significant interaction effect in the hypothesised direction (e.g., De Witte *et al.*, 2007), others reported a non-significant interaction effect (Dollard *et al.*, 2000; Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009; Parker and Sprigg, 1999; Taris *et al.*, 2003). Empirical research on the multiplicative resources hypothesis in relation to (pro)active learning or skill development is virtually absent (an exception being Nauta *et al.*, 2009).

### *1.3.3. Gap III: Employability-employment trajectories link is understudied*

Several scholars contend that employees' KSAs and/or their willingness are important precursors of future employment positions and transitions, such as labour market mobility or opportunities (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Forrier *et al.*, 2015; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Thijssen *et al.*, 2008). But empirical research is in short supply for this contention, and the available studies often stringently define employment in terms of "more" or "better" (e.g., salary increase; Wayne *et al.*, 1999). As a result, employment has an overall positive connotation in the literature (an exception being Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006, who also focussed on periods of unemployment). For instance, Van der Heijden, De Lange, Demerouti and Van der Heijde (2009) examined salary level and promotion rate and related these employment "gains" to five employability competencies. Employees'

5 To be absolutely precise, the additive active learning hypothesis refers to a situation in which job (challenge demands) and (job and human) resources simply coexist. The interactive active learning hypothesis refers to a situation in which job (challenge demands) interact with (job and human) resources in a statistical manner. Since I posit and empirically test interaction effects, I refer to the interactive active learning hypothesis in the remainder. Both interpretations are, however, well accepted in JD-R-based studies.

salary level and promotion rate also were the main focus of Volmer and Spurk (2011), who studied these gains in relation to employees' boundaryless and protean career attitudes. Overall, research has predominantly centred on employment gains, with little to no attention to employment losses (i.e., employment transitions that signal a loss of job entitlements (e.g., a demotion)).

From a practitioner's perspective, this lack of attention to losses is remarkable, since negative events are found to be more powerful predictors of employees' affections, cognitions and actual behaviours than positive ones (Duffy *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, I assert that the scant attention paid to employment losses may eventually lead to an incomplete understanding of employees' actual labour market behaviours and key decisions taken in this regard. I also argue that the limited focus on employment losses does not do justice to the changing landscape of employment trajectories. Fuelled by processes such as global competition and economic turbulence, employment trajectories in most Western countries are increasingly characterised by non-linear career paths (CBS, 2019b), job uncertainty and flexibility (WRR, 2019), and organisational restructuring (Bosch and Ter Weel, 2013; Hall, 2004). These phenomena indicate that employment losses are also relevant for contemporary working lives, and therefore, ignoring them may lead to an unrealistic and incomplete picture of the employment situation of employees.

From a conceptual point of view, ignoring losses is problematic, since several prominent employability scholars have paid attention to employment or transition types that go beyond a mere focus on gains (e.g., Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Rothwell and Arnold, 2007). In essence, scholars have differentiated between job retention and job acquisition. In doing so, they often have segregated job acquisition into upward (obtain a higher position), downward (obtain a lower position) and horizontal (obtain an equal position) forms of job mobility[6] (e.g., Raemdonck *et al.*, 2012). Hillage and Pollard (1998), for instance, referred to employees' capability to gain, maintain and obtain employment (p. 1). This distinction between different employment or transition types leads me to conclude that my aim to extend extant research on the employability-employment trajectories link requires that I account for the multifaceted nature of employment and consider the relevance of combining job retention and acquisition in a single study.

In this dissertation, I aim to address these issues by examining the role of employability, conceptualised as professional ability (the ability axis) and developmental proactivity (the willingness axis), in the likelihood of employees experiencing employment gains and circumventing employment losses. As in gap II, I test these associations on a sample of senior employees only. Relating employability to senior

6 It should be noted that the distinction between upward, downward and horizontal job mobility as well as the focus on job retention is apparent only in the literature on actual job or employment transitions. In the literature on self-assessed job or employment chances, scholars confine their attention to horizontal and/or upward job mobility (e.g., De Cuyper and De Witte, 2010; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014).

employees' experience of employment gains and (avoidance of) employment losses enables me to link the *input*- to the *output*-based approach to employability. Specifically, I am able to assess empirically the extent to which employability serves as a critical input to job retention and acquisition, a question that the literature alludes to but which has drawn sporadic scientific inquiry. From a practitioner's point of view, gaining insights into the possibly differential role of ability and willingness in job retention and acquisition may help organisations adopt tailor-made arrangements aimed at facilitating the employment transition they are interested in (e.g., a promotion) or otherwise forced to safeguard (e.g., employment).



*1.3.3.1. Theory*

I rely on Hobfoll's (1998) Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory to examine the relationships of employment gains and employment losses with senior employees' employability. To strengthen my hypotheses, I label senior employees' employability as well as the employment gains and avoidance of losses they experience as "resources". In doing so, I study gains and losses as an integral part of the actual employment transitions that senior employees make. In essence, I focus on upward transitions in the form of a promotion (referred to as a "gain"), downward transitions in the form of a demotion and/or salary loss and job retention in the form of job security versus unemployment (referred to as "losses").

Coined as a theory of human motivation, COR posits that individuals have limited resources and focus on the conservation of existing ("resource conservation tenet") and the acquisition of new resources ("resource acquisition tenet"; Hobfoll, 2002). An important corollary to these central tenets is that individuals with resources are capable of resource gain ("resources beget resources") and are less vulnerable to resource losses ("resources circumvent resource losses"). This corollary leads me to expect positive associations between employability and gains and negative associations between employability and losses (i.e., employable employees are capable of conserving work).

During the past 30 years, COR has gradually become an important theoretical framework in the literature of organisational behaviour and occupational health (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Within this stream of literature, numerous studies have provided empirical evidence in support of COR's central tenets (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). In the employability literature, COR has captured some interest. A handful of studies has, for instance, shown that employability (conceptualised as skills, dispositions or perceived external job chances) protects against burnout and exhaustion (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012a/b). On the positive side, Van Harten (2016) along with Vanhercke, Kirves, De Cuyper, Verbruggen, Forrier and De Witte (2015) have found that employability (conceptualised as skills or perceived (external) job chances) enhances employee well-

being. In studies of employment-based outcomes (e.g., salary, performance, job (in) security), COR theory has received somewhat less attention, at least compared with the literature of occupational health. However, such studies are often supportive of COR's central tenets (e.g., Halbesleben and Bowler, 2007; Ng and Feldman, 2012, 2014).

### *1.3.4. Gap IV: Role of organisational conditions in willingness to mentor is often overlooked*

In subsections 1.2.3 and 1.3.1, I briefly discussed the distinction between organisationally arranged ("formal") and spontaneously developed ("informal") mentoring relationships. I also indicated that the former can be considered an organisational condition, and the latter an individual condition. Although both types of mentoring have interested scholars during the past 20 years, I focus in this subsection on informal mentorships, partly as a result of theoretical considerations (chapter 4). In a concise overview of the literature on informal mentoring, I confine my attention to studies that examine the antecedents of general willingness to mentor, typically defined as employees' intention or willingness to become a (future) mentor (Ragins and Cotton, 1993; Ragins and Scandura, 1999). I assert that despite an impressive body of knowledge, a critical gap in the literature still exists: the role of organisational conditions in general willingness to mentor.

Researchers interested in the antecedents of general willingness to mentor have focussed on the role of individual conditions in this willingness. For instance, Allen, Poteet, Russell and Dobbins (1997b) along with Allen (2003) showed empirically that (managerial) employees' intention to become a future mentor was affected by previous mentoring experience (as a mentor and as a protégé), the dispositional variables of other-oriented empathy, locus of control and upward striving, as well as demographic variables, such as gender, age and hierarchical plateauing. They found that mentoring experience, other-oriented empathy, locus of control and upward striving were positively related to the intention to mentor, but age and hierarchical plateauing were negatively associated with it. The estimate for gender (males were used as the baseline category) was either non-significant (Allen *et al.*, 1997b) or negative (Allen, 2003). Adding to this, Aryee, Chay and Chew (1996) found that positive affectivity and altruism had a positive impact on managerial employees' motivation to mentor (which is roughly similar to general willingness to mentor).

While individual conditions have received substantial scholarly attention, organisational conditions have been passed over. In fact, I am aware of only four studies that shed light on the organisation's role in general willingness to mentor. One influential study by Allen, Poteet and Burroughs (1997a) was designed to examine systematically the organisational conditions that facilitate or inhibit mentoring. Results showed that organisational support for employee development, in-company training programs and managerial/co-worker support eased the initiation of mentorships, whereas time

pressure, organisational restructuring and a competitive atmosphere detracted from the decision to mentor. Billett (2003) identified similar organisational opportunities and barriers in his study on the workplace demands and benefits associated with mentoring in a manufacturing plant.

Notwithstanding their contributions, both studies are qualitative in nature, and therefore, lay a poor foundation for generalisation. The only two quantitative studies on organisational conditions paid attention to the quality of the relationship with the supervisor, job-induced stress (Allen *et al.*, 1997b), employee development-linked reward systems (being rewarded for developing another's talent) and opportunities for interactions on the job (Aryee *et al.*, 1996). Findings revealed that the quality of the relationship with a supervisor was positively associated with general willingness to mentor, while opportunities for interactions on the job and employee development-linked reward systems were positively correlated with the motivation to mentor. However, both studies are very limited in scope, utilising a homogeneous sample of managerial employees only and a limited number of organisational conditions (two conditions each).

To bridge this research gap, this dissertation directly examines the extent to which organisational conditions affect employees' willingness to informally mentor junior colleagues, their protégés. As in gap II, I define organisational conditions as the aggregate of work characteristics and human resource variables. Although various types of mentoring support exist (Allen, 2007; Ghosh and Reio, 2013), I confine myself to the provision of career support, or the act of transferring job- and enterprise-specific knowledge to protégés and assisting with their career advancement. Doing so enables me to help organisations adopt effective measures aimed at upholding a steady pool of talented employees for the organisation of the future. Contrary to gaps II and III, I test the associations between organisational conditions and willingness to mentor on a sample of both midcareer and senior employees.

*1.3.4.1. Theory*

I combine Self-Determination Theory (SDT) with Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the literature on Perceived Organisational Support (POS) to examine the organisational conditions under which midcareer and senior employees are willing to provide career support to a protégé. I start from the basic premise that mentoring constitutes an exemplary form of pro-organisational behaviour through its successorship of enterprise-specific knowledge. SDT posits that intrinsic values embedded in the organisation play a pivotal role in understanding employees' pro-organisational behaviour through fulfilment of employees' basic human needs. Organisational intrinsic values considered key in this dissertation are co-mentor consultation, supervisory support for volitional mentoring and learning opportunities. I subsume these values under the umbrella concept

of POS, following claims that legitimise its use as a general concept for the support an organisation provides (e.g., Koster *et al.*, 2011). In addition to the three values, I focus on two work characteristics: time pressure and organisational restructuring. The decision to focus on these values and characteristics is based on empirical studies on mentoring from the mentor's perspective as well as extant theoretical work on key precursors (i.e., drivers and barriers) of basic human need fulfilment (e.g., Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2010; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014).

SET complements SDT in that it delineates the mechanisms linking work characteristics and organisational value support to employees' willingness to mentor. A point of departure is SET's central premise that individuals enter and exit a relationship based on perceived costs and benefits. This premise first leads me to expect positive associations between organisational value support and willingness to mentor: through need fulfilment, employees notice that their organisations care about them, and therefore, feel compelled to return the positive gesture to balance the exchange relationship. In addition, I use SET's premise to assume negative associations between work characteristics and willingness to mentor: through need frustration, employees notice that their organisations undermine the cost-benefit equilibrium and refrain from acting reciprocally.

Over the past 25 years, SET has received considerable attention in studies on workplace mentoring (e.g., Allen, 2004; Allen *et al.*, 2000; Baranik *et al.*, 2010; Grima *et al.*, 2014; Janssen *et al.*, 2014; Olian *et al.*, 1993; Park *et al.*, 2016; Ragins and Scandura, 1999). To my knowledge, these studies are largely consistent with SET's central premise. In studies on the mentor-organisation relationship (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 1997a/b; Aryee *et al.*, 1996; Billett, 2003), no one has used SET as a theoretical guide (an exception being Allen *et al.*, 1997a). Several scholars interested in social exchange dynamics have used SET in combination with POS (e.g., Koster *et al.*, 2011). However, with two exceptions (Baranik *et al.*, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2016), I am aware of no research that examines mentoring relationships through the lens of POS.

SDT has a long-standing tradition in education and child studies literature (e.g., Wijnia, 2014), where research has consistently shown that intrinsic value endorsement facilitates individuals' adaptive behaviours, pro-organisational behaviours (i.e., optimal functioning) and performance (Gagné and Deci, 2005). However, SDT's application in mentoring literature is in an immature stage of development (Janssen *et al.*, 2016). When empirical studies are available, they often are supportive of SDT's central premise (e.g., Baranik *et al.*, 2017; Janssen *et al.*, 2014; Sun *et al.*, 2014); however, none of these studies centre on the mentor-organisation relationship.

### *1.3.5. Gap V: Mechanisms linking mentoring to employment opportunities are unknown*

Many scholars argue that mentoring – organisationally arranged or volitionally undertaken – benefits both the mentor and the protégé; however, the vast majority of studies pays attention to the benefits to protégés (e.g., Janssen *et al.*, 2016). When the mentor has been the main focus, studies have revealed that serving as a mentor is related to higher levels of mentorship quality (i.e., a mutually beneficial and satisfying mentorship; Allen and Eby, 2003; Mao *et al.*, 2016), personal learning and career success, to name a few mentor benefits. In spite of these encouraging findings, little is known about the mechanisms that link mentoring to mentors' benefits. I argue that this knowledge deficiency represents a notable gap in the mentoring literature, since it precludes scholars from developing models of the processes by which mentors accrue gains from mentoring.



One important study on the benefits mentors accrue from mentoring dates back to 2003. In their cross-sectional analysis of the relationship between mentoring or, to be more precise, mentorship type (formal versus informal mentoring) and mentorship quality, Allen and Eby hypothesised that informal mentors experience higher levels of mentorship quality than formal mentors. In her pioneering work on the fundamentals of high-quality mentoring relationships, Ragins (2012) also suggested that mentorship type acts as a reliable predictor of mentorship quality. More specifically, she posited that informal mentoring relationships are of higher quality than formal ones because they allow time to develop trust and interdependence. Although the assumed link between mentorship type and mentorship quality may be convincing, both studies failed to empirically support this theoretical claim: Allen and Eby found a non-significant association between mentorship type and mentorship quality, and Ragins did not empirically examine the presumed linkage. More recently, Mao, Kwan, Chiu and Zhang (2016) found empirical evidence that mentors' perceptions of mentorship quality are positively associated with their personal learning skills. As for mentors' career success, Liu, Liu, Kwan and Mao (2009) along with Fletcher and Ragins (2007) have consistently proposed that the acquisition of personal learning skills results in favourable career outcomes.

These studies hint at the possibility of a serial mediation model in which the effect of mentorship type on mentors' career success is transmitted through mentors' perceptions of mentorship quality and personal learning. Despite this presupposition, research that includes all variables in a single study is absent. In this dissertation, I aim to fill this gap by examining the extent to which mentors' perceptions of mentorship quality and personal learning mediate the relationship between mentorship type, decomposed into informal and formal mentoring relationships, and mentors' perceived employment opportunities.

As in gap IV, I test this model on a sample of midcareer and senior employees. Following prior studies on learning in mentoring relationships (e.g., Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Mao *et al.*, 2016), I divide personal learning into two learning dimensions: relational job learning and personal skill development. In what follows, I use the term "employment opportunities" instead of the term "career success" to ensure consistency in the vocabulary in this dissertation. However, the meaning of "employment opportunities" is essentially analogous to "marketability", which other scholars (e.g., De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Eby *et al.*, 2003) have used to examine career success. Anticipating a serial mediation model allows me to test the promising yet underexplored theoretical claim that mentorship quality acts as a vehicle for mentor learning and subsequent employment success. Consistent with the conceptual approach to employability adopted throughout this dissertation, I regard mentors' (i.e., employees') perceived employment opportunities as an integral part of their employment prospects and construe personal learning as a core component of their employability (see 1.3.1).

*1.3.5.1. Theory*

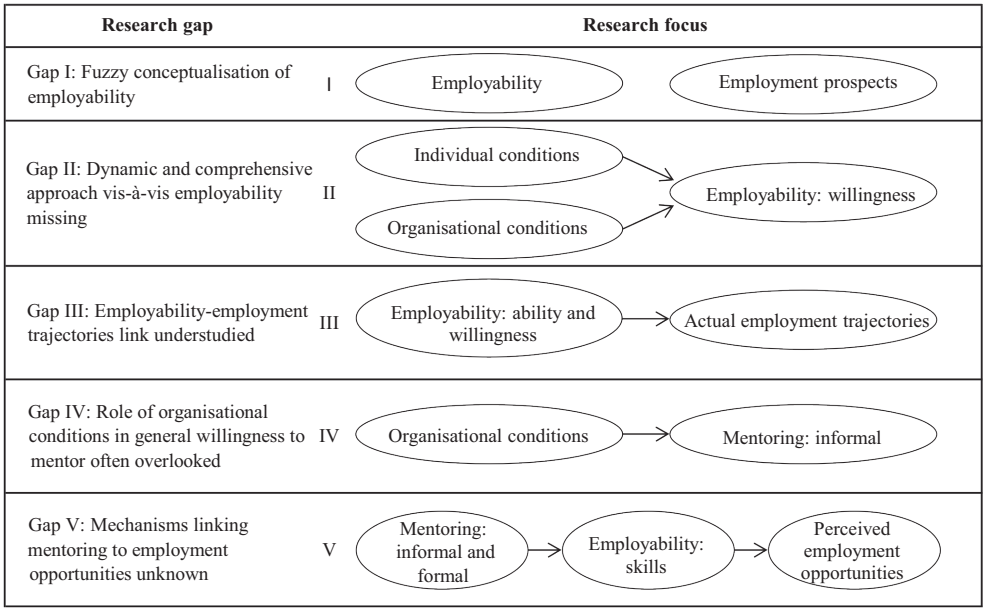
I draw on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to examine the mediating role of mentorship quality and personal learning in the relationship between mentorship type and mentors' perceived employment opportunities. I start from the basic premise that informal mentoring represents an exemplary form of autonomous motivation (i.e., mentors enter a mentorship wholly volitionally). This premise first leads me to hypothesise that informal mentors experience their mentorship to be of higher quality than formal mentors do. I then posit that mentorship quality relates positively to mentors' personal learning and subsequent employment opportunities.

The previous subsection contains a concise overview of the predictive utility of SDT in extant mentoring research, and therefore, I will not elaborate on this theory here. It should be noted, however, that SDT is virtually ignored in research on mentors' benefits.

### *1.3.6. Overview of research gaps and foci*

In the previous subsections, I described five research gaps in the scientific literature on employability and mentoring and how I approach these gaps in this dissertation. These approaches indicate how I aim to fill the research gaps and therefore, constitute the research foci of this dissertation. Figure 1.1 visualises these research foci together with the research gaps they belong to.

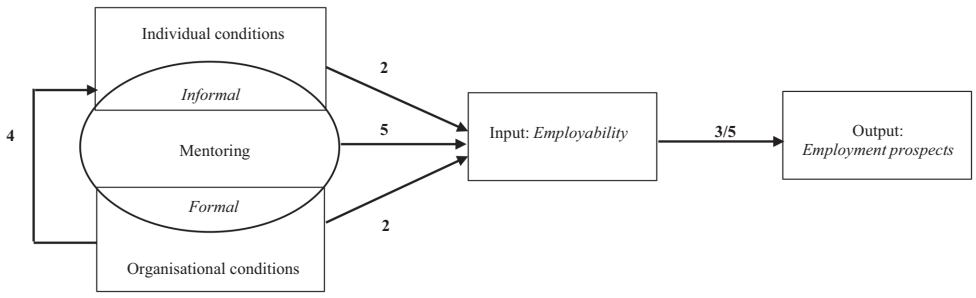
**Figure 1.1: Overview of this dissertation's research gaps (left column) and concomitant research foci (right column)**




## 1.4. Research model

My research foci, which address the gaps in the literature I have described, lay the foundation for the research in this dissertation. Focus I (employability-employment prospects) is addressed throughout this dissertation, and the other four foci are addressed in four empirical chapters. The numbered arrows in the research model below (Figure 1.2) denote the corresponding chapter numbers and the equivalently numbered research gaps outlined above.

**Figure 1.2: Dissertation research model**



The model displayed above gives impetus to four research questions. These questions concretise my research foci and form the basis of the empirical chapters following the first chapter. Table 1.1 gives an overview of my research questions and the chapters they belong to.

**Table 1.1: Overview of the research questions (RQ's)**

| Chapter | Research question |
|---|---|
| 2 | "Under which (combinations of) work characteristics (i.e., job demands, job resources) and human and personal resources do employees display developmental proactivity?" |
| 3 | "How do professional ability and developmental proactivity affect senior employees' actual employment trajectories?" |
| 4 | "Under which organisational conditions (work characteristics and human resource policies) are midcareer and senior employees willing to provide career support to junior organisational members?" |
| 5 | "To what extent does participation in mentoring relationships affect midcareer and senior employees' employment opportunities mediated by their perceptions of mentorship quality and personal learning?" |

## 1.5. Data and methods

Chapters 2 through 5 provide the empirical basis of this dissertation. Each chapter is guided by a specific research question (Table 1.1). Below, I describe, for each chapter separately, which dataset is used and how the data are analysed.

### *1.5.1. RQ 1: Relationships between job (challenge) demands, resources and employability*

In chapter 2, I examine main and interaction effects of a wide array of job (challenge) demands and resources ("employee and organisational conditions") on senior employees' developmental proactivity. For the empirical analysis, I relied on the prospective cohort study STREAM, the *Study on Transitions in Employment, Ability and Motivation,* which is an initiative of the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) launched in the fall of 2010 (Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). For this baseline measurement, the Dutch panel agency, Intomart GfK, invited a total of 26,601 employed, non-employed and self-employed individuals between the ages of 45 and 64 to complete an online questionnaire. Respondents received a small financial incentive, which increased slightly each year the respondent completed the questionnaire, depending on the time spent. The final sample at baseline included 15,118 respondents, a 71% response rate. Follow-up waves were held in the fall of 2011, 2012 and 2013. Respondents who participated in

all follow-up waves numbered 9,639, or 64% of the baseline.

STREAM is well suited to answering the research question in chapter 2 because each wave contained validated questions about employees' willingness as well as employee characteristics and workplace resources. This information allowed me to study dynamically the link between developmental proactivity and a host of employee and organisational conditions.

To test my hypotheses, I focussed on a sample of employed individuals who participated in all waves. I decided to exclude self-employed and non-employed individuals, since their scores on the core variables – developmental proactivity and resources – might significantly differ from those employed individuals. Regrettably, I was forced to exclude the first wave because it did not contain information about one of the resources in my theoretical model. These criteria resulted in a final sample of 5,874 respondents. A drop-out analysis revealed that my results were not susceptible to selective loss to follow-up.

To operationalise job (challenge) demands and resources, I relied on multi-item measures assessed on four- and five-point rating scales. Measures were derived from the Job Content Questionnaire, the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire and the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey (Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). To operationalise developmental proactivity, I used a previously validated four-item measure assessed on a five-point Likert-type response format (Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008). Two items assessed the extent to which employees engage in activities aimed at broadening their job-related skills, and two items measured the extent to which employees self-assess and anticipate future skill requirements in their current jobs.

As the data have a hierarchical structure with time nested within employees, I applied mixed effects modelling using the maximum likelihood estimation (HLM) technique for my data analysis. I started with an empty model that contained only time as a predictor, following the conventional rules of HLM when time is the lowest level of analysis (Jongerling, 2016). I then estimated a series of nested models in which I subsequently added control variables and main as well as interaction effects of job (challenge) demands and resources.

### *1.5.2. RQ 2: Relationships between employability and actual employment trajectories*

In chapter 3, I examine the role of professional ability and developmental proactivity ("employability") in senior employees' experience of employment gains and avoidance of employment losses. As indicated in subsection 1.3.3, I conceptualised gains and losses as the likelihood of experiencing a promotion, demotion, salary loss and unemployment. To test the employability-employment trajectories link, I relied on the panel survey STREAM, which contains data about employees' willingness and ability as well as upward and downward labour market mobility over a four-year period. This

information enabled me to model multiple gains and losses simultaneously and to relate the transition to these events at follow-up to the baseline employability.

The design of STREAM is described above, but I must note that the sample used in chapter 3 differed from that used in chapter 2. In essence, I designed two different samples for the research described in chapter 3. The first sample consisted of employed individuals who participated in at least two waves and assessed the likelihood of the employees' experiencing a promotion, demotion and/or salary loss. To ensure a valid model of the transition to each of these forms of upward and downward mobility at follow-up, I excluded respondents who had experienced an employment event at the start of the survey (i.e., their employment position had to be stable at baseline). These criteria resulted in a final sample of 7,751 respondents.

The second sample consisted of employed and non-employed individuals who participated in at least two waves and assessed the incidence of unemployment. To ensure a valid model of the transition to this inactive status at follow-up, I included only respondents with an active (employed) status at the start of the survey. As I wanted to compare those who remained employed with those who fell prone to unemployment, I removed any respondents with a mixed inactive/active status at the same point in time as well as those with an inactive status other than unemployment. These criteria led to a final sample of 7,241 respondents. For both samples, panel drop-out did not appear to seriously bias the results.

To operationalise employment transitions in sample 1, I first created a variable with five mutually exclusive answer categories for each follow-up wave: promotion, demotion, salary loss, salary loss and demotion and none. This variable was based on questions in STREAM concerning the incidence of each of these transitions in the 12 months preceding each follow-up wave. For the analysis, I created a final multi-categorical variable based on a hierarchical classification of transitions as assessed at each follow-up wave. In this classification, promotions had precedence over salary loss and demotion, salary loss and demotion over salary loss, salary loss over demotion and demotion over none. That is, I classified respondents as "promoted" if they had experienced at least one promotion at follow-up. I consider this classification valid, as only 1 in 10 respondents experienced multiple transitions (e.g., a promotion and demotion).

To operationalise the employment transition in sample 2, I classified respondents as employed or unemployed using the question "Are you currently", which yielded nine non-mutually exclusive answer categories. Employed individuals comprised those who were fully employed as well as those who were both employed and self-employed, but spent most working hours as an employee. Unemployed individuals comprised those who were fully unemployed as well as those who combined unemployment with another inactive status, such as studying.

To operationalise professional ability, I used a five-item measure newly

constructed by TNO with a five-point answer format. Items assessed whether employees operate close to or beyond their abilities, or whether they have headroom to draw upon their intellectual, physical and emotional resources to meet their work demands. This composite measure for professional ability connects to the concept of technical obsolescence that Thijssen and Walter (2006) adopted: *"loss of physical ability as well as any loss of mental capability"* (p. 52). With this connection, my operationalisation mirrors the measure that Van Harten (2016) adopted to operationalise employability. In her dissertation, Van Harten introduced the term "up-to-date expertise" as a component of hospital workers' abilities, and operationalised this employability axis as workers' self-assessed technical obsolescence[7]. Embedding the operationalisation of professional ability in extant (employability) research enables me to improve the construct and predictive validity of this newly developed measure. To operationalise developmental proactivity, I used the same measure as in chapter 2.



For the statistical part, I performed multiple logistic regression analyses using maximum likelihood estimation. In sample 1, the outcome variable is multi-categorical, and thus, I used a multinomial logistic regression analysis. In sample 2, the outcome variable is dichotomous (employed versus unemployed), and thus, I used a binary logistic regression analysis. For both samples, I estimated three models: (1) one including only professional ability and developmental proactivity as predictors; (2) one containing also control variables; and (3) one that added main and interaction effects for panel attrition to the equation.

### *1.5.3. RQ 3: Relationships between value support, work characteristics and mentoring*

In chapter 4, I examine the relationships between work characteristics and organisational value support ("organisational conditions") and midcareer and senior employees' willingness to provide career support to a protégé. To test these associations, I conducted a vignette study. A vignette study is a quasi-experiment in which respondents base their intentions to act (e.g., mentoring intentions) on an experimentally manipulated set of hypothetical yet realistic conditions. I decided to use a vignette study for four reasons. First, vignettes enhance the internal validity of a design due to the perfect non-association between conditions (Rossi and Anderson, 1982). This non-association or factor orthogonality enabled me to obtain unbiased estimates for the effects of organisational conditions on willingness to mentor. Second, vignettes reduce social desirability biases because respondents are unaware of the manipulation of conditions. This is a particular strength of my design, since public attention to continuous (workplace) learning (Rijksoverheid, 2019) could lead to respondents to be more eager to mentor as a signal of their willingness to develop their human capital. Third, vignettes enable researchers

7 To be absolutely precise, up-to-date expertise is a composite measure of hospital workers' perceptions of their technical, economic and perceptional expertise or obsolescence (Van Harten, 2016: 190).

to study the actual antecedents of respondents' intentions to act (Wallander, 2009). In surveys, respondents assess intentions independently and often are unaware of the principles guiding their judgments. In vignettes, researchers confront respondents with a predefined set of principles, thereby forcing the latter to base their intentions to act on the antecedents listed and imagined. Fourth, by confronting respondents with a sample of principles (instead of the full set), multiple sets of principles can be discerned (Rossi and Anderson, 1982). This feature of traditional surveys enabled me to model multiple combinations of organisational conditions, thereby ensuring greater resemblance between experimental and real-life work situations.

The vignette study was part of a cross-sectional survey I designed for this dissertation. Respondents had an occupational tenure of more than 10 years, a criterion based on previous classifications of the mentor (Aryee *et al.*, 1994). To provide career support successfully, mentors should possess abundant subject-matter knowledge, which underlines the need to confine attention to occupational experts. Based on this criterion, 2,247 individuals were invited by PanelClix, a Dutch panel agency, to complete an online questionnaire on topics such as mentorship type, mentorship quality, mentor benefits and willingness to mentor. The fieldwork took place in the fall of 2017. Among the invited individuals, 845 completed the survey and delivered valid answers to the questions of interest (38% response rate). Each respondent received three vignettes consisting of different descriptions of a manipulated work characteristics/organisational value support situation. After each vignette, respondents were asked to what extent they would be ready to mentor within the presented situation. This strategy resulted in a final sample of 2,535 vignettes[8].

To operationalise the vignette ("organisational") conditions, I created dichotomous variables with 0 indicating the absence of a condition and 1 signifying its presence. The wording of the variables measuring organisational value support (co-mentor consultation, supervisory support for volitional mentoring and learning opportunities) was derived from well-established measures of organisational (supervisory) support for co-worker consultation, self-initiation and self-development used in the literature on SDT and SET (e.g., Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014). As for the work characteristics, the wording of the variable measuring organisational restructuring was based on a question in STREAM regarding the nature of a redundancy (compulsory or not). The variable measuring time pressure was based on a reformulation of quotes of mentors concerning the time commitment associated with informal mentoring (Allen *et al.*, 1997a). To operationalise willingness to mentor, I developed a single question that assessed a respondent's intention to mentor on an 11-point rating scale.

As vignettes were clustered within individuals, I analysed my data using mixed effects modelling with the maximum likelihood estimation (HLM) technique. I started

8 As this sample contains 15 identical vignettes, I ran my final analysis on a sample of 2,520 vignettes.

with an empty model that contained only the intercept. In three steps, I enriched this baseline model by subsequently adding control variables at the individual and vignette levels and vignette conditions to the equation.

### *1.5.4. RQ 4: Relationships between mentoring, employability and employment opportunities*

In chapter 5, I examine the intervening role mentorship quality and personal learning play in the relationship between mentorship type and midcareer and senior employees' perceived employment opportunities. To test this serial mediation model, I used the cross-sectional survey described in subsection 1.5.3. For the empirical analysis, I relied only on the answers of respondents who indicated being a mentor or who otherwise reported having served in the capacity of a mentor in the 24 months preceding the survey (N=314). I used this criterion because I was interested in the actual benefits mentors had derived from mentoring rather than any potential benefits prospective mentors might accrue if they became mentors.

To operationalise mentorship type, I relied on a single question regarding how the mentorship was initiated (formal versus informal). For all other model variables, I utilised multi-item measures using five-point rating scales. All measures were drawn from the mentoring or employability literature and based on (Dutch translations of) previously validated scales for mentorship quality, personal learning and employment opportunities (Allen and Eby, 2003; Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Van Harten, 2016).

To perform the statistical analysis, I used a two-step approach to estimate a series of structural equation models using the maximum likelihood estimation technique. First, I tested a series of nested measurement models to make sure that the model variables were conceptually distinct. Second, I compared the hypothesised – serial – mediated model in which mentorship quality and personal learning fully mediated the association between mentorship type and employment opportunities with an alternative. In this alternative – partially – mediated model, I additionally estimated direct paths from mentorship type to employment opportunities and to personal learning and direct paths from mentorship quality to employment opportunities. However, this latter model did not result in a significantly better fit, and therefore, I adhered to the first hypothesised model to test my expectations.

## 1.6. Research findings

Having described the datasets and methods used in this dissertation, I now summarise the research findings, taking each chapter separately.

In **chapter 2** (Understanding senior employees' proactive action orientation towards job-related learning: The role of work characteristics, human and personal resources), I first expected positive main effects of challenge demands and resources on senior employees' developmental proactivity. Accordingly, the multilevel analysis of the panel survey, STREAM, revealed positive and significant assocations between the challenge demands of workload and mental load and developmental proactivity. As for resources, both social support and development opportunities as part of employees' job and human resources were positively and significantly related to developmental proactivity. In addition, I found even stronger positive and significant associations between developmental proactivity and the personal resources of active coping and self-efficacy. Since I assessed positive relationships, my results provided empirical support for COR's corollary that "resources beget resources". Contrary to my expectations, however, job autonomy was not significantly related to developmental proactivity, which indicates that COR's key premise did not hold for this job resource.

In addition to positive main effects, I hypothesised two positive interaction effects. Guided by the interactive active learning hypothesis, I predicted that the positive effects of job and human resources on developmental proactivity would be more pronounced under the condition of high challenge demands. Based on the multiplicative resources hypothesis, I posited that the positive effect of the personal resource of self-efficacy on developmental proactivity would be more pronounced under the condition of high human resources (development opportunities). However, none of the interaction terms were statistically significant, and therefore, I was unable to confirm empirically the hypotheses of active learning and multiplicative resources in this dissertation.

In **chapter 3** (A conservation of resources approach to the role employability plays in senior employees' actual employment trajectories: A longitudinal design), I first expected a positive relationship between the employability resources developmental proactivity and professional ability at baseline and the likelihood of an employment gain in the form of an internal promotion at follow-up. Consistent with this expectation, I found that possession of the resource developmental proactivity at baseline was associated with a higher odds of a promotion at follow-up compared with a situation in which no event occurred. However, I did not find a significant effect for professional ability.

Regarding employment losses, I predicted that possession of the resources developmental proactivity and professional ability at baseline would be associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing salary loss, demotion, salary loss and demotion or unemployment at follow-up. The analyses of the panel survey, STREAM, revealed a different pattern of relationships from the one observed for employment gains: professional ability at baseline was associated with a lower odds of experiencing salary loss, demotion or salary loss and demotion at follow-up (compared with a situation in

which no event occurred), but developmental proactivity at baseline was unrelated to these losses. Similarly, I found that the odds of experiencing unemployment at follow-up (compared with a situation of sustained employment) were significant and in the hypothesised direction for professional ability, while the odds were non-significant for developmental proactivity. Taken together, these results indicate that the predictive utility of COR is fragmented: the resource acquisition tenet applies only to developmental proactivity, and the resource conservation tenet only to professional ability.

In **chapter 4** (How the organisation can affect employees' intention to manage enterprise-specific knowledge through informal mentoring: A vignette study), I first hypothesised a positive association between organisational value support and midcareer and senior employees' willingness to provide career support to a protégé. In addition, I expected a negative association between this latter general willingness to mentor and the presence of work characteristics. To begin with organisational value support, the results of my vignette study showed that midcareer and senior employees were more eager to mentor when their organisations facilitated co-mentor consultation and self-development and when supervisors supported volitional mentoring. These results provide empirical evidence for the theoretical claims central to SDT, SET and POS that employees' positive perceptions of their organisations' support for their well-being and competence development result in pro-organisational behaviour, herein established as mentoring.

As for the work characteristics, I found that employees were less eager to mentor in their spare time when they noticed that their organisations were implementing a reorganisation with forced lay-offs. I found a similar reduced willingness to mentor among those who were unable to fulfil their formal job duties on time. These results attest to SDT and SET in that employees' perceptions of their organisations' failure to invest in a healthy work environment and enduring professional relationships with subordinates lead to a lower tendency to engage in pro-organisational behaviours (i.e., mentoring).

In **chapter 5** (The benefits of mentoring accruing to the mentor: A self-determination approach), I formulated the hypothesis that mentorship quality and personal learning (relational job learning and personal skill development) mediate the relationship between mentorship type and mentors' self-assessed employment opportunities. The results of the fully – serial – mediated model revealed that, in line with my prediction, a mediation effect holds for relational job learning. Contrary to my expectation, a full mediation effect could not be inferred for personal skill development. These findings attest to SDT in that mentors who enter a mentorship wholly volitionally perceive their mentorship as a mutually beneficial interactive forum in which mentors are able to accrue relational job learning and employment benefits without providing an immediate reward in return.

## 1.7. Overarching discussion

The topic of employability dominates scientific research and public debates, yet research on conditions that may enhance employability and its relationship to employment prospects is scarce or disunified. In addition, little is known about the organisational conditions for and multiple benefits mentors accrue from participation in mentoring, a job redesign program intended to stimulate employability. In this dissertation, I aim to bridge these gaps as I explore the following research question: *"To what extent and how are employability and mentoring related to individual and/or organisational conditions and to midcareer and senior employees' self-assessed and actual employment opportunities, positions and transitions?"* In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of the research I conducted to answer this question. I conclude with the shortcomings of this dissertation and an agenda for future research.

### *1.7.1. Theoretical implications*

*1.7.1.1. Implication I: Conceptualizing employability unambiguously*

Most scholars agree that employability denotes "the likelihood or chance of a job" (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). Yet, at the same time, there is a lack of consensus about the interpretation of this definition. Some understand employability as the aggregate of employee characteristics that increase the likelihood of a job (so-called "input-based approach"; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012b), while others construe employability as (actual/self-assessed) labour market opportunities, positions and transitions that result from these characteristics (so-called "output-based approach"; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012a/b). I address this conceptual fuzziness by providing an unambiguous conceptualisation of employability. In essence, I conceptualise employability as *"employees' ability and willingness to adjust to changing task and skill requirements in their current and future jobs"*.

To enhance conceptual clarification, I label employees' labour market opportunities, positions and transitions as "employment prospects" (and not employability) and disentangle actual from self-assessed prospects. This analytical separation of employee characteristics from employment prospects enables me to study the relationships between the two. I establish this link in two ways. First, in chapter 3, I show that employability predicts senior employees' actual employment transitions, providing novel insights into the role of employability in the *realisation* of the likelihood of a job. Second, in chapter 5, I show that employability affects midcareer and senior employees' self-assessed employment opportunities, leading to a better understanding of the role of employability in the *appraisal* of the likelihood of a job.

*1.7.1.2. Implication II: The role of appraisals in studying employability and mentoring*

Beyond its outcomes, this dissertation directs attention to the antecedents of employability. In essence, and guided by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, I examine the predictive validity of multiple job demands, job and human resources as well as of personal resources for employees' willingness to develop their job-related skills, established as developmental proactivity in chapter 2. In chapter 4, I rely on an essentially analogous set of demands and resources (personal resources omitted) to explain employees' willingness to mentor a protégé informally. I found that social (e.g., supervisor and co-mentor) support and development or learning opportunities are positively associated with both forms of employee willingness. However, whereas workload (or its alias, time pressure) is positively associated with employees' willingness to develop their job-related skills, it negatively affects employees' willingness to mentor.



This mixed effect is remarkable because mentoring is often portrayed as a particular form of learning-induced behaviour. Under this lens, the effects for workload should be comparable. I held the scope peculiar to both forms of willingness responsible for the findings obtained for workload (e.g., time pressure). As a volitional activity that is performed in employees' own spare time, informal mentoring requires an extra investment in time and energy on top of the effort expended in fulfilling formal job duties. In contrast, the act of keeping one's job-related skills at an optimal level is not necessarily extra-role. Due to the additional investments required, time pressure distorts the cost-benefit equilibrium informal mentoring is posited to rest on. Based on this reasoning, it is no longer surprising to find that time pressure exerts a negative effect on employees' willingness to mentor. Under this condition, informal mentoring is associated with too high a cost to be considered worth pursuing.

From a theoretical point of view, the mixed effect of workload expanded upon above ties in with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) appraisal theory of stress. Proposed as a theory for the study of human strain, the appraisal theory of stress posits that the appraisal of an environmental demand determines individuals' reactions to that demand (e.g., Webster *et al.*, 2011). When coping strategies are unavailable, individuals are most likely to appraise a demand as a threat. Applying this logic to the mentoring context, potential mentors appraise time pressure as a threat, owing to the costs involved and the inability to cope with this burden. Because of a negative appraisal, time pressure *decreases* learning in the context of mentoring. Transferred to the employability context, employees appraise workload as a challenge, owing to the opportunities it creates to attain future goals in life when confronted successfully. Because of a positive appraisal, workload *increases* learning in the context of employability. Assuming that these lines of thought are correct, this dissertation adds a new dimension to the appraisal theory of stress, demonstrating its potential usefulness for understanding employee learning, with specific application to the literature on mentoring.

*1.7.1.3. Implication III: Resources and demands revisited*

The aforementioned conclusion regarding Lazarus and Folkman's appraisal theory of stress in conjunction with findings obtained for (job) resources enables me to conjointly use the JD-R model to study employability and mentoring. But to do so, two issues should be taken into account. First, organisational conditions that relate to learning – in the context of employability or mentoring – have either an unambiguous positive or a mixed positive and negative valence. Second, organisational conditions that relate to learning ideally have a context-specific rather than a universal meaning. To address both issues, I propose redefining job demands and resources within the JD-R model.

Early in the 2000s, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) defined job resources as *"those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, […] and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development"* (p. 312). This dissertation gives impetus to the following redefinition. Job resources entail *"those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that individuals appraise either unambiguously positively or both positively and negatively and that are functional in achieving work goals and/or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development"*. I argue that this redefinition can improve the predictive utility of the JD-R model in the employability and mentoring literature, because of the following two features. First, as it incorporates challenge demands, it offers an integral resource-based approach to understanding employee learning (chapters 2 and 4). That is, the proposed redefinition provides a conceptual framework for understanding not only the role of conditions with an unambiguous positive valence (e.g., social support) in boosting employee learning (chapters 2 and 4), but also the role of conditions with a mixed positive and negative valence (e.g., workload) in enhancing the latter (chapter 2). Second, it provides useful conceptual inroads into understanding the findings obtained in chapter 5. As briefly explained in section 1.6, chapter 5 shows that mentorships – please recall from subsection 1.2.3 that I portray mentorships as conditions – mentors perceive as high quality, and thus, appraise positively, stimulate learning among mentors.

Job demands can be considered the negative counterpart of job resources because they refer to *"those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs"* (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007: 312). To do justice to this dissertation's findings and ensure compatibility with the proposed redefinition of job resources, I suggest redefining job demands as *"those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that individuals appraise unambiguously negatively and that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs"*. Please note that this redefinition includes hindrance demands (conditions with an unambiguous negative valence), but excludes challenge demands. Please recall from the

former paragraph that I integrate challenge demands into the definition of resources, showing that the conceptual distinction between resources and job demands is less clear than the conventional definitions of these concepts may lead one to believe. For instance, in chapter 2, workload fits my redefinition of job resources, because individuals appraise this condition partly positively (fosters learning). In contrast, in chapter 4, workload (or its alias, time pressure) fits my redefinition of job demands, because individuals appraise this condition unambiguously negatively (inhibits learning).

Redefining job resources within the JD-R model paves the way for a critical review of the resource construct within the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory. A point of departure is the definition of resources in Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl and Westman (2014), which is *"anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals"* (p. 5). Despite its potential merits, I argue that this definition needs refinement to be helpful for this dissertation. In essence, the nature of appraisals should be specified in order to tap into the issues regarding the valence and context-specific meaning of conditions peculiar to learning that I have highlighted. This assertion translates into the following proposed redefinition. Resources refer to *"all things individuals value, either unambiguously positively or both positively and negatively, that help them to attain their (learning) goals".*

The addition of the word "learning" enables me to apply this redefinition to chapters 2, 4 and 5, and the general focus on "things" rather than "aspects of the job" makes the COR-based redefinition particularly suitable for understanding the counterintuitive findings obtained in chapter 3. As described in section 1.6, I found developmental proactivity to be unrelated to resource conservation, and professional ability unrelated to resource acquisition. To explain the first finding, I reasoned that resource conservation will not help those with high developmental proactivity to attain their goals because it will prevent them from broadening their resource reservoir. Therefore, according to my redefinition, resource conservation should not be considered a resource. As for the latter finding, I reasoned that resource acquisition will not help those with high professional ability to attain their goals because it will deplete their resource reservoir. Therefore, according to my redefinition, resource acquisition should not be considered a resource.

The aforementioned logic demonstrates the usefulness of adopting a definition of COR's resource construct that is 1) applicable in multiple contexts (e.g., mentoring and employability in this dissertation) and 2) integral to an understanding of *why* concepts usually considered resources may not be such in certain situations. In the COR literature, the context-specific meaning of resources is part of a lively debate, one that Hobfoll demanded since COR's inception in the late 1980s and that remains unsettled 30 years later (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018).

### *1.7.2. Methodological implications*

*1.7.2.1. Implication I: Using large-scale (panel) surveys and data triangulation*

In addition to conceptual and theoretical innovations, this dissertation makes several methodological contributions. First, to examine the associations between conditions and employability (chapter 2) and between employability and employment trajectories (chapter 3), I utilised a multiple-wave panel survey administered among a large sample of Dutch employees, ages 45 to 64. This panel survey had three advantages. First, the survey was longitudinal, and therefore, I could study developmental proactivity dynamically. Because this employability axis barely changed within employees, this dissertation provides a new variant to the claim that employability is *"amenable to substantial enhancement by investing in it"* (Pruijt, 2013: 1614), at least as far as employability is defined in terms of proactive learning. The same longitudinal nature enables me to apply a time lag between employability and employment trajectories, and therefore, allows me to lay the foundation for causality. Third, the survey's extensive nature enables me to generalise my findings to a wide array of occupational and organisational settings in the Netherlands. I consider this heterogeneity in sample composition a noteworthy contribution to the employability literature, as previous studies (e.g., De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009; Volmer and Spurk, 2011) often relied on homogeneous samples, and thus, the question of whether expectations might apply to multiple institutional settings had long remained unanswered.

Another methodological advancement pertains to the triangulation of data collection techniques I used to examine the relation between organisational conditions and learning (chapters 2 and 4). In essence, I used a mixture of panel and vignette survey data. In the vignette survey, respondents were given certain conditions, and then asked to what extent they would be willing to learn (i.e., mentor). This set-up forced respondents to base their intention to learn (i.e., mentor) on the specified conditions, rather than the other way around. Although I cannot rule out the possibility of reserved causation, this triangulation leads me to suspect that the direction of the hypothesised relations between conditions and learning is correct.

Finally, in chapter 5, I collected survey data among Dutch mentors to examine the mechanisms linking mentoring to mentors' benefits. These data had two advantages. First, the data were collected in 2017, which provides a timely answer to the pressing question of *why* mentoring works for mentors (Janssen *et al.*, 2016). Second, my use of mentorship quality as an intervening variable responds to the emerging call to treat mentorship quality as a mechanism by which mentors gain from mentoring (Ghosh and Reio, 2013).

### *1.7.3. Practical implications*

I begin my discussion of the implications of my research for practice with the contention that senior employees are willing to learn proactively in their current jobs. This contention (supported in chapter 2) calls upon practitioners to embrace the so-called "activation model" in which senior employees are recognised as valuable organisational assets worthy of future investments. However, as proactive learning likely denotes an individual disposition (chapters 2 and 3), investments in talent development should not be directed at this employability axis, but rather aimed at fostering midcareer and senior employees' willingness to support the needs of a protégé. I am referring to volitional mentoring, an employability enhancement tool and job redesign route that I address in chapters 4 and 5. I advise organisations interested in this route to adopt the following Human Resource Management (HRM) policy measures.



First, I advise HR professionals to expend efforts in activities that unburden employees, as supported by evidence on the negative effect of workload on volitional mentoring (chapter 4). For example, an easy-to-implement tool is job carving, which involves identifying simple, routine-intensive tasks and delegating them to a colleague (Dekker *et al.*, 2013). Job carving helps to ease excessive workload, and therefore, might enable midcareer and senior employees to spend additional time on mentoring (chapter 4). Simple as it may seem, two issues warrant attention. First, job carving as a downward adjustment should not result in the elimination of tasks employees derive satisfaction from, as this might lead to a motivation mismatch (i.e., a discrepancy between employees' drivers and the work content; Sanders, 2016). Second, job carving should help employees combine mentoring and learning so there is sufficient time left to assist juniors in advancing their career without neglecting personal needs.

Second, learning opportunities foster volitional mentoring (chapter 4), which attests to the need to embed volitional mentoring in an organisation's philosophy of development. Thus, organisations can signal that mentoring is part of the corporate culture and values. I encourage HR professionals to grant employees individual training budgets. This recommendation is supported by an additional analysis showing that an "employability culture" at the corporate level (important pillars of which are personal growth and extra-role developmental activities; e.g., Nauta *et al.*, 2009; chapter 4) entices midcareer and senior employees into the mentoring role. Ideally, training budgets enable employees to participate in training and coaching sessions of their choice. Coaching has much appeal here, as it is a crucial factor in the training participation of Dutch employees ages 55 years and over (De Grip *et al.*, 2018), enabling them to sustain their careers. I argue that HR professionals should not merely offer training budgets, but also ensure employees are aware of them. This advice is supported by Freese and Schaik (2011, as cited in Dekker *et al.*, 2013) who showed that employees prefer fulfilling prescribed job duties to investments in human capital. HR professionals could heighten employees'

awareness of training budgets by listing them on monthly payslips or regularly organising career weeks. Organisational initiatives can be complemented by external consultants or ambassadors who help employees select a training course suitable to their abilities and wishes.

Third, I advise organisations to invest in collaborative workplace relationships. This first entails a solidary relationship between employees (mentors) and direct supervisors. Based on the positive effect of supervisory support on volitional mentoring (chapter 4), I encourage direct supervisors to applaud volitional functioning among (prospective) mentors and to provide them with constructive feedback. In this way, mentors can experience psychological freedom and effectiveness while mentoring. Supervisors could make (prospective) mentors aware of their positive attitudes towards volitional mentoring by integrating regular dialogues about informal activities into the annual employee evaluation cycle. It is noteworthy that supervisors should never reward their subordinates for mentoring activities, as this might lower (prospective) mentors' readiness to engage in these activities (e.g., Allen, 2003). The role direct supervisors play in employees' ability to become the master of their own (learning) behaviour was recently touched upon in a report of the *Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market* (ROA) on the training participation of the Dutch labour force (De Grip *et al.*, 2018). In addition to solidary vertical workplace relationships, I call for solidary horizontal relationships as well, based on the positive effect of co-mentor consultation on volitional mentoring (chapter 4). I advise organisations to create ample opportunities for co-mentor consultation, which could be done through periodic social meetings in which mentors share best practices, discuss setbacks, engage in networking and offer helpful feedback.

These recommendations imply that organisations carry a prime responsibility for facilitating volitional mentoring. I argue that this is partly true. On the one hand, employers are in charge, because mentoring benefits the organisation: through the transfer of accumulated wisdom, volitional mentoring represents a cost-effective way to ensure the successorship of enterprise-specific knowledge. On the other hand, employees, too, are responsible because mentoring yields individual benefits. Chapter 5 provides empirical evidence to support this claim. Prospective mentors could, for instance, demonstrate their willingness to participate in learning (e.g., mentoring) activities. Such an attitude pays off, as research (De Grip *et al.*, 2018; Fleischmann, 2014) shows that employers are more willing to invest in training if senior (older) employees express their motivation for learning.

Beyond employers and employees, the Dutch government and social partners could be held responsible. For instance, social partners may attract training funds and recruit ambassadors. These initiatives could be supported with three governmental arrangements. First, the Dutch government could relieve employers' (financial) burden

to offer training budgets (SCP, 2019). As this burden is especially felt when investments are targeted at temporary or part-time workers (De Grip *et al.*, 2018), arrangements are ideally tailor-made (i.e., directed at specific vulnerable groups). I argue that these reimbursements are preferable to the opportunity employers have to subtract earlier investments in training from the so-called "redundancy pay" (Rijksoverheid, 2020). This is because training budgets provide employees with the means to enhance their employability *while working*, whereas a redundancy pay enables employees to invest in their employability when they *have lost their jobs*. Second, the Dutch government could launch arrangements aimed at reimbursing (part of the) costs of external consultants to help employees select suitable courses. Third, I advise policy makers to introduce legislation that would facilitate employees to move to less strenuous positions without losing job entitlements, even if this implies a change in employment status. Focal points are the so-called "intrapreneurs", entrepreneurs within organisations (WRR, 2019), or "hybrid careerists", individuals who combine different employment statuses (such as employed and self-employed). To date, intrapreneurs and hybrid careerists have not been granted the same rights as other working individuals, although their share in the Dutch labour force is growing (WRR, 2019).



### *1.7.4. Limitations and future research agenda*

This dissertation has four shortcomings that deserve a prominent place in future research. First, I confined my attention to midcareer and senior employees, or those aged 30 years and over. Although employability constitutes a key challenge for this age group, this focus occludes an assessment of employability issues that appeal to younger employees. Similarly, although mentoring represents a cost-effective employability enhancement tool for those aged 30 years and over, much remains to be investigated with younger employees as the focus. For example, an endeavour for future employability research could be to map the activities of young adults employed in physically strenuous jobs, such as professional football, as they prepare themselves for work beyond their current jobs, which are unsustainable. A viable route for future mentoring research may be to study reverse mentoring, which entails the process in which a junior employee supports the needs of an elderly colleague (Haggard *et al.*, 2011). I argue that reverse mentoring is a promising research area because technological innovation makes it likely that entry-level workers possess advanced (technical) skills they could teach older colleagues, thereby sustaining their employability.

The second limitation of this dissertation is that I employed a quantitative research strategy for answering my research questions. This strategy has advantages related to statistical power, generalizability of findings and reliability. Nevertheless, future qualitative research is warranted to unravel the mechanisms underlying the associations between conditions and employability (chapters 2 and 5), conditions and

mentoring (chapter 4) and employability and employment prospects (chapters 3 and 5). A concrete suggestion would be to examine *why* respondents perceive some conditions as facilitators of mentoring and others as obstacles. Another consideration would be to study mentor learning relative to mentoring episodes, which means that researchers examine *how* learning unfolds at different growth-potential interactions with the protégé ("episodes").

Third, my research leaves open the question of whether links between conditions, mentoring, employability and employment prospects form one causal chain, as each chapter in this dissertation addresses only one link. Future longitudinal research that spans larger parts of employees' working lives is needed to examine whether the findings on employability and employment trajectories (chapters 2 and 3) and on mentoring (chapters 4 and 5) are chronologically related. For instance, researchers could draw upon the balanced HRM approach (Boselie *et al.*, 2009), which takes both employee and organisational outcomes into consideration, to develop a mediation model in which HRM-based investments are posited to facilitate mentoring, mentoring is proposed to enhance employability and employability is assumed to pay off for employees' employment prospects and well-being as well as their organisations.

Fourth, the panel survey, STREAM, which I used in chapters 2 and 3, includes data for 2010-2013. During that period, the Dutch labour market was quite unstable. After a modest growth in 2010 and 2011, the Dutch economy shrank in 2012 (CBS, 2019d). Unemployment among senior employees grew rapidly (CBS, 2019c), and financial incentives to withdraw prematurely from the labour market were low. These facts coupled with high levels of dismissal protection gave rise to a situation in which senior employees were locked into their current jobs until they were eligible for a pension allowance. Therefore, readers should interpret the findings described in chapters 2 and 3 against the background of these labour market phenomena. Future research could assess whether these findings are time pertinent.

### *1.7.5. Overarching conclusion*

Without conveying the message that this dissertation has captured all drivers, barriers and outcomes of employability and mentoring, it is one of very few to integrate different notions of employability into a single study using a meso-level theoretical perspective and relying upon a mixture of panel, semi-experimental and cross-sectional survey data. That being said, this dissertation places the organisation at the heart of employability research. Only recently, scholarly work tends to reflect the same emphasis, witness the plea Van der Lippe and Lippényi (2019) make to assign a prominent place to the organisation in (future) employability research.

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# Chapter 2

## Understanding senior employees' proactive action orientation towards job-related learning: The role of work characteristics, human and personal resources*


### Abstract

This longitudinal study examines the role of work characteristics and human and personal resources in employees' developmental proactivity (i.e., the activities employees undertake to keep their job-related skills at an optimal level). Drawing upon the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory, we define developmental proactivity as a personal resource that is posited to be fuelled by both organisational and individual resources. Our multilevel analysis of a large, heterogeneous sample of Dutch employees ages 45 to 64 shows that developmental proactivity barely changes over time. With the exception of job autonomy, work characteristics and human and personal resources significantly explain differences in developmental proactivity among employees, although coefficients for the interaction effects appear to be non-significant. Implications for theory, practice and research on ageing and learning are discussed.



*Keywords:*
Developmental proactivity
Employability
Job Demands-Resources model
Conservation Of Resources theory
Longitudinal design
Senior employees


**This chapter is co-authored by Ferry Koster. A slightly different version of this chapter is currently under review in an international peer-reviewed journal.*

## 2.1. Introduction

This study examines the antecedents of developmental proactivity, or employees' proactive action orientation towards learning and obtaining new experiences in their current jobs. In essence, developmental proactivity reflects the extent to which employees have a proactive attitude towards job-related changes and engage in activities aimed at continuous job-related development. Developmental proactivity is related to Frese and Fay's (2001) personal initiative, De Lange *et al.*'s (2010) learning-related behaviour and Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) job crafting, but has a wider scope because it simultaneously focuses on proactivity *and* learning. We assert that this combination is particularly relevant in today's competitive labour market where uncertainty, ambiguously defined job roles and ever-changing skill requirements increasingly require a proactive approach to work and a willingness to learn new skills.

With its focus on proactive learning to mitigate job obsolescence, developmental proactivity is coined as a dimension of employees' employability that benefits both employees and employers (e.g., Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, it can be argued that both employers and employees are responsible for enhancing developmental proactivity. Nevertheless, current research has hardly examined simultaneously organisational and individual conditions in relation to active learning or willingness to develop skills. Instead, studies focus on either work characteristics (demands and resources; e.g., De Lange *et al.*, 2010; De Witte *et al.*, 2007; LePine *et al.*, 2004; Taris *et al.*, 2003) or human and/or personal resources (e.g., De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Nauta *et al.*, 2009). Integrated research is, therefore, missing. In addition, studies that shift the attention from main to interaction effects limit the combinations of work characteristics to interactions between specific demands and resources (De Witte *et al.*, 2007; Taris *et al.*, 2003; an exception being Ouweneel *et al.*, 2009). Notwithstanding their contributions, this narrow focus does not do justice to the dynamic interplay between multiple work characteristics in everyday working life.

Motivated by these fragmentations, we formulated the following research question: *"Under which (combinations of) work characteristics (i.e., job demands, job resources) and human and personal resources do employees display developmental proactivity?"* As we seek to answer this question, we contribute to theory and research on ageing, learning and employee motivation in two ways.

First, we adopt a meso- and micro-level approach *vis-à-vis* developmental proactivity by combining the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) with the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2002). The relevance of this theoretical perspective is threefold. First, despite claims that context plays a role, extant COR research has predominantly focussed on the micro-level (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). We address this void by placing the organisation at the centre of

attention. Second, we transfer COR theory to research on proactive employee learning and link it to theoretical ideas on how organisational and individual conditions relate to employee motivation, according to the JD-R model. Third, in addition to main effects, we examine the interaction effects of predictors, which enables us to extend existing JD-R research in two ways: (1) we model multiple interactions between organisational and individual conditions that does justice to the dynamic interplay among these conditions in everyday working life; (2) we test these interactions for developmental proactivity, an understudied yet increasingly relevant employability axis.

Second, we aim to provide a methodological contribution: we test our theoretical model on a large, heterogeneous sample of Dutch employees ages 45 to 64 who participated in an observational cohort study (2010-2013). The benefits of this design are twofold. First, it enables us to test the pervasive yet understudied[9] claim that senior employees are less conducive to (pro)active learning and concomitant attitudes (e.g., Warr and Fay, 2001). This is important, given the role age-related (mis) perceptions still play in employers' reluctance to invest in the talent of their elderly personnel (De Grip *et al.*, 2018). Yet, talent investments in today's fast changing labour market are important, and therefore, an inaccurate picture of senior employees' receptivity to (pro)active learning might eventually endanger this vulnerable age group's standing in the labour market. Second, it allows for an assessment of the claim that developmental proactivity represents a malleable employee characteristic (Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008) by examining whether this employability axis changes within employees.



## 2.2. Developmental proactivity

We define developmental proactivity as *"a set of future-oriented and proactive actions employees often take wholly volitionally[10] to keep their job-related skills at an optimal level, the possible result of which is to achieve greater individual and/or organisational success"*. This definition includes three distinctive characteristics: (1) a focus on the future ("proactivity"); (2) initiative-taking; and (3) results that are pro-company as well as pro-worker. First, developmental proactivity denotes the extent to which employees' actions are forward-looking and anticipatory. Employees who assess the job skills they will need in the future and proactively adapt to those needs are assumed to have a long-term, proactive

9 Exceptions are Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch (2008) and De Lange, Taris, Jansen, Kompier, Houtman and Bongers (2010).

10 It is noteworthy that proactivity is often placed closer to the autonomous end of the continuum between autonomous and controlled motivation, as advanced by self-determination theory (Cangiano and Parker, 2016). That is, proactive actions often emanate from an individual's intrinsic interest in the activity itself. However, many scholars argue that proactivity sometimes may be a response to an environmental (e.g., organisational) request, suggesting that proactive actions are externally driven, and thus, forcefully undertaken. In recognition of both perspectives, developmental proactivity is portrayed as a mix of willingly and externally induced actions, but volitionally undertaken in most instances. In fact, this stance does nothing but justify our theoretical model, which contains both person- and work-related facets.

focus on their job-related development. Second, developmental proactivity reflects a continuum concerning the extent to which employees initiate learning activities. Third, developmental proactivity can benefit employees and organisations. When anticipating job-related changes, employees increase their flexibility and resilience, which may, in turn, lead to favourable career prospects, higher job performance and productivity (Crant, 2000).

As a set of proactive and predominantly self-initiated learning actions with real implications for employees and employers, developmental proactivity is posited to represent an essential personal resource in contemporary working life. Personal resources entail *"orientations and self-perceptions that relate to mental resiliency and call upon employees' belief of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully"* (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009: 236). Thus, personal resources refer to worker adjustment and agency, key aspects of developmental proactivity. As a personal resource, developmental proactivity overlaps with well-known COR resources such as *"Necessary tools for work"* and *"Motivation to get things done"* (Hobfoll, 1998: 71). Indeed, as a set of intentional attitudes and behaviours concerning learning at work, developmental proactivity is inherently motivational, and therefore, fits well with COR's notion of resources. In essence, developmental proactivity is a "valued entity in itself" that is contingent on a host of job, human and personal resources. This premise – that developmental proactivity is a function of other resources – is critical to our study, and helps to understand how work characteristics and human and personal resources affect developmental proactivity.

## 2.3. A resource-based approach to developmental proactivity

This study combines the JD-R model with COR theory to explain employees' developmental proactivity. We thereby follow Schaufeli and Taris (2013), who emphasised the importance of such an integration to understand employee behaviour. Whereas the JD-R model provides a mere heuristic tool to delineate the demands and resources that affect employee motivation, COR theory specifies *why* these demands and resources matter. As a heuristic tool, the JD-R model simplifies the work situation by distinguishing between job demands and job resources. Recently, researchers have acknowledged that job demands can have both negative and positive effects (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). They may be positively associated with both strain and non-strain (e.g., learning) outcomes, and therefore, are coined "challenge demands", or demands that are *both* energy-consuming and stimulating (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2010). Well-established challenge demands within the JD-R model are workload, responsibility and mental load (e.g., Tadić, 2014). Prior studies have found workload and mental load to be positively related to learning, employability and proactivity (De Lange *et al.*, 2010; De Witte *et al.*, 2007; LePine *et al.*, 2004; Ohly and Fritz, 2010; Van Harten, 2016), a finding

that supports the theoretical notion that both demands are stimulating.

The stimulating function of challenge demands overlaps with the motivational mechanism underlying job resources or *"those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are (1) functional in achieving work goals, (2) reduce job demands […] and (3) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development"* (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007: 312). Defined in this way, job resources comprise a varied set of work-related aspects at either the task, work process, interpersonal or organisational level (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Regardless of where they are located, job resources have motivational potential that is posited to fuel employees' developmental proactivity.

The motivational process underlying job resources as well as the stimulating function assigned to challenge demands align with COR theory, which emphasises the facilitating role of resources in predicting other resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Hobfoll, 2002). COR posits that individuals are hedonistic in nature and inclined to retain existing resources in their lives and acquire new ones (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). An important corollary of this central premise is that individuals who possess resources are capable of (future) resource gain ("resources beget resources"). Broadly, resources may be objects (e.g., shelter), conditions (e.g., permanent contract), personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem) or energies (e.g., skills) that individuals value (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993). Generally speaking, resources are valued entities in themselves or are important vehicles for obtaining other valued resources (Hobfoll, 2002). Theoretical examples of the latter category include "Feeling independent", "Support from co-workers" and "Advancement in job training" (Hobfoll, 1998: 71). Defined in this way, well-established COR resources overlap considerably with several better researched job resources within the JD-R model, including job autonomy, social support and challenging work (e.g., learning opportunities). To date, a few studies show that these job resources have predictive validity for active learning as well as for competence- and skills-based notions of employability akin to developmental proactivity (De Lange *et al.*, 2010; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012; Van Harten, 2016). Based on these findings and these characteristics' interpretability within both the COR and JD-R frameworks, we examine job autonomy, social support and development opportunities as valued resources or "vehicles" that are posited to boost developmental proactivity as a valued entity in itself, according to COR's corollary that "resources beget resources".

There is growing consensus among scholars that personal resources form an essential part of the JD-R model (Schaufeli and Taris, 2013). Examples of personal resources include self-efficacy and active coping (Frese and Fay, 2001; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009), which could be linked to theoretically mature COR resources ("feeling that I have control over my life" and "self-efficacy"), which in varying degrees touch upon workers' resiliency and capability to affect their environment successfully. Like job resources, personal resources are expected to have motivational potential (Maurer, 2001;

Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009) and thus, may generate other personal resources, such as developmental proactivity. In this context, research has found both self-efficacy and active coping to be proximal predictors of learning, employability (Maurer, 2001; Nauta *et al.*, 2009) and proactivity (Crant, 2000; Frese and Fay, 2001).

## 2.4. Hypotheses

Although COR research is usually geared towards explaining ill health, it may be applied to other outcomes, such as proactive employee learning. This application is based on the theoretical mechanism described above: challenge demands and job, human and personal resources are potential resource instigators, which may explain *why* employees are motivated to keep their job-related skills at an optimal level. To detail this "why", we formulate five hypotheses. These hypotheses convey main as well as interaction effects, and therefore, we expect predictors to act in isolation and to be multiplicative.

### *2.4.1. Challenge demands*

We examine workload and mental load as relevant challenge demands, which can be interpreted within the JD-R model, as we have illustrated. Our theoretical reasoning, based on COR, is that workload and mental load provide opportunities to preserve current resources and to accumulate new ones through solving inefficiencies. As employees' knowledge becomes inadequate and internal job pressures arise, they are motivated to proactively upgrade their job-related skills to manage the inefficiencies and to prevent the suboptimal situation to recur. Stated differently, challenge demands lead employees to adopt a proactive problem-solving coping strategy to ensure conservation of resources and acquisition of new ones. Although stress-provoking, challenge demands represent "useful" demands that, when confronted successfully, contribute to resource conservation and accumulation and thus, are worth the effort expended in proactive learning. Accordingly, we propose:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Challenge demands (workload and mental load) are positively related to developmental proactivity

### *2.4.2. Job and human resources*

We view job autonomy and social support as important job resources. In addition, we assess the role of development opportunities as potential human resources. As described, these resources can be interpreted within COR theory and studied as part of the JD-R model.

Job autonomy refers to task discretion that is posited to foster developmental proactivity through felt responsibility and psychological freedom. More specifically, job autonomy provides employees with the means (e.g., time and independence) to experiment with new work methods, which can boost their curiosity about new learning resources in their work environments. Also, employees who experience autonomy may feel more responsible for their jobs, which may spur them to keep pace with new developments as a way to strive for additional resources in the future, such as a promotion. Hence, job autonomy serves as a vehicle for creating other valued resources.

Social support refers to the personal and work-related support employees draw from their colleagues and supervisors. We expect social support to stimulate developmental proactivity through feelings of belonging. In essence, social support signals to employees that their supervisor and colleagues care about their personal functioning. That is, social support eases social interactions and gives employees encouraging and fulfilling bonds with others. This sense of emotional intimacy is intrinsically rewarding and, as such, helps workers to flourish, or in COR terminology, engenders learning resources such as developmental proactivity.



Development opportunities refer to the extent to which employees experience opportunities to practice and broaden their skills at work. We prefer to categorise them as "human resources" because they can be considered a part of an organisation's human resource toolkit (Koster, 2011). We assume that development opportunities will foster developmental proactivity as they build enduring intellectual resources. Our point of departure is that employees who perceive chances for development have the necessary tools to acquire and practice multiple skills. This opportunity optimally motivates employees to learn proactively with the aim of preserving their current learning resources and acquiring new ones in their work. This potential for resource gain, in turn, can enhance feelings of competence at work, which means that employees may feel more capable of successfully managing their work environments and handling key challenges (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2008). Hence, learning resources beget employee learning as a potential route to acquire future intellectual resources in the pursuit of ensuring felt competence at work.

In line with the above reasoning, we hypothesise:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Job and human resources (job autonomy, social support and development opportunities) are positively related to developmental proactivity

### *2.4.3. Interaction of challenge demands and job (human) resources*

A premise underlying COR is that resources are especially salient when they are needed. This theoretical claim aligns with the interactive active learning hypothesis of the JD-R model, which posits that higher levels of active learning are obtained when resource-

rich and demanding work conditions coexist, compared with learning that occurs based on their main effects (Taris *et al.*, 2003). In these so-called "active jobs", employees can demonstrate the usefulness of the resources allocated to them, which promotes learning. Following this logic, we propose that the positive impact of job and human resources on developmental proactivity is greater when challenge demands are high. Specifically, we argue that when confronted with mentally strenuous work and time pressures, a resource-rich work environment can boost employees' felt competence and the subsequent belief that their work efforts meet pre-defined goals. This felt competence and promise of goal attainment foster proactive learning, since learning allows employees to accelerate the accomplishment of their goals and to set new targets. The idea is consistent with COR's key principle that individuals have a prime desire to maximise their resource pool (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993). Hence, higher levels of proactive learning are expected when high resources and high challenges coexist, because this situation leads to goal maximisation and enhanced feelings of competence, and thus, paves the way for resource gains.

In line with this presupposition, we hypothesise:

> *Hypothesis 3:* The positive relationship between job and human resources (job autonomy, social support and development opportunities) and developmental proactivity is stronger under the condition of high challenge demands (workload and mental load)

### *2.4.4. Personal resources*

We regard self-efficacy and active coping as relevant personal resources that mirror well-developed COR resources and can be interpreted within that theory. Self-efficacy denotes employees' belief in their ability to learn new skills, professions and technologies (Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). These capability beliefs transcend one's felt ability to satisfactorily fulfil prescribed job duties. Defined in this way, self-efficacy is conceptually similar to Maurer's absolute self-efficacy for development, or *"the belief that one can improve competencies in comparison with where they currently are"* (Maurer *et al.*, 2003: 709). Since self-efficacy entails employees' belief in their ability to enlarge their existing knowledge reservoir, we expect self-efficacy to enable employees to acquire skills that go beyond traditional job requirements, and thus to stimulate their proactive search for new knowledge needs in their current jobs, which we call developmental proactivity.

Active coping refers to the strategies employees adopt to deal effectively with work-related problems (Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). We assume that active coping facilitates developmental proactivity, since employees with an active coping strategy can deal more easily with setbacks that may arise from challenging conventional learning patterns. Stated differently, active coping leads to the perception that peak situations are

controllable, a "challenge appraisal" that facilitates activities that are likely to change the status quo (Ohly and Fritz, 2010), as is the case with developmental proactivity.

Proceeding from the above reasoning, our fourth hypothesis is:

*Hypothesis 4:* Personal resources (self-efficacy and active coping) are positively related to developmental proactivity

### *2.4.5. Interaction of human and personal resources*

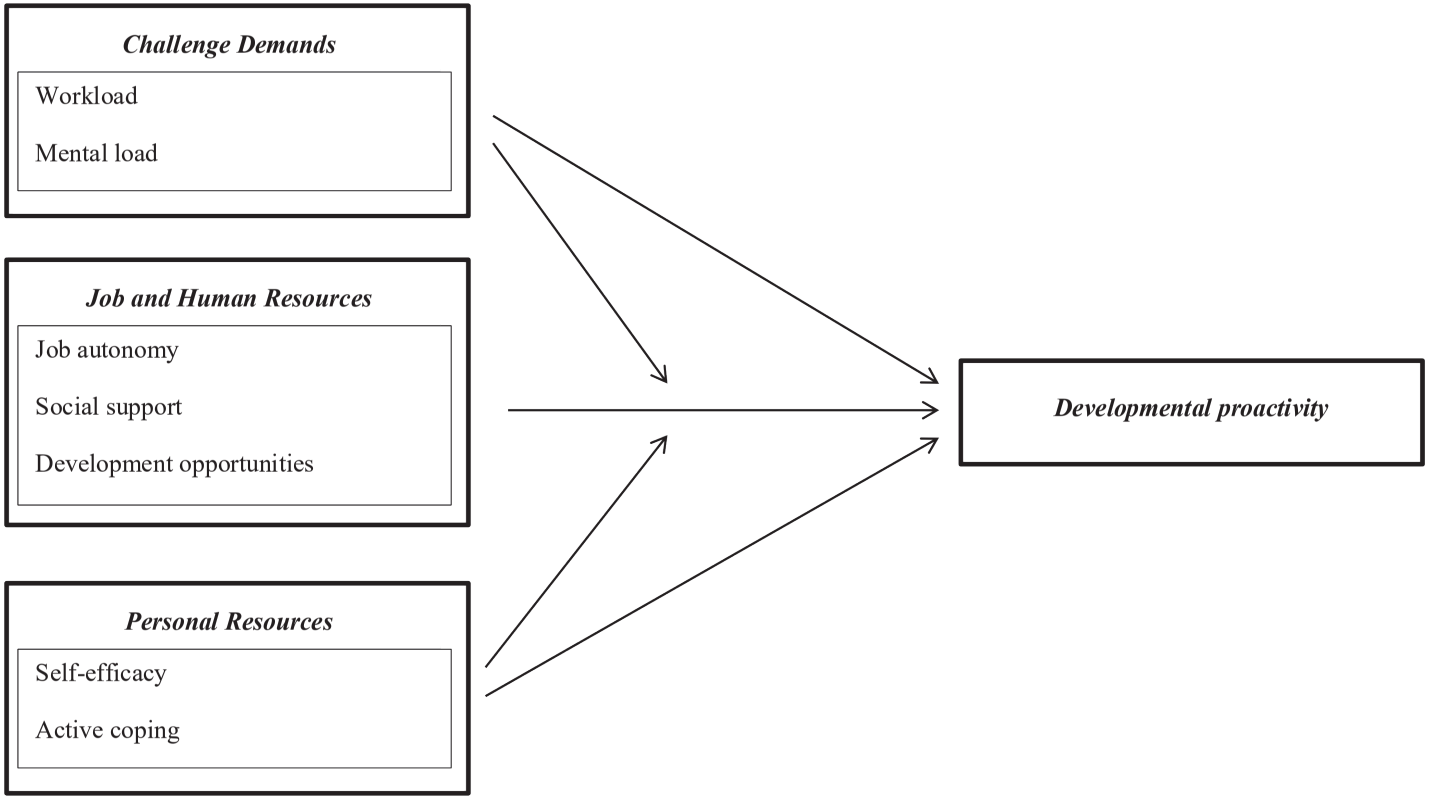
A central yet understudied premise underlying the JD-R model is that effects of resources are multiplicative (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This notion ties in with COR's corollary that "resources beget more resources", or that the return on investments in resources is higher when individuals possess more resources (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993). Extrapolating this reasoning, we assume that the positive effect of human resources on developmental proactivity is greater when employees possess personal resources. Specifically, we assert that development opportunities are more motivating to employees who feel self-efficacy for learning, because such employees are likely to believe that the benefits they wish to accrue from development activities will be maximised. This sense of accomplishment can foster proactive learning as an attractive strategy to leverage merits and stretch cognitive capabilities. In support of this presupposition, proponents of the interactionist approach to work (Watson, 2003) suggest that individuals' behaviours and experiences are the result of interactions between individuals and their (work) environments, meaning that individual and organisational conditions can reinforce each other.

Based on these considerations, we hypothesise:

*Hypothesis 5:* The positive relationship between human resources (development opportunities) and developmental proactivity is stronger under the condition of high personal resources (self-efficacy for learning)

Figure 2.1 depicts our theoretical framework.

**Figure 2.1: Proposed theoretical framework**



## 2.5. Method

### *2.5.1. Sample and procedure*

To test our hypotheses, we used the Dutch *Study on Transitions in Employment, Ability and Motivation* (STREAM), which is a four-year (2010-2013) prospective cohort study conducted by the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO; Ybema *et al.*, 2014). The sample is stratified by age (45 to 64 years at baseline) and employment status (employed, self-employed and non-employed or those inactive in the labour market). Respondents were part of the Intomart GfK Online Panel and were invited annually to complete an online questionnaire. The final sample at baseline included 15,118 respondents (71% response rate). A total of 9,639 respondents (64% of the baseline) participated in all follow-up waves. Both response rates are above average for survey research conducted among individuals (Baruch and Holtom, 2008).

Our sample included persons who participated in all waves (N=9,639). Individuals who were self-employed or not employed were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 5,874 employees who indicated being employed at each wave. We excluded self-employed and non-employed persons, as they might have different scores on our variables of interest. For example, self-employed persons may be more conducive to proactive learning than employed persons because their employability is constantly tested. Also, we excluded the first wave from our analyses because it did not include active coping, which resulted in a three-year time span.

To address response bias, we performed a drop-out analysis to assess whether employees who participated in less than four waves (N=3,834) significantly differed on scores for developmental proactivity and several background variables (i.e., education, age and gender) compared with our final sample. T-tests and $\chi^2$ -tests revealed that panel drop-out did not seriously bias the results.

### *2.5.2. Operationalisation*

*2.5.2.1. Developmental proactivity*

We measured *developmental proactivity* with a previously validated scale based on the research of Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch (2008). Two items captured the extent to which employees actively search for opportunities to develop their job-related skills and measured the *behavioural* component. Items read: "In my work, I keep trying to learn new things" and "In my work, I search for people from whom I can learn something". These items align with the conceptualisation of active learning as employee actions directed towards developing new behavioural patterns (Karasek and Theorell, 1990, as cited in Taris and Kompier, 2005). Two other items measured the degree to which employees anticipate future skill requirements in their current jobs and assessed the *attitudinal* component. The corresponding items were "With regard to my skills and

knowledge, I see to it that I can cope with changes in my work" and "I think about how I can keep doing a good job in the future". These items tap the anticipatory nature of learning, and thus align with previous notions of proactivity (Crant, 2000) in which employees are seen as active moulders of their environments. Scale anchors ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). At each wave, Cronbach's alpha was .80.

*2.5.2.2. Work characteristics*

Unless otherwise stated, all work characteristics contained multiple items measured on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 ((almost)) never) to 5 (always). We calculated the mean score of the items accompanying each measure. *Workload* was operationalised by means of four items from the Job Content Questionnaire (e.g., Karasek, 1985, as cited in Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). An example item was "Do you have to do a lot of work?" Cronbach's alpha was .87 at time 1 and .88 at times 2 and 3. *Mental load* consisted of three items based on the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey of TNO (e.g., Koppes *et al.*, 2010, as cited in Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). Cronbach's alpha varied from .78 (times 1 and 2) to .80 (time 3). *Job autonomy* was operationalised by means of five items derived from the Job Content Questionnaire. An example item was "Are you able to decide for yourself how to do your work?" Cronbach's alpha was .77 at times 1 and 3 and .78 at time 2. *Social support* was operationalised with four items from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (e.g., Kristensen *et al.*, 2005, as cited in Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). An example item was "How often is your immediate superior willing to listen to your work-related problems?" Cronbach's alpha was .81 at times 1 and 2 and .82 at time 3.

*2.5.2.3. Human resources*

We measured the variable *development opportunities* with three items that assessed the extent to which employees experience opportunities to utilise and extend their skills at work. Items included "learning and development opportunities", "interesting work" and "work independently", with answer categories ranging from 1 (not present at all) to 4 (highly present). These items have been used previously in the same combination to measure organisational intrinsic motivators (Fleischmann, 2014). The reliability of the mean scale was .68 at times 1 and 2 and .67 at time 3.

*2.5.2.4. Personal resources*

The first personal resource, *self-efficacy*, was assessed with three items based on the instructions of Bandura (2006, as cited in Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014). Answer options ranged from 1 (certainly not) to 5 (certainly). We created a mean scale with Cronbach's alphas of .76 (time 1), .75 (time 2) and .77 (time 3). The second personal resource was *active coping*, which contained three newly constructed items by TNO (Van den Heuvel *et*

*al.*, 2014) that were assessed on a response format from 1 (rarely/never) to 4 (very often). An example item was "Think up alternatives to solve a problem". Cronbach's alpha of the resulting mean scale amounted to .76 (times 1 and 3) and .77 (time 2).

*2.5.2.5. Control variables*

We chose age (in years), education, gender and managerial tasks as control variables, based on previous research into learning-related behaviour and employability (De Lange *et al.*, 2010; De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Taris *et al.*, 2003). Since access to and provision of human resources differ alongside employment status (Forrier and Sels, 2003), sector, company size (Fleischmann, 2014) and organisational climate (i.e., restructuring), these factors were additionally taken into account. Following recommendations of De Lange, Taris, Jansen, Kompier, Houtman and Bongers (2010), the age-related measures of health, work ability (with higher scores indicating a better health or work ability), tenure (in years) and age discrimination (four items, Cronbach's alpha was .86 at all occasions) were discerned.



### *2.5.3. Factor analyses*

The items underlying the core constructs in this study (developmental proactivity, workload, mental load, job autonomy, social support, development opportunities, self-efficacy, active coping and age discrimination) have not previously been used in the same set-up; therefore, we first performed an exploratory factor analysis to assess their factor structure, using data at time 1. A principal component analysis with oblimin rotation indicated a nine-factor model with factor loadings for each intended factor above .50 (mean $\lambda$ = .79) and cross-loadings below .32, the recommended threshold (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). For one item, the factor loading fell below .50 (.45), but we decided to retain it because this item was derived from a well-established scale.

To validate the measurement model, we performed the exploratory factor analysis on a random half of the sample (N=2,950), accompanied by a confirmatory factor analysis on the other half using data at times 2 and 3 (N=2,924). We compared the hypothesised nine-factor model with three alternative measurement models (Models 2-4), each with its own rationale. In model 2, we tested whether the items underlying self-efficacy, active coping and developmental proactivity loaded onto one latent factor "(active) learning capability", as they may refer to a similar learning outcome (Taris and Kompier, 2005). In model 3, we followed the JD-R model. In essence, we distinguished between demands and resources and assessed whether (1) the items of workload and mental load represented the common factor, "job demands"; (2) the items underlying job autonomy and social support measured one latent factor, "job resources"; and (3) the items accompanying self-efficacy and active coping loaded onto one common factor, "personal resources". To address the influence of common-method variance, we tested

whether all items were represented by one single factor in model 4. Because we employed four- and five-point Likert-type response scales, some of which were non-normal, we compared the maximum likelihood $\chi^2$ test statistic with the Satorra-Bentler scaled $\chi^2$ test statistic to assess model fit (Rosseel, 2012). The results of R lavaan revealed that the nine-factor solution provided the best fit to the data with $\chi^2(459)=3719.79$, CFI=.90, RMSEA=.05 at time 2 and $\chi^2(459)=3613.95$, CFI=.91, RMSEA=.05 at time 3 (Table 2.1). This empirical support for the nine-factor model as a better fit, compared with the alternatives, indicated that our main constructs were distinct from one another, which confirmed their construct and divergent validity.

To validly analyse scores in our nine-factor model across time, we tested for longitudinal measurement invariance. Assessing invariance means performing a series of related tests with increasing restrictions on the model parameters. In three consecutive steps, we performed tests for configural (comparability of factor structure across time), metric (factor loadings constrained across time) and scalar (factor loadings and intercepts constrained across time) invariance. The results from R lavaan revealed that partial measurement invariance held with $\chi^2(1463)=21721.30$, CFI=.90, TLI=.90, RMSEA=.05 (not shown), with the factor structure and all loadings assumed to be equal, but the intercepts of age discrimination and the intercept of one of the items underlying self-efficacy assumed to differ across time. Since more than two loadings and intercepts were equal across time, score comparisons could still be validly made across the measurement waves (Van de Schoot *et al.*, 2012).

**Table 2.1: Confirmatory factor analysis: fit indices for the hypothesised model and three alternative models**

| | $\chi^2$ | *df* | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | SRMR | Comparison | $\Delta\chi^2$ *(Δdf)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Time=2* | | | | | | | | |
| Model 1: Hypothesised model | 3719.79 | 459 | .90 | .89 | .05 | .05 | | |
| Model 2: Learning model | 6882.84 | 474 | .81 | .79 | .07 | .07 | MM2-MM1 | 2909.1 (15)* |
| Model 3: Demands-resources model | 11312.54 | 480 | .68 | .65 | .09 | .10 | MM3-MM1 | 7178.8 (21)* |
| Model 4: One-factor model | 26066.05 | 495 | .25 | .20 | .14 | .14 | MM4-MM1 | 20161 (36)* |
| *Time=3* | | | | | | | | |
| Model 1: Hypothesised model | 3613.95 | 459 | .91 | .89 | .05 | .06 | | |
| Model 2: Learning model | 7061.84 | 474 | .81 | .79 | .07 | .07 | MM2-MM1 | 3030.1 (15)* |
| Model 3: Demands-resources model | 11634.89 | 480 | .67 | .64 | .09 | .11 | MM3-MM1 | 7542.1 (21)* |
| Model 4: One-factor model | 25945.20 | 495 | .26 | .21 | .14 | .14 | MM4-MM1 | 19400 (36)* |

*Notes:* *p<0.001. N=2,836 for time 2 and N=2,817 for time 3 after listwise deletion (missings < 5%).
$\chi^2$=Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square; scaled chi-square difference test has been performed.
CFI=Comparative Fit Index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis Index (thresholds: ≥.90); RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (threshold: <.08; <.05 in case of a good model fit) (Hox, 2010); SRMR: Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (threshold: <.10) (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2010).

### *2.5.4. Analytical strategy*

We applied mixed effects modelling (HLM) to account for the hierarchical nature of our data, with time (level-1) nested within employees (level-2). HLM has two unique features that made it the preferred method for handling longitudinal data in our study. First, HLM enables researchers to track changes in the dependent variable (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Individual-level and time-level predictors can be included to account for the level of and fluctuations in the dependent variable. Although cross-lagged panel models are needed to infer causality, these models do not use repeated measures, and therefore, are unable to detect changes. Second, a longitudinal design such as HLM addresses unobserved individual heterogeneity and adjusts for selection biases (Allison, 1994).

We built our multilevel model using four steps. In the first step (Model 0), we entered time as a single predictor, which allowed us to examine differences in the mean of developmental proactivity throughout time. Next, we included control variables at both level-1 and level-2 (Model 1). In the third step, we estimated the main effects of level-1 work characteristics, and human and personal resources (Model 2). Finally, we added interaction terms by means of four subsequent steps to avoid excessive collinearity (Models 3a-3d).

To examine model fit, we calculated the difference in the -2*log likelihood (the deviance) for each step and subjected this difference to a chi-square distribution using the maximum likelihood estimation technique (Heck *et al.*, 2010). In addition, we used Hox's (2010) formulae for effect sizes to determine the proportion of explained variance at level-1 and level-2 due to our predictors: $R_1^2$(explained variance at level-1)=($\sigma eb^2$- $\sigma en^2$/ $\sigma eb^2$) and $R_2^2$(explained variance at level-2)=($\sigma \mu 0b^2$- $\sigma \mu 0n^2$/ $\sigma \mu 0b^2$). As correlations between occasions decline with more time elapsed between these occasions, we used the autoregressive covariance structure AR(1) to fit the composite residual of the repeated measures.

Prior to the multilevel analysis, we screened the data at each level. Except for work ability, all variables were normally distributed. We applied a log transformation to work ability to lessen the impact of strong kurtosis. Before testing our hypotheses, we applied grand mean centring to our continuous predictors and continuous control variables. We decided not to apply group mean centring because our hypotheses did not explicitly address relations on the within-person level. Centring variables is recommended (Hox, 2010; Peugh and Enders, 2005) to stabilise the model, facilitate interpretation and address multicollinearity. Due to the large sample, we used $p<.01$ as a threshold for inferring statistical significance.

## 2.6. Results

### *2.6.1. Descriptive results*

Table 2.2 lists the descriptive statistics for the variables under study. As shown, the mean scores for developmental proactivity and most of its predictors remained fairly constant across time, with somewhat more fluctuations in the mean scores for development opportunities and self-efficacy. Furthermore, correlations between most of our predictors were small ($r \leq .30$), both concurrently and across time, while the associations of developmental proactivity with our predictors were often higher.

Table 2.3 contains the descriptive statistics for our control variables. Here, we see that employees had an average tenure of almost 18 years and reported a work ability of 7.98 on average (range 0-10). In addition, more than 70% of our sample did not perform managerial tasks and almost 95% had a permanent contract. Also, almost half of the employees sampled were employed in large organisations with 250 or more persons employed, and more than two thirds reported no reorganisations in their companies during the past 12 months.

**Table 2.2: Means, standard deviations and zero-order (Pearson r) correlation coefficients for the dependent variable and level-1 predictors**

| | | | | | 1 | | | 2 | | | 3 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mean | SD | Range | t1 | t2 | t3 | t1 | t2 | t3 | t1 | t2 | t3 |
| 1. Developmental proactivity | t1 | 3.89 | 0.55 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | t2 | 3.90 | 0.55 | 1-5 | .607** | | | | | | | | |
| | t3 | 3.89 | 0.56 | | .592** | .632** | | | | | | | |
| 2. Workload | t1 | 3.11 | 0.76 | | .215** | .197** | .196** | | | | | | |
| | t2 | 3.11 | 0.78 | 1-5 | .177** | .195** | .198** | .724** | | | | | |
| | t3 | 3.11 | 0.78 | | .210** | .216** | .229** | .698** | .728** | | | | |
| 3. Mental load | t1 | 4.18 | 0.63 | | .297** | .263** | .267** | .390** | .334** | .333** | | | |
| | t2 | 4.19 | 0.63 | 1-5 | .273** | .294** | .287** | .334** | .390** | .350** | .698** | | |
| | t3 | 4.19 | 0.65 | | .275** | .281** | .312** | .333** | .335** | .397** | .667** | .697** | |
| 4. Job autonomy | t1 | 3.84 | 0.69 | | .083** | .079** | .085** | -.114** | -.092** | -.092** | .036** | .033* | .00 |
| | t2 | 3.83 | 0.70 | 1-5 | .084** | .105** | .093** | -.106** | -.124** | -.117** | .018 | .037** | -.011 |
| | t3 | 3.82 | 0.70 | | .065** | .080** | .097** | -.107** | -.108** | -.146** | .003 | .01 | .015 |
| 5. Social support | t1 | 3.59 | 0.76 | | .215** | .164** | .166** | -.048** | -.029* | -.012 | .096** | .089** | .088** |
| | t2 | 3.57 | 0.77 | 1-5 | .170** | .187** | .175** | -.040** | -.060** | -.037** | .087** | .111** | .097** |
| | t3 | 3.58 | 0.78 | | .163** | .158** | .191** | -.053** | -.048** | -.068** | .082** | .083** | .105** |
| 6. Development opportunities | t1 | 2.86 | 0.59 | | .345** | .306** | .289** | .058** | .063** | .078** | .262** | .252** | .239** |
| | t2 | 2.84 | 0.59 | 1-4 | .293** | .348** | .319** | .056** | .051** | .075** | .209** | .242** | .240** |
| | t3 | 2.81 | 0.60 | | .286** | .300** | .354** | .035** | .044** | .055** | .222** | .238** | .267** |
| 7. Self-efficacy | t1 | 3.95 | 0.79 | | .313** | .298** | .287** | .084** | .088** | .096** | .085** | .089** | .110** |
| | t2 | 3.93 | 0.79 | 1-5 | .252** | .319** | .277** | .072** | .057** | .078** | .073** | .065** | .084** |
| | t3 | 3.88 | 0.83 | | .264** | .287** | .315** | .079** | .081** | .084** | .095** | .095** | .105** |
| 8. Active coping | t1 | 2.90 | 0.54 | | .317** | .292** | .292** | .128** | .101** | .134** | .206** | .203** | .207** |
| | t2 | 2.90 | 0.55 | 1-4 | .296** | .331** | .317** | .121** | .114** | .127** | .205** | .233** | .212** |
| | t3 | 2.91 | 0.54 | | .279** | .310** | .339** | .101** | .105** | .113** | .196** | .212** | .222** |

*Notes:* Due to missing values (in any case ≤ 1%), the N ranges from 5,809 to 5,874.
*p<0.05; **p<0.01.

| 4 | | | 5 | | | 6 | | | 7 | | | 8 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| t1 | t2 | t3 | t1 | t2 | t3 | t1 | t2 | t3 | t1 | t2 | t3 | t1 | t2 | t3 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| .756** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| .702** | .754** | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| .102** | .069** | .057** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| .075** | .115** | .095** | .639** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| .072** | .080** | .124** | .589** | .644** | | | | | | | | | | |
| .313** | .272** | .267** | .321** | .273** | .256** | | | | | | | | | |
| .262** | .314** | .280** | .252** | .319** | .267** | .615** | | | | | | | | |
| .253** | .275** | .324** | .231** | .277** | .321** | .576** | .628** | | | | | | | |
| .109** | .105** | .090** | .105** | .093** | .091** | .171** | .148** | .143** | | | | | | |
| .122** | .138** | .118** | .102** | .122** | .100** | .158** | .179** | .165** | .621** | | | | | |
| .097** | .092** | .110** | .106** | .114** | .123** | .149** | .156** | .194** | .615** | .637** | | | | |
| .125** | .123** | .107** | .122** | .102** | .088** | .237** | .192** | .199** | .243** | .223** | .213** | | | |
| .144** | .166** | .129** | .094** | .122** | .096** | .215** | .233** | .208** | .223** | .238** | .208** | .587** | | |
| .143** | .140** | .143** | .109** | .111** | .127** | .210** | .215** | .241** | .240** | .253** | .251** | .573** | .598** | |

**Table 2.3: Descriptive statistics for the control variables (at either level-1 or level-2), baseline statistics (time 1)**

| | Mean | SD | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Individual characteristics level-2* | | | |
| Gender (1=female) | 0.44 | | 0/1 |
| Age | 53.33 | 4.97 | 45-64 |
| *Education (ref=low)*[1] | | | |
| middle | 0.39 | | 0/1 |
| high | 0.35 | | 0/1 |
| *Work-related characteristics level-1* | | | |
| Type of contract (1=temporary employment) | 0.06 | | 0/1 |
| Managerial tasks (1=yes) | 0.27 | | 0/1 |
| *Reorganisation (ref=no)* | | | |
| with compulsory redundancies | 0.13 | | 0/1 |
| without compulsory redundancies | 0.19 | | 0/1 |
| *Organisation size (ref=1-9 persons)* | | | |
| 10-49 persons | 0.21 | | 0/1 |
| 50-99 persons | 0.11 | | 0/1 |
| 100-249 persons | 0.16 | | 0/1 |
| 250 or more persons employed | 0.45 | | 0/1 |
| *Industry of employment (ref=Agriculture)* | | | |
| Manufacturer | 0.09 | | 0/1 |
| Energy, water | 0.01 | | 0/1 |
| Construction | 0.03 | | 0/1 |
| Transport and communication | 0.06 | | 0/1 |
| Commerce | 0.07 | | 0/1 |
| Gastronomy | 0.01 | | 0/1 |
| Financial services | 0.04 | | 0/1 |
| Commercial services | 0.07 | | 0/1 |
| Education | 0.13 | | 0/1 |
| Health and social work | 0.20 | | 0/1 |
| Public administration, government agency | 0.14 | | 0/1 |
| Other services | 0.03 | | 0/1 |
| Else | 0.12 | | 0/1 |
| *Age-related measures level-1* | | | |
| Health | 2.33 | 0.83 | 0-4 |
| Work ability | 7.98 | 1.40 | 0-10 |
| Age discrimination | 2.42 | 0.80 | 1-5 |
| Tenure | 17.25 | 11.72 | 0-48 |

*Notes:* Due to missing values (in any case < 1,5%), the N ranges from 5,801 to 5,874.
[1]low education: (not) finished primary school or completed lower vocational education; middle: finished secondary school or higher vocational training; high: obtained a bachelor's, master's or PhD degree.

### *2.6.2. Multilevel results*

Table 2.4 reports the results of the multilevel analysis. Model 0, with time as the single predictor, showed a total variance of .31 (level-1 variance .13 + level-2 variance .18). The coefficients for time were non-significant, indicating that the average score on developmental proactivity at time 2 and time 3 did not significantly differ from the mean score at time 1. When we added our level-1 and level-2 control variables in Model 1, we found a significant but modest improvement of the model fit ($\Delta$ -2LL=500.16; $\Delta$ df=9, p<.001). The corresponding error variance amounted to .28, a reduction of .03 compared with Model 0. Adding the time-varying level-1 predictors to the equation resulted in a significant improvement of the model fit ($\Delta$ -2LL=2200.28; $\Delta$ df=7, p<.001, Model 2). Compared with Model 0, the reduction of error variance at the between-employee level amounted to 44%, and from Model 0 to Model 1, the error variance decreased by 11%, which suggests that our predictors accounted for 33% of the variance in developmental proactivity at the between-employee level. The stepwise inclusion of interaction effects in Models 3a to 3d did not lead to an improvement in model fit nor meaningfully contributed to the explanation of developmental proactivity.

Regarding our hypotheses, Table 2.4 shows that both workload (b=.06, p<.001) and mental load (b=.10, p<.001) were positively and significantly related to developmental proactivity. Since we assessed positive associations, our results empirically support our challenge demands hypothesis (H1). Considering job and human resources, both social support (b=.05, p<.001) and development opportunities (b=.15, p<.001) were significantly and positively associated with developmental proactivity. In contrast, job autonomy failed to significantly predict developmental proactivity (b=.001, p>.05). As a result, our job and human resources hypothesis (H2) is only partially supported. As for the interactive active learning hypothesis (i.e., challenge demands x job (human) resources), Models 3a to 3c displayed non-significant interaction terms for all hypothesised demands x resources combinations. Therefore, the data do not support the interactive active learning hypothesis (H3). We found positive and significant relations between developmental proactivity and self-efficacy (b=.11, p<.001) and active coping (b=.13, p<.001); therefore, our results confirm our personal resources hypothesis (H4). Regarding the multiplicative resources hypothesis (i.e., human x personal resources), we can see from Model 3d that the interaction term for development opportunities x self-efficacy was non-significant. Therefore, this interaction hypothesis (H5) is rejected.

What concerns the control variables, it appeared that reorganisation (b=.04, p<.001 and b=.05, p<.001) was significantly and positively related to developmental proactivity. This means that employees whose organisation went through a reorganisation report slightly higher levels of proactive learning. Also, managerial tasks and work ability were significantly associated with developmental proactivity. While the estimate was positive for managerial tasks (b=.09, p<.001), it was negative for work ability

(b=-.16, p<.001), indicating that employees in management positions expend slightly more effort in proactive knowledge acquisition, while those with a better work ability make fewer attempts in this respect. Finally, we assessed significant and positive relations for education (b=.11, p<.001 and b=.21, p<.001) and gender (b=.06, p<.001), indicating that women and employees with a higher educational attainment are somewhat more conducive to proactive learning.

**Table 2.4: Results of the multilevel analysis for developmental proactivity (N=16,980[1])**

| | Model 0 | | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3a | | Model 3b | | Model 3c | | Model 3d | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* |
| **Fixed effects** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Intercept | 3.89*** | .01 | 3.71*** | .01 | 3.82*** | .01 | 3.82*** | .01 | 3.82*** | .01 | 3.82*** | .01 | 3.82*** | .01 |
| Wave (t2) | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | -.01 | .01 | -.01 | .01 | -.01 | .01 | -.01* | .01 | -.01* | .01 |
| Wave (t3) | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 |
| **Control variables level-1$_a$** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Managerial tasks (1=yes) | | | .09*** | .01 | .03** | .01 | .03** | .01 | .03** | .01 | .03** | .01 | .03** | .01 |
| Reorganisation (ref=no) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| with compulsory redundancies | | | .04*** | .01 | .02* | .01 | .02* | .01 | .02* | .01 | .02* | .01 | .02* | .01 |
| without compulsory redundancies | | | .05*** | .01 | .03*** | .01 | .03*** | .01 | .03*** | .01 | .03*** | .01 | .03*** | .01 |
| Health | | | .02*** | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 |
| Work ability (log) | | | -.16*** | .02 | -.04* | .02 | -.04* | .02 | -.04* | .02 | -.05* | .02 | -.04* | .02 |
| Age discrimination | | | -.03*** | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 |
| **Control variables level-2$_a$** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender (1=female) | | | .06*** | .01 | .07*** | .01 | .07*** | .01 | .07*** | .01 | .07*** | .01 | .07*** | .01 |
| Education (ref=low) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| middle | | | .11*** | .02 | .03* | .01 | .03* | .01 | .03* | .01 | .03* | .01 | .03* | .01 |
| high | | | .21*** | .02 | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 |
| **Predictors** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| *Demands* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Workload | | | | | .06*** | .01 | .06*** | .01 | .06*** | .01 | .06*** | .01 | .06*** | .01 |
| Mental load | | | | | .10*** | .01 | .10*** | .01 | .10*** | .01 | .10*** | .01 | .10*** | .01 |
| *Resources* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Job autonomy | | | | | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 | .00 | .01 |
| Social support | | | | | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 | .05*** | .01 |
| Development opportunities | | | | | .15*** | .01 | .15*** | .01 | .15*** | .01 | .15*** | .01 | .15*** | .01 |
| Self-efficacy | | | | | .11*** | .01 | .11*** | .01 | .11*** | .01 | .11*** | .01 | .11*** | .01 |
| Active coping | | | | | .13*** | .01 | .13*** | .01 | .13*** | .01 | .13*** | .01 | .13*** | .01 |

| | Model 0 | | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3a | | Model 3b | | Model 3c | | Model 3d | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* |
| **Interactions** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| *Active learning hypothesis* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Job autonomy x workload | | | | | | | -.01 | .01 | | | | | | |
| Job autonomy x mental load | | | | | | | .00 | .01 | | | | | | |
| Social support x workload | | | | | | | | | .00 | .01 | | | | |
| Social support x mental load | | | | | | | | | -.01 | .01 | | | | |
| Development opportunities x workload | | | | | | | | | | | -.01 | .01 | | |
| Development opportunities x mental load | | | | | | | | | | | -.02* | .01 | | |
| *Multiplicative resources hypothesis* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Development opportunities x self-efficacy | | | | | | | | | | | | | -.01 | .01 |
| **Variance-covariance estimates (random effects)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| $\sigma^2$e | .13*** | | .12*** | | .12*** | | .12*** | | .12*** | | .12*** | | .12*** | |
| $\sigma^2\mu 0$ | .18*** | | .16*** | | .10*** | | .10*** | | .10*** | | .10*** | | .10*** | |
| -2 Log Likelihood (-2LL) | 21796.63 | | 21296.47 | | 19096.19 | | 19094.50 | | 19092.31 | | 19086.68 | | 19095.30 | |
| $\chi^2$ | | | 500.16*** | | 2200.28*** | | 1.69[2] | | 3.88[2] | | 9.51[2]** | | 0.89[2] | |
| *df* change | | | 9 | | 7 | | 2 | | 2 | | 2 | | 1 | |
| AIC | 21808.63 | | 21326.47 | | 19140.19 | | 19142.50 | | 19140.31 | | 19134.68 | | 19141.30 | |
| $R^2$ level-1 (repeated measures) | | | .08 | | - | | - | | - | | - | | - | |
| $R^2$ level-2 (employee level) | | | .11 | | .33 | | - | | - | | - | | - | |

*Notes:* *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

[1]Listwise deletion reduced the level-1 records to 16,980.

[a]Non-significant coefficients for organization size, industry, age, tenure and contract type are removed for reasons of parsimony and to improve readability.

[2]Compared to model 2, since these models are nested.

AR1 error covariance structure adopted.

## 2.7. Discussion and conclusion

This study examined proactive employee learning among a large and heterogeneous sample of Dutch employees ages 45 to 64 using a longitudinal design. Three theoretical implications arise from our findings. First, workload and mental load appeared to be positively and significantly correlated with employees' developmental proactivity. Consistent with the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory, this finding shows that workload and mental load can be considered "carriers" of resource protection and resource generation, the promise of which elicits proactive learning. As a result of this promise, workload and mental load represent motivation-stimulating work characteristics. From the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) perspective, this implies that workload and mental load can be construed as potential challenge demands, or demands that – although stressful[11] – trigger a motivational process similar to the one usually ascribed to job resources. We argue that this overlapping mechanism raises possibilities for a systematic integration of workload and mental load into COR, even more so because COR is often depicted as a theory of human motivation. While such an integration is open for discussion, it might inspire researchers to critically reflect on one of COR's key assets: its definition of resources.

As potentially stressful work characteristics, workload and mental load may not readily fit well with COR's conventional definition of resources as *"all things individuals value"* (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993: 129), which has an overall positive connotation. However, the promise of goal attainment underlines the instrumental worth of workload and mental load in individuals' working lives. Therefore, workload and mental load may fit with the redefinition of resources from Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl and Westman (2014) as *"anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals"* (p. 5). While this redefinition does justice to the depiction of COR as a theory of human motivation, it fails to address the different *nature* of resources and their associated valence. To resolve this, the definition needs refinement.

As discussed earlier, the energetic process inherent in workload and mental load may make it unlikely that employees appreciate their value as much as they do in the case of typical (job) resources, which have unambiguous positive connotations, according to JD-R (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014). On the positive side, the motivational process inherent in workload and mental load suggests that they act in much the same way as typical (job) resources. That is, workload and mental load can be considered vehicles for learning, personal growth and development, an exemplary form of which is developmental proactivity. Workload and mental load also may be beneficial for achieving goals other than learning, although this study did not test this assumption.

11 This contention is supported by an additional analysis showing that workload and mental load respectively were negatively and non-significantly related to senior employees' work ability. In contrast to developmental proactivity, which captures a motivational process, work ability assesses employees' energy level.

Taken together, the aforementioned reasoning justifies the conclusion that workload and mental load or – more generally formulated, "challenging work characteristics" – can be considered resources that match COR's portrayal as a theory of human motivation, but ones that should be assigned a different valence than other resources in the model. To capture this nuance, we propose the following reconceptualisation of the definition of resources from Halbesleben *et al.* (2014). Resources represent *"all things individuals value, either unambiguously positively or both positively and negatively, that help them to attain their learning goals".* This definition allows for a more fine-grained investigation of the different *nature* of resources and their associated valence, as proposed in the JD-R literature but sporadically subjected to scientific scrutiny (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014).

Second, we found that a wide variety of job resources (i.e., social support and development opportunities) and personal resources (i.e., self-efficacy and active coping) were positively and significantly related to employees' developmental proactivity. This finding supports the theoretical notion central to COR that resources evolve in caravans, or the idea that the possession of one resource acts as a reliable determinant of the possession of another resource (i.e., "resources beget resources"; Ungerath, 2012). As we also assess meso-level resources, this study is one of very few to attest to COR's premise that organisations support resource creation (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). We additionally improve upon the immense body of JD-R research by showing that resources previously known to affect employees' energy *level* (i.e., work engagement) via a motivational process act as reliable predictors of employees' energy *allocation* (i.e., developmental proactivity; Dorenbosch, 2014) as well. It is important to mention that the idea of resource caravans does not apply to the relationship between job autonomy and developmental proactivity; that is, contrary to our expectation, job autonomy was not positively associated with employees' developmental proactivity. One explanation for this counterintuitive finding may pertain to the scope of developmental proactivity, which reflects personal initiative towards development rather than towards solving task-related problems. It could well be that job autonomy touches upon employees' proactive behaviour but in a way that they feel responsible to search for new ways of working to ensure smooth work processes, as is the case with job proactivity (Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008). In this respect, prior studies have repeatedly found positive associations between job control (autonomy) and personal initiative (e.g., Ohly and Fritz, 2010). Another explanation might concern the operationalisation of autonomy, which is restricted to task discretion. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which provides an alternative interpretation of the intrinsic motivational potential of resources, autonomy support also captures aspects such as employers' recognition of their workers' perspective and the provision of *"a meaningful rationale"* (Sheldon *et al.*, 2003: 367) for engagement in a task. These aspects were not part of our measure of autonomy, which may have limited its predictive power.

Third, in addition to main effects, we modelled and subsequently tested interactions between demands and resources. That being said, we aimed to improve upon extant JD-R research by testing multiple interactions between demands and resources. In addition, we tried to fill a gap in the JD-R literature by examining interactions between resources in relation to developmental proactivity. In essence, and drawing upon COR's premise that resources become particularly meaningful when needed, we hypothesised that job and human resources result in higher levels of proactive learning when combined with high challenge demands. Based on COR's corollary that effects of resources are multiplicative, we additionally proposed that human resources (i.e., development opportunities) yield higher levels of proactive learning when accompanied by high personal resources (i.e., feeling self-efficacious for learning). In the JD-R literature, the first boosting effect is generally referred to as the interactive active learning hypothesis (e.g., De Witte *et al.*, 2007), while the second "joint effect" of resources may be called the multiplicative resources hypothesis. Contrary to our expectations, neither the interactive active learning nor the multiplicative resources hypothesis was supported.

One explanation for these counterintuitive findings may pertain to the sample studied. All of our hypotheses were tested on Dutch employees in their late professional careers. Although this age group is interesting because of the societal challenges (e.g., shrinking jobs; Bosch and Ter Weel, 2013) late careerists face, our focus occluded significance testing among younger age groups. For the interactive active learning hypothesis, the relevance of a sample that includes young employees is clearly underlined by De Witte, Verhofstadt and Omey (2007): since young (i.e., entry-level) employees' limited amount of job experience makes them more conducive to fluctuations in work characteristics, the interactive active learning hypothesis may particularly hold for this age group. In contrast, late careerists might have encountered numerous constellations of work characteristics during their careers and may have devised effective strategies to manage changes, reducing their sensitivity to changes in work characteristics later in life. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether a transfer to a situation of high challenges and high resources at an older age would generate higher levels of "active" learning. The same aversion to fluctuations in work characteristics among older employees might explain why the multiplicative resources hypothesis was unsupported. Here again, it is difficult to disentangle, in this case, the effects of changes in resources from employees' past job experiences and coping strategies, which mute the effect of these changes.

### *2.7.1. Limitations and future research directions*

We acknowledge four limitations to this study and provide directions for future research. First, all measures relied on self-assessments, which may have inflated correlations. To address this so-called "common-method" bias, we applied several techniques based on the work of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff (2003). First, we compared a one-

factor to a nine-factor model and found a better fit for the nine-factor model (Table 2.1). Second, we guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality to respondents, which addressed social desirability biases to some extent. Third, we relied upon a variety of previously validated scales and employed different scale anchors and values to measure our core constructs. Thus, common-method bias should not be considered a major disadvantage of our research. Nonetheless, future research could complement self-assessments with measurements less susceptible to common-method bias, such as supervisor ratings.

Second, although we utilised a multiple-wave panel survey, we were not able to draw causal conclusions because we examined concurrent relationships. Future research could estimate a cross-lagged panel model and, preferably, adopt an experimental design to address causality. From the perspective of COR, examining the dynamic causal interplay between resources and developmental proactivity allows for an assessment of *resource spirals*, which denote the mutual dependency of resources (Ungerath, 2012). However, this limitation may not discredit our study, which modelled main and interaction effects of an extensive set of resources in relation to developmental proactivity and tested these effects on a sample of employees for whom (pro)active learning constitutes a key challenge.

Third, although we provided ample support for COR's premise that resources evolve in caravans, we did not find significant changes in developmental proactivity over time. Therefore, we failed to provide empirical evidence to support Hobfoll's (2002) *gain* and *loss spirals*, or the continued and increased gain or loss of resources. Similarly, we were unable to test the contention by Karasek and Theorell (1990, as cited in Taris *et al.*, 2003) that a continuous employment in active jobs – those characterised by high challenges and high resources – results in higher learning levels over time. It is noteworthy, however, that the interval applied in our study may not be the appropriate time frame to capture "true" differences in developmental proactivity. Consequently, possible fluctuations within persons may remain unnoticed in our research. Longitudinal research covering a relatively long time span is needed to draw firmer conclusions about the changing nature of developmental proactivity over time and to test whether Hobfoll's (2002) and Karasek and Theorell's (1990) premises apply to developmental proactivity.

Fourth, although individuals ages 45 to 64 constitute the majority of the Dutch labour force (CBS, 2019), a study that does not include younger age groups precludes a full account of important age-related differences in learning motivation and work value orientations as acknowledged by lifespan theories. According to lifespan theorists (Baltes *et al.*, 1999), employees in their early and mid-careers (<45 years) attach importance to personal growth and knowledge acquisition, while those in their late careers (≥45 years) value maintenance and protection of losses. These deep-seated motivational differences between age groups suggest that the effects of HRM-related investments and personal resources on employee outcomes, such a proactive learning, vary considerably

among employees of different ages. Development opportunities, for instance, might especially pay off for younger employees, while practices to enhance self-efficacy might be particularly salient for older ones. Future research on HRM-related resources and proactive learning for a broad range of age groups is needed to assess these theoretical claims empirically.

### *2.7.2. Practical implications*

One overall practical implication of this study is the finding that senior employees are willing to proactively learn in their current jobs. This finding contradicts earlier findings (Warr and Fay, 2001) and the deep-rooted prejudices against senior employees (e.g., Posthuma and Campion, 2009; Van Harten, 2016), which convey the message that employees' willingness (and ability) to learn decreases with age. Although it is too early for a definite conclusion, our findings suggest that it is a step too far to portray developmental proactivity as an action orientation foreign to senior employees. Such a narrow focus merely justifies employers' decisions to refrain from training senior staff rather than opening a fair debate on fruitful ways to mitigate senior employees' knowledge obsolescence.

Before detailing implications for practice, we must state that opportunities for employees, employers and other practitioners to enhance proactive learning are somewhat limited because developmental proactivity hardly varies within individuals. We may conclude, then, that some employees are more predisposed to this action orientation than others. Therefore, employers whose revenues are strongly dependent upon employees' proactive approach should screen employees early in the hiring process for this orientation.

Strictly speaking, to provide meaningful implications for practice requires insight into the changing nature of the conditions addressed in this study. An additional analysis shows that, with the exception of development opportunities and self-efficacy[12], none of the conditions studied changed across time. This finding may explain why developmental proactivity remains stable within employees: if the conditions this employability axis is posited to rest upon remain unchanged across time, developmental proactivity also can be expected to remain unchanged during that time. Future research could assess whether positive changes in conditions vary with positive changes in developmental proactivity. Assuming that this is true, we cite the following two practical implications.

First, we encourage HR professionals and employers to create challenging work environments in which employees can stretch their mental capabilities. To maximise the benefits of these investments, we advise direct supervisors to adopt an "activation

12 Though significant, the across-time changes found in development opportunities and self-efficacy were very small. We even argue that these effects can be considered negligible, as the sample size used in this study was very large.

model" rather than the frequently practiced *"depreciation model"* (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009: 162) in which writing off senior employees is considered normal.

Second, we advise employers to facilitate collaborative workplace relationships in which senior employees could count on co-workers and direct supervisors for work-related and personal assistance when needed. In an era in which the content of work is less predictable, we can expect senior employees to regularly face unexpected setbacks and challenges; therefore, having someone to rely on can be important not only to support the intrinsic motivation to learn (e.g., De Lange *et al.*, 2010), but also to uphold one's job performance, productivity and satisfaction.

### *2.7.3. Conclusion*

This study indicates that work characteristics as well as human and personal resources can explain individual differences in developmental proactivity, or employees' proactive action orientation towards job-related learning. This research extends the literature with our comprehensive and dynamic approach *vis-à-vis* developmental proactivity and an alternative definition of COR's key asset: "resources". We show that developmental proactivity barely changes within employees, which sheds new light on the claim that developmental proactivity is mouldable (Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008). Contrary to common belief, we show that senior employees *are* conducive to proactive learning, a finding that could encourage practitioners to participate in an open discussion about the usefulness of retaining and recruiting senior employees for their organisations.

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# Chapter 3

## A conservation of resources approach to the role employability plays in senior employees' actual employment trajectories: A longitudinal design*


### Abstract

This four-year longitudinal study examines how two employability axes – professional ability and developmental proactivity – are linked to senior employees' actual employment trajectories. Drawing upon the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory, we construe employability as a personal resource that predicts a higher likelihood of employment gains (promotions) and a lower likelihood of employment losses (salary loss, demotion, and unemployment). We rely upon a large, heterogeneous sample of Dutch employees ages 45 to 64 to test our hypotheses. Results reveal that professional ability predicts a lower incidence of employment losses, while developmental proactivity predicts a higher incidence of employment gains. The findings indicate that these two employability axes can offer critical insights for understanding the employment trajectories of senior employees.



*Keywords:*
Employability
Employment trajectories
Conservation Of Resources theory
Longitudinal design
Senior employees


**This chapter is co-authored by Hans Pruijt, Ferry Koster and Fenna Leijten. A slightly different version of this chapter has been conditionally accepted for publication in an international peer-reviewed journal.*

## 3.1. Introduction

Employability, generally viewed as a set of individual assets such as up-to-date expertise (Van Harten, 2016), is often seen as a precursor to employees' future employment position or transitions (e.g., labour market mobility or opportunities; e.g., Forrier and Sels, 2003; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Thijssen *et al.*, 2008). However, empirical research about this relationship is lacking (an exception being Forrier *et al.*, 2015). The present study aims to address this void by answering the question how two employability axes – professional ability and developmental proactivity – enable employees to sustain and to improve their actual employment positions. Beginning with the basic premise that employability is a critical personal resource, according to the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2002), we hypothesise that resource-rich (employable) employees are less vulnerable to future employment losses and succeed better in attaining future employment gains.

Formulating the aforementioned hypothesis allows us to add clarity to the employability literature by conceptually disentangling employability from employees' future employment position or transitions. Specifically, in this study, we examine employability as a supply side phenomenon – the skills, abilities, attitudes and competencies that employees bring to their organisations and the labour market (e.g., Forrier and Sels, 2003; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Thijssen *et al.*, 2008; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006). As this approach highlights assets bound to the employee, we use the term "employee characteristics" to refer to employability. As regards employment, we hereby lay the emphasis on employees' actual employment trajectories, which encompass employment positions and transitions between positions. In the literature, characteristics and trajectories are generally referred to as the *input*- versus the *output*-based approach to employability (e.g., De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012b), and thus, conveniently subsumed under the single denominator of "employability" (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). This conceptual fuzziness may explain why research on the employability-employment trajectories link is scarce.

In addition to a conceptual contribution, we aim to extend the literature by adopting a comprehensive approach *vis-à-vis* the term "employment trajectories". Specifically, we examine employment gains in conjunction with employment losses. We consider this approach to be advantageous compared with the almost single focus on gains in extant research (e.g., Hirschi, 2012), because employment losses are also relevant to contemporary workers in light of employment shocks, offshoring and downsizings (Bosch and Ter Weel, 2013; Ng and Feldman, 2014).

This research is an observational cohort study (2010–2013) of a large sample of Dutch employees ages 45 to 64 employed in a wide variety of institutional settings. The design yields two advantages. First, it allows for a time lag between employability and

employment trajectories, which contributes to the current evidence that is mostly cross-sectional (e.g., Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009). Second, it allows for a focus on an age group that faces specific employability hurdles. On the one hand, employees ages 45 to 64 run the risk of ending up in routine-intensive jobs due to negative stereotypical beliefs about their proactive attitudes (e.g., Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008)[13]. On the other hand, this age group – referred to as senior employees hereafter – might face severe difficulty re-entering the labour market[14] due to age discrimination and other factors. This state of affairs shows that senior employees not only have to struggle hard to obtain employment gains, but also substantially benefit from protection against employment losses, hence the focus of this study.

## 3.2. Employment trajectories

In this study, we examine the employment trajectories of senior employees. In line with our primary focus, we define employment trajectories as the employment positions and the transitions between positions that senior employees experience. Using the words "position" and "transition" indicates that employment trajectories not only deal with a senior employee's avoidance of employment losses, and therefore, represent a situation of job retention. Employment trajectories also cover the attainment of employment gains and thus also represent a situation of job acquisition. We consider the dual focus on job retention and acquisition relevant, as it ties in with the scholarly work of several pioneering employability scholars who define employability as the ability to retain and obtain employment (e.g., jobs; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Rothwell and Arnold, 2007; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012).

We assess senior employees' employment trajectories by means of one employment gain and three employment losses, namely: (1) promotions; (2) salary losses; (3) demotions; and (4) (periods of) unemployment. Collectively, gains and losses constitute the employment events senior employees experience. Theoretically, promotions and avoidance of salary losses, demotions and unemployment represent valued events that are conditional upon valued employee characteristics. This perspective aligns with Hobfoll's definition of resources as *"all things individuals value"* (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993: 129), which contains two variants: *"entities that are valued in their own right"* (e.g., the *"outputs"*) and *"entities that serve as means to obtain valued ends"* (e.g., the *"inputs"*; Hobfoll, 2002: 307). Following Hobfoll's conceptualisation, both employability and employment trajectories can thus be considered "resources". Resources of the category "entities

13 It is noteworthy that this low receptivity to proactive modes of thinking and acting is often considered the result of employees' age rather than the cohort they belong to (Warr and Fay, 2001).

14 In the Netherlands, senior employees – despite their relative high levels of dismissal protection – have been hit hard by the economic crisis, with unemployment rates rising sharply from 3,9% in 2010 to 6,0% in 2013 among those aged 45 years and above (CBS, 2019).

that are valued in their own right" (e.g., the *"outputs"*) may encompass *"Status at work"*, *"Financial stability"* or *"Stable employment"* (Hobfoll, 1998: 71). Given their emphasis on "stability while working" and "advancing one's work status", COR resources are essentially analogous to the four employment events we discern.

Perceiving employment trajectories as valued events in their own right or "resources" that are dependent upon valued employee characteristics or "entities that serve as means to obtain valued ends" enables us to adopt a resource-based approach to employability according to COR's resource conservation and acquisition tenet. These tenets form the backbone of our theoretical reasoning regarding the link between employability and senior employees' employment trajectories. Before stating our hypotheses, we briefly outline the key principles of COR and conceptually link employability to this theory.

## 3.3. Employability as a personal resource

Personal resources refer to *"orientations and self-perceptions that relate to mental resiliency and call upon employees' belief of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully"* (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009: 236). A central premise of COR theory (Hobfoll, 2002) is that individuals have limited resources and focus on the conservation of existing ("resource conservation tenet") and the acquisition of new resources ("resource acquisition tenet"). A first corollary grounded in Hobfoll's central premise is that "resources beget resources". This means that individuals who possess personal resources are thriving and capable of (future) resource gain. A second corollary is that "resources circumvent resource losses". This means that individuals who possess personal resources are less prone to (future) resource losses and capable of investing in conservation of those resources. COR further posits that resource possession induces favourable judgments from others (Hobfoll, 2002).

COR has a long-standing tradition in the (occupational) health and stress literature (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993), but it is also helpful for explaining employment-related outcomes such as job insecurity, rewards, appraisals and employment opportunities (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Ng and Feldman, 2012, 2014). Drawing on these studies, we assert that COR can serve as a useful theoretical guide for probing how employability affects senior employees' employment trajectories. We start from the basic presupposition that employability represents a critical personal resource in today's volatile and uncertain world of work where ongoing changes increasingly necessitate (pro)active learning and (psychological, emotional and physical) adjustment (Maurer *et al.*, 2003; Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008). In essence, we conceptualise employability as employees' perceptions of their professional ability and developmental proactivity.

Professional ability refers to employees' ability to confidently perform their current jobs. Crucially important is whether employees operate close to or beyond their abilities, or whether they have headroom to draw upon their intellectual, physical and emotional resources to meet their work demands.[15] With such headroom, senior employees can invest in conservation and expansion of their resource reservoirs. Conversely, employees who struggle to cope with changes and difficulties may lose resources and fail to replenish them. Thus, any endeavour becomes an uphill battle.

Developmental proactivity denotes employees' motivation to learn and willingness to assess future skill requirements in their current jobs. This employability axis helps employees to be prepared for changes. Developmental proactivity overlaps with several key psychological and social resources identified in the employability and careers literature, such as the propensity to learn (Fugate *et al.*, 2004), openness to change and curiosity (Hirschi, 2012) and the inclination to build a (developmental) network (e.g., Hirschi, 2012).

While professional ability denotes employees' ability to adjust reactively to changing task requirements, developmental proactivity concentrates on employees' willingness to anticipate knowledge needs and to respond proactively to changing skill requirements. In sum, employability refers to employees' resiliency, agency and control over environmental demands, key facets of personal resources.

This dual focus on ability and willingness links our study to the work of Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco (2008) and Van Harten (2016), who also included ability and willingness (to learn) in their definitions of employability. The use of self-perceptions connects us to the work of Van Harten (2016), who also relied on employees' perceptions of their willingness and ability when assessing employability. Self-perceptions can serve as a catalyst for individuals' behaviours (Katz and Kahn, 1978, as cited in Forrier *et al.*, 2015) and thus, presumably, also would predict senior employees' employment trajectories. In this regard, Van Emmerik, Scheurs, De Cuyper, Jawahar and Peeters (2012) were quick to point out that employees *"are more likely to act upon their perceptions rather than upon any objective reality"* (p. 106).

## 3.4. Hypotheses

We posit that employability enables senior employees to obtain new employment resources ("resource acquisition tenet") and to protect existing employment resources against losses ("resource conservation tenet"). This overarching presupposition yields the following five hypotheses.

15 Considered in this way, professional ability shares important similarities with the human capital resources identified in the career resources model that Hirschi (2012) developed, or "*the ability to meet the performance expectations for a given occupation*" (p. 374).

### *3.4.1. Resource acquisition tenet*

Hypothesis 1 concerns the likelihood that senior employees will experience employment gains, which delineates the resource acquisition tenet. Our point of departure is COR's corollary that "resources beget resources".

The theoretical line of reasoning starts from the presupposition that employees who can confidently perform their current jobs are able to react to changing work demands when they are expected to do so. In this way, employees who demonstrate professional ability can meet the short-term expectations of a given job. In a different vein, developmental proactivity enables employees to manage setbacks that accompany rapid adjustment to fast-paced changes as they are able to avoid being unprepared. Also, as they build a developmental network, learning-oriented employees might encounter influential decision makers in charge of performance appraisals. In both cases, employable employees engage in activities that are valued by managers who aim to meet fluctuating demands or otherwise know how to project a corresponding image. Promotions are widely recognised as proximal indicators of employees' assessed net worth or typically classified as tangible means to reward valuable organisational assets (Ng *et al.*, 2005). Hence, we hypothesise:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Self-perceived employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) is positively related to the likelihood of experiencing a future internal promotion

### *3.4.2. Resource conservation tenet*

Hypotheses 2 through 5 concern the likelihood that senior employees will avoid employment losses, which outlines the resource conservation tenet. Our point of departure is COR's corollary that "resources circumvent resource losses".

Regarding a salary loss, we reason that employees who are able to keep pace with changes in their work (professional ability) are less likely to experience a salary loss, because they have intellectual, physical and emotional resources to spare to meet work demands. This headroom minimises the risk that they will be judged as underperforming employees caused by a fruitless struggle to meet new task requirements. Of course, this reasoning does not imply that salary loss is impossible, but based on employee performance at least, there is no reason for it to occur. Likewise, employees who exhibit proactive learning behaviour should be able to minimise the risk of a salary loss because they can anticipate situations in which their activities may be less valuable to the organisation, and therefore, can prepare for new, more important activities. Based on these considerations, we propose:

*Hypothesis 2:* Self-perceived employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) is negatively related to the likelihood of experiencing a future salary loss

For a demotion, we apply the following reasoning. Employees who are able to live up to the short-term expectations of their current jobs (professional ability) could avoid falling out due to prolonged exposure to an overly strenuous work surrounding. In addition, through a timely response to difficulties, these employees are able to navigate out of dead-ends in due course. On a related note, learning-oriented employees are able to set aside outdated work methods that can be detrimental to their organisations as they anticipate skill requirements. Also, through searching for knowledgeable others, these employees could polish the skills needed to successfully perform their day-to-day job tasks in the future. Co-workers could, for instance, suggest novel strategies to handle unforeseen work situations. In both cases, the intellectual, physical and emotional (professional ability) or psychological and social (developmental proactivity) resources in one's possession are such that managers do not have reasons to suspect that the employee could not bear the work or might cause damage which could be valid grounds for a forced demotion.

Even voluntary demotions are less likely to occur among employable employees, because when employees are employable, they are in control and thriving; therefore, they are unlikely to consider relinquishing their job responsibilities (voluntary demotion). Hence, we hypothesise:

*Hypothesis 3:* Self-perceived employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) is negatively related to the likelihood of experiencing a future demotion

We developed our fourth hypothesis more inductively than the others. A loss in salary and a loss of job responsibilities (demotion) can occur together, which constitutes a double resource loss and a worst-case scenario since the employee loses multiple valued employment resources simultaneously. In hypotheses 2 and 3, we formulated the expectation that employable employees are less conducive to either a salary loss or a demotion, each representing a single resource loss. This begs the question of whether employability also affects a double resource loss. We assume that employees who experience both salary loss and demotion have lower professional ability and developmental proactivity than those who experience only one of these employment losses. Accordingly, we predict:

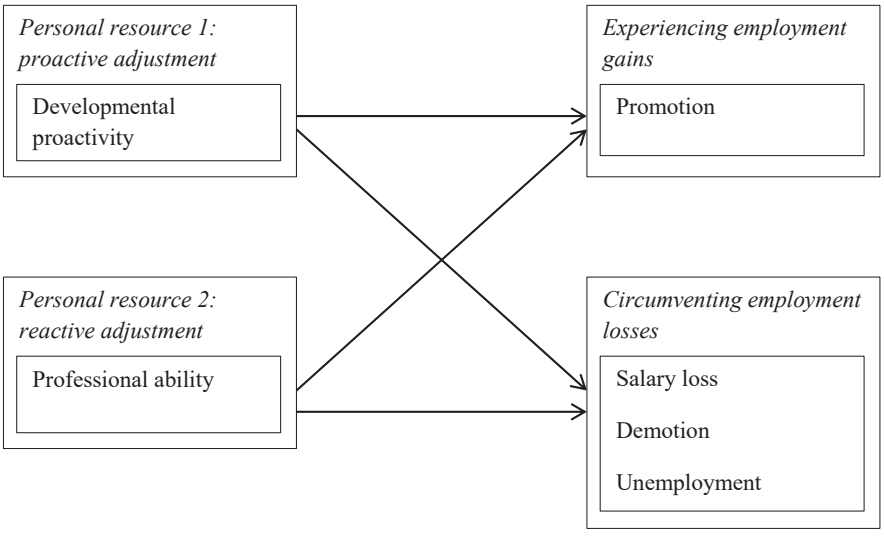
*Hypothesis 4:* The negative association between self-perceived employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) and future employment losses is stronger when salary loss and demotion occur concurrently

For unemployment, we reason as follows. Employees who are able to reactively adjust to changing task requirements (professional ability) possess qualities that managers operating in a turbulent work environment seek. To materialise their recognition, managers may nominate their employable subordinates as candidates for an enduring professional relationship. On a related note, as learning-oriented employees seek knowledgeable others, they may meet people who can help them obtain an enviable new post should they experience a forced replacement. The same people could alert the learning-oriented employee to interesting job offers elsewhere when job security at the current employer can no longer be guaranteed. Hence, the sheer amount of resources that employable employees possess helps them remain employed. Put differently, they are unlikely to experience unemployment. Against this background, De Cuyper, Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Mauno and De Witte (2012a) proposed that perceived employability reduces job insecurity. Accordingly, we predict:

*Hypothesis 5:* Self-perceived employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) is negatively related to the likelihood of experiencing future unemployment

Figure 3.1 depicts our theoretical framework.

**Figure 3.1: Proposed theoretical framework**



## 3.5. Method

### *3.5.1. Survey*

We based this study on the Dutch *Study on Transitions in Employment, Ability and Motivation* (STREAM), a prospective cohort study with a four-year time span conducted by the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, or TNO (Ybema *et al.*, 2014). The sample is stratified by age (45 to 64 years at baseline) and employment status (employed, self-employed and non-employed or those inactive in the labour market).

All respondents included in STREAM were part of the Intomart GfK Online Panel and invited annually to complete an online questionnaire on topics such as proactivity, health, work, and labour market transitions. Overall, 15,118 respondents participated in the baseline questionnaire of 2010, a response rate of 71%.

### *3.5.2. Datasets and participants*

To test hypotheses 1 through 4, we used a sub-dataset that enabled us to assess the likelihood of experiencing an employment event (promotion, salary loss, demotion or combination of salary loss and demotion) rather than sustained "stability" (remaining employed throughout the study without experiencing any of these employment events). Since we were interested in respondents' employment development *at a later point in time*, we focused on respondents who participated at the baseline and at least one follow-up wave (N=13,781).

Next, we excluded self-employed persons, since they may have different employment trajectories and thus score differently on employability resources (remaining N=12,573). We also excluded non-employed persons, because we wanted to concentrate on employment events occurring *while working* relative to no event occurring (remaining N=8,666). Finally, we omitted those respondents who had experienced an employment event in the 12 months prior to the baseline measurement to ensure a stable and equal starting position for all. The final sample included 7,751 respondents.

To test hypothesis 5, we relied upon a second sub-dataset. This sub-dataset is comparable to the first in that all self-employed persons were removed and only those who participated in at least two waves were included. As a result, only respondents classified as "employed" or "non-employed" who participated at the follow-up were part of our sample (N=12,573). Next, we removed respondents with a mixed employed/non-employed status at the same point in time to avoid biases in our estimates. After all, we wanted to compare those who had remained employed with those who had made the transition to unemployment at follow-up (remaining N=10,027). In addition, we removed participants who were non-employed at the baseline, so the starting position was similar for all (i.e., everyone was employed; remaining N=8,335). Finally, we excluded participants who had an inactive labour market status other than unemployment at the

follow-up (such as work disability). The final sample included 7,241 respondents.

Appendix I provides details of the participation pattern of respondents in both samples.

### *3.5.3. Drop-out analyses*

We performed drop-out analyses to compare the scores on our predictor variables of respondents who participated only at the baseline with scores of those who participated in at least two measurement waves. Because we employed two sub-datasets, we performed two drop-out analyses using T-tests and $\chi^2$-tests. We compared each study sample (N=7,751 and N=7,241) with a sample of employees who took part only in the baseline questionnaire (N=912 for sub-dataset 1; N=929 for sub-dataset 2[16]). Some loss to follow-up biases appeared in age, relaxation and recovery, professional ability and gender (only in sub-dataset 2). The mean differences remained rather small although significant, in part due to the large sample sizes. In essence, Cohen's d effect size measure was |.20| or lower in all cases[17]. Also, Φ was |.03| for gender. Based on these small to negligible effect sizes, we do not consider loss to follow-up a problem when interpreting the results from both sub-datasets.

### *3.5.4. Dependent variables*

For the dependent variables, we used factual questions, which seem less susceptible to self-selection and common-method biases than perceptual measures.

#### *3.5.4.1. Sub-dataset 1*

Participants belonging to sub-dataset 1 were asked whether they had received a promotion in their company in the past 12 months. The question was included in each measurement wave. Scale anchors were 1 (yes) and 2 (no). Employees who answered "no" were asked if they had moved from a higher to a lower position or from a higher to a lower salary in the past 12 months. Respondents could choose one of four answers: 1 (no), 2 (yes, lower position and lower salary), 3 (yes, lower position), 4 (yes, lower salary). These questions were collapsed into one variable with five mutually exclusive categories at each follow-up wave: promotion, salary loss, demotion, salary loss and demotion (combined) and sustained "stability" (those experiencing no employment event).

Since we restricted our sample to those who had not experienced an employment event in the 12 months prior to the baseline measurement, four transition categories could be distinguished from baseline stability to promotion, salary loss, demotion and

16 Due to differences in the composition of our study samples (see heading "Datasets and participants"), the sizes of the benchmark samples differed slightly.

17 According to Cohen (1977), values for Cohen's d between .20 and .35 are indicative of a small effect size, while values below .20 indicate effect sizes that can be considered negligible; however, Wolf (1986) considers an effect meaningful when Cohen's d is .25 or above.

salary loss and demotion (combined) at follow-up, as well as a category encompassing those who had not experienced an employment event at follow-up. Based on these transitions, we created a final variable for sub-dataset 1 that prioritised promotion over combined salary loss and demotion; combined salary loss and demotion over salary loss (singular); and salary loss (singular) over demotion (singular). Thus, respondents were categorised as "promoted" if they had experienced a promotion at least once at follow-up. We consider this hierarchical classification valid, because senior employees' employment patterns were quite consistent over time. In fact, only 10% had a mixed participation pattern in which they had experienced two or more different employment events at follow-up.

*3.5.4.2. Sub-dataset 2*

We classified participants in sub-dataset 2 as employed or non-employed (unemployment) based on the question "Are you currently"…., after which respondents could choose among nine possible choices of status. These choices were not mutually exclusive. Participants were categorized as employed if they held at least one job with one or multiple employers or combined a career as an employee with a career as an entrepreneur (self-employment), but spent most hours as an employee. The non-employed were those who had lost their jobs and were thus fully unemployed or were combining unemployment with another inactive status, such as studying or running the household.

Our rationale for classifying the non-employed in the aforementioned way is that we were interested in whether respondents became unemployed at follow-up (and hence, lost the jobs they had) rather than in how they spent their time outside the labour market. Besides, we could not rule out that respondents who classify themselves as unemployed also spent time on other activities outside the work domain.

### *3.5.5. Independent variables*

For both datasets, we measured employability based on whether employees had two resources – professional ability and developmental proactivity – which we assessed at the baseline.

We measured *professional ability* using a scale developed by TNO which consists of five items that reflect employees' assessment of their reactive adjustment to future job-related changes. Example items are "Able to perform one's present job in the coming 12 months" and "Able to continue working if work becomes physically more demanding". Answers ranged from 1 (certainly not) to 5 (certainly). Only respondents with a valid score on at least four items contributed to the mean scale. Cronbach's alpha was .85 in both samples.

We measured *developmental proactivity* using four items to assess employees' judgment of their willingness to learn new skills and proactive adjustment to future job

requirements. The scale was originally developed by Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch (2008) and includes items such as "In my work, I search for people from whom I can learn something" and "With regard to my skills and knowledge, I see to it that I can cope with changes in my work". Response anchors ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Only respondents with a valid score on at least three items contributed to the mean scale. Cronbach's alpha was .81 in both samples, which is comparable to the coefficient found by Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch (2008).

### *3.5.6. Factor analyses*

The aforementioned employability resources have not been studied simultaneously; therefore, we first performed an exploratory factor analysis on one random half of the samples for sub-dataset 1 (N=3,910) and sub-dataset 2 (N=3,655) using baseline data. In both datasets, two factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 resulted from the principal component analysis with oblimin rotation. All cross-loadings fell below .32, while intended loadings exceeded .50 (mean $\lambda$ value=.79). These thresholds for loadings correspond with the recommended bottom-line indexes for factor analyses (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The average variance explained (AVE) amounted to .63 for both professional ability and developmental proactivity (.64 for sub-dataset 2). The composite reliability (CR) was .90 for professional ability in both datasets, and .87 and .88 respectively for developmental proactivity.

All these values lie above the recommended threshold of .50 for the AVE and .70 for the CR (Hair *et al.*, 2010). As a result, our factor analysis provides sufficient evidence for the convergent validity of our latent constructs. Moreover, the square root of the AVE belonging to a particular construct was higher than the correlation between that construct and the other employability resource, confirming the divergent validity of our measurement model.

To validate our measurement model, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on a second random half of the samples for sub-dataset 1 (N=3,841) and sub-dataset 2 (N=3,586) using data assessed at baseline. Specifically, we compared a hypothesised second-order factor model, in which professional ability and developmental proactivity together with their corresponding items were supposed to load onto a second-order factor "employability resources", with two alternatives. The first alternative concerned a two-factor model in which the items accompanying professional ability and developmental proactivity were supposed to load onto their corresponding first-order factor. The second alternative pertained to a one-factor model in which the items belonging to professional ability and developmental proactivity were supposed to load onto one first-order factor.

A CFA model is considered a good fit to the data if the CFI and TLI are .90 or higher, the RMSEA falls below .08 and the SRMR is .10 or lower (Hox, 2010; Van

den Broeck *et al.*, 2010). Our results in R lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) indicated that the hypothesised second-order factor model provided a satisfactory fit to the data with $\chi^2(26) = 352.77$, CFI=.98, TLI=.97, RMSEA=.06 and SRMR=.04 (sub-dataset 1) and $\chi^2(26) = 298.58$, CFI=.98, TLI=.97, RMSEA=.05 and SRMR=.04 (sub-dataset 2). However, the two-factor model also provided an acceptable fit. In contrast, the one-factor model yielded a very poor fit to the data (Table 3.1).

These results justify the conclusion that professional ability and developmental proactivity should be treated as two distinct constructs which apparently are also an integral part of a second-order factor "employability resources".

**Table 3.1: Confirmatory factor analysis: fit indices for the hypothesised model and two alternative models[1]**

| | | $\chi^2$ | *df* | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | SRMR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1: Second-order factor model (hypothesised model) | Sub-dataset 1 | 352.77 | 26 | .98 | .97 | .06 | .04 |
| | Sub-dataset 2 | 298.58 | 26 | .98 | .97 | .05 | .04 |
| Model 2: 2 factors model | Sub-dataset 1 | 286.68 | 25 | .98 | .98 | .05 | .04 |
| | Sub-dataset 2 | 277.27 | 25 | .98 | .97 | .05 | .04 |
| Model 3: 1 factor model (Harman's model) | Sub-dataset 1 | 5044.95 | 26 | .66 | .53 | .23 | .18 |
| | Sub-dataset 2 | 4319.59 | 26 | .68 | .55 | .22 | .18 |

*Notes:* N=3,801 for sub-dataset 1; N=3,539 for sub-dataset 2.
$\chi^2$=Maximum Likelihood chi-square.
CFI=Comparative Fit Index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR=Standardised Root Mean Square Residual.
[1]Since different techniques have been used to identify the models, the fit of the different measurement models could not be compared.

### *3.5.7. Control variables*

Previous research indicates that demographic, well-being, and work-related variables affect employees' employment position and loss of paid employment (e.g., Leijten *et al.*, 2015; Seibert *et al.*, 1999; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009; Volmer and Spurk, 2011; Yang and Chau, 2016). Therefore, we included these potential confounders in our analyses. Demographic variables included employees' age (in years), gender (0=male; 1=female) and educational level (dummies for low and middle; reference category is high). In addition, we used employees' years of job tenure to represent work-related aspects. Finally, we used relaxation and recovery – the degree to which employees could detach from work after a working day (three items, α=.71 in both samples) – as a proxy for well-being.

### *3.5.8. Analytical strategy*

We performed two logistic regression analyses, one to address hypotheses 1 through 4 (using sub-dataset 1) and one to address hypothesis 5 (using sub-dataset 2). In the first

analysis, we used one outcome variable with multiple categories in a multinomial logistic regression analysis. In the second analysis, we conducted a binary logistic regression analysis of whether paid employment was lost or not. For both analyses, we reported the odds ratios or Exp(B) and the statistical significance levels.

For both logistic regression analyses, we estimated three models. In the first, we included the employability resources. In the second, we added the control variables to the equation to address potential confounding relationships. In the third, we included the variable "participation" as part of a panel attrition analysis. Specifically, we added a main term for participation as well as interaction terms with our employability resources to the equation (see Model 3 in Tables 3.4 and 3.7). In this way, we could assess how frequency of participation affected the outcome variables of interest and the assumed relationships between these outcomes and employability.

The aforementioned panel attrition analysis is analogous to the pattern mixture model frequently used in linear mixed effect models (Son *et al.*, 2012). We used the likelihood ratio test statistic (denoted by $\chi^2$) to assess improvement in model fit and relied on the AIC to adjust for model complexity. In addition, we used the Nagelkerke $R^2$ as an analogue to the $R^2$ commonly used in linear regression analyses.

## 3.6. Results

### *3.6.1. Sub-dataset 1 (hypotheses 1-4): Descriptive results*

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 display the descriptive statistics for sub-dataset 1. The reported mean scores were 4.20 for professional ability and 3.91 for developmental proactivity, with little variation among respondents. Our first sample consisted of slightly more males than females with an average age of 53, and mainly with medium and higher education levels. Multicollinearity was not a concern because correlations between the study variables (i.e., independent and control variables) fell below the threshold of .80 (Field, 2009). There was a small and positive correlation between professional ability and developmental proactivity ($r=.16$, $p<.01$). Although these two resources are conceptually distinct, this coefficient indicates that these resources are related, which aligns with their classification as "employability resources".

**Table 3.2: Descriptive results for sub-dataset 1: means, standard deviations and ranges for the independent and control variables at the baseline**

| | Mean | SD | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Employability resources* | | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 3.91 | 0.57 | 1-5 |
| Professional ability | 4.20 | 0.62 | 1-5 |
| *Demographic characteristics* | | | |
| Age (years) | 53.31 | 5.04 | 45-64 |
| Gender (ref=male) | 0.44 | | 0/1 |
| *Education (ref=high)*[1] | | | |
| low | 0.26 | | 0/1 |
| middle | 0.39 | | 0/1 |
| *Work-related characteristic* | | | |
| Job tenure (years) | 11.19 | 9.51 | 0-45 |
| *Well-being related characteristic* | | | |
| Relaxation and recovery | 2.91 | 0.71 | 1-5 |

*Notes:* Due to missing values (< 1% of total), the N ranges from 7,705 to 7,751.
[1]low: (not) finished primary school or completed lower vocational education; middle: finished secondary school or higher vocational training; high: obtained a bachelor's, master's or PhD degree.

**Table 3.3: Zero-order (Pearson r) correlation coefficients for the independent and control variables at the baseline (sub-dataset 1)**

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Developmental proactivity | - | | | | | | |
| 2. Professional ability | .156** | - | | | | | |
| 3. Age (years) | -.035** | -.150** | - | | | | |
| 4. Gender (ref=male) | .033** | -.033** | -.026* | - | | | |
| 5. Education[1] | .186** | .053** | -.030** | -.056** | - | | |
| 6. Job tenure (years) | -.059** | -.075** | .194** | -.061** | -.044** | - | |
| 7. Relaxation and recovery | -.123** | .081** | .017 | -.072** | -.130** | .006 | - |

*Notes:* *p<0.05; **p<0.01. [1]Spearman correlation used.
Due to missing values (< 1% of total), the N fluctuates between 7,705 and 7,751.

### *3.6.2. Sub-dataset 1 (hypotheses 1-4): Logistic regression results*

Table 3.4 presents the results from the sequential multinomial logistic regression analyses for sub-dataset 1. Model 1, which contains only employability resources, provides a statistically significant improvement in fit over the intercept-only model, with $\chi^2(8)=113.1$, $p<.001$ and AIC is 1754.3 ($R^2=.020$). Model 2, which displays the full model, shows a statistically significant better fit than Model 1, with $\chi^2(32)=287.7$, $p<.001$ and AIC is 9323.4 ($R^2=.052$; $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta 24)=174.6$, $p<.001$). Model 3, which contains the panel attrition analysis, shows negligible differences in comparison to our full model

(Model 2), indicating that respondents' participation patterns did not bias our results.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that employees with a favourable self-assessment of their employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) would have a higher probability of experiencing a future internal promotion. Estimated results shown in Table 3.4 support this hypothesis for developmental proactivity: respondents who assessed their developmental proactivity more favourably at baseline were more likely to have experienced an internal promotion at follow-up (Exp(B)=1.58, p<.001). However, no significant results were found for professional ability. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is partially supported.

Hypotheses 2-4 posited that positive self-rated employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) predicts a lower probability of experiencing a future salary loss (H2), demotion (H3), or demotion and salary loss (H4). Across these outcomes, no statistically significant findings were found for developmental proactivity. However, professional ability was significantly related to having experienced a salary loss at follow-up. The odds ratio fell below 1, indicating that respondents who assessed their professional ability positively at baseline had a lower likelihood of having experienced a salary loss at follow-up (Exp(B)=0.68, p<.001). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is partially supported.

The analyses also partially support hypotheses 3 and 4. Professional ability reliably distinguished between employees who had experienced a demotion and those who had experienced no employment transition at follow-up. Specifically, we found that employees who rated their professional ability favourably at baseline had a lower likelihood of having experienced a demotion at follow-up (Exp(B)=0.65, p<.001). In addition, we found a significant relationship between self-assessed professional ability at baseline and having experienced demotion and salary loss at follow-up. Specifically, employees who rated their professional ability positively at baseline were less likely to have experienced a simultaneous demotion and salary loss at follow-up (Exp(B)=0.47, p<.001). This negative relation is stronger than those separate relationships between professional ability and salary loss (H2) and demotion (H3), which confirms hypothesis 4.

**Table 3.4: Multinomial logistic regression analyses for sub-dataset 1: employment gains and losses as well as stability at follow-up as a function of employability resources and control variables assessed at the baseline, including panel attrition analyses**

| | Model 1 (M1)[1] Exp(B) | Model 2 (M2)^ Exp(B) | Model 3 (M3)^^ Exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Category 1: Promotion (n=597 (M1); n=593 (M2 and M3))** | | | |
| *Employability resources* | | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.69*** | 1.58*** | 1.49*** |
| Professional ability | 1.12 | 1.03 | 0.98 |
| *Control variables* | | | |
| Age (years) | | 0.93*** | 0.93*** |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.85 | 0.85 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | | |
| low | | 0.86 | 0.87 |
| middle | | 0.74** | 0.74** |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.97*** | 0.97*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 0.83** | 0.83** |
| *Panel attrition* | | | |
| Participation in two waves (P1) | | | 1.13 |
| Participation in three waves (P2) | | | 0.03** |
| Developmental proactivity*P1 | | | 1.06 |
| Developmental proactivity*P2 | | | 1.49 |
| Professional ability*P1 | | | 0.77 |
| Professional ability*P2 | | | 1.41 |
| Constant | -4.95*** | 0.58 | 1.27 |
| **Category 2: Salary loss (singular; n=273 (M1); n=272 (M2 and M3))** | | | |
| *Employability resources* | | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.07 | 1.09 | 1.15 |
| Professional ability | 0.67*** | 0.68*** | 0.63*** |
| *Control variables* | | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.01 | 1.01 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.98 | 0.98 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | | |
| low | | 1.08 | 1.08 |
| middle | | 0.83 | 0.83 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 1.01 | 1.01 |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.02 | 1.03 |
| *Panel attrition* | | | |
| Participation in two waves (P1) | | | 0.22 |
| Participation in three waves (P2) | | | 1.09 |
| Developmental proactivity*P1 | | | 0.95 |
| Developmental proactivity*P2 | | | 0.77 |
| Professional ability*P1 | | | 1.21 |
| Professional ability*P2 | | | 1.18 |
| Constant | -1.76*** | -2.36* | -2.13* |
| **Category 3: Demotion (singular; n=216 in all models)** | | | |
| *Employability resources* | | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.30* | 1.24 | 1.27 |
| Professional ability | 0.67*** | 0.65*** | 0.59*** |

| | Model 1 (M1)[1] Exp(B) | Model 2 (M2)^ Exp(B) | Model 3 (M3)^^ Exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Control variables* | | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.92 | 0.92 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | | |
| low | | 0.89 | 0.90 |
| middle | | 1.15 | 1.15 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.97*** | 0.97*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 0.94 | 0.95 |
| *Panel attrition* | | | |
| Participation in two waves (P1) | | | 0.18 |
| Participation in three waves (P2) | | | 0.21 |
| Developmental proactivity*P1 | | | 0.79 |
| Developmental proactivity*P2 | | | 1.01 |
| Professional ability*P1 | | | 1.54 |
| Professional ability*P2 | | | 1.36 |
| Constant | -2.77*** | -2.18* | -1.62 |
| **Category 4: Salary loss and demotion (combined; n=113 in all models)** | | | |
| *Employability resources* | | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.15 | 1.09 | 1.09 |
| Professional ability | 0.49*** | 0.47*** | 0.43*** |
| *Control variables* | | | |
| Age (years) | | 0.98 | 0.98 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 1.38 | 1.39 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | | |
| low | | 0.76 | 0.77 |
| middle | | 0.82 | 0.84 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.97* | 0.97* |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.11 | 1.12 |
| *Panel attrition* | | | |
| Participation in two waves (P1) | | | 5.23 |
| Participation in three waves (P2) | | | 0.16 |
| Developmental proactivity*P1 | | | 0.45 |
| Developmental proactivity*P2 | | | 1.33 |
| Professional ability*P1 | | | 1.06 |
| Professional ability*P2 | | | 1.21 |
| Constant | -1.65*** | -0.28 | 1.00 |
| -2LL ($\chi^2$) | 1730.3 (113.1)*** | 9251.4 (287.7)*** | 9171.1 (369.5)*** |
| $\Delta\chi^2$($\Delta$df) | - | 174.6 (24)*** | 81.8 (24)*** |
| AIC | 1754.3 | 9323.4 | 9291.1 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .020 | .052 | .066 |

*Notes:* Reference category: sustained stability (n=6,527 (M1); n=6,487 (M2 and M3)).
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
[1]Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,726 (< 1% of total).
^Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,681 (< 1% of total).
^^Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,681 (< 1% of total).

### *3.6.3. Sub-dataset 2 (hypothesis 5): Descriptive results*

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 present the descriptive statistics for sub-dataset 2. Respondents had an average age of 53 years, were predominantly male, and had medium or higher levels of education. Contrary to sub-dataset 1, which assessed employment events among employed persons, sub-dataset 2 compared those remaining employed with those who became unemployed at follow-up. Overall, multicollinearity was not evident, since correlations between the study variables fell below .80 (Field, 2009). As with sub-dataset 1, we found a positive relationship ($r=.17$, $p<.01$) between developmental proactivity and professional ability. Also, the mean scores on the employability resources were quite similar to those of sub-dataset 1: 3.93 for developmental proactivity and 4.21 for professional ability. In addition, we found a negative correlation between developmental proactivity and relaxation and recovery ($r=-.12$, $p<.01$), indicating that employees who anticipated knowledge needs in their jobs had more difficulty detaching from work.

**Table 3.5: Descriptive results for sub-dataset 2: means, standard deviations and ranges for the independent and control variables at the baseline**

| | Mean | SD | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Employability resources* | | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 3.93 | 0.57 | 1-5 |
| Professional ability | 4.21 | 0.63 | 1-5 |
| *Demographic characteristics* | | | |
| Age (years) | 53.05 | 4.85 | 45-64 |
| Gender (ref=male) | 0.37 | | 0/1 |
| *Education (ref=high)*[1] | | | |
| low | 0.26 | | 0/1 |
| middle | 0.39 | | 0/1 |
| *Work-related characteristic* | | | |
| Job tenure (years) | 10.85 | 9.60 | 0-45 |
| *Well-being related characteristic* | | | |
| Relaxation and recovery | 2.91 | 0.72 | 1-5 |

*Notes:* Due to missing values (< 1,5% of total), the N ranges from 7,168 to 7,241.
[1]low: (not) finished primary school or completed lower vocational education; middle: finished secondary school or higher vocational training; high: obtained a bachelor's, master's or PhD degree.

**Table 3.6: Zero-order (Pearson r) correlation coefficients for the independent and control variables at the baseline (sub-dataset 2)**

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Developmental proactivity | - | | | | | | |
| 2. Professional ability | .173** | - | | | | | |
| 3. Age (years) | -.027* | -.164** | - | | | | |
| 4. Gender (ref=male) | .037** | -.035** | .001 | - | | | |
| 5. Education[1] | .166** | .067** | -.019 | -.051** | - | | |
| 6. Job tenure (years) | -.084** | -.071** | .222** | -.062** | -.060** | - | |
| 7. Relaxation and recovery | -.120** | .070** | .015 | -.066** | -.144** | .010 | - |

*Notes:* *p<0.05; **p<0.01. [1]Spearman correlation used.
Due to missing values (< 1,1% of total), the N fluctuates between 7,168 and 7,241.

### *3.6.4. Sub-dataset 2 (hypothesis 5): Logistic regression results*

Table 3.7 displays the results from the binary logistic regression analysis for sub-dataset 2. Model 1, which contains the employability resources, provides a statistically significant better fit than the intercept-only model ($\chi^2(2)=81.3$, $p<.001$). The accompanying AIC is 3150.4 and $R^2$ is .031. Model 2, which includes the control variables, shows a significant improvement in fit over Model 1, with $\chi^2(8)=150.6$, $p<.001$ and AIC is 3070.2 ($R^2=.058$; $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta 6)=69.3$, $p<.001$). Model 3 shows the panel attrition analysis. Differences between the findings of this and our full model (Model 2) were very small, indicating that respondents' participation patterns did not distort our results.

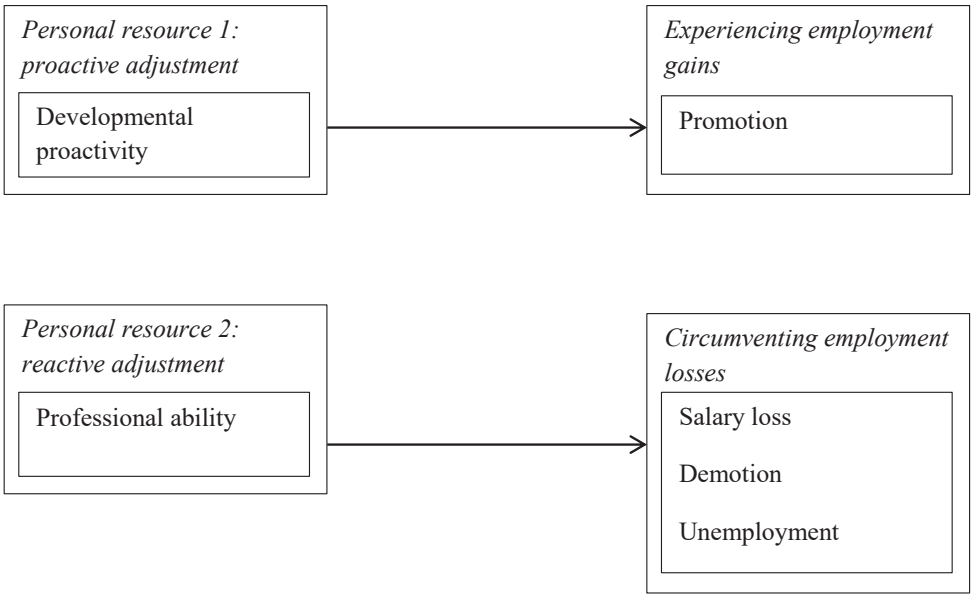
Hypothesis 5 predicted that employees with a favourable self-assessment of their employability (professional ability and developmental proactivity) are less likely to experience future unemployment. Our logistic regression analysis showed a significant relationship for professional ability, that is, those who self-assessed as having greater professional ability at baseline had a higher probability of having retained work ("sustainable employment"; Exp(B)=1.89, $p<.001$). However, the relationship between developmental proactivity and sustainable employment was non-significant. Therefore, the data partially support hypothesis 5. Figure 3.2 summarises the outcomes.

**Table 3.7: Binary logistic regression analysis for sub-dataset 2: employment losses and stability at follow-up as a function of employability resources and control variables assessed at the baseline, including panel attrition analysis**

| | Model 1[1] | Model 2^ | Model 3^^ |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Exp(B) | Exp(B) | Exp(B) |
| *Employability resources* | | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 0.99 | 0.96 | 1.01 |
| Professional ability | 1.90*** | 1.89*** | 1.98*** |
| *Control variables* | | | |
| Age (years) | | 0.97*** | 0.97*** |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.94 | 0.93 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | | |
| low | | 0.71** | 0.71** |
| middle | | 0.97 | 0.96 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 1.04*** | 1.04*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 0.77*** | 0.77*** |
| *Panel attrition* | | | |
| Participation in two waves (P1) | | | 8.67[2] |
| Participation in three waves (P2) | | | 2.64 |
| Developmental proactivity*P1 | | | 0.79 |
| Developmental proactivity*P2 | | | 0.90 |
| Professional ability*P1 | | | 0.83 |
| Professional ability*P2 | | | 0.91 |
| Constant | 0.17 | 2.78*** | 2.30** |
| -2LL ($\chi^2$) | 3144.4 (81.3)*** | 3052.2 (150.6)*** | 3041.0 (161.8)*** |
| $\Delta\chi^2$($\Delta$df) | - | 69.3 (6)*** | 11.2 (6) |
| AIC | 3150.4 | 3070.2 | 3071.0 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .031 | .058 | .062 |

*Notes:* Reference category: transition to unemployment at follow-up.
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
[1]Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,213 (< 1% of total).
^Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,161 (=1,1% of total).
^^Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,161 (=1,1% of total).
[2]The non-significance of this parameter estimate may be due to an inflated Type II error rate caused by the Wald statistic. However, since the difference in the -2LL between model 2 and model 3 is non-significant, model 3 is not a better fit than model 2, leading us to conclude that it is not strictly necessary to control for panel attrition when interpreting the findings for sub-dataset 2.

**Figure 3.2: Corroborated theoretical framework**




## 3.7. Discussion and conclusion

This study tested a parsimonious and theory-driven model that relates two employability axes – professional ability and developmental proactivity – to senior employees' actual employment trajectories. Drawing upon COR, we construed employability as a critical personal resource that enables employees to gain additional employment resources ("resource acquisition tenet") and to protect existing employment resources against losses ("resource conservation tenet"). In line with this prediction, we found that professional ability led to a lower incidence of employment losses (salary loss, demotion, and unemployment) and developmental proactivity led to a higher probability of employment gains in the form of an internal promotion. From a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest that COR's resource conservation tenet applies only to professional ability, whereas its resource acquisition tenet holds only for developmental proactivity.

Based on this study, we found that the predictive validity of COR's central tenets was fragmented. In an attempt to explain this fragmentation, we propose a redefinition of COR's key asset: "resources". Before launching this redefinition, we briefly reiterate COR's long-adhered definition of resources, which laid the foundation for our hypotheses. Since COR's inception, resources have been broadly defined as *"all things individuals value"* (Hobfoll and Lilly, 1993: 129). Consistent with this definition, we expected professional ability and developmental proactivity to predict not only

employees' employment gains, but also their avoidance of employment losses. Indeed, both employment gain and avoidance of employment losses represent events to which every individual likely attaches a value, albeit in varying degrees. A different interpretation applies when the definition of resources is more seamlessly aligned with COR's main purpose, namely its classification as a theory of human motivation. Against this background, Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl and Westman (2014) redefine resources as *"anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals"* (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014: 5).

Based on this definition of resources from Halbesleben *et al.* (2014), we pose an alternative interpretation of the counterintuitive finding for professional ability. As a proxy for employees' *reactive* adjustment to future job-related changes, professional ability entails adaptation in its most elementary form. As a basic form of adaptation, professional ability is indicative of a relatively limited resource reservoir. In this situation, employees attach more value to resource protection than to resource acquisition strategies, because resource acquisition strategies – such as striving for a promotion – involve putting existing resources at risk, an activity that precipitates stress if resources are too heavily consumed and, ultimately, get lost. This "hollowing out" of resources makes striving for a promotion a risky employment event that may even curtail employees' ability to protect scarce resources. Indeed, even if the aim is to protect resources, those resources must not be depleted too deeply. This argument leads us to conclude that a promotion, albeit a valuable event, can put employees in a position in which even the most mundane goal – securing their employment position – can no longer be assured. Hence, a promotion should not be considered a resource for employees with high professional ability, and therefore, should not be posited to follow logically from this employability resource.

A similar argument applies to the unexpected finding for developmental proactivity. As a measure for employees' *proactive* adjustment to future job-related changes, developmental proactivity primes the type of skill requirements employees need to respond to in the foreseeable future. Hence, developmental proactivity is indicative of a comparatively rich resource reservoir. In this situation, employees are more eager to channel their energy into actions that aim to enlarge their resource reservoir than to focus on their jobs with their current entitlements (and ways to protect them). A possible explanation for this prioritization is that resource acquisition strategies satisfy employees' inborn desire to gain additional resources, whereas resource protection strategies, such as securing one's employment position, thwart this desire. Self-indulgent, resource-rich employees are likely to view resource gain as a goal in itself (Ng and Feldman, 2014), and therefore, we can expect resource protection strategies, which thus frustrate resource gain, to act as important goal barriers. Hence, the act of circumventing employment losses, albeit centrally valued, should not be considered a resource for employees with

high developmental proactivity, and therefore, should not be posited to result causally from this employability resource.

Altogether, our findings convey the core message that COR's conventional definition of resources does not capture the differential role employability resources play in obtaining employment gains and circumventing employment losses. A reconceptualisation is required that does justice to COR's depiction as a theory of human motivation, such as the one developed by Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl and Westman (2014). That is not to say that COR's conventional definition of resources has lost its predictive utility altogether. To the contrary, the result that developmental proactivity leads to resource acquisition and professional ability leads to resource conservation still fits well with this definition (see the second paragraph of this discussion). The point we would like to make is that it is of pre-eminent importance to critically reflect on definitions of COR's resource construct to ensure that hypotheses leave ample room for theoretical depth and specificity. In this way, COR's predictive validity can be improved.

With COR as a theoretical guide, this study's contributions to the employability and careers literature are fourfold. First, we juxtaposed COR's conventional definition of the resource construct with the alternative definition from Halbesleben *et al.* (2014) to come to terms with our findings. Second, we relied on COR's resource acquisition and conservation tenet to symmetrically cover employment gains and losses. This approach enabled us to put career models that are particularly suitable for studying employment gains (e.g., Hirschi, 2012) into perspective, at least as far as senior employees are concerned. Third, we conceptually distinguished between the input-based approach (employee characteristics) and the output-based approach (employment positions and transitions) to employability, and we longitudinally linked both angles to one another. In this way, we clarified previous employability studies in which both angles were not clearly decoupled, hampering research on the employability-employment trajectories link. Finally, our findings bring some nuance to current thinking about employability: in general, (pro)activity is central to ideas about employability (e.g., De Grip *et al.*, 2004; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006), and extant scholarly work on sustainable work performance tends to reflect the same emphasis (Dorenbosch, 2014). However, while proactivity is certainly relevant to senior employees, the ability to confidently perform day-to-day work seems critical.

### *3.7.1. Limitations and future research directions*

We acknowledge three limitations to this study and suggest future research directions. First, our method for classifying respondents could be optimised to account for more subtle variations in intrapersonal employment trajectories. However, we are confident that our hierarchical classification did not lead to serious biases, since employment trajectories were fairly consistent over time. In fact, only 10% of our respondents experienced a mixed participation pattern. Nonetheless, a viable route for future research would be to model all subtle intra-individual fluctuations in employment positions using a longitudinal design with a longer view of individuals' working lives than the STREAM study, for instance, by testing a latent transition model or combining sequence analysis with logistic regression analysis. Modelling subtle employment fluctuations over time enables researchers to assess *gain* and *loss* spirals (Ungerath, 2012), or the continued and increased gain or loss of resources.

Second, although extant (theoretical) research hints at this possibility, we did not empirically assess the role of mediators in the link between employability and employment events. Therefore, we recommend researchers to consider mediating factors, such as job performance and well-being. Recent research (Bozionelos *et al.*, 2016; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2012a; Vanhercke *et al.*, 2015; Van Harten, 2016) has shown that employability predicts the possession of these and related resources. Some competencies such as corporate sense, which figures as an independent variable in existing research (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009), can arguably also be considered a mediating factor. It is plausible that employees who are in control and thriving (employability) experience employment gains because they have available time to go the extra mile to help their organisations reach their goals (corporate sense).

Third, we did not assess whether the results belonging to sub-dataset 1 were susceptible to changes in organisational setting and work conditions. To offset this potential drawback, we reran our multinomial logistic regression analysis on a sample encompassing those who have neither experienced a reduction in working hours nor a switch of employer at follow-up (N=6,233). Except for salary loss, where the coefficient for professional ability became non-significant, differences in parameter estimates were negligible. A likely reason for the non-significant finding for salary loss may pertain to the severe shrinkage in sample size for this category, leading to deflated correlations and inflated Type II error rates. As for sub-dataset 2, we did not assess whether our findings were influenced by the year in which respondents first made the transition to unemployment or by the duration of unemployment. To address this potential limitation, we performed sensitivity analyses to correct for these facets (N=7,241) and found the comparable results. Appendices II through IV display the results of the additional analyses for sub-dataset 1 and 2 respectively.

### *3.7.2. Practical implications*

This chapter carries several practical implications for direct supervisors, employers and policy makers. First, the finding that developmental proactivity increases senior employees' chances for promotions calls for HR practices to stimulate developmental progression among these employees. However, we argue that such opportunities should not be overstated, as developmental proactivity likely refers to an individual disposition (chapter 2). Notwithstanding this argument, about a decade of research on similar constructs has attested to the importance of investing in (pro)active learning and concomitant adaptive attitudes (e.g., De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Van Harten, 2016). Such investments include the provision of learning opportunities, the allocation of task variety and the supply of managerial support.

Research (Van Harten, 2016) has shown that these investments also benefit employees' professional ability,[18] and thus inoculate employees against salary losses, demotions and unemployment. Other important areas of management interventions aimed at professional ability are issues that prevent suitably qualified employees from struggling with their daily work tasks. This recommendation is supported by recent research showing that employees are less able to confidently perform their current jobs if they experience a high workload (e.g., Van Harten *et al.*, 2016). Focal points can be exemption from administrative tasks that come on top of role-prescribed duties, long working hours, uncertainty-generating reorganisations and excessive physical demands. It may well be that efforts to address such issues can do more for senior employees' employability than whatever attitude- or behaviour-based interventions aimed at leveraging developmental proactivity can accomplish.

### *3.7.3. Conclusion*

In conclusion, employees' proactive adjustment to job-related changes leads to employment gains, and employees' reactive adjustment to job-related changes predicts avoidance of employment losses, that is, results in employment protection. These findings could inspire researchers to critically review COR's resource construct as they undertake their research and encourage practitioners to launch programs aimed principally at ensuring the ability to confidently perform one's day-to-day work.

18 Strictly speaking, Van Harten (2016) employed the term "up-to-date expertise"; however, this term shares important similarities with professional ability. Specifically, both are related to Thijssen and Walter's (2006) concept of technical obsolescence referred to in chapter 1.

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# Appendices

**Appendix I: Participation pattern of respondents comprising sub-dataset 1 and 2 compared with the participation pattern of respondents included in the entire STREAM study**

| | Sub-dataset | | | | STREAM | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | | 2 | | Total | |
| Participation pattern[1] ↓ | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* |
| 1-1-1-1 | 5,257 | 67,8 | 4,827 | 66,7 | 9,639 | 63,8 |
| 1-1-1-0 | 804 | 10,4 | 792 | 10,9 | 1,313 | 8,7 |
| 1-1-0-1 | 355 | 4,6 | 339 | 4,7 | 628 | 4,2 |
| 1-1-0-0 | 562 | 7,3 | 535 | 7,4 | 850 | 5,6 |
| 1-0-1-1 | 391 | 5,0 | 392 | 5,4 | 724 | 4,8 |
| 1-0-1-0 | 240 | 3,1 | 222 | 3,1 | 381 | 2,5 |
| 1-0-0-1 | 142 | 1,8 | 134 | 1,9 | 246 | 1,6 |
| 1-0-0-0 | NA | | NA | | 1,337 | 8,8 |
| *Total* | 7,751 | 100 | 7,241 | 100 | 15,118 | 100 |

*Notes:* [1]The numeral 1 signifies that a respondent participated in a specific wave; 0 signifies that a respondent skipped that wave.

**Appendix II: Additional multinomial logistic regression analyses for sub-dataset 1**

| | Model 1 (M1)[1] | Model 2 (M2)^ |
|---|---|---|
| | Exp(B) | Exp(B) |
| **Category 1: Promotion (n=473 (M1); n=471 (M2))** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.64*** | 1.51*** |
| Professional ability | 1.21* | 1.11 |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 0.93*** |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.87 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 0.84 |
| middle | | 0.83 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.98*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 0.79** |
| Constant | -5.23*** | 0.30 |
| **Category 2: Salary loss (singular; n=89 (M1); n=88 (M2))** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.01 | 0.99 |
| Professional ability | 0.99 | 0.97 |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.01 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.63* |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 0.71 |
| middle | | 0.68 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 1.01 |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.06 |
| Constant | -4.08*** | -3.84* |
| **Category 3: Demotion (singular; n=166 in both models)** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.41* | 1.34 |
| Professional ability | 0.62*** | 0.61*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.00 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.87 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 0.82 |
| middle | | 1.07 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.97*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 0.93 |
| Constant | -2.89*** | -1.81 |

| | Model 1 (M1)[1] | Model 2 (M2)^ |
|---|---|---|
| | Exp(B) | Exp(B) |
| **Category 4: Salary loss and demotion (combined; n=53 in both models)** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.16 | 1.11 |
| Professional ability | 0.49*** | 0.48*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.01 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.97 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 0.72 |
| middle | | 0.84 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.98 |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.06 |
| Constant | -2.29* | -2.34 |
| -2LL ($\chi^2$) | 1262.6 (71.1)*** | 6141.9 (187.3)*** |
| $\Delta\chi^2$($\Delta$df) | - | 116.2 (24)*** |
| AIC | 1286.6 | 6213.9 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .018 | .047 |

*Notes:* Reference category: sustained stability (n=5,433 (M1); n=5,401 (M2)).
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
[1]Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=6,214 (< 1% of total).
^Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=6,179 (< 1% of total).

**Appendix III: Additional multinomial logistic regression analyses for sub-dataset 2; sensitivity analysis regarding the year in which respondents first made the transition to unemployment**

| | Model 1 (M1)[1] | Model 2 (M2)^ |
|---|---|---|
| | Exp(B) | Exp(B) |
| **Category 1: Transition to unemployment at wave 2 (n=107 in both models)** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 0.85 | 0.90 |
| Professional ability | 0.39*** | 0.38*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.03 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.87 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 1.42 |
| middle | | 1.20 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.95*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.42* |
| Constant | 0.23 | -1.20 |
| **Category 2: Transition to unemployment at wave 3 (n=141 (M1); n=140 (M2))** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.12 | 1.15 |
| Professional ability | 0.59*** | 0.58*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.04* |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 1.17 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 1.21 |
| middle | | 0.79 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.95*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.42** |
| Constant | -2.14** | -4.92*** |
| **Category 3: Transition to unemployment at wave 4 (n=176 (M1); n=174 (M2))** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.03 | 1.06 |
| Professional ability | 0.59*** | 0.62*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.04* |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.97 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 1.63* |
| middle | | 1.19 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.98* |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.13 |
| Constant | -1.61* | 4.36*** |
| -2LL ($\chi^2$) | 1015.4 (92.9)*** | 3934.6 (175.7)*** |
| $\Delta\chi^2$($\Delta$df) | - | 82.7 (18)*** |
| AIC | 1033.4 | 3988.6 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .029 | .055 |

*Notes:* Reference category: remained employed throughout the survey (n=6,789 (M1); n=6,740 (M2)).
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
[1]Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,213 (< 1% of total).
^Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,161 (= 1,1% of total).

**Appendix IV: Additional multinomial logistic regression analyses for sub-dataset 2; sensitivity analysis regarding the duration of unemployment**

| | Model 1 (M1)[1] | Model 2 (M2)^^ |
|---|---|---|
| | Exp(B) | Exp(B) |
| **Category 1: Recovery from resource loss during follow-up (n=65 in both models)** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 0.92 | 0.96 |
| Professional ability | 0.58** | 0.55*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 0.97 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.90 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 1.83^ |
| middle | | 0.97 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.91*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.42* |
| Constant | -2.13* | -1.05 |
| **Category 2: Non-recovery from resource loss during follow-up (n=249 (M1); n=248 (M2))** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 0.98 | 1.02 |
| Professional ability | 0.52*** | 0.54*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.10*** |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 0.97 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 1.35 |
| middle | | 1.06 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.97*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.26* |
| Constant | -0.53 | -4.96*** |
| **Category 3: Unknown whether recovery from resource loss took place (n=110 (M1); n=108 (M2))** | | |
| *Employability resources* | | |
| Developmental proactivity | 1.13 | 1.13 |
| Professional ability | 0.52*** | 0.51*** |
| *Control variables* | | |
| Age (years) | | 1.00 |
| Gender (ref=male) | | 1.42 |
| *Education (ref=high)* | | |
| low | | 1.36 |
| middle | | 1.04 |
| Job tenure (years) | | 0.97*** |
| Relaxation and recovery | | 1.30 |
| Constant | -1.90* | -2.75 |
| -2LL ($\chi^2$) | 962.8 (82.4)*** | 3817.3 (183.3)*** |
| $\Delta\chi^2$($\Delta$df) | - | 100.9 (18)*** |
| AIC | 980.8 | 3871.3 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .027 | .059 |

*Notes:* Reference category: remained employed throughout the survey (n=6,789 (M1); n=6,740 (M2)).
^p<0.10[2]; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
[1]Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,213 (< 1% of total).
^^Listwise deletion reduced the number of records to n=7,161 (= 1,1% of total).
[2]The decision to rely on the threshold of p<0.10 in this equation is based on the small sample size for category 1.

# Chapter 4

## How the organisation can affect employees' intention to manage enterprise-specific knowledge through informal mentoring: A vignette study*


### Abstract

This study examines the role of organisational conditions in the intentions of midcareer and senior employees to manage their organisations' enterprise-specific knowledge through providing volitional career support (mentoring) to junior organisational members, their protégés. We build on the literature on Social Exchange Theory (SET), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Perceived Organisational Support (POS) to construe mentoring as a form of Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) that relates positively to an organisation's endorsement of intrinsic values (e.g., learning opportunities) and negatively to the presence of hindrance demands (e.g., time pressure). We conducted a vignette study among a heterogeneous sample of Dutch employees ages 29 to 69 to test our expectations. Results from our multilevel linear model confirm our hypotheses that mentoring intention is positively affected by an organisation's endorsement of intrinsic values and negatively influenced by the presence of hindrance demands. Our results attest to SDT in that values and characteristics embedded in the work environment can facilitate or inhibit mentorships.



*Keywords:*
Mentoring
Social Exchange Theory
Self-Determination Theory
Perceived Organisational Support
Vignette study
Midcareer and senior employees



**This chapter is co-authored by Ferry Koster. A slightly different version of this chapter has been published as: Roobol, C.J.J. and Koster, F. (2020), "How organisations can affect employees' intention to manage enterprise-specific knowledge through informal mentoring: a vignette study", Journal of Knowledge Management, Vol. 24 No. 7, pp. 1605-1624. doi: 10.1108/JKM-11-2018-0668*

## 4.1. Introduction

Mentorships have often been construed as balanced social exchange relationships that benefit all parties involved – the protégé, the mentor and the organisation (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 1997a). Despite this contention, most studies focus on the protégé. Apart from the protégé, research acknowledges the importance of mentoring for the organisation (e.g., Allen, 2003). Through providing career support to junior organisational members or protégés, midcareer and senior employees with abundant work experience to draw upon as mentors (e.g., Allen, 2007) enable their organisations to preserve enterprise-specific knowledge. As such, mentoring prevents organisations from reinventing the wheel.

Apart from their focus on mentors' benefits (Allen and Eby, 2003; Bozionelos, 2004; Grima *et al.*, 2014), the few studies that address the mentor's perspective examine how individual conditions such as prior mentoring experience or dispositional variables affect employees' willingness to become a mentor (Allen, 2003; 2007). However, the literature is largely missing an examination of the role of organisational conditions in the intention to mentor, such as work characteristics or human resource policies. This lacuna is remarkable, given the embeddedness of mentorships in organisations (Janssen *et al.*, 2016) and the presumed benefits of mentoring for this aggregate (e.g., knowledge preservation; Karkoulian *et al.*, 2008). Our research question, therefore, is: *"Under which organisational conditions (work characteristics and human resource policies) are midcareer and senior employees willing to provide career support to junior organisational members?"*

Our search to answer this question extends extant mentoring research in three ways. First, we provide quantitative research on the role of a broad array of organisational conditions for the general willingness to mentor. While Kram (1985) argued that organisations could affect mentorships, only four studies (Allen *et al.*, 1997a/b; Aryee *et al.*, 1996; Billett, 2003) have examined the role of organisational conditions in (experienced) employees' willingness or motivation to mentor others. Two of these studies are qualitative in nature, and although descriptions are rich, the foundations for causality are poorly laid. Also, the two remaining studies are quantitative, but they examine only two conditions each.

Second, despite recommendations for a (semi-)experimental design (Allen *et al.*, 2008), few mentoring studies have relied upon this model. We respond to this call by conducting a vignette study, which minimises social desirability and enhances internal validity (Ganong and Coleman, 2006; Wallander, 2009). Numerous scholars writing in the organisational (training) literature have successfully used a vignette design to assess human judgments (e.g., Fleischmann, 2014), making it a suitable method for our study.

Third, we combine insights from the literature on Social Exchange Theory (SET), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Perceived Organisational Support (POS) to develop an integrated model of the intention of midcareer and senior employees to

become mentors. A point of departure is that mentoring constitutes a pro-organisational activity through its successorship of enterprise-specific knowledge. Such an integrated model lays the foundation for future theory on mentoring relationships from the mentor's perspective. This model extends our knowledge, since studies that have relied on SET, SDT or POS have investigated only the protégé's perspective (Baranik *et al.*, 2010; Baranik *et al.*, 2017; Ensher *et al.*, 2001; Park *et al.*, 2016; an exception being Janssen *et al.*, 2014).

We collected data in the Netherlands, a country where the labour force is rapidly ageing and issues regarding sustainable employment dominate public debates (CBS, 2017). Participation in formal training activities decreases with age, while involvement in informal activities does not (Pleijers and De Winden, 2014). Against this background, it is interesting to study how midcareer and senior (i.e., experienced) employees' engagement in informal learning practices – such as mentoring – could be further stimulated to uphold a skilled ("employable") labour force.

## 4.2. Mentoring: a definition

The motivation to mentor depends on the type of mentorship under consideration (Allen, 2003); therefore, we must explain what the term "mentoring" means. In this study, we focus on informal mentoring aimed at career support or *"a spontaneously developed and informal form of providing career support that is not officially mandated within the organisation and characterised by an often intimate, interpersonal relation between the mentor and the protégé as well as by informal rules regarding contract duration, targeted goals and interaction frequency and content"* (Allen, 2003: 136; Eby and Lockwood, 2005: 442).[19] A first feature of mentoring is the provision of career support, which means that the mentor transmits job-related knowledge to the protégé and assists the individual's career advancement. Doing so empowers the protégé and thus helps organisations manage enterprise-specific knowledge. A second feature of mentoring is that mentorships are not formally arranged and hence, not structured along stringent (selection) criteria and tight guidelines (e.g., Allen, 2003). Therefore, we focus on informal mentorships that are governed by reciprocity rules of exchange (i.e., parties abide by unspecified and unwritten obligations and rights that are usually not subjected to a formal bargaining process; e.g., Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). A final, inherent feature of these so-called "informal mentorships" is that they develop naturally (e.g., Ragins and Scandura, 1999) without an internal mandate, meaning that mentoring has a volitional nature and is often not

19 However, it is noteworthy that in contemporary mentoring research, the intensity and frequency of the mentoring assistance are far from clearly identified. Various forms of mentorships exist, the duration and intensity of which can vary considerably (e.g., Janssen *et al.*, 2016). Although it seems reasonable to distinguish informal "ad hoc" activities in kind from informal mentorships that are more durable, no formal criteria exist that meaningfully differentiate between the two. Since criteria regarding relationship duration and intensity barely carry theoretical implications, we will not detail these criteria when portraying mentoring in our vignettes.

an integral part of employees' formal job descriptions and remuneration. Therefore, informal mentoring can be seen as a form of extra-role behaviour, or *"behaviour that goes beyond the formal contract"* (Koster, 2005: 53). Together, these features enable us to study informal mentorships through the lens of *Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)*, or *"employee behaviour that is discretionary (i.e., not an essential part of one's contractual tasks), not formally rewarded, and [supposed to] benefit the functioning of the organisation"* (Organ, 1988: 4).

This link follows Allen's (2003; 2007) invitation to the scientific community to define mentorships as a particular dimension of OCB. Her reasoning is based on the result that dispositional aspects generally found to affect prosocial behaviour (outside of work) appear also to relate to employees' propensity to become mentors (Allen, 2003). Recent research (Janssen *et al.*, 2014) strengthened Allen's (2003; 2007) presupposition by showing that motivations to mentor are not limited to the perceived personal benefits, but also are relational, with mentors showing concern for their protégés or their organisations. In sum, acknowledging that informal mentoring is a form of *OCB* that can be *reciprocal* and *relational* in nature is crucial to our understanding of the role that organisational conditions play in incentivising midcareer and senior employees to become informal mentors.

## 4.3. A SET-, SDT- and POS-based approach to mentoring

A thorough review of the literature on the mentor's perspective on mentoring revealed five core organisational determinants for general willingness to mentor: co-mentor consultation, supervisory support for (volitional) mentoring, learning opportunities, time pressure and organisational restructuring. In this study, we rely on SET, SDT and POS to detail the mechanisms linking these determinants to midcareer and senior employees' intention to volitionally mentor protégés. We start from the premise that mentoring represents a balanced social exchange relationship in which key skills and experiences are passed from experienced "senior" organisational members or mentors, whom the organisation supports and values for this task, to less experienced "junior" organisational members or protégés. For the social exchange relationship to be enduring, it should be mutually satisfying. As Gouldner (1960) argued, the success of a social exchange relationship is contingent on the norm of reciprocity. Broadly stated, the norm of reciprocity entails that individuals reciprocate investments generated by another party, because they feel obliged to do so (i.e., the norm specifies how they ought to behave; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

In this study, we assume that the norm of reciprocity guides the relationship between an organisation's investments in a work environment supportive of mentoring and midcareer and senior employees' readiness to pass down skills to junior organi-

sational members. Our theoretical point of departure is that informal mentoring, as a particular dimension of OCB, constitutes an exemplary form of optimal worker functioning. According to SDT, optimal functioning or *"[…] employees' [positive] attitudes towards the organization"* (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014: 1907) is instigated, especially when activities are undertaken volitionally, by a theoretical mechanism called basic need fulfilment (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Employees need to feel part of a community (need for relatedness), to be enabled to work in a self-directed manner (need for autonomy) and to feel capable of doing their work (need for competence). These needs are posited to be fulfilled through a social context that promotes values such as affiliation, self-development, empowerment and community contribution (Gagné and Deci, 2005; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014). Organisations can endorse these so-called "intrinsic values" (e.g., Kasser and Ryan, 1996[20]), which lead employees to act in a reciprocal manner. SET specifies that exchanges are guided by the norm of reciprocity; SDT specifies which exchanges employees value.

While the former paragraph portrays intrinsic value endorsement objectively, it is widely believed that employees' actions emanate from their perceptions of the (work) environment rather than from any objective situation (Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012). Employees' perceptions of their organisations' intrinsic values are often subsumed under the term *Perceived Organisational Support*, or *POS*. POS is commonly defined as employees' perceptions about the extent to which their organisations appreciate their contributions and show genuine interest in their well-being and competence development (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Koster *et al.*, 2011). POS has been studied extensively through the lens of SET (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Koster *et al.*, 2011), which posits that employees who are cognisant of their employers' concern and support are more likely to act reciprocally. These responses in kind may become manifest in a higher tendency to exhibit OCB. As we conceptualise mentoring in terms of OCB, we assert that this reciprocal response can also be defined in terms of the tendency among experienced employees to engage beyond their core responsibilities with junior organisational members in order to pass down skills, that is, to take on a mentoring role volitionally. Hence, mentoring represents one way that employees can repay POS, the intrinsic value support they experience from their organisations.

In addition to organisational conditions that fulfil employees' basic human needs, some conditions may thwart basic human need fulfilment. In studies on organisational theories (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2010), these work characteristics are coined hindrance demands. Examples of hindrance demands are role conflict, role

20 It is important to note that Kasser and Ryan paid attention to personal values as assessed by individuals rather than to values endorsed by the employing organisation.

ambiguity, job insecurity and sometimes also time pressure[21] (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2010; Webster *et al.*, 2011). A built-in feature of hindrance demands is that they tax individuals' energy reservoirs and, as need barriers, can be expected to lower optimal functioning (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2010). Research is supportive of this premise, showing that hindrance demands are detrimental to employees' health, well-being and organisational commitment (Tadić, 2014; Webster *et al.*, 2011).

## 4.4. Hypotheses

Analogous to a SET, SDT and POS theoretical perspective, we classified our determinants into two overarching categories: perceived organisational intrinsic value support (containing co-mentor consultation, supervisory support for volitional mentoring and learning opportunities) and hindrance demands (containing time pressure and organisational restructuring). This classification has much appeal, as the theoretical underpinnings differ for determinants across categories, but overlap for those within categories. For example, supervisory support forms an integral part of autonomy-supportive work climates characteristic of intrinsic value support, whereas restructuring fits theoretical notions of job insecurity pertinent to hindrance demands. It furthermore contains across-discipline precursors of autonomous motivation and citizenship behaviour (e.g., Gagné and Deci, 2005), showing predictive validity. Hypotheses relating both categories to general willingness to mentor are detailed below.

### *4.4.1. Perceived organisational intrinsic value support*

Perceived organisational intrinsic value support encompasses three organisational conditions: co-mentor consultation, supervisory support for (volitional) mentoring and learning opportunities. Co-mentor consultation refers to the opportunities employees experience to consult co-mentors when needed. Organisations can adopt an HR policy aimed at facilitating teamwork, which normalises consultation among co-workers for social and work-related assistance. As this policy enables employees to experience affiliation, it fulfils their need for relatedness, and thus, boosts their optimal functioning. Hence, the horizontal worker-to-worker relationship is one facet of organisational intrinsic value support, and thus, an integral part of the mentor-organisation exchange relationship that we theorise. Supervisory support for volitional mentoring denotes perceptions of a work climate in which supervisors support their subordinates' willingness to self-initiate mentoring. Organisations can either employ autonomy-supportive supervisors or train employees with leadership qualities in this

21 It is important to note that time pressure cannot be uniformly treated as a hindrance demand. In the literature, two contrasting theories coexist with insights into the classification of job demands. For instance, the challenge-hindrance stressor framework labels time pressure as a challenge demand, but the appraisal theory of stress classifies time pressure as either a challenge or a hindrance demand, contingent on employees' perceptions (e.g., Webster *et al.*, 2011).

skill, thereby endorsing an autonomy-supportive work climate. As this climate enables employees to experience empowerment, it encourages autonomy need fulfilment and optimal functioning. Learning opportunities signify the means job incumbents think they have to invest in self-development. Organisations can pursue an HR policy directed at continuous learning through on-the-job experimenting, access to training courses and task rotation. As this policy espouses a development philosophy characterised by ample learning facilities and optimal challenge, it fulfils employees' need for competence and eases optimal functioning.

All these HR policies are signals that employers desire a caring professional relationship with their employees. In this situation, intrinsic value support instils social exchange beliefs in employees and incentivises them to reciprocate their employers' positive gestures. This logic is consistent with the notion of the "new" psychological contract (Pruijt, 2013): employers invest in employees' well-being and development in exchange for solidarity. This solidarity can manifest itself in a higher motivation to engage willingly in pro-organisational activities. Mentoring can be seen as an activity through which employees express their goodwill, since transferring job-related knowledge to junior staff members likely contributes to the successorship of enterprise-specific knowledge. Hence, mentoring reflects the reciprocal nature of cooperative employee behaviour that follows from employees' perceptions of their employers' investments in a work environment supportive of intrinsic values and the capacity of the latter to fulfil employees' basic human needs. Therefore, we hypothesise:



*Hypothesis 1:* Employees who experience opportunities for co-mentor consultation are more likely to mentor others

*Hypothesis 2:* Employees who experience supervisory support for their self-initiation are more likely to mentor others

*Hypothesis 3:* Employees who experience organisationally-arranged learning opportunities are more likely to mentor others

### *4.4.2. Hindrance demands*

Hindrance demands comprise two work characteristics: time pressure and organisational restructuring. Time pressure entails employees' perceived (in)ability to fulfil their formal job duties on time. Our decision to classify time pressure as a hindrance demand is based on prominent mentoring studies showing that mentors perceive time pressure as a contextual condition that inhibits mentoring or makes it less attractive or demanding (Allen, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 1997a; Billett, 2003). This argumentation agrees with the perspective of Van Emmerik *et al.* (2012) referred to earlier, namely that employees'

actions are believed to emanate from their own perceptions rather than from any objective situation. Our theoretical point of departure is that time pressure hinders employees from feeling efficacious in their daily work surroundings, thereby frustrating their need for competence. Relatedly, as external job pressures rob employees of their sense of volition, time pressure likely also thwarts employees' need for autonomy. In short, time pressure renders mentoring unrewarding and cost-intensive (Ragins and Scandura, 1999). This is in line with the way hindrance demands, as need barriers, threaten the cost-benefit equilibrium upon which optimal worker functioning is supposed to rest. Accordingly, we propose:

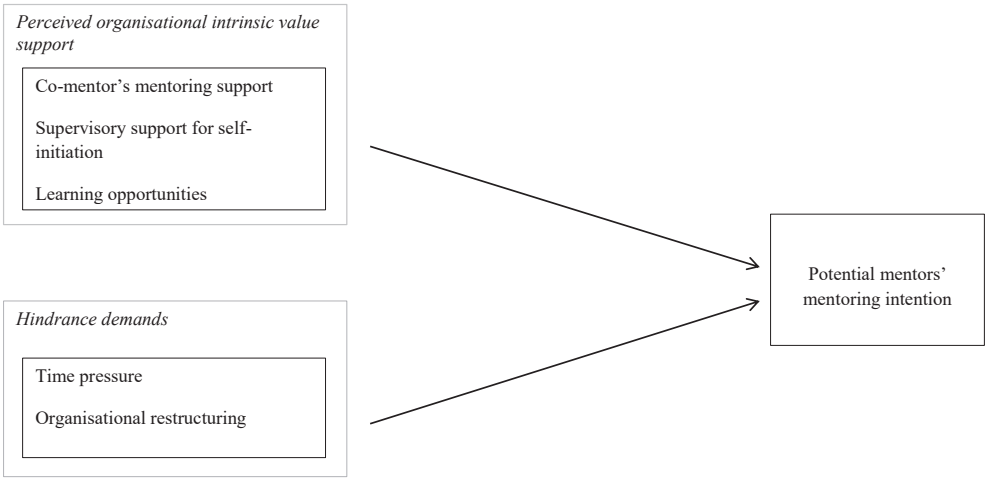
> *Hypothesis 4:* Employees who experience time pressure are less likely to mentor others

A similar frustration may arise when employees' jobs are in jeopardy due to perceptions of organisational restructuring with forced lay-offs. Employees who are aware of their employers' efforts to flatten the management structure might be less inclined to volitionally assume the mentoring role because of their tempered feelings of organisational bonding. Theoretically, a reorganisation with compulsory redundancies signals a breach of the psychological contract, defined as *"employees' beliefs concerning mutual obligations between the employee and the organization"* (Bal *et al.*, 2008: 144). A contract breach distorts the cost-benefit equilibrium upon which fair social exchange relationships are predicated, and therefore constitutes a hindrance demand at the interpersonal (employee-employer) level. As a hindrance demand, a contract breach frustrates basic human need fulfilment and therefore, tempers employees' optimal functioning or willingness to engage in pro-organisational activities as one way to restore the cost-benefit equilibrium. This reasoning leads to the prediction that organisational restructuring dampens employees' motivation to informally mentor junior colleagues, since mentoring is a pro-organisational activity. In this context, Allen, Poteet and Burroughs (1997a) already have suggested that organisational restructuring obstructs the initiation of informal mentorships. Therefore, we propose:

> *Hypothesis 5:* Employees who have recently experienced or are experiencing an organisational restructuring are less likely to mentor others

Figure 4.1 depicts our theoretical framework.

**Figure 4.1: Proposed theoretical framework**




## 4.5. Method

### *4.5.1. Procedure and participants*

We conducted a vignette study to test our hypotheses. Before collecting the data, we performed a pilot study and consulted a bilingual speaker to check the Dutch translations of the English questionnaire items. Fifty-seven respondents took part in our pilot study, which exceeds the minimum threshold of 30 for a valid assessment of the internal consistency of latent constructs (Yurdugül, 2008). Only employed persons with an occupational tenure of more than 10 years participated in our pilot study and completed the final questionnaire. This selection criterion was grounded in the career stage theory of Super (e.g., Aryee *et al.*, 1994). According to this theory, respondents with an occupational tenure of more than 10 years fit the maintenance stage, a period in one's professional career in which employees can be considered experts in their occupational field and may be willing to mentor junior staff.

Although career stage theories have sometimes been criticised for their reduced utility in predicting mentoring intentions (e.g., Allen, 2003), we adhere to Super's theory (as cited in Aryee *et al.*, 1994) for three reasons. First, in almost all instances, the mentor is defined as a senior employee with abundant experience and extensive (job-related) knowledge. Since we focus on career-related mentoring, occupational expertise is a valuable asset of potential mentors. Second, while most studies on ageing in the workplace uses calendar age as a proxy for career and life stage processes (Froehlich *et al.*, 2015), age and career stage may not be as intimately intertwined as in previous eras. This means that employees of the same age may not be equipped with the same

expert knowledge, and therefore, may not have the same occupational tenure. Finally, and contrary to prior mentoring studies (Allen, 2003; Allen *et al.*, 1997a/b; Janssen *et al.*, 2014; Ragins and Scandura, 1999), we included both managerial and non-managerial employees in our sample. The rationale behind this choice is that efforts to prune managerial jobs (CBS, 2018) may have led to an increased demand for non-managerial employees willing to mentor junior staff.

### *4.5.2. Survey and sample*

After the pilot study, we made some slight amendments to the initial questionnaire – such as the rewording of items accompanying the latent constructs – and invited 2,247 respondents who fit the target group to complete the final questionnaire. The respondents were part of the PanelClix online panel. PanelClix owns the largest active panel in the Netherlands, is ISO-26326 certified and meets the rules of conduct specified by ESOMAR, the global representative of market research agencies. To ensure the quality, representativeness and integrity of its panel, PanelClix imposes high-quality standards upon its panel by continuously monitoring active membership and any fraudulent behaviour.

We explained the study's objectives to respondents prior to their completing the questionnaire, and ensured confidentiality of information and anonymity of responses. Respondents could supply an email address if they were interested in receiving the outcomes of the study. Although we regarded this opportunity as an excellent means to boost the response rate, it may have led to a small yet uncontrollable bias because it may have particularly allured individuals whose career was at stake to take part. Respondents who successfully completed the survey received an incentive ranging from 0,98 to 1,30 euro, depending on the time spent. Although this reward may have made respondents feel appreciated, we do not consider it high enough to have induced individuals to take part.

The survey was open for eight weeks (October-November 2017). To boost the response rate, reminders were sent after six weeks. A total of 998 respondents completed the questionnaire. 845 of them provided reliable and usable information (a response rate of 38%). Although lower than average for questionnaires administered to individuals, this rate is still within the accepted range (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). Data from these 845 respondents were stored in a secured computer system and linked to the large-scale labour market research – "Arbeidsmarkt GedragsOnderzoek" – of Intelligence Group, a Dutch data and tech agency specialising in recruitment, employability and labour market communication. This link adds a survey component to our vignette study by enabling us to obtain respondent-specific statistics. That, we presume, enhances the external validity of the method used.

Upon completion of the fieldwork, we matched these statistics with the

respondents' answers in the vignette study. We found the average occupational tenure was 23 years (*SD=8.2*) and the average organisational tenure was 18 years (*SD=10.3*). Respondents were on average 49 years old, predominantly male (58%), non-managerial (68%) and with medium (39%) or higher (46%) education levels (Table 4.1). Half of them held an occupation in which the successorship of craftsmen knowledge is important for sustainable organisational growth. Examples include IT/R&D/engineering (15%), health care (15%), education (9%) and finance (5%).

Although our sample was heterogeneous in nature, it was not representative of the Dutch labour force; however, that heterogeneity was preferable because we aimed to assess the influence of organisational conditions on mentoring intentions rather than to draw conclusions about the share of Dutch employees willing to mentor junior staff.

### *4.5.3. Dependent variable: mentoring intentions*

Respondents read a short introductory text detailing the nature and form of mentoring studied. Drawing upon Noe (1988), Allen (2003) and Allen *et al.* (1997a), we described mentoring as "a volitional activity that transcends formal job requirements and is undertaken for the purpose of sharing job-related knowledge with the protégé and assisting the latter in achieving career advancement" (i.e., informal career support). After the introductory text, each respondent was randomly assigned three vignettes and asked to what extent they would be willing to become a mentor based on the work situation listed and also with a protégé as imagined. Scale anchors ranged from 0 (very unlikely) to 10 (very likely) to assume the mentoring role. We also asked respondents to assess how well the hypothetical work situation in each vignette represented a real-life work scenario, using an 11-point scale, varying from 0 (very unrealistic) to 10 (very realistic).

### *4.5.4. Independent variables: vignette conditions*

We defined five vignette conditions (a "1" indicating that the condition was present and a "0" indicating it was absent). The first condition was co-mentor support, which assessed whether employees had the opportunity to consult co-mentors for help (a parallel item in the short version POS survey is: *"help is available from the organization when I have a problem"*; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986: 502). The second condition was supervisory support for self-initiation, which measured whether supervisors supported employees' volitional "intended" decisions to invest additional time in mentoring (a parallel condition of autonomy-supportive work climates (SDT) is: supervisors who […] *"encourage self-initiation"*; Gagné and Deci, 2005: 355). Our third condition, learning opportunities, assessed the means for self-development opportunities (a parallel item of the Aspiration Index (SDT) is: organisational importance […] *"to invest in self-development"*; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014: 1909). Fourth, we discerned time pressure. This condition assessed whether employees were able to fulfil their primary job duties on time. We worded this

condition based on mentors' statements highlighting the time commitments they faced in their work (Allen *et al.*, 1997a; Billett, 2003; Ragins and Scandura, 1999). The final condition was organisational restructuring, which measured whether the organisation went through a reorganisation with compulsory redundancies during the preceding year. We worded this condition based on the operationalisation of restructuring used in the Dutch *Study on Transitions in Employment, Ability and Motivation* (Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2014), which followed the stem "Did the company you work for carry out a reorganisation (with compulsory redundancies) in the past 12 months?"

As each condition was dichotomous in nature, we discerned a total of 32 (2*2*2*2*2) unique combinations of vignette conditions. In fact, with the inclusion of two control conditions (each assessed with a dichotomous variable), 128 unique combinations were possible. However, in vignette studies, it is not necessary that respondents judge all combinations (Wallander, 2009), which is why each respondent received a sample of vignettes. All levels of the vignette conditions (the "ones" and "zeros") had the same likelihood of being included in the sample.

### *4.5.5. Control variables: the individual level*

Employee characteristics previously found to affect the dependent variable of interest (i.e., mentoring intention) were included as potential confounders. First, and following Allen (2003), we adjusted for *age* (years), *occupational tenure* (years) and *hierarchical plateauing* (four items; e.g., "The likelihood that I will get ahead in my organization is limited"; α=.86). Second, and drawing upon Allen *et al.* (1997b), Allen (2003) and Allen and Eby (2003), we controlled for *experience as a protégé* ("In my work life, I have had [some number of] mentor(s)"; recoded into a dummy variable of 0=no mentors or 1=one or more) and *experience as a mentor*. We assessed the latter variable with the question "During your career, has there been an individual who you have taken a personal interest in; who you have guided, sponsored, or otherwise had a positive and significant influence on their professional career development? In other words, have you ever been a mentor?" Anchors were 0=no and 1=yes. Third, and drawing upon Allen *et al.* (1997b) and Allen (2003; 2007), we focussed on *other-oriented empathy* (four items; e.g., "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them"; α=.66), *locus of control* (four items; e.g., "When I get what I want, it's usually because I worked hard for it"; α=.68) and *helpfulness* (four items; e.g., "I have done volunteer work for a charity"; α=.68). Finally, and relying upon Allen *et al.* (1997b), Allen (2003) and Ragins and Cotton (1993), we concentrated on *developmental proactivity* (five items; e.g., "I think about how I can keep doing a good job in the future"; α=.76), *gender* (0=male; 1=female), *educational attainment* (1=(not) finished primary school through 6=master/PhD; normally distributed) and *leadership position* (0=no; 1=yes) as demographic and labour market controls.

Except for helpfulness, which was assessed with response categories varying from 1 (never) to 5 (very often), all composite measures were scored using five-point Likert-type response formats ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We calculated the mean of the items to obtain scale scores. Table 4.1 provides the descriptive statistics for the individual-level control variables.

To reduce the survey length and to prevent respondent fatigue, we used shortened versions of well-established scales to measure the five latent constructs (hierarchical plateauing, other-oriented empathy, locus of control, helpfulness and developmental proactivity). We selected items based on factor loadings as well as content validity. To validate factor structure, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis using the Satorra-Bentler scaled $\chi^2$ test statistic and robust standard errors to address non-normality of some of the items in the analysis. To examine discriminant validity, we compared the hypothesised five-factor model with two three-factor models and a one-factor model. A $\chi^2$/df-ratio beneath 3, a CFI and TLI of at least .90 and a RMSEA of up to .08 are indicative of a plausible model fit (e.g., Hox, 2010). Estimates from R lavaan revealed that the five-factor model provided the best fit to the data, with all alternative models showing a significant deterioration in model fit in comparison (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics for the individual-level control variables**

| | Mean | SD | Range | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. | 11. | 12. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Age (years) | 49.15 | 8.62 | 29-69 | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Occupational tenure (years) | 22.88 | 8.20 | 11-50 | .620** | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Hierarchical plateauing | 3.62 | 0.82 | 1-5 | .169** | .131** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Experience as a mentor (1=yes) | 0.61 | | 0/1 | .123** | .106** | -.118** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Experience as a protégé (1=yes) | 0.66 | | 0/1 | -.052 | -.025 | -.147** | .454** | - | | | | | | | |
| 6. Other-oriented empathy | 3.51 | 0.56 | 1.25-5 | .034 | -.020 | .063 | .063 | .010 | - | | | | | | |
| 7. Locus of control | 3.73 | 0.51 | 2-5 | -.035 | .017 | -.137** | .148** | .078* | .069* | - | | | | | |
| 8. Helpfulness | 3.08 | 0.74 | 1-5 | .046 | -.005 | -.006 | .177** | .107** | .342** | .049 | - | | | | |
| 9. Developmental proactivity | 3.70 | 0.52 | 1.60-5 | -.002 | -.012 | -.245** | .269** | .173** | .182** | .388** | .240** | - | | | |
| 10. Gender (1=female) | 0.42 | | 0/1 | -.178** | -.169** | .059 | -.032 | -.029 | .177** | .004 | .126** | .050 | - | | |
| 11. Educational attainment | 4.13 | 1.30 | 1-6 | -.033 | -.093** | .006 | .172** | .044 | .038 | .042 | .200** | .184** | .060 | - | |
| 12. Leadership position (1=yes) | 0.32 | | 0/1 | .125** | .072* | -.193** | .230** | .108** | .014 | .088* | .093** | .156** | -.202** | .136** | - |

*Notes:* *p<0.05; **p<0.01. Pearson correlation used for age, occupational tenure, experience as a mentor, experience as a protégé, gender and leadership position. Spearman correlation used in all other cases.
Due to missing values on educational attainment, the N fluctuates between N=842 and N=845.

**Table 4.2: Confirmatory factor analysis: fit indices for the hypothesised model and three alternative models**

| | $\chi^2$ | *df* | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | Comparison | $\Delta\chi^2$ *(Δdf)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1: 5 factors (hypothesised model) | 493.02 | 179 | .93 | .92 | .05 | | |
| Model 2: 3 factors (prosocial personality model)[1] | 1254.30 | 186 | .76 | .73 | .08 | MM2-MM1 | 590.21 (7)* |
| Model 3: 3 factors (prosocial - proactive personality model)[2] | 925.88 | 186 | .84 | .81 | .07 | MM3-MM1 | 321.00 (7)* |
| Model 4: 1 factor (Harman's model) | 2937.12 | 189 | .39 | .32 | .13 | MM4-MM1 | 1795.10 (10)* |

*Notes:* *p<0.001. N=845.
$\chi^2$=Maximum Likelihood chi-square; scaled chi-square difference test has been performed.
CFI=Comparative Fit Index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.
[1]In this second model, we assume items underlying other-oriented empathy, locus of control and helpfulness to load onto a common factor "prosocial personality".
[2]In this third model, we assume items underlying other-oriented empathy and helpfulness to load onto a common factor "prosocial personality" and the items accompanying locus of control and developmental proactivity to load onto a common factor "proactive personality".

### *4.5.6. Control conditions: the vignette level*

To mask our experimental (vignette) conditions, we included two control conditions in our vignettes: protégé willingness to learn and protégé-mentor similarity. Both aspects appeared to affect a mentor's decision to enter into a mentorship with a particular protégé (Allen, 2004; Allen *et al.*, 1997a). We operationalised protégé willingness to learn with a dichotomous variable: 1=willing to learn and 0=unwilling to learn. Likewise, we measured protégé-mentor similarity as 1=the protégé reminds the mentor of himself or herself early in his or her career and 0=this is not the case. We randomly varied the order of the vignette and control conditions across the vignettes to avoid a situation in which the order might affect the outcome. Table 4.3 provides a description of our vignette and control conditions. Appendix I shows an example of a vignette.

**Table 4.3: Control conditions, experimental conditions, their levels and their operationalisation**

| Conditions | Levels | Operationalisation |
|---|---|---|
| *Control conditions* | | |
| Protégé willingness to learn | Protégé willing to learn | 1 |
| | Protégé not willing to learn | 0 (ref) |
| Protégé-mentor similarity | Protégé-mentor similarity | 1 |
| | Protégé-mentor dissimilarity | 0 (ref) |
| *Experimental conditions* | | |
| Co-mentor's mentoring support | Being able to consult co-mentors if necessary | 1 |
| | Being unable to consult co-mentors if necessary | 0 (ref) |
| Supervisory support for self-initiation | Supervisory support for volitional mentoring | 1 |
| | Absence of supervisory support for volitional mentoring | 0 (ref) |
| Learning opportunities | Opportunities for self-development | 1 |
| | No opportunities for self-development | 0 (ref) |
| Time pressure | Failure to fulfil formal job duties on time | 1 |
| | Being able to fulfil formal job duties on time | 0 (ref) |
| Organisational restructuring | Experienced a reorganisation with compulsory redundancies during past 12 months | 1 |
| | Not experienced a reorganisation with compulsory redundancies during past 12 months | 0 (ref) |

### *4.5.7. Analytical strategy*

Since vignettes were clustered within employees, we performed a multilevel analysis. First, a null-model was specified in which we estimated errors at both the vignette and the employee levels. This two-level model leads to the intra-class correlation as a measure for the dependence of errors, which enabled us to include predictors at both the vignette and the employee levels without inflating the Type I error rate. Second, we entered the individual-level control variables into the equation (Model 1a). Continuous control variables were grand mean centred to facilitate parameter interpretation and to address collinearity. Next, we included the control conditions (Model 1b), followed by the vignette conditions in a final step (Model 2). We used the difference in the -2*log likelihood (the deviance) to assess model fit and relied upon the AIC to address model complexity. In addition, we calculated the $R^2$ as a measure of effect size using the formulae provided by Hox (2010): $R_1^2=(\sigma^2eb- \sigma^2en/ \sigma^2eb)$ and $R_2^2=(\sigma^2\mu0b- \sigma^2\mu0n/ \sigma^2\mu0b)$.

We ran our multilevel model twice. In the first run, we relied upon the final sample of 845 respondents (N=2,520 vignettes, Table 4.4) to test our expectations. In the second run, we used a sample in which we excluded the vignettes we deemed most unrealistic. Such a run enables us to improve the credibility of the vignette conditions presented. Simpson and Piquero (2002) adopted a similar strategy to respond to the

general criticism that situations in vignettes may lack realism (Wallander, 2009), which might jeopardise the external validity of the results. In practice, we analysed respondents' assessments of whether the vignettes were realistic, and excluded those with a score more than one standard deviation below the mean *(M=4.5; SD=2.7)* from the analysis. The rerun (N=2,078 vignettes) revealed negligible differences in parameter estimates, indicating that the vignette results from the first run are robust against threats of external validity. Appendix II presents the results of the second run.

## 4.6. Results

### *4.6.1. Multilevel results*

Table 4.4 displays the results from our first multilevel analysis for employees' mentoring intention. The null-model showed significant variability in intentions to mentor at both the employee ($\sigma^2\mu0=3.35$, $p<.001$) and the vignette level ($\sigma^2e=3.12$, $p<.001$). Adding the level-2 individual-level control variables in Model 1a significantly improved the model fit ($\chi^2(7)=130.48$, $p<.001$). Inclusion of our control conditions in Model 1b further enhanced model fit ($\chi^2(2)=297.69$, $p<.001$) and lowered the level-1 variance by 15% compared with the null-model. In Model 2, the vignette conditions were included in the equation, which led to a significant drop in the -2*log likelihood, a substantially lower AIC compared with the former models and an additional reduction in the level-1 variance of 10% (25% compared with the null-model). These indices clearly indicate that our vignette conditions as a set uniquely contributed to the prediction of mentoring intent.

Hypothesis 1 assumes a greater willingness to mentor junior staff among those who can consult co-mentors. We found a significant and positive parameter estimate for co-mentor support ($b=.41$, $p<.001$), confirming our first hypothesis. Hypothesis 2 predicts a greater readiness to mentor junior colleagues when supervisors support employees' volitional "intended" decisions to become mentors. Further, hypothesis 3 posits a higher intention to pass along job-related expertise to entry-level employees among those who are able to invest in self-development. As shown in Table 4.4, we observed positive and significant parameter coefficients for both supervisors' support for employees' self-initiation ($b=.78$, $p<.001$) and learning opportunities ($b=.40$, $p<.001$), corroborating both hypotheses 2 and 3. Hypothesis 4 states that mentoring intentions are negatively associated with time pressure, that is, a sheer lack of time in daily functioning. Table 4.4 shows a negative and significant coefficient for time pressure ($b=-.56$, $p<.001$), supporting hypothesis 4. According to hypothesis 5, a negative association exists between mentoring intentions and organisational restructuring, that is, reorganisations with forced lay-offs. The corresponding, statistically significant parameter estimate was negative ($b=-.19$, $p<.01$), corroborating hypothesis 5.

Our control variables revealed a pattern of relationships that mostly aligns with previous research. First, experience as a protégé (b=.57, p<.001, Model 1a) was positively associated with willingness to mentor. This finding underscores the importance of reciprocity norms in mentorships: those who have been a protégé are more eager to repay the positive gesture by becoming a mentor themselves. In addition, experience as a mentor (b=.42, p<.01, Model 1a) as well as helpfulness (b=.23, p<.05, Model 1a) positively predicted willingness to mentor, while hierarchical plateauing (b=-.36, p<.001, Model 1a) negatively predicted it. Allen (2003) obtained similar findings. Finally, protégé willingness to learn (b=1.30, p<.001, Model 1b) and protégé-mentor similarity (b=.30, p<.001, Model 1b) appeared to be positive correlates of mentoring intentions at the vignette level, which attests to the role social exchange and similarity-attraction paradigms play in how protégé profiles affect mentoring intentions (Allen, 2007).

**Table 4.4: Results from the multilevel analysis for employees' mentoring intention (first run)**

| | Model 0 | | Model 1a | | Model 1b | | Model 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* |
| **Fixed effects**[1] | | | | | | | | |
| Employee level (level 2)$_a$ | | | | | | | | |
| *Control variables* | | | | | | | | |
| Age (years) | | | .01 | .01 | .01^ | .01 | .02* | .01 |
| Hierarchical plateauing | | | -.36*** | .09 | -.36*** | .09 | -.37*** | .08 |
| Experience as a mentor (1=yes) | | | .42** | .16 | .42** | .16 | .44** | .16 |
| Experience as a protégé (1=yes) | | | .57*** | .16 | .56*** | .16 | .53** | .15 |
| Helpfulness | | | .23* | .10 | .24** | .09 | .23* | .09 |
| Gender (1=female) | | | -.22 | .14 | -.24^ | .14 | -.20 | .14 |
| Developmental proactivity | | | .66*** | .14 | .69*** | .14 | .68*** | .14 |
| Vignette level (level 1) | | | | | | | | |
| *Control conditions* | | | | | | | | |
| Protégé willingness to learn | | | | | 1.30*** | .07 | 1.25*** | .07 |
| Protégé-mentor similarity | | | | | .30*** | .07 | .32*** | .07 |
| *Experimental conditions* | | | | | | | | |
| Co-mentor's mentoring support | | | | | | | .41*** | .07 |
| Supervisory support for self-initiation | | | | | | | .78*** | .07 |
| Learning opportunities | | | | | | | .40*** | .07 |
| Time pressure | | | | | | | -.56*** | .07 |
| Organisational restructuring | | | | | | | -.19** | .07 |
| Intercept | 5.30*** | .07 | 4.76*** | .14 | 3.95*** | .15 | 3.55*** | .17 |
| **Variance-covariance estimates (random effects)**[2] | | | | | | | | |
| $\sigma^2$e | 3.12*** | | 3.12*** | | 2.67*** | | 2.34*** | |
| $\sigma^2\mu 0$ | 3.35*** | | 2.72*** | | 2.71*** | | 2.73*** | |
| -2 Log Likelihood (-2LL) | 11229.19 | | 11098.71 | | 10801.02 | | 10559.54 | |
| $\chi^2$ | | | 130.48*** | | 297.69*** | | 241.48*** | |
| *df* change | | | 7 | | 2 | | 5 | |
| AIC | 11235.19 | | 11118.71 | | 10825.02 | | 10593.54 | |
| $R^2$ level-1 (vignette level) | | | - | | 0.15 | | 0.10 | |
| $R^2$ level-2 (employee level) | | | 0.19 | | - | | - | |

*Notes:* p(rho)= .52; ^p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

N=845 respondents; 2,520 vignettes (15 identical vignettes were dropped from the final analysis).

[1]Maximum Likelihood estimation is used.

[2]Variance components covariance structure used to mimic the composite residual of models 0-2.

$_a$Non-significant coefficients for occupational tenure, other-oriented empathy, locus of control, leadership position and educational attainment are removed for reasons of parsimony and to improve readability.

## 4.7. Discussion and conclusion

This study represents one of the first efforts to understand the relationships between organisational conditions and midcareer and senior employees' willingness to mentor volitionally. Before detailing implications, we should make clear that our conclusions apply particularly to non-managerial employees. We consider this an addition to the literature for two reasons. First, we portray mentoring as a volitional activity. This opens up possibilities to concentrate especially on those who intend to mentor protégés because it is enjoyable. Such a dedicated focus is commendable, as a remaining unanswered question is how non-managerial employees' mentoring intention can be fostered. Second, half the non-managerial subsample is employed in knowledge-intensive industries such as IT/technology, pharmacy/health care or finance. Almost two thirds of them hold an occupation in which intergenerational knowledge transfer is indispensable for sustainable organisational growth, enhancing the utility of our study for scholars interested in knowledge management issues in organisations.

### *4.7.1. Theoretical implications*

A first notable finding is that perceptions of co-mentor consultation, supervisory support for employees' self-initiation and learning opportunities positively predict experienced employees' willingness to volitionally mentor a junior colleague, conceptualised as an exemplary form of Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB). This finding carries two theoretical implications. First, it underlines the importance of a combined Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) perspective in research on pro-organisational behaviour, as it attests to the role *the content* of organisational value support plays in instilling social exchange beliefs in employees. The same "combined" theoretical perspective was adopted by Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, De Witte and Vansteenkiste (2014), who posited and found that favourable perceptions of organisational intrinsic value support strengthen employees' feelings of organisational bonding in that employees search for internal job opportunities. However, whereas Van den Broeck *et al.* (2014) relied on SET and SDT to examine the role of perceived organisational intrinsic value support in optimal *worker* functioning, we used these theories to establish a link between perceived organisational intrinsic value support and optimal *mentor* functioning. In this way, our study is one of the first to show the predictive utility of SDT for studying the mentor-organisation relationship.

Second, from the perspective of SET and Perceived Organisational Support (POS), our finding taps into the work of Baranik, Roling and Eby (2010) and Park, Newman, Zhang, Wu and Hooke (2016), who posited and found that positive perceptions of an organisation's investments in the well-being and development of its personnel enhance organisational commitment and lower turnover intentions among

protégés. However, whereas these researchers drew upon SET and POS to show that social exchange mechanisms apply to the *protégé*-organisation relationship (the latter personified by the mentor), our study suggests that similar reciprocal mechanisms operate in the *mentor*-organisation relationship, a conclusion that has been barely empirically supported because of the field's overwhelming focus on the micro-level.

Regarding the work characteristics, we find a reduced willingness to mentor among those who have recently experienced or are experiencing a reorganisation with compulsory redundancies. Applying SET and SDT, reorganisations with forced lay-offs constitute a psychological contract breach that, as a potential hindrance demand, distorts the cost-benefit equilibrium on which mentoring, as a form of optimal worker functioning, is supposed to rest. This reasoning is consistent with the premise of the "old" psychological contract theory (Pruijt, 2013): employers invest in employment security in exchange for solidarity. If employment security cannot be guaranteed, solidary employee behaviour may not occur.

In addition, our results show a lower general willingness to mentor among those who regularly fail to finish their formal job duties on time. This finding supports the premise of SDT that time pressure, as a potential hindrance demand, blocks optimal worker functioning through failure to meet employees' needs for fellowship, felt competence and self-directedness. However, assuming that mentoring is a form of employee learning, it is interesting to note that time pressure repeatedly has been found to be positively associated with employee learning (e.g., Van Harten, 2016). A possible explanation for the differential effects on learning and mentoring may lie in the scope of these activities: learning can be either in-role or extra-role, while informal mentoring is explicitly extra-role. As such, informal mentoring requires an additional investment in time on top of the efforts expended to meet formal deadlines. To simultaneously fulfil both "duties", employees must exert continuous effort, which ultimately may be draining. From a SET perspective, time pressure increases the costs of mentoring by undermining the equity of exchange on which intentions to mentor are premised. In support of this view, Ragins and Scandura (1999) found a negative association between expected costs (e.g., energy drain) and intentions to informally mentor others. Hence, time pressure can be both detrimental and beneficial for learning-induced behaviour, possibly because of the scope (i.e., in-role versus extra-role) of this behaviour and its direct costs.

Finally, our findings enable us to link mentoring and employability literatures. Roughly a decade of research consistently shows that opportunities for skill usage, social support for workers' well-being and (supervisor) support for workers' development are related to workers' employability, conceptualised as continuous learning and skill acquisition (Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Van Dam, 2004; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012; Van Harten, 2016). As our study indicates, similar factors appear to be associated with general

willingness to mentor. This parallel hints at the conclusion that mentoring represents an important developmental practice. Under this lens, Mullen (1994) referred to mentorships as a bi-directional exchange of information, implying that mentoring brings certain learning benefits to the mentor. Indeed, considering the volatility of knowledge, it is plausible that protégés transfer novel knowledge – mainly advanced technical skills – to their mentors, which enhances the mentors' employability. In this regard, Noe (1988) proposed that mentoring incentivises mentors to overcome a shortage of technical skills. If we view mentoring as an ideal employability enhancement tool, we can conclude – albeit with some reservation – that the employability literature can be an important knowledge reservoir for future endeavours to study mentoring from the mentor's perspective. Theoretical approaches used to understand workers' employability – at least conceptualised in terms of learning and skill acquisition – could serve as critical inputs for subsequent theory building in mentoring research, especially since the employability literature represents a somewhat more mature area of inquiry.

### *4.7.2. Limitations and future research directions*

We acknowledge four limitations to this study and suggest future research directions. First, we limited our attention to the role the organisational context plays in employees' intention to volitionally (i.e., informally) mentor junior colleagues, and it remains unclear whether the same conditions apply to formal mentorships, those in which employees are mandated to participate as part of their formal job descriptions (Allen and Eby, 2003; Eby and Lockwood, 2005). Theoretically, formal mentors abide by negotiated (clearly specified obligations and rights that are part of a formal bargaining process) rather than reciprocity rules of exchange. Mentors are often forcefully (i.e., involuntarily) recruited, which makes formal mentoring a form of controlled rather than autonomous motivation. Therefore, other theoretical mechanisms might underlie employees' intention to formally mentor junior colleagues. To our knowledge, no one has yet identified these mechanisms. To address this gap, future research could simultaneously investigate informal and formal mentorships. In a similar vein, future research could focus on psychosocial instead of career-related mentoring and assesses the extent to which the organisation can influence employees' intention to provide psychosocial assistance to junior colleagues. Research that assesses the organisation's differential role in facilitating these two types of mentoring is relevant because employees' motives to provide them could differ (Allen, 2003).

A second limitation relates to our use of vignettes to measure mentoring decisions. Respondents rated their mentoring intentions based on a hypothetical description of a work situation. As such, planned rather than actual behaviour was examined. Although intentions are widely believed – and accepted – as indicative of actual behaviour (Sheeran, 2002), future research could examine the extent to which

mentoring intentions translate into actual mentoring behaviour.

Third, our data were cross-sectional, which makes it difficult to establish causality. Longitudinal research is relevant to determine unambiguously the direction of the relationships found. However, we derived our hypotheses from well-established theories such as SET (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) and SDT (Gagné and Deci, 2005), which propose that organisational support predicts employee behaviour and concomitant attitudes. Hence, it is plausible that the direction of the hypothesised relations is correct. Nevertheless, future research could adopt a multiple-wave study design to assess the possibility of reversed causation, or the effect mentorships have on their organisational contexts. Such a design may bring more nuance to the cross-sectional studies of Baranik *et al.* (2010) and Park *et al.* (2016), who found that participation in mentorships predicts protégés' POS. As such, their results were in the opposite direction of our findings, namely that POS predicts mentors' participation in mentorships.

Fourth, the hypothesised relationships between our study variables could be more complex than theoretically proposed. A premise underlying SDT is that the salience of basic human needs changes across the lifespan (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This implies that the effect of organisational intrinsic value support on intentions to mentor is different for employees at different life stages. In our data, we only found the effect of supervisory support for self-initiation to significantly vary between employees (not shown), with the slopes for all other facets of organisational intrinsic value support to be fixed. Because including cross-level interaction terms while omitting random slopes (please note that it is uncommon to include non-significant random slopes) leads to underestimated standard errors due to unmodelled heteroskedasticity and unmodelled cluster-correlated errors (Heisig and Schaeffer, 2019), we refrain from performing an additional analysis with life stage as a possible moderator. Nevertheless, future research could examine whether lifespan processes as advanced by lifespan theorists (Baltes *et al.*, 1999) explain the random slope for supervisory support for self-initiation. In line with social exchange and POS theory (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986), future research could also assess whether employees' social exchange ideology moderates the relationship between perceived organisational value support and intentions to mentor.

### *4.7.3. Practical implications*

This study has four implications for employers interested in cost-effective ways to manage enterprise-specific knowledge. First, organisations do a good job when they employ supervisors who are able to applaud their subordinates' intention to engage volitionally in activities beyond their formal duties. Supervisors could make their subordinates aware of their positive attitude towards volitional mentoring by integrating regular dialogues about citizenship activities into the annual employee evaluation cycle.

Second, organisations could benefit from adopting an open-door policy that normalises consultations among mentors. To intensify mentors' social ties and allow interdependence, organisations also can launch initiatives to convene periodic social meetings in which mentors can openly discuss mentoring-related problems, share best practices, offer unambiguous feedback and engage in networking. Such meetings also may provide an ideal platform to share organisational knowledge gleaned from mentoring others. Mentors paired with protégés from different work units or departments may become acquainted with different work methods and organisational politics, which enable them to enhance their organisational sensitivity, self-disclosure and relational skills.

Strengthening employees' feelings of relatedness should not remain limited to relationships between colleagues. As discussed earlier, employees are more eager to mentor in the absence of organisational restructuring. This highlights the importance of a solidary employer-employee relationship – one in which both members are willing to fulfil obligations laid down in the psychological contract. This does not necessarily mean, however, that employers merely offer job security in exchange for solidarity. As our finding for learning opportunities suggests, employers do a great job when they also espouse a development philosophy aimed at continuous learning. To achieve this goal, organisations could foster an "employability culture" (Nauta *et al.*, 2009) that promotes on-the-job experimenting, stimulates personal growth and allots employees sufficient latitude for extra-role developmental activities. This recommendation is supported by an additional analysis on a subsample of experienced employees showing that midcareer and senior employees are more eager to assume the mentoring role if their organisation espouses an employability culture. Such a culture can be especially relevant for senior employees, as it signals that they are valuable assets worth future investments rather than less agile, demanding constituents with outdated qualifications and a reduced need for learning. This signal fosters feelings of organisational bonding, as research has shown (e.g., Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2014).

A final implication concerns the trade-off that should be made between the effort expended in learning and the time needed to fulfil formal and informal duties (i.e., mentoring). As our results indicate, time pressure inhibits mentoring, which underlines the need to unburden employees. A useful practice in this regard is job carving, which means that simple, routine-intensive tasks are trimmed away and delegated to a colleague (Dekker *et al.*, 2013). As long as it does not remove tasks that are the most valuable to employees, job carving may be an excellent way to reduce formal job pressures and thus to pave the way for volitional mentoring.

### *4.7.4. Conclusion*

Organisations can enhance experienced employees' intention to volitionally provide career support to junior colleagues through endorsing intrinsic values and removing hindrance demands. We expanded extant research by combining the literature on SDT, SET and POS to arrive at a parsimonious and theory-driven model of the organisational antecedents of general willingness to mentor. We tested this model using a semi-experimental design. Our results show that practitioners could deploy HR instruments such as co-mentor consultation, managerial support for volitional functioning and learning opportunities to manage enterprise-specific knowledge through mentoring.

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# Appendices

### Appendix I: Example of a vignette

Imagine: you become a mentor of a less experienced colleague, called the protégé. As a mentor, you transfer job-related knowledge to the protégé. You also suggest new ideas and assist the protégé in achieving career advancement. You volitionally assume the mentoring role beyond your formal job duties and don't get paid for your role. You do have, however, latitude over your choice of a protégé. One important goal of mentoring is that you help your organisation preserve enterprise-specific knowledge accumulated over the years.

You fulfil your mentoring role in the following work situation:

- You are able to consult co-mentors if necessary
- Your protégé is willing to learn
- Your supervisor supports volitional mentoring
- Your organisation offers no opportunities for self-development
- You regularly fail to fulfil formal job duties on time
- Your protégé doesn't remind you of yourself early in your career
- Your organisation carried out a reorganisation with compulsory redundancies during the past 12 months

To what extent are you willing to become a mentor, given the work situation imagined?

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Very unlikely Very likely

To what extent does the work situation described above represent a real-life work scenario for you?

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Very unrealistic Very realistic

**Appendix II: Results from the multilevel analysis for employees' mentoring intention (second run)**

| | Model 0 | | Model 1a | | Model 1b | | Model 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* | *b* | *s.e.* |
| **Fixed effects[1]** | | | | | | | | |
| Employee level (level 2)[a] | | | | | | | | |
| *Control variables* | | | | | | | | |
| Age (years) | | | .02* | .01 | .02** | .01 | .02** | .01 |
| Hierarchical plateauing | | | -.26** | .08 | -.27** | .08 | -.27** | .08 |
| Experience as a mentor (1=yes) | | | .33* | .15 | .33* | .15 | .34* | .15 |
| Experience as a protégé (1=yes) | | | .32* | .15 | .34* | .15 | .35* | .15 |
| Helpfulness | | | .19* | .09 | .22* | .09 | .21* | .09 |
| Gender (1=female) | | | -.16 | .13 | -.20 | .13 | -.16 | .13 |
| Developmental proactivity | | | .67*** | .14 | .69*** | .14 | .68*** | .14 |
| Vignette level (level 1) | | | | | | | | |
| *Control conditions* | | | | | | | | |
| Protégé willingness to learn | | | | | 1.14*** | .07 | 1.11*** | .07 |
| Protégé-mentor similarity | | | | | .13^ | .07 | .15* | .07 |
| *Experimental conditions* | | | | | | | | |
| Co-mentor's mentoring support | | | | | | | .35*** | .07 |
| Supervisory support for self-initiation | | | | | | | .62*** | .07 |
| Learning opportunities | | | | | | | .32*** | .07 |
| Time pressure | | | | | | | -.52*** | .07 |
| Organisational restructuring | | | | | | | -.16* | .07 |
| Intercept | 5.72*** | .07 | 5.32*** | .14 | 4.64*** | .15 | 4.31*** | .16 |
| **Variance-covariance estimates (random effects)[2]** | | | | | | | | |
| $\sigma^2$e | 2.46*** | | 2.46*** | | 2.13*** | | 1.90*** | |
| $\sigma^2\mu 0$ | 2.51*** | | 2.11*** | | 2.12*** | | 2.15*** | |
| -2 Log Likelihood (-2LL) | 8767.47 | | 8672.62 | | 8450.46 | | 8282.71 | |
| $\chi^2$ | | | 94.85*** | | 222.16*** | | 167.75*** | |
| *df* change | | | 7 | | 2 | | 5 | |
| AIC | 8773.47 | | 8692.62 | | 8474.46 | | 8316.71 | |
| $R^2$ level-1 (vignette level) | | | - | | 0.13 | | 0.10 | |
| $R^2$ level-2 (employee level) | | | 0.16 | | - | | - | |

*Notes:* p(rho)= .51; ^p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
2,078 vignettes (442 vignettes were dropped from the analysis since they were deemed most unrealistic).
[1]Maximum Likelihood estimation is used.
[2]Variance components covariance structure used to mimic the composite residual of models 0-2.
[a]Non-significant coefficients for occupational tenure, other-oriented empathy, locus of control, leadership position and educational attainment are removed for reasons of parsimony and to improve readability.

# Chapter 5

## The benefits of mentoring accruing to the mentor: A self-determination approach*


### Abstract

This study develops and tests a model in which mentorship quality and personal learning (relational job learning and personal skill development) mediate the relationship between mentorship type (formal versus informal mentoring) and mentors' perceived employment opportunities. Relying upon Self-Determination Theory (SDT), we portray informal mentoring as an exemplary form of autonomous motivation that predicts higher levels of mentorship quality as perceived by mentors. We then posit that perceived mentorship quality enhances mentors' personal learning and subsequent employment opportunities. We tested our hypotheses on a heterogeneous sample of Dutch employees ages 31 to 69. Results reveal that mentorship quality and relational job learning mediate the relationship between mentorship type and perceived employment opportunities, but we cannot infer a full mediation effect for personal skill development. These findings assign a prominent place to mentorship quality as a mechanism by which mentors gain from mentoring, and thus have implications for theory building on mentoring processes from the mentor's perspective.



*Keywords:*
Mentorship type
Mentorship quality
Personal learning
Employment opportunities
Self-Determination Theory
Midcareer and senior employees


**This chapter is co-authored by Ferry Koster. The results section is co-authored by Caspar van Lissa.*

## 5.1. Introduction

Mentoring can be considered an important vehicle for mentors' career or employment opportunities (Bozionelos, 2004; Ghosh and Reio, 2013); however, the theoretical mechanisms linking mentoring to mentors' employment benefits are largely unknown. This knowledge deficiency leaves a notable gap in the literature, since it curtails our understanding of the processes by which mentors gain from mentoring.

This study examines *how* mentors benefit from mentoring by relying upon Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to assume that mentorship quality and personal learning are intervening mechanisms in the relationship between mentorship type (formal versus informal mentoring) and mentors' employment opportunities. The point of departure is that informal mentoring constitutes an exemplary form of autonomous motivation that incentivises mentors and protégés to collaborate, a core component of high-quality mentoring, in order to strive for mutual benefits. Although the mentoring literature hints at this mediated model, no research combines all steps in a single study.

This study's contributions to the literature on mentoring benefits are twofold. First, we examine mentorship quality as a crucial intervening mechanism in the link between mentorship type and mentors' employment opportunities. Our emphasis on mentorship quality ties in with a recent shift in paradigm in which mentorships are equated with an interactive learning platform in which mentors and protégés mutually support each other, as acknowledged by Relational Mentoring Theory (RMT; Fletcher and Ragins, 2007). Second, we rely on SDT (Gagné and Deci, 2005) to develop a theory-driven model of *how* mentors benefit from mentoring. Using SDT as a theoretical lens enables us to provide a fertile basis for future research on mentoring benefits accruing to the mentor.

## 5.2. Theory and hypotheses

Scholarly studies on mentoring and mentoring benefits provide a three-step basis for a theory of how mentoring may affect career or employment opportunities. First, research has posited that mentorship type, or the structure that governs the mentorship, affects mentorship quality (Allen and Eby, 2003; Ragins, 2012). Second, research has hypothesised that mentorship quality impacts upon mentors' personal learning (Mao *et al.*, 2016). Third, research has proposed that the acquisition of relational skills and competencies, core elements of personal learning, enhances mentors' career or employment opportunities (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007; Ghosh and Reio, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2009). Before we detail each step, we briefly clarify the theoretical underpinnings of mentorship quality to illuminate the link between quality and mentorship type that SDT predicts.

### *5.2.1. Perceived mentorship quality*

We define perceived mentorship quality as mentors' perceptions of their mentorships as being mutually beneficial, satisfying and effective (Allen and Eby, 2003; Mao *et al.*, 2016). High-quality mentoring is characterised by mutual respect (admiration for each other's qualities), support, shared influence and relational depth (Ragins, 2012). As such, high-quality mentoring can be studied through the lens of relational mentoring, which is generally conceptualised as *"an interdependent and generative developmental relationship that promotes mutual growth, learning and development within the career context"* (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007: 374). Only recently has high-quality mentoring captured the interest of the scientific community (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007; Ragins, 2012). With the focus on mutuality, relational mentoring expands – yet does not defy – traditional mentoring, which views a mentorship as a unidirectional, hierarchical relationship in which the mentor assists the protégé.

Metaphorically expressed, high-quality mentoring can be equated with an interactive learning platform, in which mentors and protégés actively collaborate and strive for mutual benefits. (Non-)expert roles are exchangeable, implying that the mentor-protégé relationship is bi-directional and non-hierarchical in nature. Support is based on needs without apparent reward, rather than on transactional exchanges (Ragins, 2012). Despite the absence of exchange rules, mentors and protégés feel responsible for each other's growth (Liu *et al.*, 2009; Ragins, 2012). Based on these distinctive features, mentorship quality is often construed as an important component of mentorship effectiveness (Allen and Eby, 2003).

The perception of high-quality mentoring as an interactive forum in which mentors and protégés constructively help each other enables us to study high-quality mentoring through the lens of Organisational Citizenship Behaviour targeted at Individuals, abbreviated as OCB-I, or *"(cooperative) behavior directed at specific individuals in the organization"* (Koster, 2005: 54). In essence, high-quality mentoring is a form of altruism, or behaviour that benefits specific others (e.g., co-workers), which conceptually underpins OCB-I (Koster, 2005). According to Williams and Anderson (1991), OCB-I constitutes a particular dimension of the better researched concept of OCB (*i.e., "Organisational Citizenship Behaviour targeted at Organisations" – also OCB-O*), which refers to cooperative employee behaviour that falls beyond the formal reward system and is supposed to benefit the organisation (Organ, 1988). To date, OCB (e.g., OCB-I) has been widely studied through the lens of social exchange norms (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). According to initial research, however, OCB (e.g., OCB-I) is not necessarily guided by social exchange norms[22]. This leads us to conclude that high-quality mentoring, reflecting co-worker solidarity devoid of clearly specified social exchange norms, could

22 By definition (Organ, 1988: 4), OCB is *"a matter of personal choice"*, which leads us to conclude that OCB is not necessarily reciprocal in nature, and thus, not *per se* contingent on the positive gesture of the person to whom the solidary behaviour is directed.

be subsumed under the denominator of OCB-I. This view of high-quality mentoring as an exemplary form of OCB-I is crucial to understanding the role that mentorship type may play in boosting high-quality mentoring, as SDT postulates.

### *5.2.2. Mentorship type and perceived mentorship quality*

Traditionally, mentorships may be structured as formal or informal, and this structure or mentorship type is considered an important antecedent of mentorship quality (Allen and Eby, 2003; Ragins, 2012). Informal mentorships arise spontaneously, with mentors entering the relationship wholly volitionally (Allen, 2003). Because of this feature, mentors often have considerable latitude in selecting a particular protégé (Allen, 2004). In most instances, the mentorship lasts a relatively long time, usually three to five years (Ragins, 2012). During that period, goals and expectations are often loosely defined. In contrast, formal mentorships are organisationally mandated and officially launched. Although some might volunteer, most mentors are externally appointed and forcefully recruited. Third parties pair mentors with protégés, which can render the relationship superficial and impersonal. Formal mentorships often span a short time period, ranging from six months to one year (Allen and Eby, 2003; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 2012). The goals and expectations are usually clearly specified.

These dual types of mentorship align with SDT's distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation. We contend that informal mentoring is a prototype of autonomous motivation, and formal mentoring represents an exemplary form of controlled motivation. According to SDT, autonomous motivation refers to actions that are willingly undertaken and set in motion out of personal choice. Therefore, individuals who are autonomously motivated are posited to experience volition. As previously discussed, informal mentors act volitionally and without being told to do so – i.e., they "spontaneously" start a mentorship – , which justifies our portrayal of informal mentoring as a set of autonomously pursued actions. In contrast, controlled motivation denotes feelings of being forced to undertake certain activities. Externally regulated extrinsic motivation – or behaviour […] *"initiated […] by contingencies external to the person"* (Gagné and Deci, 2005: 334) – is prototypically controlled. As noted above, formal mentors act in response to an external request. This request may not be fully endorsed by mentors, suggesting that they fulfil duties imposed upon them. Consequently, formal mentoring may instil externally induced feelings of coercion in mentors, which are key facets of controlled motivation.

Based on the classification of mentorship type according to SDT's forms of motivation, we expect that informal mentors experience their mentorships to be of higher quality than formal mentors do. We reason that, as a form of autonomous motivation, informal mentoring facilitates citizenship-related activities that are central to high-quality mentoring. More precisely, we posit that mentors and protégés who

participate in freely chosen, close interpersonal mentorships are intrinsically motivated to explore common interests and develop mutual respect. As a precondition for shared influence (Ragins, 2012), mutual respect leads parties to believe that the other party brings something of value to the mentoring relationship, thereby encouraging parties to rely on each other for assistance. Because of this feature, informal mentorships lay a solid foundation for mutual support and cooperation, and over time they are likely to develop into mutually satisfying, interactive forums in which mentors experience a win-win situation. A similar line of thinking is adopted in the parent-child and friendship literature in which intimate interpersonal bonds pave the way for mutual commitment, respect and support (Gagné and Deci, 2005).

In contrast, the forced and impersonal nature of formal mentorships may make it less likely that parties experience mutual commitment, thereby inducing them to focus on *independence* rather than *interdependence*. In this regard, SDT researchers (Gagné and Deci, 2005) proposed that controlled motivation inhibits participation in citizenship-related activities among those whose behaviour is regulated. Given the portrayal of high-quality mentoring as a citizenship activity, this suggests that formal mentoring, which seeks to control mentors, results in lower levels of mentorship quality as perceived by mentors. Following these theoretical considerations, we propose:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Informal mentors perceive their mentorships to be of higher quality than formal mentors do

### *5.2.3. Perceived mentorship quality and personal learning*

Following Lankau and Scandura (2002: 780), we define personal learning as *"the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and competencies that contribute to mentors' personal development"*. Personal learning can be partitioned into two learning dimensions: relational job learning and personal skill development. Relational job learning enables mentors to understand the wider organisational and departmental contexts of their jobs and how they connect to others. It encompasses skills such as organisational awareness, feedback and self-disclosure. Personal skill development comprises the skillset needed to engage in smooth interpersonal relationships and includes empathy, self-reflection and effective communication (e.g., active listening). Personal learning skills are transferable; that is, they are useful across occupations, organisations and industries. Transferable skills are particularly valuable in today's volatile economy where prescheduled intra-organisational careers are no longer the prerogative for many. Against this background, DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) used the concept of the "boundaryless career" to refer to a career attitude in which employees view organisational settings as contingent and replaceable.

By definition, high-quality mentorships have learning enhancing properties. This idea is consistent with the premise of RMT (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007) that high-quality mentorships pave the way for mutual (i.e., bi-directional) learning. More precisely, we predict that through the mutual respect inherent in high-quality mentorships, mentors are pushed out of their traditional role as teachers and casted into the dual role of teachers and learners. In this dual role, mentors are posited to become conducive to their protégés' perspectives on the job and role in the department or organisation as a whole. Relational depth can facilitate this process of "mutual exposure", as it reduces the burden mentors may initially feel to seek their protégés' guidance. In support of this argument, Mao, Kwan, Chiu and Zhang (2016) suggested that high-quality mentoring stimulates mentors to *"value the experiences of others"* (Mao *et al.*, 2016: 82). Appreciating and eventually absorbing protégés' perspectives likely enables mentors to better understand the interconnected nature of their jobs and their position in the corporate hierarchy, thereby promoting self-disclosure and organisational awareness. Therefore, we expect high-quality mentoring to enhance mentors' relational job learning. Accordingly, we propose:

> *Hypothesis 2a:* Mentors' perceived mentorship quality is positively related to their relational job learning

Openness to protégés' experiences may also enable mentors to obtain valuable job-related feedback and to expand their way of thinking, thereby enhancing self-reflection. Indeed, it is plausible that protégés are equipped with advanced (technical) skills, the dissemination of which keeps mentors up-to-date with the latest job-related developments. Also, mentors are able to brush up their communication skills as they engage in enduring interactions. Finally, through relational depth, mentors learn to empathise with others. Taken together, we assume high-quality mentoring also to increase mentors' personal skill development. Accordingly, we predict:

> *Hypothesis 2b:* Mentors' perceived mentorship quality is positively related to their personal skill development

### *5.2.4. Personal learning and perceived employment opportunities*

Following Van Harten (2016: 33), perceived employment opportunities refer to *"mentors' self-assessed likelihood of getting another – equivalent or better – job at their current or at another employer and to their perceived ability to improve their performance in their current jobs"*. Defined in this way, perceived employment opportunities is similar to the concept of perceived marketability, comprehensively defined as employees' self-assessed (internal/external) market value (e.g., De Vos *et al.*, 2011). To date, research has largely supported

the contention that perceived marketability is conditional upon employees' skills, knowledge and competencies (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Forrier *et al.*, 2015), including their transferable skills. Building on this, we advance the idea that mentors' beliefs regarding their employment opportunities are also contingent on their personal learning skills acquired through mentoring. More precisely, we posit that, as a set of transferable skills, personal learning enables mentors to navigate more easily the boundaryless world of work, thereby leading to favourable perceptions of intra- and interorganisational employment opportunities. In addition, mentors' organisational sensitivity and ability to develop new job-related skills through feedback may make them feel more confident about their ability to continue performing in their current jobs as well as to move to higher-level internal positions. In support of these considerations, Liu, Liu, Kwan and Mao (2009) proposed that personal learning helps employees realise career success; that is, personal learning serves as a vehicle for employees' marketability or employment opportunities. Based on this supposition, we hypothesise:

> *Hypothesis 3:* Personal learning (relational job learning and personal skill development) is positively related to mentors' perceived employment opportunities

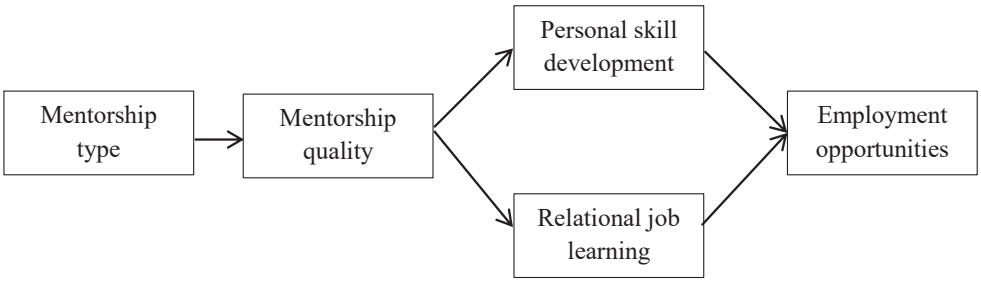
#### *5.2.5. Mediating roles of mentorship quality and personal learning*

Finally, we advance the idea that mentorship quality and personal learning act as intervening mechanisms in the relationship between mentorship type and perceived employment opportunities. This presupposition rests on extant mentoring research that attests to a serial mediation model as reflected in H1-H3. In addition, we ground our presupposition in studies (Bozionelos *et al.*, 2016; De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Van Harten, 2016) that – either implicitly or explicitly – portray employee learning and competence development as "proximal" and career or employment opportunities as "distal" outcomes of workplace practices (e.g., participation in mentoring, work characteristics, managerial support). Hence, we posit:

> *Hypothesis 4:* Perceived mentorship quality and personal learning (relational job learning and personal skill development) mediate the relationship between mentorship type and mentors' perceived employment opportunities

Figure 5.1 depicts our theoretical framework.

**Figure 5.1: Proposed theoretical framework**




## 5.3. Method

### *5.3.1. Dataset and participants*

To test our theoretical model, we collected data in the Netherlands. Only employees with an occupational tenure of more than 10 years were invited to take part in our study, a selection criterion based on the career stage theory of Super (e.g., Aryee *et al.*, 1994). This theory classifies individuals in the maintenance stage – which Aryee, Chay and Chew (1994) operationalised as occupational tenure – as potential mentors because of their expertise and willingness to help junior colleagues. We prefer the tenure criterion in Aryee *et al.* (1994) to the long-adhered age criterion because tenure and age may not be as tightly entwined in the modern world of work as they formerly have been. For instance, relatively young long-tenured employees may be as equally qualified as older long-tenured employees to serve as mentors, leading to a regrettable exclusion of respondents if age was the selection criterion.

A total of 2,247 respondents who fit the target group were invited by PanelClix via e-mail and instructed to complete an online questionnaire. PanelClix is an ISO-26326 certified panel agency that adheres to strict norms regarding panel recruitment and management. At the start of the questionnaire, respondents were informed of the study's objectives and assured of response anonymity and confidentiality of information. They also were offered the opportunity to supply their e-mail addresses if they wanted to receive the study's findings. Although this may have resulted in a small bias, we viewed this opportunity as an ideal means to increase the number of completed questionnaires. Respondents who completed the questionnaire successfully received a small incentive as a token of appreciation. Although some may be more sensitive to rewards than others, the incentive was never high enough to induce respondents to fill out the questionnaire just because of the reward.

The fieldwork took eight weeks (October-November 2017). To boost the

response rate, respondents received a reminder in mid-November. A total of 998 respondents completed the questionnaire, and among these, 896 provided valid answers to our questions (a response rate of 39%). This rate is below the average found in survey research conducted among individuals, but still within the accepted norm (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). Of the 896 respondents, 582 were non-mentors and 314 indicated they were currently serving as a mentor or had served as a mentor in the two years preceding the survey. Since we are interested in the benefits of mentoring to the mentor, only those 314 respondents were included in our final sample. A first screening of our sample revealed that mentors were on average 50 years old, predominantly male (58%), non-managerial (52%) and with medium (36%) or higher (56%) education levels. The average occupational tenure was 23 years *(SD=7.8)* and the average organisational tenure was 19 years *(SD=10.2)* (Table 5.1).

Although the sample was heterogeneous, it was not representative of the Dutch population of past and current mentors; however, we do not consider this problematic because we sought to discover how mentoring works out for mentors rather than to draw conclusions about the share of Dutch mentors who benefit. Therefore, for our purpose, heterogeneity is preferable to representativity.

### *5.3.2. Operationalisation*

The questionnaire was written in Dutch, the dominant language of our sample. Prior to the fieldwork, we consulted a proficient bilingual speaker to check the Dutch translations of the original English questionnaire items. Except for mentorship type, multi-item measures were used to operationalise the concepts included in our theoretical model. To assess the internal consistency of these composite measures, we relied upon the Cronbach's coefficient alpha with a bottom-line index of .70 (Nunnaly, 1978). Unless otherwise specified, all items were scored using five-point Likert-type response formats ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).



#### *5.3.2.1. Experience as a mentor*

Drawing upon Allen and Eby (2003), we operationalised *experience as a mentor* with the following question "During your career, has there been an individual who you have taken a personal interest in; who you have guided, sponsored or otherwise had a positive and significant influence on their professional career development? In other words, have you ever been a mentor?" Respondents who answered "yes" to this question were designated as mentors and redirected to a follow-up question assessing whether respondents were currently mentoring. Of the 314 respondents classified as mentors, 173 indicated they were currently serving as a mentor. The remaining 141 respondents reported having served as a mentor in the 24 months preceding the survey. We established this 24-month threshold to avoid respondents answering questions about a mentorship they could

hardly remember. Previous mentors who had multiple protégés were instructed to base their answers on the most recent mentorship. Current mentors with multiple protégés were asked to report on the mentorship to which they devoted the most time.

*5.3.2.2. Mentorship type*

*Mentorship type* was assessed by asking mentors to select one of two statements: "I entered the mentorship wholly volitionally. Hence, the mentorship developed spontaneously" or "I was assigned by a third party like my organisation. Hence, the mentorship was formally arranged". We borrowed both statements from Allen and Eby (2003) and reworded them to ensure the dichotomy embodies the essence of autonomous and controlled motivation advanced by SDT. This enabled us to validly assess whether respondents' mentorship was initiated informally (coded 0) or formally (coded 1).

*5.3.2.3. Perceived mentorship quality*

We operationalised *perceived mentorship quality* by means of a five-item scale derived from the work of Allen and Eby (2003). Scale anchors ranged from 1 (certainly not) to 5 (certainly). Example items are "I was effectively utilized as a mentor by my protégé" and "Both my protégé and I benefited from the mentoring relationship". Cronbach's alpha amounted to .87.

*5.3.2.4. Personal learning*

*Personal learning*, conceptualised as relational job learning and personal skill development, was measured with two six-item scales that Lankau and Scandura (2002) originally developed to assess learning among protégés. Examples of items measuring relational job learning include "I have increased my knowledge about the organisation as a whole" and "I have learned about others' perceptions about me or my job". Cronbach's alpha was .79. Examples of items relating to personal skill development are "I have learned how to communicate effectively with others" and "I have developed new ideas about how to perform my job". Cronbach's alpha was .82.

*5.3.2.5. Perceived employment opportunities*

We employed a six-item scale derived from the work of Van Harten (2016) to operationalise *perceived employment opportunities*. The composite measure assessed respondents' expectations regarding their employment opportunities for the next 12 months using three axes: receiving an internal promotion, becoming eligible for an equivalent job in another organisation and continuing to work in one's current job. This suggests a second-order factor structure consisting of three first-order factors. Each first-order factor was assessed with two items, examples being "In the next year, I have a reasonable chance to move to a higher-level job in my current organisation" and "I

expect that I can easily get an equivalent job in another organisation". Cronbach's alpha was .78.

*5.3.2.6. Control variables*

Previous research (Allen and Eby, 2003; De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Mao *et al.*, 2016; Van Harten, 2016) indicates that mentor gender, age, organisational tenure, mentorship duration and mentor experience (operationalised as the number of protégés supervised) may affect our study's dependent variables (quality, learning and employment opportunities); therefore, we controlled for these potential confounders in our analyses. Respondents self-assessed the confounders. Except for gender, which was dichotomous (0=male; 1=female), all potential confounders were assessed on a continuous scale. We applied a log 10 base transformation to mentorship duration and mentor experience to lessen the effect of severe skewness. Table 5.1 lists the descriptive statistics for our study and control variables.

**Table 5.1: Descriptive statistics for the study and control variables**

| | Mean | SD | Range | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Mentorship type (1=formal) | 0.59 | | 0/1 | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Mentorship quality | 3.81 | 0.79 | 2-5 | -.162** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Relational job learning | 3.23 | 0.64 | 1-5 | -.018 | .335** | - | | | | | | | |
| 4. Personal skill development | 3.52 | 0.65 | 1-5 | .040 | .276** | .630** | - | | | | | | |
| 5. Employment opportunities | 2.93 | 0.67 | 1-5 | .014 | .142* | .408** | .340** | - | | | | | |
| 6. Gender (1=female) | 0.42 | | 0/1 | .187** | .075 | -.141* | .013 | -.068 | - | | | | |
| 7. Age (years) | 49.57 | 8.51 | 31-69 | -.117* | .115* | -.039 | -.079 | -.175** | -.183** | - | | | |
| 8. Organisational tenure (years) | 18.54 | 10.19 | 0-48 | -.054 | .014 | -.031 | -.097 | -.221** | -.120* | .497** | - | | |
| 9. Mentorship duration (years) (log) | 0.27 | 0.23 | 0-1.28 | -.061 | .038 | .213** | .171** | .108 | -.164** | .054 | .022 | - | |
| 10. Number of protégés mentored (log) | 0.89 | 0.44 | 0-2 | .090 | .072 | .001 | -.055 | .094 | -.096 | .257** | .162** | .089 | - |

*Notes:* *p<0.05; **p<0.01. Pearson correlation used.
Due to missing values, the N fluctuates between N=293 and N=314.

### *5.3.3. Analytical strategy*

We tested our proposed serial mediation model using the recommended two-step approach to structural equation modelling (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). This involves using confirmatory factor analysis in conjunction with structural equation modelling and comparing different nested models by means of sequential chi-square difference tests. We relied upon the RMSEA, TLI and CFI to assess model fit. To consider a model fit acceptable, the RMSEA should fall below .08, while the TLI and CFI should be .90 or higher (Hox, 2010). All models were tested using the maximum likelihood estimation technique in R lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). We based significance testing on bootstrapped standard errors and p-values to control for non-normality of the sampling distribution of the indirect effects.

## 5.4. Results

### *5.4.1. Measurement model*

We first validated the factor structure of the latent concepts in our theoretical model (Figure 5.1). We did this by comparing our hypothesised second-order factor model with three alternative measurement models. Our hypothesised model consisted of three first-order factors – perceived mentorship quality, relational job learning and personal skill development – and a second-order factor structure for perceived employment opportunities. The first alternative, a four-factor model, was identical to our hypothesised model, except that the measurement model underlying perceived employment opportunities had a first-order instead of a second-order structure; that is, all items belonging to this composite measure were supposed to load directly onto one factor "perceived employment opportunities". The second alternative, a three-factor model, was identical to the four-factor model (first alternative), except that the items measuring relational job learning and personal skill development were posited to load onto one factor "personal learning". In each model, the latent concepts were allowed to covary. The third alternative model consisted of one overarching factor onto which all items were supposed to load.

Table 5.2 reveals that the hypothesised model fitted the data well with $\chi^2(221, n=276)=340.72$, CFI=.95, TLI=.94, RMSEA=.04. The same table also reveals that all alternative models yielded a poor fit to the data, based on at least two fit indices; therefore, we retained the hypothesised second-order factor model while estimating our structural equation model.

### *5.4.2. Structural model*

In the theory section, we posited that mentorship quality and personal learning mediate the relationship between mentorship type and mentors' self-assessed employment opportunities. To ensure that our data supported this presupposition, we compared a serial – fully – mediated model with an alternative. This alternative was a partially mediated model in which direct paths from mentorship type to employment opportunities as well as from mentorship type to personal learning and from mentorship quality to employment opportunities were added to the equation.

The hypothesised serial mediated model appeared to show a satisfactory fit to the data with $\chi^2(320, n=276)=469.52$, CFI=.94, TLI=.93, RMSEA=.04. However, the alternative partially mediated model also provided a satisfactory fit with $\chi^2(316, n=276)=464.18$, CFI=.94, TLI=.93, RMSEA=.04. The chi-square difference test was non-significant, meaning that the alternative model did not fit the data significantly better than our hypothesised model. Therefore, we based our results on the hypothesised serial mediated model. Figure 5.2 displays the standardised factor loadings and path coefficients accompanying this model. Appendix I contains an overview of the standardised estimates for all direct and indirect effects.

Hypothesis 1 posited that informal mentors perceive their mentorship to be of higher quality than formal mentors do. The accompanying path coefficient was statistically significant and in the hypothesised direction ($\beta=-.21$, $p<.001$), thus corroborating H1. Hypothesis 2a predicted that mentorship quality is positively related to mentors' relational job learning. The corresponding path coefficient was positive and statistically significant ($\beta=.34$, $p<.001$), thus confirming H2a. Hypothesis 2b predicted that mentorship quality is positively related to mentors' personal skill development. The corresponding path coefficient was positive and statistically significant ($\beta=.26$, $p<.001$), thus supporting H2b. Hypothesis 3 assumed that mentors who possess personal learning skills self-assess their future employment opportunities favourably. Only the path coefficient for relational job learning appeared to be statistically significant ($\beta=.57$, $p<.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is partially supported by the data. Hypothesis 4 proposed that mentorship quality and personal learning mediate the relationship between mentorship type and mentors' self-assessed employment opportunities. This indirect effect held only for relational job learning ($\beta=-.04$, $p<.05$), with a non-significant parameter coefficient for personal skill development ($\beta=-.004$, $p>.05$). Therefore, the data partially support hypothesis 4 (coefficients for the indirect effects are not shown in Figure 5.2).

Several control variables displayed significant associations with the dependent variables of interest (coefficients for the control variables are not shown in Figure 5.2). On average, female mentors experienced a higher mentorship quality than male mentors ($\beta=.15$, $p<.05$). At the same time, female mentors reported on average a lower score on

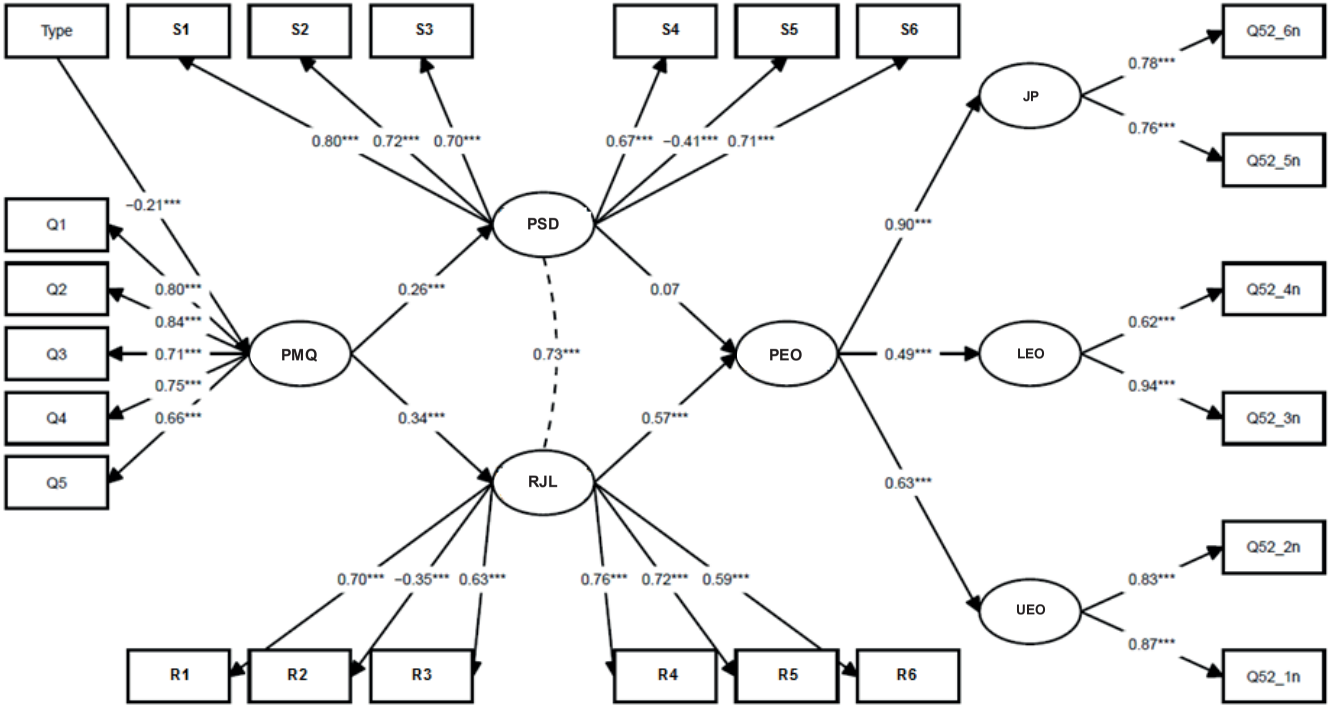
relational job learning than their male counterparts (β=-.16, p<.05). Moreover, mentors whose mentorships lasted longer reported higher levels of personal learning skills than those with shorter mentorships (β=.21, p<.01 for relational job learning and β=.19, p<.01 for personal skill development). Also, mentors whose organisational tenure was longer indicated somewhat lower levels of personal skill development than those with shorter organisational tenures (β=-.14, p<.05). We found a similar negative association between organisational tenure and self-assessed employment opportunities (β=-.21, p<.01). Finally, we found a positive relationship between mentor experience and self-assessed employment opportunities (β=.13, p<.05), which indicated that the more protégés mentors had had, the better they rated their future employment opportunities.

**Table 5.2: Confirmatory factor analysis: fit indices for the hypothesised model and three alternative models**

| | $\chi^2$ | *df* | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | Comparison | $\Delta\chi^2$ *(Δdf)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1: Second-order factor model (hypothesised model) | 340.72 | 221 | .95 | .94 | .04 | | |
| Model 2: 4 factors model | 541.60 | 224 | .87 | .85 | .07 | MM2-MM1 | 200.88 (3)* |
| Model 3: 3 factors model | 653.87 | 227 | .83 | .81 | .08 | MM3-MM1 | 313.14 (6)* |
| Model 4: 1 factor model (Harman's model) | 1378.72 | 230 | .53 | .49 | .14 | MM4-MM1 | 1038.00 (9)* |

*Notes:* *p<0.001. N=276.
$\chi^2$=Maximum Likelihood chi-square.
CFI=Comparative Fit Index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

**Figure 5.2: Final serial mediation model for mentors' benefits**




*Notes:* Parameter estimates represent standardised factor loadings and path coefficients. The arrow drawn between PSD and RJL represents the factor covariance.
***p<0.001. N=276.
Type=Mentorship type; PMQ=Perceived mentorship quality; PSD=Personal skill development; RJL=Relational job learning; PEO=Perceived employment opportunities; UEO=Upward employment opportunities; LEO=Lateral employment opportunities; JP=Job performance in one's current job.
Coefficients for the indirect effects and control variables are removed to improve readability.

## 5.5. Discussion and conclusion

This study is one of very few to unravel the conditions necessary for mentors to benefit from mentoring. Drawing upon Self-Determination Theory (SDT), we posited that the effect of mentorship type (formal versus informal mentoring) on mentors' employment opportunities is transmitted through mentorship quality and personal learning. A key assumption is that informal mentoring is a prototype of autonomous motivation that causes mentors and protégés to display citizenship behaviour characteristic of high-quality mentorships. More precisely, we expected that employees who mentor volitionally and base their choice of a protégé on mutual attraction would perceive their mentorship as an interactive learning forum in which mentors and protégés constructively support each other to ensure mutual benefits. In line with this prediction, we found that informal mentors experienced their mentorship to be of higher quality than formal mentors did. This finding extends extant SDT research on the role of autonomy-supportive parents in citizenship and helping behaviours among children (e.g., Gagné and Deci, 2005) by being one of the first who showed that similar theoretical mechanisms operate in mentoring relationships, at least when assessed from the mentor's perspective. That is, we provided evidence that autonomously motivated mentors are more likely to have engaged in mutually satisfying relationships in which mentors and protégés could count on each other for their own developmental needs without providing an immediate, tangible reward in return.

In addition to a direct effect of mentorship type on mentorship quality, we provided empirical evidence for an indirect effect of mentorship type on mentors' personal learning that passes through mentorship quality. More specifically, we found that bi-directional mentoring relationships in which mentors and protégés cater to each other's needs provide an ideal platform for mentors to derive relational job learning and personal skills from mentoring. This finding has two implications. First, it sheds new light on the study of Mao *et al.* (2016), who found a non-significant association between mentorship quality and personal skill development. However, they conducted their study in China, which has quite a different work context than the Dutch one. Chinese employees, for instance, cherish collectivistic values and social ties, while Dutch employees, by and large, foster individualistic values and independence. As a result, Chinese employees could hone their personal skills in everyday high-quality interactions other than mentoring, while Dutch employees need high-quality mentorships to improve these skills.

Second, the finding regarding the mediating role of mentorship quality attests to the relational cultural approach to mentoring (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007). Coined as an attractive alternative to traditional mentoring theory, Relational Mentoring Theory (RMT) posits that the quality of the mentoring relationship constitutes an important

condition for mentors to learn from mentoring. To date, virtually no one has empirically shown that mentorship quality acts as an intervening mechanism in the relationship between mentorship type and mentors' learning benefits. On the contrary, prior research – if existent at all – has drawn foremost attention to the direct effect of either mentorship type (Allen and Eby, 2003) or mentorship quality (Mao *et al.*, 2016) on mentor learning. Our findings, however, provide evidence for one of the key premises of RMT, and thus hint that the mentor-protégé relationship is driven not merely by instrumental motives, as previous research into mentors' selection of protégés may lead one to believe (role of protégés' performance, Olian *et al.*, 1993; role of protégés' ability, Allen *et al.*, 2000; role of protégés' willingness to learn, Allen, 2004). Rather, our findings clearly indicate that altruistic motives and communal norms also underlie the mentor-protégé relationship, and that interdependence instead of independence is key to ensuring mentoring benefits. Collaboration rather than autonomy appears to be the keyword here. Having this concluded, our study carries implications for the role of Social Exchange Theory (SET) in mentoring research because rules of exchange other than the long-adhered norm of reciprocity (e.g., Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) are also relevant when studying (the outcomes of) mentoring relationships in the workplace.

Third, we found a positive and significant association between mentors' relational job learning and their self-assessed ("perceived") employment opportunities. Specifically, we found that mentors who had a heightened awareness that their jobs were embedded in the organisation and interrelated with those of their colleagues had a more favourable assessment of their future – internal and external – employment opportunities. This finding adds to extant scholarly work on employability by providing evidence for the widely held yet understudied claim that employees' skills and/or expertise act as precursors to their future employment opportunities (e.g., Forrier and Sels, 2003; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). To date, research on employee characteristics and employment beliefs has shown little cross-fertilisation, leaving unanswered the question of how both "employability concepts" are related (chapter 1). If studies are available, they have defined skills in terms of educational attainment (Berntson *et al.*, 2006), job-related skills (Wittekind *et al.*, 2010) or up-to-date expertise (Van Harten, 2016[23]). Transferable (e.g., "generic") skills are ignored in this thin strand of research, with two exceptions (De Vos *et al.*, 2011[24]; Forrier *et al.*, 2015). This omission is remarkable, as these skills have grown in prominence due to the erosion of intra-organisational employment trajectories. By focussing on relational job learning skills, our study does justice to today's labour market reality and expands our view of the association between employees' skills and future

23 It is important to note that these studies often also concentrate on employee characteristics other than skills such as employees' willingness, motivation or labour market knowledge.

24 De Vos *et al.*'s (2011) study deals with perceived marketability as an indicator of employees' subjective career success. However, as demonstrated in chapter 1, marketability is analogous to the term employment opportunities used in this dissertation.

employment opportunities.

Fourth, contrary to our prediction, we found a non-significant relationship between mentors' personal skill development and their self-assessed employment opportunities (Figure 5.2). One possible explanation for this unexpected finding may relate to the nature of the skills obtained via personal skill development. Personal skill development entails the acquisition of skills that allow smooth interpersonal relationships, including empathy and active listening. These skills are somewhat more generic in nature, with a skill such as empathy that is also useful outside the workplace, than the skills obtained via relational job learning, which are more tied to the work environment (such as organisational awareness). Due to the "relative" broad nature of its skills, personal skill development may give less direction to mentors' career paths; that is, personal skill development might have less of a signalling function than relational job learning. As a result, mentors who gain personal learning skills may find it more difficult to paint a clear picture of their future employment chances (with their current organisation) than those who gain relational job learning skills. Hence, the correlation between personal skill development and perceived employment opportunities is weak or, as in our case, non-significant.

### *5.5.1. Limitations and future research directions*

We acknowledge the following three restrictions and provide suggestions for future research. First, all the data for this study were drawn from a single source – the mentor – and were based on self-assessments. Some scholars (e.g., Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012) argue that individuals *"are more likely to act upon their perceptions rather than upon any objective reality"* (p. 106), which implies that self-assessments are preferable to objective ratings. However, our results could be liable to common-method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), and as a result, the correlations between our study variables may have been inflated. To assess the seriousness of this inflation, we adopted several strategies. First, we compared our hypothesised (second-order factor) model with a one-factor model. Our analysis reveals that the one-factor model yielded a significant poorer fit to the data than the hypothesised model. This implies that common-method bias does not seriously distort our findings. Second, we relied on different answer formats to capture employees' responses and worded some items negatively. That being said, common-method bias should not be overstated; Lance, Dawson, Birkelbach and Hoffman (2010) argued that *"in contrast to conventional wisdom, common method effects do not appear to be so large as to pose a serious threat to organizational research"* (p. 450). Nevertheless, future research could use multiple sources, such as protégé, supervisor and mentor ratings, to assess mentorship quality, personal learning and employment opportunities.

Second, our data were cross-sectional, which makes it difficult to claim causality. It is possible that employees (i.e., mentors) who assess their employment opportunities

favourably are more eager to volunteer for mentoring programmes since this enables them to capitalize on previously acquired employment benefits. This presupposition ties in with the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2002): for those who possess essential employment resources – accumulated through engagement in former mentorships – mentoring may be considered a valuable tool to acquire personal learning resources with the ultimate aim to envisage new employment opportunities. Although this theoretical line of reasoning may be plausible, we grounded our hypotheses in a theory (SDT) with a solid empirical foundation. As such, it is highly likely that the causal direction of the hypothesised relationships is correct. Notwithstanding this argument, future – longitudinal (and experimental) – research is needed to test the possibility of reversed and reciprocal causation in order to arrive at a more definite conclusion about the causal direction of the relationships between our study variables.

Third, although our hypothesised model is theoretically plausible and yields a good fit to the data, there is room for elaboration. Guided by RMT (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007), a first viable route for future research would be to examine simultaneously the tangible and intangible benefits mentors derive from mentoring, as research on this is limited. Benefits needing further exploration are internal recognition, transformational leadership (Chun *et al.*, 2012) and intrinsic satisfaction (i.e., rewarding experience; Ragins and Scandura, 1999). Using the same theoretical lens, future research could assess whether and how mentoring relationships at work affect mentors' private lives (Ragins, 2012), such as life satisfaction and the ability to solve family conflicts. Although it is reasonable to assume that workplace relationships change individuals' behaviours, feelings and thoughts in more fundamental ways, research on the spill-over effects of mentoring across various societal domains is scarce (the exceptions being Hu *et al.*, 2019 and Mao *et al.*, 2016, who studied mentors' spill-over effects in an eastern country). Based on the balanced HRM approach (Boselie *et al.*, 2009), a third endeavour for future research would be to examine whether (informal) mentoring equally promotes the interests of mentors and employers or whether a trade-off effect arises. Since personal learning comprises skills supposed to ease interpersonal relationships, a final consideration for future research would be to examine the extent to which personal learning mediates the relationship between mentorship type and outcomes on the team level such as team engagement.

### *5.5.2. Practical implications*

The core message for practitioners is that informal mentoring in the workplace represents an effective and less costly way to stimulate learning and labour market mobility among midcareer and senior employees. When mentors experience psychological freedom while mentoring, they rate the quality of their mentorships as fairly good, which means they view the relationships as beneficial for their protégés and for themselves. This

perception of "mutual effectiveness" allows mentors to assess more favourably their personal learning skills and subsequent employment opportunities.

Employers could deploy several instruments to encourage midcareer and senior employees to volitionally transmit accumulated wisdom to junior colleagues. First, organisations could espouse a development philosophy that conveys the importance of continuous self-development, also at an older age. Research (Allen *et al.*, 1999) has shown that top management support for learning, defined as top managers' beliefs in the added value of training for their subordinates, can mitigate employees' (negative) perceptions of becoming hierarchically plateaued in their organisation. As shown in chapter 4, a reduced self-assessed risk of becoming hierarchically plateaued enhances employees' intentions to mentor junior colleagues in their own spare time.

A second route employers could take to foster informal mentoring is to make sure that direct supervisors are endowed with skills to encourage volitional functioning, which enables mentors to be in charge of their own behaviour while mentoring. In addition to vertical forms of support, horizontal support in the form of assistance from co-mentors when needed should be facilitated (chapter 4).

Third, employers could ensure that protégés act as loyal allies for their mentors (Ragins and Scandura, 1999). They can allot supervisors of potential protégés the task of informing their subordinates of the bi-directional nature of a mentorship, thus laying the foundation for a mutually enriching partnership.

The same supervisors could be entrusted to encourage learning-oriented protégés to express their motivation for learning (Allen, 2004), which can enhance mentoring intentions (chapter 4) and further ensure a mutual learning experience. Protégés who are willing to learn may also be motivated to generate new knowledge they can share. Since protégés are often entry-level workers born in the information society, this "new" knowledge is likely to be advanced technical information with which mentors are unfamiliar, thereby creating a win-win situation.



### *5.5.3. Conclusion*

This study expands the literature on mentors' benefits by showing that the effect of mentorship type on mentors' employment opportunities is transmitted through mentors' perceived mentorship quality and personal learning skills. We applied SDT to the literature on mentors' benefits and showed that RMT offers substantial promise for this area of inquiry. Our results make a plea for informal mentoring programmes and provide concrete suggestions to organisations to incentivise midcareer and senior employees to take on volitional mentoring roles.

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# Appendices

**Appendix I: Standardised estimates for all direct and indirect effects**

| | Perceived mentorship quality | Relational job learning | Personal skill development | Perceived employment opportunities | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Direct effect* | *Indirect effect*[i] |
| Mentorship type | -0.21 (0.10)** | 0.11 (0.09) | 0.11 (0.09) | 0.08 (0.09) | 1: -0.00 (0.02) |
| | | | | | 2: -0.04 (0.03) |
| | | | | | 3: -0.00 (0.01) |
| | | | | | 4: 0.06 (0.05) |
| | | | | | 5: 0.01 (0.03) |
| Perceived mentorship quality | -- | 0.37 (0.07)*** | 0.29 (0.08)*** | 0.01 (0.06) | -- |
| Relational job learning | -- | -- | -- | 0.56 (0.17)** | -- |
| Personal skill development | -- | -- | -- | 0.07 (0.15) | -- |
| $R^2$ | 0.06 | 0.21 | 0.15 | 0.44 | |

*Notes:* Standardised path coefficients are displayed.
Bootstrapped standard errors are enclosed in parentheses.
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.
[i]1=indirect effect transmitted through mentorship quality only;
2=indirect effect transmitted through mentorship quality and relational job learning;
3=indirect effect transmitted through mentorship quality and personal skill development;
4=indirect effect transmitted through relational job learning only;
5=indirect effect transmitted through personal skill development only.
Coefficients for the control variables are removed to improve readability.

# English summary

## Introduction

The term employability – the likelihood or chance of a job including mentorships – entered the research arena in the 1950s. Yet, it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s before the number of employability studies grew rapidly, with economists, psychologists and sociologists paying attention to the topic. Scholars have, for instance, focussed on the role that work characteristics or human resource variables – "organisational conditions" – play in employability (e.g., Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012; Van Harten *et al.*, 2016), the effect individual characteristics have on mentoring intentions (e.g., Allen, 2003) or the benefits employees accrue from mentoring (e.g., Allen and Eby, 2003; Mao *et al.*, 2016).

Scientific research is, however, in short supply when it comes to the combined effects of individual and organisational conditions on employability and mentoring, the role employability plays in employment positions and transitions and the mechanisms that link mentoring to mentors' self-assessed employment opportunities. I argue that these lacunae have considerable appeal for senior employees, those aged 45 years and older. Senior employees run the risk of ending up in routine-intensive jobs due to age-related prejudices, limited growth opportunities and few transitions beyond organisational borders. This state of affairs undoubtedly raises the question of how this age group secures its employability, echoing serious concerns in this respect.

In addition to seniors, midcareer employees (those ages 30 to 45) face challenges because they have to deal with regular job moves and insecurity due to the erosion of intra-organisational career trajectories. How does mentoring enable them to seize their employment opportunities?

Arguing that employees and employers carry a joint responsibility for mentoring and employability enhancement and presupposing that the latter constitute important vehicles for midcareer and senior employees' self-assessed and actual employment prospects, I address the aforementioned lacunae by answering the following research question:

*"To what extent and how are employability and mentoring related to individual and/or organisational conditions and to midcareer and senior employees' self-assessed and actual employment opportunities, positions and transitions?"*

## Research model

The tremendous growth in the number of employability studies has resulted in a plethora of definitions of the term, leading scholars to characterise the research field as "scattered". At the same time, there is some consensus that employability refers to "the likelihood or chance of a job" (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). Two interpretations of this definition dominate the literature. The first fits the so-called "input-based" approach, which frames employability as *"personal strengths that increase the chance of a job"* (Forrier *et al.*, 2015: 56). Personal strengths can take different forms, ranging from employees' job-related skills or work ability, to their attitudinal flexibility, to their transferable skills. The second fits the so-called "output-based" approach, which frames employability as employees' (perceived or actual) chances of another job in the labour market based on their personal strengths, also referred to as "the appraisal" or "realisation" of the chance of a job (Forrier *et al.*, 2015).

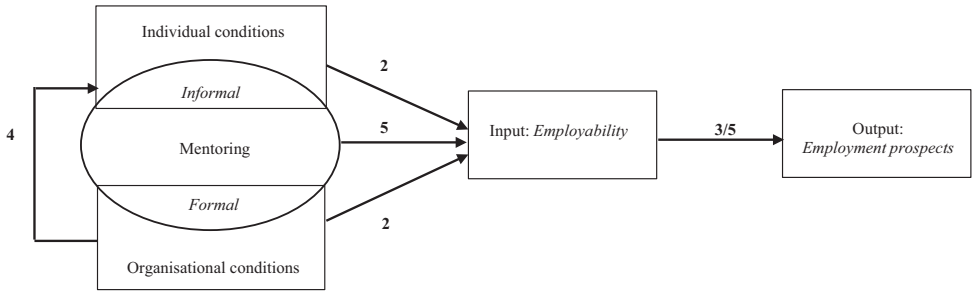
Some scholars transcend the input- and output-based approaches by (also) focussing on contextual conditions (e.g., Hillage and Pollard, 1998; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Contextual conditions comprise multiple barriers and opportunities that are positioned at either the organisational (e.g., unfair recruitment procedures) or societal (e.g., governmental reimbursements) level.

A handful of scholars study employability through the lens of social capital (e.g., Forrier *et al.*, 2015; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). In the employability literature, social capital is understood as the whole array of social networks aimed at providing learning and career opportunities. This definition inspired some to study mentoring – a workplace-based relationship in which a senior employee fulfils the developmental needs of a junior employee (e.g., Fletcher and Ragins, 2007) – as an integral part of individuals' social capital (e.g., Eby *et al.*, 2003), and thus, as one facet of their employability. A unique feature of mentoring is that it qualifies as both an individual and contextual ("organisational") condition, depending on the social network under consideration – compare a job notification received from a friend with an organisationally subsidised replacement service.

In this dissertation, I disentangle and combine different notions of employability in a single research model. This model contains five core concepts and visualises the relationships between them as explicated in my research question (Figure 1). Individual conditions I define as all characteristics of an employee. Organisational conditions encompass the whole gamut of work characteristics and human resource instruments supervisors could deploy to manage their workforce. Mentoring I define as *"a workplace-based relationship between a midcareer or senior employee (the mentor) and a junior employee (the protégé) aimed at providing support to the protégé, with consideration of the mentors' own needs".* Embedded in the employability literature on social capital (former paragraph), I

consider mentoring a form of learning-induced behaviour. Based on extant mentoring research, I distinguish between informal mentoring (a relationship mentors and protégés self-initiate) and formal mentoring (a relationship organisations mandate and regulate). Employability consists of three concepts: professional ability, or the ability to confidently perform one's current job ("work ability"), developmental proactivity, or the motivation for learning and willingness to develop job-related skills ("attitudinal flexibility") and personal learning, or those transferable skills that contribute to personal development. Employment prospects encompass two concepts: perceived employment opportunities, or employees' beliefs about their future job chances as well as their perceptions of being able to continue in their current job ("appraisal of the chance of a job") and actual employment trajectories, or employees' employment positions and transitions ("realisation of the chance of a job").

**Figure 1: Research model**




*Note:* The numbers accompanying the arrows represent my research foci and correspond with the equivalently numbered chapters in this dissertation.

## Empirical chapters

The aforementioned model contains four research foci, which are addressed in four empirical chapters. In **chapter 2,** I examine the dynamic and combined effects of individual and organisational conditions on senior employees' developmental proactivity. Drawing upon the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory, I portray developmental proactivity as a personal resource – a form of worker adjustment, agency and control over situations – and relate it to a wide array of challenge demands (workload, mental load) and job, human (job autonomy, social support, development opportunities) as well as personal (self-efficacy, active coping) resources. I rely on COR's corollary that "resources beget resources" to expect positive relationships between challenge demands, resources and developmental proactivity. Next to positive main effects, I expect two positive interaction effects. The first tests whether challenge demands boost the positive effect of job and human

resources ("interactive active learning hypothesis"). The second tests whether the effect of self-efficacy gains in salience under the condition of human resources ("multiplicative resources hypothesis"). I rely on the four-year (2010-2013) prospective cohort study STREAM (*Study on Transitions in Employment, Ability and Motivation (TNO);* Ybema *et al.*, 2014), encompassing data about the employment transitions, learning motivation and work ability of Dutch employed, self-employed and non-employed persons ages 45 to 64, to test my expectations. Results from my multilevel linear model show that, except for job autonomy, all challenge demands and resources are positively and significantly related to developmental proactivity. Therefore, I am able to corroborate COR's corollary that "resources beget resources". Contrary to my prediction, none of the interaction effects are statistically significant, leaving the interactive active learning hypothesis and multiplicative resources hypothesis unsupported.

In **chapter 3,** I examine the role professional ability and developmental proactivity play in the employment positions and transitions – coined "employment trajectories" – that senior employees experience. I adopt a comprehensive approach *vis-à-vis* employment trajectories by simultaneously focussing on gains and losses, following scholarly work that alludes to this dichotomy (e.g., Raemdonck *et al.*, 2012). In essence, I focus on upward transitions in the form of a promotion (which I refer to as a "gain"), downward transitions in the form of a demotion and/or salary loss and job retention in the form of job security versus unemployment (which I refer to as "losses"). Using COR as a theoretical guide, I depict professional ability and developmental proactivity as well as the employment gains and avoidance of losses that senior employees experience as "resources". Based on COR's corollary that "resources beget resources", I hypothesise positive relationships between employability and gains. Based on COR's corollary that "resources circumvent resource losses", I hypothesise negative relationships between employability and losses. I use the STREAM study to test both hypotheses. Results from cross-lagged logistic regression analyses reveal that developmental proactivity predicts a higher likelihood of employment gains and professional ability predicts a lower likelihood of employment losses.

In **chapter 4,** I examine the role of organisational conditions in midcareer and senior employees' willingness to informally mentor a junior colleague, their protégé. A point of departure is the depiction of informal mentoring as a prototype of *Organisational Citizenship Behaviour* (OCB), or *"employee behaviour that is discretionary (i.e., not an essential part of one's contractual tasks), not formally rewarded, and [supposed to] benefit the functioning of the organisation"* (Organ, 1988: 4). To strengthen my theoretical apparatus, I classify organisational conditions as perceived organisational intrinsic value support (co-mentor consultation, supervisory support for informal mentoring, learning opportunities) and

hindrance demands (time pressure, organisational restructuring). I then propound that intrinsic value support eases and hindrance demands inhibit mentoring intentions. This premise is central to a combined Self-Determination (SDT), Social Exchange (SET) and Perceived Organisational Support (POS) theory perspective, positing that employees act reciprocally when organisations care about them (offer value support), but refrain from exhibiting this behaviour when organisations neglect them (offer demands). I conduct a vignette study – a semi-experiment in which respondents base their mentoring intentions on a hypothetical yet realistic work situation – to test my expectations. This vignette study is part of a cross-sectional survey I administered to a large, heterogeneous sample of Dutch employees ages 29 to 69 in the autumn of 2017. Results from my multilevel linear model show that organisational intrinsic value support facilitates and hindrance demands thwart mentoring, corroborating my theoretical premises.

In **chapter 5,** I test the premise implicit in scholarly studies on mentoring and mentoring benefits that mentorship quality – a mutually beneficial mentorship in which mentors and protégés unconditionally support each other – and personal learning mediate the relationship between mentorship type (formal versus informal mentoring) and mentors' perceived employment opportunities. Based on prior research (e.g., Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Mao *et al.*, 2016), I focus on two personal learning dimensions: relational job learning (organisational awareness, feedback, self-disclosure) and personal skill development (empathy, self-reflection, communication skills). Using SDT as a theoretical guide, I first posit that informal mentors perceive their mentorship to be of higher quality than formal mentors do. I then propose that high-quality mentorships enable mentors to assess their personal learning skills and subsequent employment opportunities favourably. I rely on the same cross-sectional survey as in **chapter 4** to test my expectations. Analyses of my serial structural equation model reveal that a mediation effect holds for relational job learning. Contrary to my expectation, a serial mediation effect does not apply to personal skill development.

## Theoretical contributions

The aforementioned empirical chapters lead to a number of conclusions. First, I find that job and human resources (i.e., social (co-mentor and supervisory) support, learning opportunities) peculiar to employees' employability – conceptualised as developmental proactivity – also positively affect their general willingness to mentor. This finding is noteworthy on two fronts. First, it enables me to confirm the SDT-, POS- and SET-based premise that perceptions of organisational intrinsic value support engender reciprocal *mentor* behaviour – a conclusion barely drawn due to considerable attention paid to the micro-level (e.g., mentor-protégé relationships). Second, it leads me to conclude

that theories used in employability studies also might have predictive utility for future research from the mentor's perspective – an area of inquiry considered less mature than the employability domain.

Second, I find that workload (or its alias, time pressure) as part of job demands positively correlates with developmental proactivity but negatively affects general willingness to mentor. This differential effect agrees with appraisal theories of stress (e.g., Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), positing that individuals' reactions to an environmental (e.g., job) demand are contingent on the appraisal of that demand. Apparently, prospective mentors appraise time pressure as a hindrance (a threat), owing to the double burden felt when informal mentoring tasks are fulfilled under extreme time pressures. Because of a hindrance appraisal, a *negative* link between time pressure and learning – defined as mentoring – is established. In contrast, senior employees appraise workload as a challenge (a chance), owing to the opportunities it provides for goal attainment when tackled successfully. Because of a challenge appraisal, a *positive* link between workload and learning – defined as employability – is established. Assuming that this reasoning is correct, I add a new dimension to appraisal theories of stress by showing their potential relevance for examining employee learning, with specific attention paid to their application to mentoring studies.

Third, I make a plea for a redefinition of job demands and job resources within the JD-R model. Both redefinitions should address two issues, as evidenced by the aforementioned conclusions. First, organisational conditions peculiar to learning – defined as employability or mentoring – have a multifaceted meaning, ranging from unambiguous positive, to mixed positive and negative, to unambiguous negative. Second, organisational conditions peculiar to learning have a context-specific meaning. Job resources usually refer to *"those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, […] and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development"* (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007: 312). I propose redefining job resources as *"those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that individuals appraise either unambiguously positively or both positively and negatively and that are functional in achieving work goals and/or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development".* The added value of this redefinition is twofold. First, it provides a comprehensive resource-based approach to understanding learning because it includes conditions with an unambiguous positive (e.g., social (co-mentor and supervisory) support; the typical "job resources"; **chapters 2 and 4**) as well as those with a mixed positive and negative meaning (e.g., workload; a so-called "challenge demand"; **chapter 2**). Second, it offers a theoretical lens for the finding pertinent to **chapter 5** that the mentorships which mentors perceive as high quality, and thus, appraise positively – recall from Figure 1 that I portray mentorships as conditions – stimulate personal learning.

Job demands represent the negative pendant of job resources and refer to *"those*

*physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs"* (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007: 312). I suggest redefining job demands as *"those physical, psychological, social or organizational aspects of the job that individuals appraise unambiguously negatively and that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs".* This redefinition complements my redefinition of job resources because it excludes challenge demands, but includes hindrance demands (conditions with an unambiguous negative meaning). That being said, it explains the differential effect of workload (or its alias, time pressure) from a single model. Indeed, whereas workload fits the JD-R model's redefinition of job resources (it qualifies as a challenge demand (see above)), time pressure fits the JD-R model's redefinition of job demands (it qualifies as a hindrance demand). Based on this argument, I conclude that the distinction between job resources and job demands is more blurred than the conventional definitions of these terms imply.

With regard to the relationships between employability, mentoring and employees' self-assessed and actual employment prospects, I draw the following conclusions. First, I find that relational job learning positively predicts midcareer and senior employees' *perceived* employment opportunities (**chapter 5**). I also find that developmental proactivity and professional ability affect senior employees' *actual* employment trajectories (**chapter 3**). These findings enable me to confirm the multi-cited yet unfounded premise (an exception being Forrier *et al.*, 2015) that personal strengths ("inputs") have predictive validity for both the appraisal and realisation of the likelihood of a job ("outputs").

Second, I find that developmental proactivity fails to predict the avoidance of employment losses and professional ability fails to predict the presence of employment gains. This finding carries two implications. First, it implies that proactivity is less crucial to employability than extant scholarly work may lead one to believe (e.g., Fugate *et al.*, 2004), at least as far as senior employees are concerned. Second, it paves the way for a redefinition of the term "resources" within COR-theory. A point of departure is Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl and Westman's (2014) definition of resources as *"anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals"* (p. 5). The aforementioned issues regarding the context-specific and multifaceted meaning of resources peculiar to learning lead to the following redefinition. Resources refer to *"all things individuals value, either unambiguously positively or both positively and negatively, that help them to attain their (learning) goals"*. I argue that this redefinition provides an integral explanatory framework for this dissertation's findings, with specific application to **chapter 3**. To explain the counterintuitive findings obtained in this chapter, I apply the following reasoning. Developmental proactivity fails to predict the avoidance of

employment losses because the latter hinders future resource gain. That being said, the act of avoiding losses represents a goal barrier for those with high developmental proactivity, and therefore, should not be considered a resource. Professional ability fails to predict the presence of employment gains because the latter depletes one's resource pool. That being said, the act of acquiring gains represents a goal barrier for those with high professional ability, and therefore, should not be considered a resource.

## Methodological contributions

Apart from theoretical and conceptual innovations, this dissertation yields four methodological contributions. First, I study developmental proactivity dynamically, showing that this employability axis barely changes within employees (**chapter 2**). This finding enables me to shed new light on the claim that employability is *"amenable to substantial enhancement by investing in it"* (Pruijt, 2013: 1614), at least as far as employability is defined as proactive learning and also as far as senior employees are concerned.

Second, I apply a time lag between employability and employment trajectories (**chapter 3**). This allows me to lay a solid foundation for causality, providing a new variant to prior cross-sectional studies on the topic (e.g., Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009).

Third, I adopt a semi-experimental design to examine the associations between organisational conditions and general willingness to mentor. The advantages of this design are twofold. First, it enhances internal validity and eliminates social desirability, enabling me to obtain unbiased estimates. Second, it allows me to more conclusively determine the direction of the relationships between organisational conditions and learning-induced behaviour. The multilevel linear model I estimated in **chapter 2** assesses concurrent relationships between conditions and learning, and therefore, is less suitable for causal inferences. The vignette study pertinent to **chapter 4** circumvents this drawback by forcing respondents to first read the conditions listed before rating their learning intentions. This set-up entails that organisational conditions precede learning rather than the other way around.

Fourth, I provide a timely answer to the understudied question of whether mentorship quality mediates the relationship between mentoring and mentors' employment benefits (**chapter 5**). This approach responds to the emerging call to place mentorship quality at the heart of mentoring research (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007; Janssen *et al.*, 2016; Ragins, 2012).

## Practical implications

This dissertation carries several implications for practitioners interested in cost-effective and efficient ways to stimulate informal mentoring and employability in the workplace. First, I recommend that organisations adopt a corporate learning and development philosophy. Such a philosophy contains two pillars. First, it underlines the need for continuous personal growth. This can become manifest in the provision of individual training budgets that grant employees access to training and coaching sessions of their preference. Coaching is especially relevant, as research shows that employees ages 55 years and over are more willing to participate in training courses if coaching has been made available to them (De Grip *et al.*, 2018). Prevalent as training opportunities may seem, awareness of these opportunities is also relevant. Employee awareness of training budgets could be raised by mentioning these budgets on the monthly payslip or periodically organising career weeks. To maximise the return on investment, employers could hire external consultants who assist employees in selecting courses that match their potential and wishes.

Second, a development philosophy attests to the importance of fulfilling extra-role activities, preferably those that involve learning. Direct supervisors play an important role here because this dissertation shows that prospective mentors are more eager to become an informal mentor if their supervisors applaud volitional functioning. Although support for volitional functioning is commendable, supervisors should refrain from offering rewards because this might dampen (prospective) mentors' willingness to assume the mentoring role (Allen, 2003). Top managers can lend direct supervisors a hand by expressing a firm belief in the potential of training for job holders. This belief can lower employees' (negative) perceptions of becoming hierarchically plateaued (Allen *et al.*, 1999), and therefore, serves as a vehicle for informal mentoring. Direct supervisors of potential protégés also are in charge because they can help their subordinates get a mentor by persuading those who are adept at learning to express their motivation for learning (**chapter 4)**.

Another fruitful measure to consider is to encourage solidary horizontal workplace relationships (collaborative relationships among colleagues). In essence, I make a plea for informal social gatherings that allow feedback seeking and networking among mentors as well as conversations about best mentoring practices and setbacks. Such meetings not only strengthen feelings of interdependence, but also might help mentors develop organisational sensitivity and self-disclosure due to possible interactions with mentors who support protégés from different work units.

In addition to social support and developmental practices, I call for cushioning strategies (measures that unburden employees). More specifically, I advise practitioners to redesign jobs in such a way that simple, routine-intensive tasks are isolated and

delegated to someone else. This "hollowing out" of jobs is called job carving (Dekker *et al.*, 2013), which may represent a useful means to lower formal job pressures. That being said, job carving might facilitate informal mentoring. When espousing job carving, two issues necessitate attention: (1) trim only the tasks employees find the least interesting to avoid a situation in which work loses its appeal to employees; (2) make sure that employees are not only busy developing the talent of their protégés, but also are enabled to spend additional time on self-development. This recommendation is supported by this dissertation showing that informal mentorships could be likened to mutually beneficial learning forums that help mentors enhance their employability and subsequent employment opportunities.

Not only are cushioning strategies useful to stimulate informal mentoring in the workplace; they also may represent important means to leverage employees' professional ability. Therefore, cushioning strategies might act as a protective shield against employment losses such as salary losses or unemployment.

Organisations should not carry the sole responsibility for employability and mentoring. Social partners and the Dutch government, too, are in charge. Whereas social partners (e.g., unions) can help employers attract training funds, the Dutch government can reimburse part of the costs associated with hiring consultants. Governmental reimbursements also might be useful for training budgets allocated to part-time, senior or temporary employees because employers are somewhat hesitant to invest in the talent of these vulnerable groups (De Grip *et al.*, 2018). I argue that governmental reimbursements at the front end are preferable to the so-called "redundancy pay"[25] at the back end because the first enables employees to uphold their employability while working, whereas the latter enables employees to hone their skills when chances for a contract prolongation have already evaporated.

25 A redundancy pay is a tenure-contingent budget Dutch employees receive when they involuntarily lose their job and is intended to acquire skills necessary to obtain another job (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

# Nederlandse samenvatting

## Inleiding

Het concept inzetbaarheid – de waarschijnlijkheid van en kans op een baan inclusief mentor-protégé relaties (kortweg "mentoringrelaties") – deed zijn intrede in het onderzoeksveld in de jaren '50 van de vorige eeuw. De explosieve groei in het aantal studies dat handelt over inzetbaarheid is echter pas waarneembaar in de tweede helft van de jaren '90 en de eerste jaren na de eeuwwisseling. Gedurende deze periode voedde het werk van economen, psychologen en sociologen de onderzoeksliteratuur over inzetbaarheid. Geleerden hebben onder meer aandacht besteed aan de rol van baankenmerken of managementondersteuning – kortweg aangeduid als "organisatorische voorwaarden" – in het verklaren van inzetbaarheid (e.g., Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012; Van Harten *et al.*, 2016), het effect van individuele kenmerken op de bereidheid om mentor te worden (e.g., Allen, 2003) en/of de opbrengsten die gepaard gaan met deelname aan een mentoringrelatie (e.g., Allen and Eby, 2003; Mao *et al.*, 2016).

Bovenstaande onderzoeksinspanningen laten onverlet dat wetenschappelijk onderzoek gaten vertoont wanneer het gaat om de gecombineerde effecten van individuele en organisatorische voorwaarden op de inzetbaarheid van werknemers en hun deelname aan mentoringrelaties, de rol die inzetbaarheid inneemt in het verklaren van iemands arbeidsmarktpositie en –transitie alsook de mechanismen die ten grondslag liggen aan het verband tussen mentoringrelaties en door mentoren gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen. Ik betoog dat deze hiaten vooral van belang zijn voor ervaren werknemers van 45 jaar en ouder. Ervaren werknemers binnen deze leeftijdscategorie lopen het risico bekneld te raken in geroutineerde, monotone banen door de aanwezigheid van leeftijdsgerelateerde vooroordelen, beperkte ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden en weinig baanveranderingen buiten de huidige werkgever om. Deze situatie roept ongetwijfeld de vraag op hoe ervaren werknemers hun inzetbaarheid kunnen waarborgen. Een vraag ook, die getuigt van de serieuze zorgen omtrent dit thema.

Naast ervaren werknemers, worden ook werknemers in hun "mid-career" – gedefinieerd als werknemers tussen de 30 en 45 jaar – geconfronteerd met uitdagingen. Zo dienen zij in toenemende mate te accepteren dat de erosie van een levenslang dienstverband bij één werkgever gepaard gaat met een verlies aan baanzekerheid ("toenemende baanonzekerheid") alsook tot gevolg heeft dat zij regelmatig van werkgever dienen te veranderen. Biedt deelname aan mentoringrelaties soelaas op dit vlak, in de zin dat deze relaties de zogeheten "mid-careerists" in staat stellen hun arbeidsmarktkansen te vergroten? Indien ja, hoe dan?

De stelling dat werkgevers en werknemers een gedeelde verantwoordelijkheid hebben voor inzetbaarheidsvraagstukken alsmede voor de totstandkoming van mentoringrelaties voedt – in combinatie met de vooronderstelling dat laatstgenoemden belangrijke kruiwagens vormen voor de gepercipieerde evenals daadwerkelijke

loopbaanvooruitzichten van werknemers – mijn overweging de voornoemde hiaten te adresseren in de volgende onderzoeksvraag:

*"In welke mate en hoe zijn inzetbaarheid en mentoringrelaties gerelateerd aan individuele en organisatorische voorwaarden alsmede aan de gepercipieerde en daadwerkelijke arbeidsmarktkansen, –posities en –transities van ervaren werknemers en mid-careerists?"*

## Onderzoeksmodel

De kolossale groei in het aantal studies dat handelt over inzetbaarheid heeft geresulteerd in een veelheid aan definities van het concept. Deze grote conceptuele verscheidenheid heeft geleerden ertoe gebracht het onderzoeksveld te karakteriseren als "gefragmenteerd". Tegelijkertijd is er enige consensus aanwezig dat inzetbaarheid verwijst naar "de waarschijnlijkheid van en kans op een baan" (Forrier *et al.*, 2015). In de inzetbaarheidsliteratuur zijn twee interpretaties van deze definitie prominent aanwezig. De eerste interpretatie strookt met de zogeheten *"input-based"* benadering. Binnen deze benadering wordt inzetbaarheid opgevat als *"persoonlijke krachten die de kans op een baan vergroten"* (Forrier *et al.*, 2015: 56). De term "persoonlijke krachten" vormt een containerbegrip voor een verscheidenheid aan werknemerskenmerken, variërend van baanspecifieke vaardigheden en werkvermogen tot een aanpassingsgerichte werkhouding en zogeheten *"transferable skills"* (vaardigheden die nuttig zijn in verschillende banen, organisaties en sectoren; de werknemer kan ze "meenemen"). De tweede interpretatie strookt met de zogeheten *"output-based"* benadering. Binnen deze benadering wordt inzetbaarheid opgevat als de gepercipieerde en daadwerkelijke arbeidsmarktkansen, –posities en –transities die het resultaat (*"output"*) zijn van iemands persoonlijke krachten. In korte bewoordingen wordt de *output-based* benadering ook wel aangeduid als de "inschatting" en "realisatie" van de kans op een baan (Forrier *et al.*, 2015).

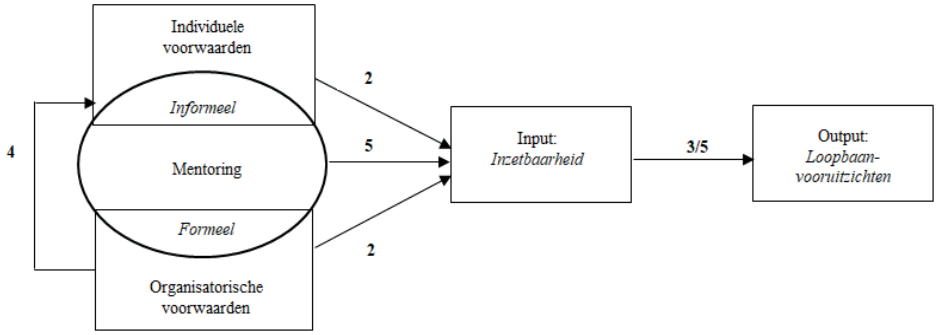
Enkele geleerden overstijgen de *input- en output-based* benaderingen door (tevens) aandacht te besteden aan contextuele voorwaarden (e.g., Hillage and Pollard, 1998; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Contextuele voorwaarden omvatten een veelheid aan organisatorische en maatschappelijke barrières en mogelijkheden (bv. ongelijke behandeling van sollicitanten of overheidsvergoedingen).

Een handvol geleerden bestudeert inzetbaarheid door de lens van sociaal kapitaal (e.g., Forrier *et al.*, 2015; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). In de inzetbaarheidsliteratuur wordt sociaal kapitaal omschreven als het arsenaal aan sociale netwerken die steun bieden bij het vormgeven van iemands carrière en groeiambities. Deze definitie heeft enkelen geïnspireerd om mentoring als een integraal onderdeel van iemands sociaal kapitaal (e.g., Eby *et al.*, 2003) en daarmee inzetbaarheid te aanschouwen. Traditioneel gezien wordt mentoring namelijk omschreven als een werksituatie waarin een ervaren

werknemer een minder ervaren "jongere" kandidaat helpt diens carrièrewensen vorm te geven (e.g., Fletcher and Ragins, 2007). Een uniek kenmerk van een mentoringrelatie is dat die aangeduid kan worden als zowel een individuele alsook een contextuele ("organisatorische") voorwaarde, afhankelijk van het sociale netwerk dat bestudeerd wordt. Vergelijk in dat kader een tip voor een nieuwe baan die iemand ontvangt van een vriend met een door de organisatie gefaciliteerde herplaatsingsvoorziening.

In deze dissertatie breng ik verschillende benaderingen van het concept inzetbaarheid onder in een enkel onderzoeksmodel. Dat doe ik door een duidelijk onderscheid te maken tussen deze benaderingen en ze vervolgens aan elkaar te relateren. In essentie visualiseert mijn onderzoeksmodel de relaties tussen vijf inzetbaarheidscomponenten naar analogie van mijn onderzoeksvraag (Figuur 1). Het eerste concept (individuele voorwaarden) definieer ik als alle kenmerken van een werknemer. Het tweede concept (organisatorische voorwaarden) definieer ik als het arsenaal aan baankenmerken en management ondersteunende HR-praktijken. Het derde concept (mentoring) definieer ik als *"een werksituatie waarin een ervaren werknemer of mid-careerist ondersteuning biedt aan een minder ervaren "jongere" kandidaat, met inachtneming van zijn of haar eigen behoeften"*. Van noemenswaardig belang is dat de inzetbaarheidsliteratuur over sociaal kapitaal mij ertoe brengt mentoring als een vorm van leerbevorderend gedrag te aanschouwen. Verder geeft de literatuur aanleiding het concept mentoring op te delen in informele en formele mentoringrelaties. Een informele mentoringrelatie ontstaat spontaan zonder interventie; een formele mentoringrelatie wordt officieel door een organisatie ingesteld en gereguleerd. Het vierde concept (inzetbaarheid) breng ik onder in drie deelconcepten: professioneel werkvermogen, oftewel het vermogen om met vertrouwen de huidige baan te kunnen uitoefenen; ontwikkelingsproactiviteit, oftewel de motivatie om te leren evenals bereidheid om baanspecifieke vaardigheden te ontwikkelen voordat veranderingen optreden ("aanpassingsgerichte werkhouding"); persoonsgebonden leren, oftewel de ontwikkeling van zogeheten *"transferable skills"* (bv. communicatieve vaardigheden) die bijdragen aan iemands persoonlijke ontwikkeling. Het vijfde en laatste concept (loopbaanvooruitzichten) breng ik onder in twee deelconcepten. Het eerste deelconcept (gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen) betreft de verwachtingen van werknemers over hun toekomstige kansen op een baan evenals de inschatting van hun vermogen de huidige baan te continueren. Het tweede deelconcept (feitelijke loopbanen) betreft de arbeidsmarktposities van werknemers evenals de veranderingen die zij in deze posities doormaken.

**Figuur 1: Onderzoeksmodel**




*Noot:* De nummers die de pijlen vergezellen geven mijn onderzoeksthema's weer en komen overeen met de empirische hoofdstukken in dit proefschrift.

## Empirische hoofdstukken

Mijn onderzoeksmodel bevat vier onderzoeksthema's die in vier afzonderlijke empirische hoofdstukken worden geadresseerd. In **hoofdstuk 2** bestudeer ik de dynamische en gecombineerde effecten van individuele en organisatorische voorwaarden op de ontwikkelingsproactiviteit van ervaren werknemers. Ik gebruik het Taakeisen-Hulpbronnen model (doorgaans aangeduid als het *"Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model"*) alsmede de *Conservation Of Resources (COR)* theorie om ontwikkelingsproactiviteit te definiëren als een persoonlijke hulpbron. Persoonlijke hulpbronnen omvatten aspecten van een individu die betrekking hebben op het vermogen de omgeving op succesvolle wijze te beïnvloeden dan wel te beheersen (Schaufeli en Taris, 2013[26]). Dezelfde theorieën zijn gehanteerd om richting te geven aan de verbanden tussen ontwikkelingsproactiviteit en een breed scala aan uitdagingen (de zogeheten *"challenge demands"*; gemeten als werkdruk en mentale belasting), hulpbronnen (de baankenmerken; gemeten als autonomie en sociale steun), management ondersteunende HR-praktijken (gemeten als ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden) en persoonlijke hulpbronnen (gemeten als waargenomen eigen competentie om nieuwe taken te leren ("self-efficacy") en actieve coping). Vervolgens neem ik COR's gevolgtrekking dat "hulpbronnen (andere) hulpbronnen voortbrengen" als vertrekpunt om positieve verbanden te veronderstellen tussen uitdagingen, hulpbronnen, management ondersteunende HR-praktijken en ontwikkelingsproactiviteit.

Naast hoofdverbanden formuleer ik twee interactieverbanden. Het eerste interactieverband toetst of uitdagingen in de werkomgeving de positieve verbanden tussen baankenmerken, management ondersteunende HR-praktijken en ontwikkelingsproacti-

26 Schaufeli, W. en Taris, T. (2013), "Het Job Demands-Resources model: Overzicht en kritische beschouwing", *Gedrag & Organisatie*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 182-204.

viteit versterken. Deze hypothese wordt doorgaans aangeduid als de *"interactive active learning hypothesis"*. Het tweede interactieverband toetst of het effect van self-efficacy als persoonlijke hulpbron vooral sterk positief is wanneer werknemers over management ondersteunende HR-praktijken beschikken. Deze hypothese duid ik aan als de *"multiplicative resources hypothesis"*.

Ik maak gebruik van het grootschalige, vierjarige (2010-2013) cohortonderzoek STREAM (*Study on Transitions in Employment, Ability and Motivation (TNO);* Ybema *et al.*, 2014) om voornoemde vooronderstellingen empirisch te toetsen. STREAM verschaft een rijkelijk inzicht in de determinanten van de loopbanen van ervaren, Nederlandse werknemers tussen de 45 en 64 jaar (leeftijd bij aanvang van het onderzoek) en includeert variabelen zoals ontwikkelingsproactiviteit en werkvermogen. Mijn multilevel linear model laat zien dat, met uitzondering van autonomie, alle uitdagingen, hulpbronnen en management ondersteunende HR-praktijken positief en significant gerelateerd zijn aan ontwikkelingsproactiviteit. Deze resultaten stellen mij in staat om COR's gevolgtrekking dat "hulpbronnen (andere) hulpbronnen voortbrengen" empirisch te staven. Tegen mijn verwachting in blijken beide interactieverbanden statistisch niet-significant te zijn. Dit resultaat betekent dat ik voorlopig geen uitspraken kan doen over de empirische validiteit van de *"interactive active learning hypothesis"* en *"multiplicative resources hypothesis"* in dit proefschrift.

In **hoofdstuk 3** onderzoek ik de mate waarin professioneel werkvermogen en ontwikkelingsproactiviteit verklaringen bieden voor de arbeidsmarktposities en –transities (aangeduid als "feitelijke loopbanen") van ervaren werknemers. Ik hanteer een brede visie op de term "loopbaan" wat betekent dat ik zowel baanzekerheid alsook neerwaartse en opwaartse transities in iemands loopbaan in ogenschouw neem. In deze benadering volg ik bestaand onderzoek dat deze dichotomie impliceert (e.g., Raemdonck *et al.*, 2012). Concreet meet ik opwaartse transities aan de hand van een promotie, neerwaartse transities aan de hand van een demotie en/of verlies van salaris en baanzekerheid aan de hand van baanbehoud versus baanverlies (een werknemer raakt "werkloos"). Conceptueel gezien duid ik opwaartse transities aan als "arbeidsmarktwinsten" (in het Engels aangeduid als *"employment gains"*) en neerwaartse transities evenals baanverlies als "arbeidsmarktverliezen" (in het Engels aangeduid als *"employment losses"*).

Als theoretisch kader gebruik ik wederom de *Conservation Of Resources (COR)* theorie. Op basis van deze theorie definieer ik professioneel werkvermogen, ontwikkelingsproactiviteit evenals de bewerkstelliging van arbeidsmarktwinsten en afwezigheid van arbeidsmarktverliezen als hulpbronnen. COR's gevolgtrekking dat "hulpbronnen (andere) hulpbronnen voortbrengen" helpt mij vervolgens om positieve verbanden te veronderstellen tussen professioneel werkvermogen, ontwik-

kelingsproactiviteit en arbeidsmarktwinsten. COR's gevolgtrekking dat "hulpbronnen een verlies van (andere) hulpbronnen tegengaan" helpt mij om negatieve verbanden te veronderstellen tussen professioneel werkvermogen, ontwikkelingsproactiviteit en arbeidsmarktverliezen. Ik gebruik het voornoemde cohortonderzoek STREAM om deze vooronderstellingen empirisch te toetsen. Mijn cross-lagged logistische regressiemodellen laten zien dat ontwikkelingsproactiviteit voorspellende waarde heeft voor de bewerkstelliging van arbeidsmarktwinsten, terwijl professioneel werkvermogen voorspellende waarde heeft voor het voorkomen van arbeidsmarktverliezen.

In **hoofdstuk 4** onderzoek ik de rol die organisatorische voorwaarden vervullen in de bereidheid van ervaren werknemers en "mid-careerists" om informeel mentor te worden. Belangrijk vertrekpunt is de conceptualisering van informeel mentoren als een exemplarische vorm van *Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)* – in het Nederlands omschreven met behulp van de minder gebruikelijke term "Organisatorisch Burgerschap". *Organisational Citizenship Behaviour* verwijst naar *"werknemersgedrag dat discretionair van aard is (d.w.z.: geen inherent onderdeel vormt van iemands contractuele baan), niet formeel wordt beloond en waarvan verondersteld wordt dat het de organisatie ten goede komt"* (Organ, 1988: 4).

Teneinde mijn theoretische vooronderstellingen kracht bij te zetten, breng ik organisatorische voorwaarden onder in twee deelconcepten: belemmeringen in de werkomgeving (de zogeheten *"hindrance demands"*; gemeten als tijdsdruk en reorganisaties) en "gepercipieerde organisatorische steun van intrinsieke waarden". Concreet verwijst dit tweede deelconcept naar de mate waarin werknemers waarnemen dat hun organisatie intrinsieke waarden uitdraagt. Steun van collega-mentoren, leermogelijkheden alsook leidinggevenden die informeel – en daarmee – spontaan mentoren aanmoedigen, zijn intrinsieke waarden die centraal staan in dit proefschrift. Vervolgens veronderstel ik dat de gepercipieerde organisatorische steun van intrinsieke waarden informeel mentoren faciliteert, terwijl belemmeringen in de werkomgeving informeel mentoren in de weg staan.

Voornoemde vooronderstellingen zijn afgeleid van een theoretisch kader waarin zelf-determinatie theorie (in het Engels aangeduid als *"Self-Determination Theory (SDT)"*), sociale ruiltheorie (in het Engels aangeduid als *"Social Exchange Theory (SET)"*) en theorieën omtrent gepercipieerde organisatorische steun (in het Engels aangeduid als *"Perceived Organisational Support (POS)"*) samenkomen. Deze theorieën poneren de stelling dat werknemers reciproque gedrag vertonen wanneer hun organisatie voor hen zorgt (intrinsieke waarden behartigt), maar afzien van dit gedrag wanneer hun organisatie hen verwaarloost (belemmeringen opwerpt).

Ik gebruik een vignette studie om mijn vooronderstellingen empirisch te toetsen. Een vignette studie is een quasi-experiment waarin respondenten hun bereidheid om

informeel mentor te worden baseren op een hypothetische doch realistische werksituatie. Deze vignette studie was onderdeel van een cross-sectioneel vragenlijstonderzoek dat in het najaar van 2017 is uitgezet onder een grote, heterogene steekproef van Nederlandse werknemers in de leeftijd van 29 tot 69 jaar. Mijn multilevel linear model laat zien dat ervaren werknemers en "mid-careerists" gemiddeld genomen meer bereid zijn om informeel mentor te worden wanneer hun organisatie intrinsieke waarden uitdraagt, maar gemiddeld genomen minder daartoe geneigd zijn wanneer hun organisatie belemmeringen in de werkomgeving opwerpt.

In **hoofdstuk 5** toets ik de impliciete aanname dat zowel de gepercipieerde kwaliteit van de mentoringrelatie alsook persoonsgebonden leren het verband tussen het type mentoringrelatie (informeel versus formeel) en de door mentoren gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen mediëren. Daarbij verwijst de gepercipieerde kwaliteit van de mentoringrelatie naar de percepties van mentoren aangaande de mate waarin de mentoringrelatie voor zowel mentoren als protégés bevredigend, effectief en bevorderlijk (beide partijen profiteren van de relatie) is (Allen and Eby, 2003; Mao *et al.*, 2016). Bestaand onderzoek (e.g., Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Mao *et al.*, 2016) voedt mijn keuze om persoonsgebonden leren op te delen in twee dimensies: werkgerelateerd, relationeel leren (organisatorisch bewustzijn, feedback en zelfonthulling) en persoonlijke vaardigheden (empathie, zelfreflectie en communicatieve vaardigheden). Ik gebruik de in de psychologie veelgebruikte zelf-determinatie theorie om de vooronderstelling te poneren dat de gepercipieerde kwaliteit van de mentoringrelatie gemiddeld genomen hoger ligt onder informele dan onder formele mentoren. Vervolgens veronderstel ik dat naarmate mentoren de kwaliteit van hun mentoringrelatie hoger inschatten, zij hun persoonsgebonden leren evenals gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen gunstiger beoordelen.

Ik gebruik hetzelfde cross-sectionele vragenlijstonderzoek als in **hoofdstuk 4** om voornoemde vooronderstellingen empirisch te toetsen. Mijn seriële structurele vergelijkingen modellen (in het Engels aangeduid als *"Structural Equation Models (SEM)"*) laten zien dat het verband tussen het type mentoringrelatie en de door mentoren gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen tot stand komt via de gepercipieerde kwaliteit van de mentoringrelatie en werkgerelateerd, relationeel leren. Alle coëfficiënten zijn daarbij in de veronderstelde richting. Tegen mijn verwachting in geldt een dergelijk mediërend verband niet voor persoonlijke vaardigheden.

## Theoretische bijdragen

De voornoemde empirische hoofdstukken geven aanleiding tot een aantal conclusies. Op de eerste plaats laten mijn resultaten zien dat de organisatorische determinanten van

inzetbaarheid tevens belangrijke antecedenten vormen van de bereidheid om informeel mentor te worden. Concreet wijzen mijn analyses uit dat baankenmerken en management ondersteunende HR-praktijken (sociale steun (ontvangen van leidinggevenden en collega's), ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden) zowel een positief verband onderhouden met ontwikkelingsproactiviteit als met de bereidheid om informeel mentor te worden. Dit resultaat is op een tweetal fronten van noemenswaardig belang. Allereerst stelt het mij in staat om de op SDT-, POS- en SET-gebaseerde propositie aan te nemen dat organisaties die intrinsieke waarden uitdragen reciproque werknemersgedrag uitlokken. Concreet verwoord vergroten deze organisaties de bereidheid van ervaren werknemers en "mid-careerists" om informeel mentor te worden. Door de eenzijdige nadruk op individuele determinanten in bestaand onderzoek naar mentoring is een dergelijke conclusie tot op heden nauwelijks getrokken. Ten tweede voedt het de conclusie dat veelgebruikte theorieën in de inzetbaarheidsliteratuur meerwaarde hebben voor toekomstig onderzoek waarin de mentor centraal staat. Dit is een relevante gevolgtrekking, omdat de inzetbaarheidsliteratuur verder doorontwikkeld is dan de onderzoeksliteratuur waarin de mentor het middelpunt is.

Op de tweede plaats laten mijn resultaten zien dat werkdruk (of zijn equivalent: tijdsdruk) als onderdeel van iemands taakeisen een positief verband onderhoudt met ontwikkelingsproactiviteit, maar een negatief effect sorteert op de bereidheid om informeel mentor te worden. Dit gedifferentieerde effect kan begrepen worden bij gebruikmaking van de zogeheten *"appraisal theories of stress"* (e.g., Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In essentie poneren deze theorieën de stelling dat de manier waarop een individu reageert op een eis van buitenaf (bv. een taakeis vanuit de organisatie) afhangt van diens beoordeling van deze eis. Mijn resultaten impliceren dat potentiële mentoren tijdsdruk als een belemmering beoordelen, waarschijnlijk omdat deze druk een dubbele belasting met zich meebrengt – stelt u zich een situatie voor waarin iemand buiten werktijd om een jongere kandidaat ondersteuning gaat bieden wanneer er nauwelijks ruimte is het eigenlijke werk binnen werktijd af te ronden. Omdat de beoordeling een belemmering indiceert, wordt een negatief verband gevonden tussen tijdsdruk (de eis) en leerbevorderend gedrag (de reactie) – in dit geval gemeten aan de hand van de bereidheid om informeel mentor te worden. Mijn resultaten impliceren tevens dat ervaren werknemers werkdruk als een uitdaging kunnen beoordelen wanneer deze druk beperkt blijft tot het eigenlijke werk. De reden hiervoor is dat werkdruk waarschijnlijk een positieve belofte in zich draagt. Deze belofte werkt stimulerend en leidt tot proactief leren om de werkdruk te beteugelen. Aldus is het plausibel dat een positief verband wordt gevonden tussen werkdruk (de eis) en leerbevorderend gedrag (de reactie) – in dit geval gemeten aan de hand van ontwikkelingsproactiviteit als inzetbaarheidscomponent. Ervan uitgaande dat voornoemde redeneringen juist zijn, levert dit proefschrift een bijdrage aan de literatuur over *"appraisal theories of stress"* door het potentiële nut van

deze theorieën voor het verklaren van leerbevorderend gedrag in het algemeen en mentoringrelaties in het bijzonder aan te tonen.

Op de derde plaats pleit ik voor een herdefiniëring van taakeisen en hulpbronnen in het Taakeisen-Hulpbronnen *("Job Demands-Resources")* model. De conclusies uit de voornoemde twee paragrafen onderstrepen het belang daarbij twee zaken in ogenschouw te nemen. Ten eerste dient erkend te worden dat de organisatorische determinanten van leerbevorderend gedrag – gemeten aan de hand van inzetbaarheid of mentoring – verscheidene valenties kennen. Deze valenties lopen uiteen van een eenduidige positieve tot een gedeelde positieve en negatieve tot een eenduidige negatieve valentie. Ten tweede dient erkend te worden dat de valenties van de organisatorische determinanten contextgebonden zijn. In het Taakeisen-Hulpbronnen model worden hulpbronnen doorgaans gedefinieerd als *"die fysieke, psychologische, sociale of organisatorische aspecten van het werk die functioneel zijn bij het bereiken van werkdoelen, […] en/of persoonlijke groei en ontwikkeling stimuleren"* (Schaufeli en Taris, 2013: 195). Ik sta de volgende herdefiniëring voor: hulpbronnen verwijzen naar *"die fysieke, psychologische, sociale of organisatorische aspecten van het werk die individuen hetzij eenduidig positief dan wel zowel positief als negatief beoordelen en die functioneel zijn bij het bereiken van werkdoelen, […] en/of persoonlijke groei en ontwikkeling stimuleren"*. De meerwaarde van deze herdefiniëring is tweeledig. Allereerst integreert het hulpbronnen met verscheidene valenties in één begrip. Daarmee biedt de herdefiniëring een alomvattend interpretatiekader waarbinnen het belang van zowel hulpbronnen met een eenduidige positieve valentie (bv. sociale steun; de "typische" hulpbronnen; **hoofdstukken 2 en 4**) alsook hulpbronnen met een gedeelde positieve en negatieve valentie (bv. werkdruk; een zogeheten *"challenge demand"* of "uitdaging"; **hoofdstuk 2**) begrepen kan worden. Ten tweede biedt de herdefiniëring een theoretisch interpretatiekader voor mijn resultaten uit **hoofdstuk 5**. Uit dit hoofdstuk blijkt dat mentoren die de kwaliteit van hun mentoringrelatie als hoogstaand beoordelen – en derhalve hun mentoringrelatie een positieve valentie toedichten – leerbevorderend gedrag vertonen.

Taakeisen vormen de conceptuele tegenhanger van hulpbronnen en worden doorgaans gedefinieerd als *"die fysieke, psychologische, sociale of organisatorische aspecten van het werk die voortdurende fysieke en/of psychologische (cognitieve en emotionele) inspanning of vaardigheden vereisen en waaraan dientengevolge fysiologische en psychologische kosten verbonden zijn"* (Schaufeli en Taris, 2013: 195). Ik stel voor taakeisen te herdefiniëren als *"die fysieke, psychologische, sociale of organisatorische aspecten van het werk die individuen eenduidig negatief beoordelen, waarvan bekend is dat zij voortdurende fysieke en/of psychologische (cognitieve en emotionele) inspanning of vaardigheden vereisen en waaraan dientengevolge fysiologische en psychologische kosten verbonden zijn"*. Deze herdefiniëring complementeert mijn herdefiniëring van hulpbronnen, omdat het *challenge demands* (de "uitdagingen") uitsluit, maar *hindrance demands* (de "belemmeringen", oftewel voorwaarden met een

eenduidige negatieve valentie) includeert. Dat gezegd hebbende, poneer ik de stelling dat het Taakeisen-Hulpbronnen model een integraal interpretatiekader biedt voor het begrijpen van het gedifferentieerde effect van werkdruk (of zijn equivalent: tijdsdruk). Ik kan immers betogen dat werkdruk strookt met mijn herdefiniëring van hulpbronnen (het vormt een uitdaging), terwijl tijdsdruk (zijn equivalent) strookt met mijn herdefiniëring van taakeisen (het vormt een belemmering). Op grond hiervan concludeer ik dat het conceptuele onderscheid tussen hulpbronnen en taakeisen vager is dan de gebruikelijke definities van beide concepten impliceren.

Met betrekking tot de relaties tussen inzetbaarheid, mentoring en de gepercipieerde evenals daadwerkelijke loopbaanvooruitzichten van werknemers, trek ik de volgende conclusies. Allereerst laten mijn resultaten uit **hoofdstuk 5** zien dat de werkgerelateerde, relationele vaardigheden van ervaren werknemers en "mid-careerists" een positief verband onderhouden met hun gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen. Daarnaast laten mijn resultaten uit **hoofdstuk 3** zien dat ontwikkelingsproactiviteit en professioneel werkvermogen invloed uitoefenen op de daadwerkelijke arbeidsmarktposities en –transities van ervaren werknemers. Deze resultaten stellen mij in staat om de veelgeciteerde doch empirisch nauwelijks gestaafde propositie (een uitzondering vormt het werk van Forrier *et al.*, 2015) zó te valideren dat persoonlijke krachten (*"inputs"*) voorspellende waarde hebben voor zowel de "inschatting" als "realisatie" (*"outputs"*) van de kans op een baan.

Op de tweede plaats – en tegen mijn verwachtingen in – wijzen mijn resultaten uit dat ontwikkelingsproactiviteit geen voorspellende waarde heeft voor het voorkomen van arbeidsmarktverliezen, terwijl professioneel werkvermogen geen voorspellende waarde heeft voor de bewerkstelliging van arbeidsmarktwinsten. De implicaties van dit resultaat zijn tweeledig. Allereerst impliceert het dat de prominente rol die proactiviteit veelal krijgt toebedeeld in bestaand inzetbaarheidsonderzoek (e.g., Fugate *et al.*, 2004) dient te worden afgezwakt. Proactiviteit is – afgaand op mijn proefschrift – geen allesbepalende factor in de beoordeling van de inzetbaarheid van ervaren werknemers. Ten tweede effent voornoemd resultaat het pad voor een herdefiniëring van het concept "hulpbronnen" binnen de *Conservation Of Resources (COR)* theorie. Belangrijk vertrekpunt hiervoor is de definitie van hulpbronnen zoals opgesteld door Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl en Westman (2014). In hun conceptueel paper over Hobfoll's COR theorie definiëren zij hulpbronnen als *"alles wat een individu percipieert als zijnde behulpzaam bij het behalen van zijn of haar doelen"* (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014: 5). De voornoemde erkenning dat hulpbronnen voor leerbevorderend gedrag contextgebonden zijn en verscheidende valenties kennen, voedt mijn keuze om hulpbronnen binnen Hobfoll's COR theorie als volgt te herdefiniëren. Hulpbronnen verwijzen naar *"alles wat individuen aanschouwen als waardevol en als zijnde behulpzaam bij het behalen van hun (leer)doelen, waarbij de term "alles"*

*ofwel een eenduidige positieve ofwel een gedeelde positieve en negatieve valentie kan hebben".*

Door de erkenning van verscheidende valenties en inclusie van de term "leren" – graag herinner ik de lezer eraan dat zowel ontwikkelingsproactiviteit, mentoring als persoonsgebonden leren leerelementen in zich dragen – beweer ik dat voornoemde herdefiniëring een interpretatiekader biedt voor de resultaten waarvan in dit proefschrift verslag is gedaan. Daarbij gaat speciale aandacht uit naar **hoofdstuk 3**. De volgende redenaties geef ik als houvast mee om de onverwachte resultaten in dit hoofdstuk te duiden. Ontwikkelingsproactiviteit heeft geen voorspellende waarde voor het voorkomen van arbeidsmarktverliezen omdat de focus op deze activiteit het aangaan van nieuwe uitdagingen in de weg staat: uitdagingen, die de belofte in zich kunnen dragen nieuwe doelen te behalen. Anders verwoord ontneemt een proactieve werknemer zichzelf de kans nieuwe doelen te behalen wanneer hij of zij zich richt op het behoud van bestaande hulpbronnen zonder zich in te spannen deze bronnen uit te breiden. Gegeven het belang van doelrealisatie in mijn herdefiniëring van hulpbronnen, leidt deze redenatie tot de conclusie dat het voorkomen van arbeidsmarktverliezen *geen* hulpbron vormt voor proactieve werknemers.

Andersom geredeneerd doet het argument opgeld dat professioneel werkvermogen geen voorspellende waarde heeft voor de bewerkstelliging van arbeidsmarktwinsten, omdat deze activiteit verlangt dat werknemers bestaande hulpbronnen inzetten om nieuwe prestaties te leveren (bv. "zichzelf laten zien om een promotie te bemachtigen"). Werknemers die professioneel werkvermogen bezitten, hebben *ceteris paribus* minder hulpbronnen tot hun beschikking dan werknemers die proactief leren – dat is, ze zijn "net" vermogend genoeg hun huidige baan uit te oefenen. Op het moment dat werknemers die professioneel werkvermogen bezitten hun bestaande hulpbronnen gaan inzetten, ontstaat de kans op verspilling. Deze verspilling leidt er vervolgens toe dat zelfs de meest basale doelen – zoals baanbehoud – niet meer gegarandeerd kunnen worden. Gegeven het belang van doelrealisatie in mijn herdefiniëring van hulpbronnen, leidt deze redenatie tot de conclusie dat de bewerkstelliging van arbeidsmarktwinsten *geen* hulpbron vormt voor werknemers met professioneel werkvermogen.

## Methodologische bijdragen

Naast conceptuele en theoretische bijdragen levert dit proefschrift een viertal methodologische vernieuwingen. Op de eerste plaats bestudeer ik of de ontwikkelingsproactiviteit van ervaren werknemers verandert over een periode van vier opeenvolgende jaren (**hoofdstuk 2**). Mijn resultaten laten zien dat dit niet het geval is – een ervaren werknemer laat een nagenoeg gelijke mate van ontwikkelingsproactiviteit zien over de bestudeerde tijdsperiode. Daarmee werpen mijn resultaten nieuw licht op de claim dat iemands inzetbaarheid *"substantieel vergroot kan worden door erin te investeren"* (Pruijt,

2013: 1614). Het is echter vermeldenswaardig dat deze conclusie opgeld doet voor zover inzetbaarheid is gedefinieerd als ontwikkelingsproactiviteit alsook voor zover inzetbaarheidsonderzoek zich richt op ervaren werknemers.

Op de tweede plaats gebruik ik een cross-lagged model om de effecten van de inzetbaarheidscomponenten "ontwikkelingsproactiviteit" en "professioneel werkvermogen" op de daadwerkelijke loopbaanvooruitzichten van ervaren werknemers te schatten (**hoofdstuk 3**). Dit onderzoeksdesign stelt mij in staat om een solide basis te leggen voor de causale richting van de verbanden tussen inzetbaarheid en loopbaanvooruitzichten. Dit is belangrijk, omdat bestaand, overwegend cross-sectioneel inzetbaarheidsonderzoek (e.g., Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009) nauwelijks mogelijkheden biedt dergelijke causaliteitsaannames te maken.

Op de derde plaats gebruik ik een quasi-experimenteel design om de relaties tussen organisatorische voorwaarden en de bereidheid om mentor te worden, te onderzoeken. De meerwaarde van dit onderzoeksdesign is tweeledig. Allereerst verhoogt het de interne validiteit van mijn onderzoek en reduceert het sociaal-wenselijke antwoorden. Dit stelt mij in staat om de "echte" effecten van condities op de bereidheid om mentor te worden, te achterhalen (met het woord "echt" wordt bedoeld dat de coëfficiënt die aangeeft of een bepaalde voorwaarde van invloed is niet wordt vertroebeld door de coëfficiënten die horen bij de andere, in het model opgenomen voorwaarden). Ten tweede stelt voornoemd onderzoeksdesign mij in staat om fermere conclusies te trekken over de richting van de verbanden tussen organisatorische voorwaarden en leerbevorderend gedrag. In het door mij in **hoofdstuk 2** geschatte multilevel linear model wordt ervan uitgegaan dat antecedenten (de organisatorische voorwaarden) en uitkomsten (leerbevorderend gedrag) *gelijktijdig* optreden. Mijn quasi-experiment in **hoofdstuk 4** omzeilt deze gelijktijdigheid door respondenten te dwingen zich *eerst* de organisatorische voorwaarden in te beelden *alvorens* een inschatting te maken van hun bereidheid om mentor te worden. Zonder mijn conclusie op dit vlak te verabsoluteren, acht ik het aldus plausibel dat organisatorische voorwaarden *voorafgaan aan in plaats van volgen op* leerbevorderend gedrag.

Op de vierde plaats bied ik een hedendaags antwoord op de onderbelichte vraag of de kwaliteit van de mentoringrelatie het verband tussen het type mentoringrelatie (informeel versus formeel) en de door mentoren gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen medieert (**hoofdstuk 5**). Deze benadering komt tegemoet aan de groeiende behoefte om de kwaliteit van de mentoringrelatie een prominente rol toe te dichten in (toekomstig) onderzoek naar mentoring(relaties) (Fletcher and Ragins, 2007; Janssen *et al.*, 2016; Ragins, 2012).

## Praktische bijdragen

Dit proefschrift biedt enkele handvatten aan praktijkbeoefenaars die geïnteresseerd zijn in kostenbesparende en effectieve instrumenten om informeel mentoren en inzetbaarheid binnen de organisatie te stimuleren. Op de eerste plaats raad ik organisaties aan om een integraal leerklimaat te omarmen. Een dergelijk leerklimaat kent twee pijlers. De eerste pijler is gericht op voortdurende persoonlijke groei en ontwikkeling. Dit kan worden bewerkstelligd door werknemers een persoonlijk werkbudget toe te kennen dat ze vrijelijk kunnen gebruiken voor opleidingen, coaching en het aanleren van vaardigheden. Reeds eerder is een lans gebroken voor een dergelijke "persoonlijke portemonnee" (NRC, 2018[27]), maar de praktijk van alledag blijkt weerbarstiger. Zestig procent van de Nederlandse werkgevers wenst meer overheidsvergoedingen op dit vlak (SCP, 2019) – een punt waar ik op terugkom. Coaching is in het bijzonder relevant. Onderzoek heeft namelijk aangetoond dat coaching positief gerelateerd is aan de cursusdeelname van werknemers van 55 jaar en ouder (De Grip *et al.*, 2018).

De voornoemde relevantie van persoonlijke werkbudgetten laat mijns inziens onverlet dat ook aandacht dient te worden besteed aan de bewustwording van het bestaan van dergelijke budgetten. Deze aanbeveling wordt bekrachtigd door onderzoek waaruit blijkt dat werknemers zich eerder verplicht voelen de huidige baan goed uit te oefenen dan te investeren in opleidingen (Freese en Schaik, 2011, zoals geciteerd in Dekker *et al.*, 2013). Organisaties kunnen het bewustzijn van werknemers vergroten door de werkbudgetten op de salarisstroken te vermelden alsook door periodiek carrièreweken te organiseren. Teneinde de allocatie van werkbudgetten rendabel te laten zijn, is het tevens raadzaam externe consultants in te huren die werknemers helpen een opleiding of cursus te kiezen die aansluit bij hun (leer)vermogens en wensen. In dat kader doet het inschakelen van consultants recht aan het belang van coaching voor oudere werknemers (zie vorige alinea).

De tweede pijler onderstreept het belang om leeractiviteiten naast de huidige baan uit te oefenen. De bevinding in dit proefschrift dat werknemers gemiddeld genomen meer bereid zijn om informeel mentor te worden wanneer hun leidinggevenden informeel (spontaan) mentoren aanmoedigen, onderstreept de rol die hierin is weggelegd voor direct leidinggevenden. Vermeldenswaardig is echter dat leidinggevenden dienen af te zien van financiële incentives, omdat deze incentives de bereidheid om mentor te worden kunnen onderdrukken (Allen, 2003). Top managers kunnen direct leidinggevenden een helpende hand bieden door de meerwaarde van trainingen voor werknemers te erkennen – i.e. hun geloof in deze meerwaarde te uiten. Doordat deze erkenning de negatieve

27 NRC (2018), "Tien jaar later, jammer van de gemiste kansen", Persbericht, Beschikbaar via [Beveiligd]: https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/12/03/tien-jaar-na-commissie-bakker-deja-vu-van-gemiste-kansen-a3007726 (Geraadpleegd op 28 augustus 2020).

percepties van werknemers over de kans om tegen een glazen plafond aan te lopen, kan reduceren (Allen *et al.*, 1999), geeft het een positieve impuls aan informeel mentoren op de werkvloer. Leidinggevenden van protégés vervullen tevens een schakelfunctie, omdat zij protégés die bekwaam zijn in leren kunnen overtuigen van het belang hun leermotivatie kenbaar te maken. Deze leermotivatie prikkelt potentiële mentoren om informeel mentor te worden (**hoofdstuk 4**).

Op de tweede plaats raad ik organisaties aan te investeren in solidaire horizontale relaties op de werkvloer – d.w.z.: te investeren in positieve samenwerkingsverbanden tussen collega's. Deze samenwerkingsverbanden kunnen concreet vorm krijgen door periodiek informele bijeenkomsten te organiseren die mentoren in staat stellen positieve ervaringen met het mentorschap te delen, tegenslagen openlijk te bespreken, feedback te ontvangen van collega-mentoren en bestaande netwerken uit te breiden. Dergelijke samenwerkingsverbanden versterken niet alleen gevoelens van onderlinge verbondenheid, maar stellen mentoren mogelijkerwijs ook in staat hun organisatiesensitiviteit en zelfonthulling te verbeteren doordat zij in contact kunnen staan met collega-mentoren die protégés van verschillende afdelingen begeleiden.

Naast een integraal leerklimaat en solidaire horizontale werkrelaties bepleit ik ontziemaatregelen (maatregelen die tot doel hebben werknemers te ontlasten). Concreet raad ik praktijkbeoefenaars – i.e. HR professionals en adviseurs – aan om banen dusdanig te herontwerpen dat geroutineerde, monotone taken die simpel van aard zijn uit de baan worden "geknipt" en worden overgeheveld naar een collega. Dit "uithollen" van een bestaande baan wordt *job carving* genoemd (Dekker *et al.*, 2013) en kan een bruikbaar instrument zijn om de tijdsdruk binnen de contractuele baan te reduceren. Door de mogelijke reductie van tijdsdruk kan *job carving* tevens een interessant instrument vormen om informeel mentoren te faciliteren. Praktijkbeoefenaars die *job carving* voorstaan, raad ik aan aandacht te besteden aan twee zaken. Ten eerste: verwijder enkel taken die werknemers niet tot nauwelijks interessant vinden. Op deze manier wordt voorkomen dat de baan zijn aantrekkingskracht op de werknemer verliest (de werknemer raakt bv. gedemotiveerd). Ten tweede: zorg ervoor dat de tijd die vrijkomt niet enkel wordt besteed aan het vormgeven van de groeiambities en carrière van de protégé, maar ook aan de ontwikkeling van de mentor zelf. Deze aanbeveling wordt ondersteund door de bevinding in dit proefschrift dat informele mentoringrelaties vergelijkbaar zijn met wederkerige leerfora die mentoren helpen hun inzetbaarheid en gepercipieerde arbeidsmarktkansen te vergroten.

Ontziemaatregelen vormen niet enkel een bruikbaar instrument om informeel mentoren op de werkvloer te faciliteren. Dergelijke maatregelen kunnen ook een belangrijk middel vormen om het professioneel werkvermogen van werknemers op te vijzelen. Op deze manier vormen ontziemaatregelen mogelijkerwijs een interessant instrument voor werknemers om zich in te dekken tegen arbeidsmarktverliezen zoals

baanverlies of verlies van salaris – of om op z'n minst de kans op deze verliezen te reduceren.

Voornoemde aanbevelingen wekken wellicht de suggestie dat enkel organisaties verantwoordelijk zijn voor inzetbaarheidsvraagstukken alsmede voor de totstandkoming van mentoringrelaties. Dat is geenszins mijn bedoeling. In mijn optiek vervullen sociale partners en de Nederlandse overheid ook een schakelfunctie. Terwijl sociale partners werkgevers kunnen helpen de juiste werkbudgetten aan te trekken, vervult de Nederlandse overheid mijns inziens onder meer de rol van financier. Deze rol kan tot uitdrukking komen door het gedeeltelijk dekken van de kosten die gepaard gaan met het inhuren van externe consultants, maar kan ook manifest worden door werkgevers vergoedingen voor persoonlijke werkbudgetten te bieden. Aangezien recent onderzoek (De Grip *et al.*, 2018) laat zien dat werkgevers enigszins huiverig zijn om te investeren in de talenten van kwetsbare groepen zoals parttime, ervaren of tijdelijke werknemers, is het raadzaam dergelijke vergoedingen op maat aan te bieden. Ik beweer dat dergelijke overheidsvergoedingen aan de voorkant, d.w.z. bij indiensttreding en tijdens het dienstverband, de voorkeur verdienen boven de zogeheten "transitievergoeding"[28] aan de achterkant, d.w.z. bij uitdiensttreding. Belangrijke reden hiervoor is dat persoonlijke werkbudgetten aan de voorkant werknemers mogelijkheden bieden hun inzetbaarheid op peil te houden tijdens hun dienstverband, terwijl transitievergoedingen aan de achterkant werknemers "slechts" mogelijkheden bieden nieuwe vaardigheden aan te leren wanneer hun kansen op een contractverlenging reeds zijn verdampt.

28 Een transitievergoeding is een op de duur van het dienstverband gebaseerde vergoeding die werknemers van hun werkgevers ontvangen bij ontslag. Een transitievergoeding is onder meer bedoeld om vaardigheden op te doen voor een andere baan (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

# Curriculum Vitae

## About the author

Conny Jacoba Johanna Roobol was born in Delft in 1985. After successfully completing her pre-university education ("vwo") at the Christian Lyceum Delft in 2003, she enrolled in the bachelor's program in sociology at the Department of Sociology of Erasmus University Rotterdam. In 2005, she participated in the first multidisciplinary "class of excellence" called the Erasmus Honours Programme, for which she received an additional note on her bachelor's certificate in 2007 and a letter of recommendation from the rector magnificus. Continuing her interest in sociology and social research, Conny became a student of the Dutch Master *Arbeid, Organisatie en Management* ("Labour, Organisation and Management") of Erasmus University Rotterdam and graduated in 2009 (judicium "cum laude").

In 2009 and 2010, she worked as a junior lecturer at the Department of Sociology of Erasmus University Rotterdam, teaching several courses in statistics, methodology and sociological theory.

From 2010 to 2014, Conny served as a labour market analyst in the research department of Intelligence Group, a Dutch data and tech agency specialising in recruitment, employability and labour market communication. She collected and analysed quantitative data for HR professionals and recruiters tasked with attracting top talent and setting up an employer brand campaign. Conny worked for a variety of nationally and internationally renowned companies and fulfilled the roles of prime investigator and coordinator in large-scale research projects on recruitment.

In September 2014, Conny returned to Erasmus University as a PhD candidate on the NWO-TOP project "Sustaining Employability". She has written a dissertation on the drivers, barriers and outcomes of employability and mentoring in the Netherlands and has published in the *Journal of Knowledge Management*. She has presented her work at conferences such as Dutch Day of Sociology (Dag van de Sociologie, 2015-2018), Dutch HRM Network (2017) and the Dutch Labour Market Day (Nederlandse ArbeidsmarktDag, 2015 and 2017). From 2015 to 2018, she followed statistics courses at the Graduate Schools of Utrecht University and Erasmus University Rotterdam and attended summer schools in London and Milan. Beyond being a quantitative researcher, Conny taught and supervised undergraduate students who were writing their theses. In the final stage of her PhD trajectory, she coordinated the interactive masterclass, "Sustaining Employability: Where Science Meets Practice", at Erasmus University Rotterdam in December 2018.

As of April 2020, Conny has joined the information management department of Leiden University as a policy advisor Institutional Research/HRM where she performs (statistical) data analyses and advises education directors and policy makers.

# Portfolio

## Portfolio

*Courses*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2018 | Big data analyses in R | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| 2018 | Introduction course R | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| 2016 | Integrity course | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| 2015 | Longitudinal data analyses | Utrecht University |
| 2015 | Mplus course | Utrecht University |
| 2015 | Academic writing for PhD candidates | Erasmus University Rotterdam |

*Summer schools*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2016 | Life course research | Bocconi University Milan |
| 2015 | Mediation and moderation in Mplus | University of Sheffield London |

*Teaching*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2016-2017 | Thesis Supervision BA Students | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| 2015-2016 | Leeronderzoek (BA/pre-master) | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| | Statistics 1 course (BA/pre-master) | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| 2014-2015 | Thesis Supervision BA Students | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| | Leeronderzoek (BA/pre-master) | Erasmus University Rotterdam |

*Conferences*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2018 | Dutch Day of Sociology (DvdS) | 14 June, Rotterdam (EUR) |
| 2017 | PhD consortium Dutch HRM | 8 November, Nijmegen (RU) |
| 2017 | Dutch Labour Market Day (NAD) | 12 October, Utrecht |
| 2017 | Dutch Day of Sociology (DvdS) | 8 June, Brussels (VUB) |
| 2016 | PhD Day | 14 Dec., Rotterdam (EUR) |
| 2016 | Dutch Day of Sociology (DvdS) | 9 June, Tilburg (TiU) |
| 2015 | PhD Day | 17 Dec., Rotterdam (EUR) |
| 2015 | Dutch Labour Market Day (NAD) | 8 October, The Hague |
| 2015 | Dutch Day of Sociology (DvdS) | 27 May, Amsterdam (UvA) |
| 2014 | PhD Day | 11 Dec., Rotterdam (EUR) |

*Publications – journal articles*

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|---|---|---|
| 2020 | *'How the organisation can affect employees' intention to manage enterprise-specific knowledge through informal mentoring: a vignette study'* | Accepted for publication in the *Journal of Knowledge Management* (co-authored by prof.dr. F. Koster) |

*Publications – conference papers*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2018 | *'The benefits of mentoring accruing to the mentor'* | DvdS, 14 June, R'dam (EUR) |
| 2017 | *'Becoming an informal mentor: Examining the role of the organisational context in midcareer and senior workers' decision to become a mentor: a vignette study'* | NAD, 12 October, Utrecht |
| 2017 | *'Using the conservation of resources theory to assess the role of employability resources in elderly employees' actual employment opportunities: a longitudinal approach'* | DvdS, 8 June, Brussels (VUB) |
| 2016 | *'Unravelling the employability enhancement chain: assessing the mediating role of employability competences in the relation between employability investments and employees' sustainable employment'* | DvdS, 9 June, Tilburg (TiU) |
| 2015 | *'Towards an explanatory framework for employees' developmental proactivity: a longitudinal approach'* | PhD Day, 17 Dec., R'dam (EUR) |
| 2015 | *'How HR practices, work characteristics and personal resources affect employees' employability: a longitudinal study'* | NAD, 8 October, The Hague |

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|---|---|---|
| 2015 | '*Does participation matter? A longitudinal study on the relation between involvement in HR developmental practices and employees' employability'* | DvdS, 27 May, Amsterdam (UvA) |
| 2014 | *'Employability practices and employees' employability enhancement'* | PhD Day, 11 Dec., R'dam (EUR) |