



Proactive champions: how personal and organizational resources enable proactive personalities to become idea champions

Dirk De Clercq^a and Renato Pereira^b

^aBrock University; ^bISCTE-Instituto Universitario de Lisboa and Emerging Markets Research Center, ISCIM

ABSTRACT

In investigating the relationship between employees' proactive personality and idea championing, this study addresses how this relationship might be augmented when employees can draw from pertinent personal resources (persuasion self-efficacy and job enthusiasm) and organizational resources (social interaction and organizational support for change). Two-wave survey data, collected among employees in a banking organization, show that employees' proactive personalities increase the likelihood that they mobilize support for innovative ideas, especially if they (1) feel confident that they can defend these ideas successfully, (2) experience their jobs as sources of personal fulfillment, (3) maintain informal relationships with peers, and (4) believe their organizations embrace change. For managers, these findings indicate that employees will leverage their positive energy, derived from their desire for initiative taking, into enhanced change-oriented championing activities if they also can draw from pertinent resources that enhance their ability or motivation to engage in those leveraging efforts.

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Introduction

Organizational scholars and practitioners acknowledge that an important component of employees' innovative work behaviors pertains to their active promotion of ideas that change and improve the organizational status quo (Bilal & Mariam, 2018; Caniels & Veld, 2019; Tan & Heracleous, 2001). Such championing behaviors – defined as the extent to which employees mobilize support for innovative ideas, whether their own or their colleagues' – benefit the organization, as well as the champions. Their persistent efforts to mobilize support for new ideas enhance employees' job performance (Kissi et al., 2013), decision-making quality (Van Laere & Aggestam, 2016), and ability to develop effective networks within the organization (Coakes & Smith, 2007). Thus, finding ways to encourage employees to engage in idea championing, beyond creative efforts, remains critical, because new ideas alone are not sufficient. Rather, employees must undertake diligent efforts to make other organizational members *aware* of the value of new ideas for their benefits to accrue (De Clercq et al., 2011; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Van De Ven, 1986).

Championing innovative ideas is difficult though. Some organizational members may experience their peers' championing as self-centered or intrusive (Day, 1994; Howell & Boies, 2004; Walter et al., 2011), particularly if the novel ideas do not originate from themselves or if the ideas point to some of their shortcomings (Hon et al., 2014; Markham, 1998; Van Dijk & Van Dick, 2009). The promotion of new ideas, whether targeted at colleagues or supervisors, even could harm champions' personal standing, such that they gain a reputation as troublemakers who push new ideas, without

consideration of others' preferences or concerns (Milliken et al., 2003; Yuan & Woodman, 2010). From this perspective, organizational practitioners need to understand why some employees still go out of their way to champion innovative ideas.

A central premise of this study is that a key personal factor may stimulate championing behaviors, despite the challenges. In particular, employees with proactive personalities exhibit a "disposition toward engaging in active role orientations, such as initiating change and influencing their environment," which implies "an active rather than passive approach toward work" (T.-Y. Kim et al., 2009, p. 94). Due to this disposition, proactive employees might continuously look for new ways to do things, excel in finding opportunities for organizational betterment, and seek to influence others with their opinions (Parker & Sprigg, 1999).¹ Previous research cites a positive association between proactive personalities and various positive work behaviors and outcomes, such as intentions to initiate informal mentorship (Hu et al., 2008), job performance (Thompson, 2005), creativity (Kim, 2019), innovation (Rodrigues & Rebelo, 2019), career progress (Seibert et al., 2001), career satisfaction (T.-Y. Kim et al., 2009), and team effectiveness (Becherer & Maurer, 1999). To add to this research line, we seek to explicate how a proactive personality, as a source of positive job-related energy (Bateman & Crant, 1993), might spur persistent championing of new ideas; we also aim to specify the conditions in which this catalyzing effect is more likely to occur.

To clarify the contingent nature of the link between a proactive personality and championing behavior, we posit that this individual characteristic may stimulate productive work activities for both feasibility- and desirability-related reasons (Chen et al., 2013). In particular, a disposition to be proactive instead of reactive fuels employees with positive energy that they can devote to making the case that innovative ideas are useful and should be accepted by the organization (Seibert et al., 2001). Moreover, a proactive personality enhances their motivation to do all they can to get novel ideas implemented, because this process grants them intrinsic satisfaction (Jiang & Gu, 2015). In turn, the *extent* to which a proactive personality promotes championing behaviors should depend on whether employees have access to pertinent resources that reinforce their ability or motivation to allocate their positive energy, attained from their proactive posture, to relentless mobilization efforts in support of innovative ideas (Quinn et al., 2012).

We focus on four resources, which span two categories: persuasion self-efficacy and job enthusiasm as personal resources and social interaction and organizational support for change as organizational resources. Each resource might serve as a catalyst of the translation of a proactive personality into new idea championing behaviors. That is, we predict that the positive relationship between proactive personality and championing behaviors is more salient to the extent employees (1) are confident they can persuade others to embrace the ideas they suggest (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), (2) feel enthusiastic about their work and experience it as a source of personal fulfillment (Misiółek et al., 2017),² (3) know their organizational colleagues on a personal level (Pooja et al., 2016), and (4) believe the organizational climate is open to change and innovation (Kao et al., 2015).

All four resources enhance the potency with which employees can leverage their proactive personalities to promote innovative ideas, despite any skepticism or resistance they might encounter (Howell, 2005; Quinn et al., 2012; Walter et al., 2011). They do so in complementary ways. First, employees' persuasion self-efficacy and job enthusiasm arise from their personal skills and preferences (Gil-Monte & Figueiredo-Ferraz, 2018; Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), but their social interactions and sense of organizational support for change reflect the organizational context in which they operate (De Clercq et al., 2015; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Second, complementary mechanisms underlie the invigorating roles that we anticipate. The beneficial effects of persuasion self-efficacy and social interaction should derive primarily from employees' increased *ability* to apply positive personal energy to sell innovative ideas to other members, whereas their job enthusiasm and organizational support for change speak mostly to their *motivation* to do so (Quinn et al., 2012). The four selected moderators thus offer a consistent, comprehensive perspective on how employees' access to complementary resources increases the chances that they exercise their proactive preferences in the form of enhanced championing efforts.

COR theory

Our arguments for how and when employees' proactive personality spurs the likelihood that they champion innovative ideas are grounded in conservation of resources (COR) theory. This theory predicts that employees' dedication to certain work activities is informed by the resource gains that they seek to obtain from undertaking these activities (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Specifically, employees should be prone to engage in productive work activities (e.g., idea championing) to the extent that they can leverage their existing personal energy reservoirs to generate additional resource gains (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Employees' relentless mobilization of support for novel ideas promises to improve their current and future work situation, as long as the ideas are accepted and implemented, so it could generate a positive sense that they can contribute meaningfully to their organization's success (De Clercq et al., 2011; Howell, 2005; Kissi et al., 2013). Leveraging their positive personal energy, gained from their proactive personalities, thus might create resource gains for these employees, when they go out of their way to defend innovative ideas.

In addition, COR theory proposes a significant invigorating effect of employees' access to valuable resources – whether personally held or part of the organizational environment (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000) – on their productive work activities. The notion of resource gain spirals (Hobfoll, 2011) postulates an instrumental role of employees' access to complementary resources that *trigger* the application of discretionary personal energy, as long as that application appears attainable or attractive (Quinn et al., 2012). In the context of this study, positive energy resources might translate more readily into championing behaviors if employees can rely on additional resources that make the translation particularly feasible or desirable (Kim, 2019; Chen et al., 2015). Formally, the positive relationship between employees' proactive personality and championing behaviors should be stronger at higher levels of persuasion self-efficacy, job enthusiasm, social interaction, and perceived organizational support for change.

Contributions

This study can benefit organizational scholars, because it details an underexplored behavioral outcome of employees' proactive personality, namely, relentless efforts to promote innovative ideas to organizational colleagues (Howell & Boies, 2004; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Other personal characteristics also stimulate idea championing, such as employees' openness to experience (Lin et al., 2014) or narcissism (Pinto & Patanakul, 2015); we seek to integrate proactive personalities too, as a notable source of positive energy that stimulates action such as innovative idea championing (Parker & Sprigg, 1999; Seibert et al., 2001). As we theorize and empirically show, a proactive personality also translates into championing efforts more forcefully when employees have access to four relevant resources that enhance the viability and appeal of this process (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000; Quinn et al., 2012): persuasion self-efficacy, job enthusiasm, social interaction, and organizational support for change. With this view, this study complements extant research that considers *direct* beneficial effects of these or related resources for spurring innovative work activities. That is, championing activities are more likely among employees who are confident about their persuasion capabilities (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), feel excited about their jobs (Kuo et al., 2014), can draw from close social relationships (Liu, 2013), or enjoy a supportive organizational environment (Shanker et al., 2017). Each focal resource also is connected to work engagement, in that employees tend to be more engaged with their work to the extent that they possess skills that enable them to convince others of their opinions (T.T. Kim et al., 2019), feel enthusiastic toward work (Salanova et al., 2011), and operate in supportive interpersonal (Hutahayan, 2019) or organizational (Saks, 2019) environments. Building on these insights, we address a relevant question for organizational practice, related to how the four resources might stimulate employees to *leverage* their disposition toward initiative taking in the form of diligent championing efforts. That is, we establish when a key personal characteristic like a proactive personality produces the greatest organizational payoffs for such efforts.

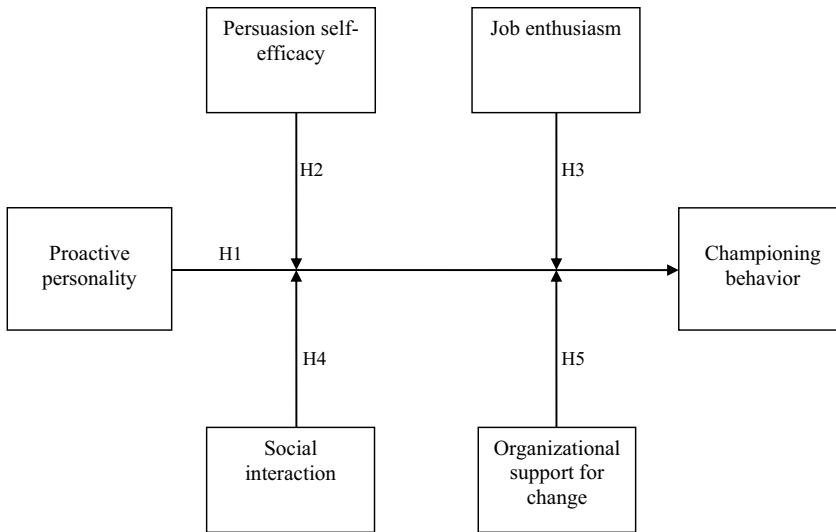


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

We test these predictions in an understudied African context, Mozambique. This country is marked by high levels of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2010), such that employees might be somewhat reluctant to work actively to mobilize support for potentially controversial ideas that could compromise their organizational standing (Howell, 2005; Walter et al., 2011). Our focus on the *reinforcing* value and influence of pertinent resources should be particularly relevant in this empirical context, in which people might generally want to avoid applying their proactive personality to enhanced championing behavior. Moreover, this study responds to calls for investigations of innovative work behaviors in non-Western settings, to generate practical insights into how organizations that compete in different regions of the world, including Africa, can leverage the personal energy and preferences held by their employee bases toward dedicated innovative activities that add value to the entire organization (Antwi et al., 2019; Diesel & Scheepers, 2019).

Our proposed conceptual framework and its constituent hypotheses are detailed in Figure 1. The baseline relationship captures the connection between employees' proactive personality and championing behavior. We postulate that this connection is triggered or invigorated by four pertinent resources: persuasion self-efficacy, job enthusiasm, social interaction, and organizational support for change. The overall framework defines proactive personality as a determinant of an underexplored facet of behavioral outcomes (i.e., championing innovative ideas), with a particular focus on the conditions in which this source of positive personal energy is more likely to produce beneficial effects.

Hypotheses

Proactive personality and championing behavior

We anticipate a positive link between employees' proactive personality and championing behaviors, for both ability and motivation reasons. First, a proactive personality is an energy-boosting personal resource from which employees can draw to sell innovative ideas to other organizational members (Yildiz et al., 2017). Relentless efforts to mobilize support for new and potentially controversial ideas can be perceived as intrusive or intimidating, so the targets of these efforts might react negatively, such as by critiquing the innovative ideas or questioning the credibility of the champions (De Clercq et al.,

2011; Hon et al., 2014). According to extant research, employees who can draw from their own proactive personality deal better with adverse work conditions (Kisamore et al., 2014; Parker & Sprigg, 1999), which might include resistance from coworkers, so they should continue to be able to work to convince others of the value of innovative ideas (Chen et al., 2013; Subhakaran & Dyaram, 2018). Employees with an existing disposition toward action should be more confident that any resource gains achieved from their promotion efforts, such as enhanced career success (Seibert et al., 2001), are within their reach. That is, we argue that proactive personalities fuel employees' stamina to mobilize support for innovative ideas, despite any anticipated skepticism or rejection of the ideas by others who might feel threatened by them (Walter et al., 2011).

Employees with proactive personalities also might enjoy a sense of personal accomplishment if they devote effort to improve their organization's well-being, because they feel responsible for applying their personal skills toward these ends (Fuller et al., 2006; Jiang & Gu, 2015). Further, employees who take such an active approach might regard the process of mobilizing support among colleagues as opportunities to learn and *improve* their skill sets (Major et al., 2006). A learning orientation is associated with a proactive personality (Raemdonck et al., 2012; Setti et al., 2015), and it might steer employees toward diligent promotion efforts, with the anticipation that they will develop a better understanding of how their organization operates and how to induce changes to the status quo (Choi & Thompson, 2005; B. J. Kim et al., 2019). Employees' proactive personalities should stimulate their desire to stretch themselves and champion innovative ideas, because the process grants them personal satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, employees who are not equipped with a proactive personality likely do not derive much personal joy from relentless efforts to find support, so they exhibit a weaker motivation to apply their positive energy resources to such potentially controversial activities (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000).

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between employees' proactive personality and their championing behavior.

Moderating role of persuasion self-efficacy

This positive relationship should be invigorated by personal resources, including persuasion self-efficacy. We predict employees' enhanced *ability* to leverage relevant positive energy resources into productive work activities as a result of their perceived personal capacities (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). According to COR theory, employees leverage positive personal energy to perform resource-enhancing work activities to a greater extent when they possess personal resources that lead them to believe their leveraging efforts will pay off (Hobfoll, 2001). For example, if employees feel confident they can convince others, they may experience enhanced energy to share their personal ideas (Xue et al., 2015; Yukl et al., 1999), so they are better able to leverage their proactive approach in persistent championing activities. Persuasion self-efficacy broadens the set of *cognitive* tools employees have at their disposal to support these leveraging efforts (Frieder et al., 2019); in turn, they can gain an expanded understanding of how to channel their positive energy bases, derived from their proactive posture, into activities that benefit the entire organization (Chen et al., 2013).

Potential resistance is pertinent to this argument too (Walter et al., 2011). Employees who are confident in their ability to convince others can effectively cope with resistance or doubts prompted by championing efforts (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016; Petty et al., 2002). They accordingly are better able to channel their positive energy, derived from their proactive personality, into such efforts. Political savvy also is linked to strong persuasion self-efficacy (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016), so employees likely possess deeper insights into how their job situation or career prospects might benefit if they allocate their positive energy reservoirs to championing activities (Grosser et al., 2018; Xue et al., 2015). Finally, employees who are generally confident about their personal skills, including political skill, tend to be strongly dedicated to performing their job tasks (Ott et al., 2019). This dedication enhances their

abilities to allocate positive energy resources to diligent championing efforts. Overall then, employees with high levels of persuasion self-efficacy likely leverage their proactive personalities in dedicated championing efforts, because of their heightened ability to do so successfully (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016).

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between employees' proactive personality and their championing behavior is moderated by their persuasion self-efficacy, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of persuasion self-efficacy.

Moderating role of job enthusiasm

Employees' job enthusiasm could trigger such a positive connection too. This invigorating effect stems from employees' *willingness* to allocate positive personal energy, gained from their proactive personality, to the promotion of innovative ideas because of how they experience their own work (Misiólek et al., 2017). Consistent with the notion of resource gain spirals (Hobfoll, 2011), people equipped with positive energy resources channel their energy into resource-enhancing work activities to a greater extent when this channeling offers an apparent route to generate even more resource gains. Employees who experience their job as an important source of personal accomplishment tend to be strongly motivated to ensure their organization's well-being, even at a cost to themselves (De Clercq et al., 2011; Shipton et al., 2006). Due to this motivation, they should experience greater value from leveraging their proactive personalities in championing efforts that enhance organizational success. That is, the personal resource of job enthusiasm should generate high levels of personal satisfaction when employees exploit their inclinations toward initiative taking in the form of productive championing activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Employees who are enthusiastic about their work also tend to feel fulfilled by making a meaningful difference to their organization (De Clercq et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2013), so they should be particularly eager to leverage their proactive tendencies by championing innovative ideas. If employees feel excited about their job situation, they enjoy the possibility of involving others in discussions of ways to improve the status quo (Liang et al., 2012; Morrison, 2011). Job enthusiasm thus should strengthen the positive link between a proactive personality and championing behaviors, because employees feel personally fulfilled when they apply their positive energy to convince other members to benefit the organization (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Conversely, employees who feel little excitement about their jobs are less concerned about their organization's success (Jiang et al., 2009; Misiólek et al., 2017) and accordingly may be less keen to use their disposition toward initiative taking to sell their ideas for organizational betterment.

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between employees' proactive personality and their championing behavior is moderated by their job enthusiasm, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of job enthusiasm.

Moderating role of social interaction

Employees' social interaction with organizational peers may also increase the chances that their proactive personality translates into elevated championing behaviors, reflecting employees' enhanced *ability* to channel their positive energy resource bases in this way, due the nature of their relationships with organizational peers (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Consistent with the COR logic, the anticipated usefulness of allocating the positive energy associated with their proactive personality to championing behaviors is contingent on the extent to which employees have access to complementary organizational resources that render such allocation efforts feasible (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Informal communications with peers enhance the *quality* of these exchanges (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), which should expand employees' understanding of how they can leverage their proactive approaches in championing efforts (Chen et al., 2013). For example, if employees

communicate informally with colleagues, they may gain deeper insights into why some of them are skeptical about new ideas (De Clercq et al., 2015; Tsai, 2002), and those insights likely increase their ability to exploit their desire for initiative taking by addressing this skepticism and lobbying for the ideas.

Strong peer relationships also diminish the stress that employees experience in challenging work situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Pooja et al., 2016). For example, they can reach out to other members to learn how to deal with a situation in which their dedicated efforts to improve the status quo may backfire and fail to generate tangible, short-term benefits (Hon et al., 2014; Walter et al., 2011). These learning experiences increase the ability of employees with an existing disposition toward initiative taking to leverage their positive energy resources in championing efforts for their innovative ideas (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). In contrast, if peer interactions are very formal, employees likely cannot get a clear sense of why colleagues might resist innovative ideas (Stephens et al., 2013), with harmful consequences for their successful championing. In this scenario, employees have limited insights into why peers feel threatened, so they are poorly positioned to allocate their positive personal energy reservoirs to appropriate championing activities (Hobfoll, 2001).

Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between employees' proactive personality and their championing behavior is moderated by social interaction, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of social interaction.

Moderating role of organizational support for change

Finally, employees' perceptions of organizational support may serve as catalysts of the translation of their proactive personality into championing behaviors. This contingent factor entails the enhanced *motivation* employees have to leverage their proactive personality as championing efforts, due to their experience of a protective organizational climate (Scott & Bruce, 1994). According to COR theory, a supportive organizational climate – as exists when employees believe their organization is open to change and wants employees to address problem situations in innovative ways (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017) – increases the motivation to allocate personal energy bases to dedicated championing activities, because these allocations are consistent with organizational norms (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Such an organizational climate diminishes the fear that organizational decision makers will reject innovative ideas (Kao et al., 2015; Shanker et al., 2017) or that they will have allocated their positive energy resources in vain (Walter et al., 2011), even if the ideas challenge the status quo. Perceptions of organizational support for change thus should make it more likely that employees are *willing* to use their proactive posture to support their own championing efforts.

Employees also tend to experience greater job autonomy when their employer embraces instead of inhibits change (Scott & Bruce, 1994; De Spiegelaere et al., 2014), so they should feel more in control when deciding how to put their desire for initiative taking to use (Weigl et al., 2010). Conversely, if employees perceive organizational decision making as rigid or hampered by red tape, they might sense limited chances for actually improving the organizational status quo (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017), so leveraging their positive personal energy resources in championing activities seems less desirable (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). In a related vein, when the organization seems to discourage innovation, employees may anticipate that their intensive lobbying efforts will backfire (Van Dijk & Van Dick, 2009; Yuan & Woodman, 2010) and grow reluctant to allocate positive energy, stemming from their proactive personalities, to this effort.

Hypothesis 5: The positive relationship between employees' proactive personality and their championing behavior is moderated by their perceptions of organizational support for change, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of such perceptions.

Research method

Sample and data collection

This study used a deductive approach, such that we develop research hypotheses first, grounded in COR theory, then empirically test them with data collected from a sample of employees of a single banking organization in Mozambique. By focusing on a specific organization, industry, and country, we reduce the risk of unobserved variance in employees' propensity to mobilize support for innovative ideas, due to any internal firm-level factors or external industry- or country-level factors. The banking sector in Mozambique is marked by tough competition, exacerbated by uncertainties about government policies and regulations (Barros et al., 2018; Gil-Alana et al., 2017; Modan & Hassan, 2018), so there might be significant external pressures on employees to generate and push innovative ideas for organizational improvement. Accordingly, the industry setting is relevant for determining how and when employees' general tendencies to take initiatives may translate into dedicated championing efforts that can enhance the organizational status quo. Yet according to senior managers, the organization under study did not offer formal rewards to employees for promoting innovative ideas. From this perspective, this organizational setting provides a *conservative* test of the proposed theoretical framework: If we find empirical support for a positive relationship between a proactive personality and championing efforts in this setting, it likely will be even stronger in organizations that recognize such efforts explicitly.

We used a two-wave design, with a time lag of eight months between the two rounds, that reduces concerns about reverse causality and expectancy biases (i.e., when respondents answer questions after guessing the research hypotheses). In both survey rounds, we clearly communicated that complete confidentiality was assured, that no personal identifying data would ever be released, that only anonymous composite data would be communicated outside the research team, and that they could withdraw at any time. The surveys also emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, that we expected variation among respondents in how they answered specific questions, and that it was instrumental that they complete the surveys honestly and truthfully. These features diminish the chances of social desirability bias (Spector, 2006).

Before the administration of the surveys, a pilot test requested input from five randomly selected employees, not part of the actual data collection; we used their feedback to improve survey readability. All the questions were first written in English, translated into Portuguese by a bilingual translator, and then back-translated to English by a second translator. After addressing any discrepancies, the surveys were finalized in Portuguese (Brislin et al., 1973).³ The first survey focused on, and was limited to, assessments of the independent variable (proactive personality) and moderating variables (persuasion self-efficacy, job enthusiasm, social interaction, and perceptions of organizational support for change), as well as two demographic characteristics (gender and organizational tenure) and two personal traits (narcissistic exhibitionism and social cynicism). The second, short survey captured the dependent variable (championing behavior). Of the 439 originally contacted employees, we received 324 responses in the first round and 216 in the second, for an overall response rate of 49%. Of the respondents, 49% were women, and their average organizational tenure was 12 years.

Measures

The measurement items for the six focal constructs, drawn from previous research, used seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree").

Championing behavior

Employees' efforts to promote innovative ideas were measured with an idea championing scale (Janssen, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994) with three items: "I often mobilize support for innovative ideas," "I often make important organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas," and "I often request approval for innovative ideas" (Cronbach's alpha = .80). These items appeared in the second survey

round, so employees completed them eight months after they had assessed the other constructs. We purposefully relied on self-assessments for this construct. We might have solicited peer or supervisor ratings of idea championing, but these others likely do not have full insights into the comprehensive set of promotion activities that employees undertake (De Clercq et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2011). Mobilization of support for innovative ideas is an intentional, goal-oriented process, so its performers tend to provide more accurate assessments, compared with their colleagues or bosses (Markham, 1998; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Schon, 1963), which is why self-rated assessments of idea championing are a common research practice (De Clercq et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2014; Wichmann et al., 2015).

Proactive personality

To assess employees' disposition toward initiative taking, we relied on a four-item scale of proactive personality (Parker & Sprigg, 1999) that comprises the four items with the highest loadings from Bateman and Crant (1993) original scale. For example, employees assessed whether "I excel at identifying opportunities" and "No matter what the odds, if I believe in something I will make it happen" (Cronbach's alpha = .72).⁴

Persuasion self-efficacy

We assessed employees' confidence that they can convince other members of their ideas with a five-item scale of persuasion self-efficacy (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). The respondents mentioned, for example, whether "I am always successful at persuading others to take my suggestions" and "I feel confident when I defend an opinion at work" (Cronbach's alpha = .77).

Job enthusiasm

To measure the personal resource of job-related excitement, we applied a five-item scale of their enthusiasm toward the job (Misiółek et al., 2017). For example, respondents indicated their agreement with statements such as, "I feel enthusiastic about my job" and "I see my job as a source of personal accomplishment" (Cronbach's alpha = .82).

Social interaction

We assessed the extent to which employees maintain informal relationships with their organizational peers with a four-item scale of social interaction (De Clercq et al., 2015). Two example statements are "My colleagues and I maintain close social relationships with one another" and "My colleagues and I know each other on a personal level" (Cronbach's alpha = .81).

Organizational support for change

We measured employees' beliefs that their employing organization embraces change and innovation with a four-item scale, based on prior research (Scott & Bruce, 1994). For example, they evaluated whether "My company is responsive to change" and "Innovation is encouraged in my company" (Cronbach's alpha = .81).

Control variables

The statistical models included two demographic control variables: gender (1 = female), because male employees may exhibit a stronger tendency to share new ideas with others, compared with their female counterparts (Detert & Burris, 2007), and organizational tenure, because employees who have worked for their organization for a longer time may feel more confident that they can successfully sell innovative ideas to others (Gong et al., 2013). Moreover, we controlled for two personality traits, to establish whether employees' proactive personality influenced their championing behavior above and beyond these alternative traits. In particular, we controlled for employees' *narcissistic exhibitionism* or their self-centered motivation for self-display, using a three-item scale (e.g., "I am apt to show off if I get the chance," Xie et al., 2006), and for their *social cynicism*, which captured their cynical beliefs that people in powerful positions tend to always get their way, with a four-item scale (e.g., "Powerful people

tend to exploit others,” Leung et al., 2010). Exhibitionistic employees may intensively lobby for innovative ideas, as a way to show off (Naderi & Strutton, 2015); cynical employees may avoid any championing behaviors, in the belief that their efforts will be in vain (Alexandra et al., 2017).

Construct validity

We assessed the validity of the six focal constructs by estimating a six-factor measurement model with a confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The model fit was adequate ($\chi^2(215) = 378.15$, incremental fit index = .91, Tucker-Lewis index = .88, confirmatory fit index = .91, root mean square error of approximation = .06), and the convergent validity of the six constructs was evident in the strongly significant factor loadings ($p < .001$) of each item on its respective construct (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). To test for discriminant validity, we ran 15 *separate* sets of analysis – one for each possible construct pair – in which we compared the fit of a model with a constrained construct pair (correlation between the two constructs was set equal to 1) against that of a model with an unconstrained construct pair (correlation between the two constructs was free to vary). The fit of each of the constrained models was significantly worse than that of their unconstrained counterparts ($\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} > 3.84$, $p < .05$; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), which affirmed the presence of discriminant validity.

Common source bias

The independent and moderating variables on the one hand and the dependent variable on the other hand were assessed at different points in time, yet these assessments still came from the same respondents. We accordingly checked for common source bias, with two statistical tests. First, Harman’s one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) revealed that the six constructs captured only 27% of the total variance in the data, which diminished concerns about common source bias. Second, we compared the fit of the six-factor measurement model with an alternative model that included a common method factor on which each of the measurement items loaded (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The difference in fit between these two models was not significant ($\chi^2(23) = 34.17$, $p > .05$), which further alleviated concerns about our reliance on a common respondent (Lattin et al., 2003). Conceptually, the risk of common source bias is substantially diminished for tests of theoretical frameworks that include multiple moderating effects. It is more challenging for participants, in such a scenario, to predict the research hypotheses and adjust their responses to match (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

Results

Table 1 shows the zero-order correlations between the constructs, as well as their descriptive statistics. Table 2 contains the outcomes of the hierarchical moderated regression analyses. Model 1 included the control variables, Model 2 added proactive personality, Model 3 added the direct effects of the four moderators, and Models 4–7 added the proactive personality \times persuasion self-efficacy, proactive personality \times job enthusiasm, proactive personality \times social interaction, and proactive personality \times organizational support for change interaction terms, respectively. It is preferable to assess multiple moderating effects in separate regression equations, to avoid masking their true interaction effects in a simultaneous estimation (Covin et al., 2006; Zahra & Hayton, 2008). Consistent with the approach recommended by Aiken and West (1991), we mean-centered the constructs before calculating their respective product terms. The variation inflation factor for each variable was much lower than the conservative value of 5.0 (Studenmund, 1992), so multicollinearity is not a concern.

The control model (Model 1) indicated that employees were more likely to undertake championing behavior to the extent that they exhibited higher levels of narcissistic exhibitionism ($\beta = .113$, $p < .10$) and lower levels of social cynicism ($\beta = -.103$, $p < .05$). Consistent with the baseline argument in Hypothesis 1 that the positive energy that derives from a disposition toward initiative taking stimulates employees to mobilize support for innovative ideas, Model 2 indicated a positive relationship between proactive personality and championing behavior ($\beta = .292$, $p < .001$). Model 3 also revealed a weak,

direct, positive relationship between social interaction and championing behavior ($\beta = .101, p < .10$) but, somewhat surprisingly, no significant relationships for the other three resources. Each of the four resources was positively and significantly correlated with championing behavior (Table 1), but the multiple regression results in Model 3 indicated their direct effects got overpowered by proactive personality, which reiterates the critical importance of this personal characteristic in spurring championing behavior.

Models 4–5 provided support for the hypothesized invigorating effects of the two personal resources: persuasion self-efficacy ($\beta = .122, p < .01$) and job enthusiasm ($\beta = .159, p < .001$). The likelihood that a stronger proactive personality translated into enhanced idea championing was higher

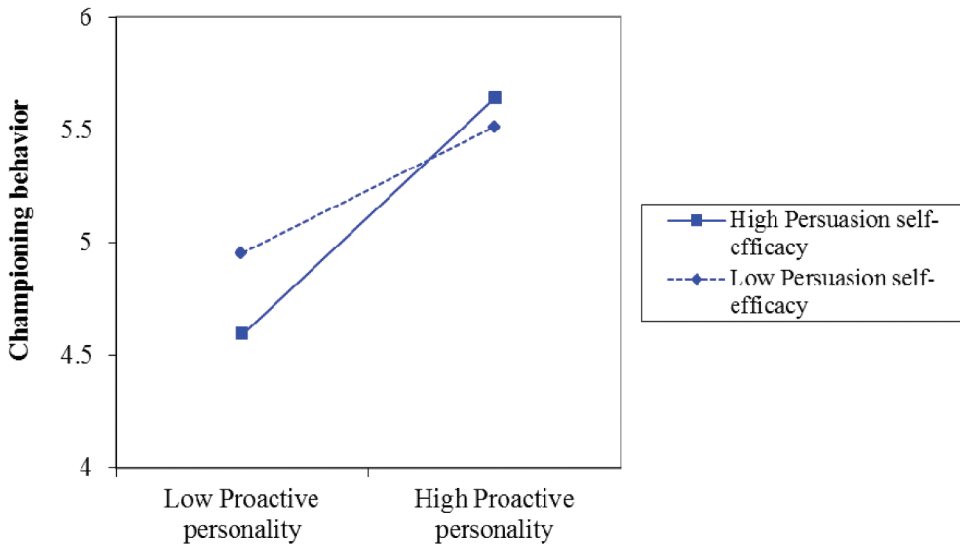


Figure 2. Moderating effect of persuasion self-efficacy on the relationship between proactive personality and championing behavior.

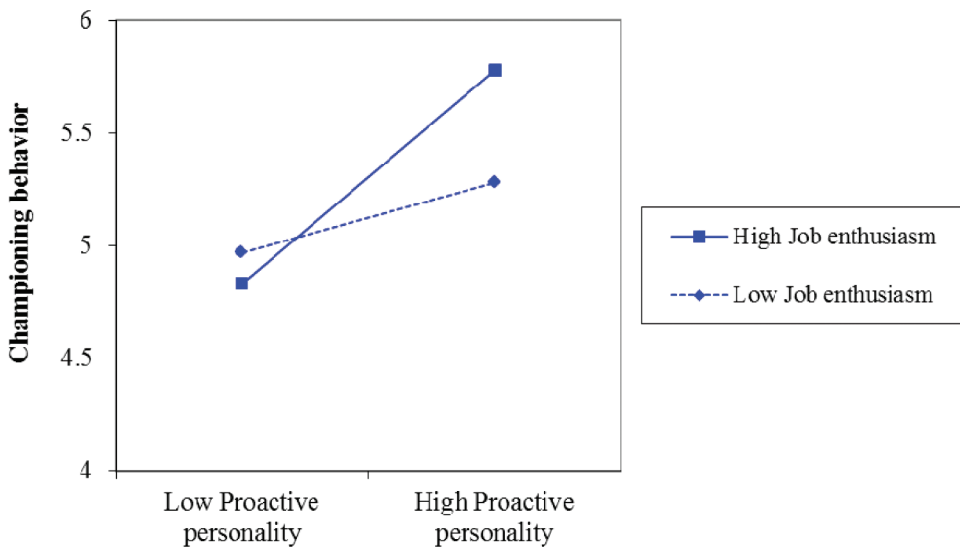


Figure 3. Moderating effect of job enthusiasm on the relationship between proactive personality and championing behavior.

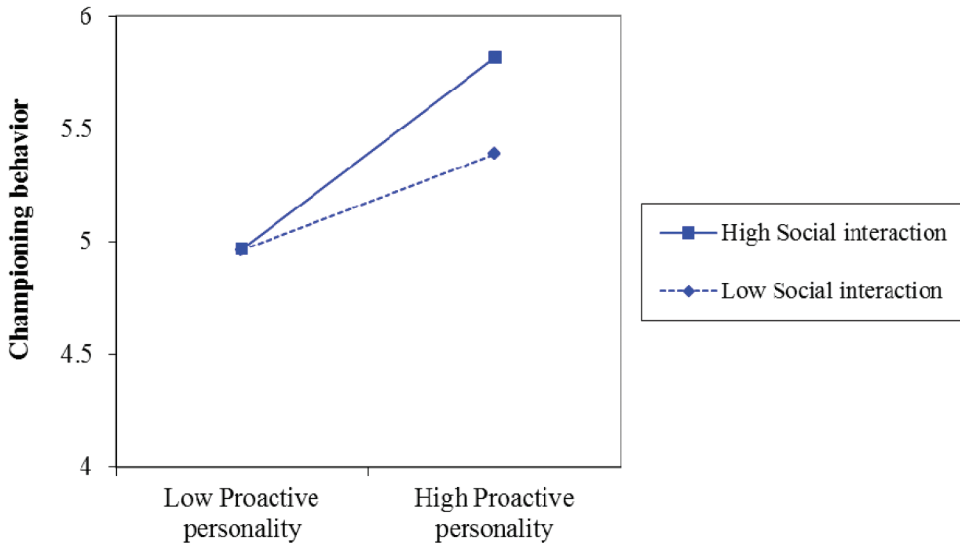


Figure 4. Moderating effect of social interaction on the relationship between proactive personality and championing behavior.

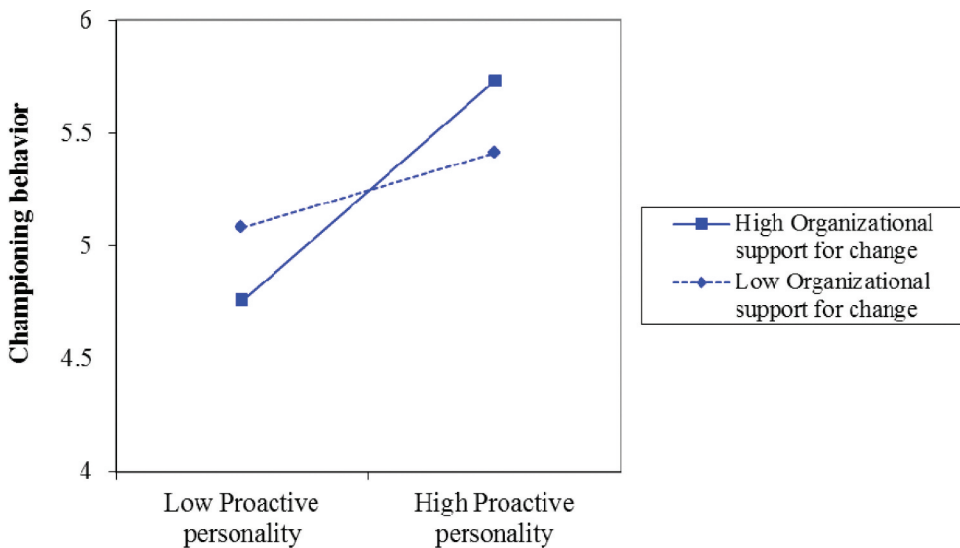


Figure 5. Moderating effect of organizational support for change on the relationship between proactive personality and championing behavior.

when employees felt confident of their ability to convince other people of their opinions (Hypothesis 2) and felt excited about their jobs (Hypothesis 3). Similarly, the results in Model 6–7 were consistent with the expected catalytic effects of the two organizational resources: social interaction ($\beta = .106, p < .05$) and organizational support for change ($\beta = .161, p < .001$). Leveraging a proactive orientation into championing efforts was more likely among employees who enjoyed informal peer relationships (Hypothesis 4) and believed their employer was open to change (Hypothesis 5). Figures 2–5 display the relationships of proactive personality and championing behavior at high and low levels of the four resources. In each case, the positive relationship is more pronounced at high resource levels, in support of the theoretical framework.

Discussion

This study extends extant research by detailing how employees' proactive personality fuels their propensity to mobilize support for innovative ideas, a process triggered by their access to relevant personal and organizational resources. The relatively limited attention devoted to these topics is striking, considering the well-established argument that even if employees' positive personal characteristics grant them energy to undertake productive work behaviors that might add to organizational effectiveness, their energy applications are not automatic if they doubt that their behaviors will generate actual benefits (De Clercq et al., 2011; Kim, 2019; Van Dijk & Van Dick, 2009). To leverage their disposition toward initiative taking in championing efforts, they might need access to complementary resources. With a basis in COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we theorize specifically that the translation of a proactive personality into enhanced championing behaviors is particularly prominent when employees can rely on their own persuasion self-efficacy and job enthusiasm, as well as when they operate in organizational environments marked by informal peer relationships and support for change. The research findings provide empirical support for these theoretical predictions.

The active promotion of innovative ideas can benefit the organization and the champions, but champions still encounter challenges, especially if their efforts threaten to undermine the existing privileges of other members (Hon et al., 2014; Howell & Boies, 2004). A key theoretical insight of this study is that this challenge can be mitigated if employees can draw on their own proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Pan et al., 2018). A critical factor herein, according to COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), is the resource gains that employees expect to obtain from allocating their positive personal energy to behaviors that can benefit their organization and their own job situation. As we theorized, both ability and motivation mechanisms might be at work. The discretionary energy and stamina that accompany a proactive personality enable employees to overcome challenges, even if their championing efforts evoke skepticism (Chen et al., 2013; Milliken et al., 2003). The sense of personal accomplishment they gain from applying positive energy to activities from which their organization can benefit fuels their desire to champion those ideas (Jiang & Gu, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Rather than directly assessing these ability and motivation routes, we used them to inform our arguments about how employees' reliance on pertinent resources can *invigorate* the positive connection between their proactive personality and championing behaviors.

As another theoretical implication, this study reveals how employees' proactive personality leads to enhanced championing behaviors to a *greater* degree when their access to complementary resources renders this application more attainable or attractive (Hobfoll et al., 2018). As we explained in the Introduction, the four specific resources we investigate are expansive and encompassing, along two dimensions. First, they are personally held (persuasion self-efficacy and job enthusiasm) or part of the surrounding organizational context (social interaction and organizational support for change). Second, they speak to employees' ability (persuasion self-efficacy and social interaction) or motivation (job enthusiasm and organizational support for change) to leverage their proactive personality by undertaking dedicated championing efforts. The empirical findings provide the novel theoretical insight that this link materializes more forcefully when employees (1) are convinced that they can persuade targets about the value of innovative ideas, (2) feel enthusiastic about their jobs, (3) can draw from close social relationships with organizational peers, and (4) perceive strong organizational support for innovative endeavors.

Limitations and future research

This study is not without limitations, which offer opportunities for further research. First, its focus is on employees' proactive personality, as informed by the active, change-oriented approach that comes with this trait, and its associated potential to enhance the feasibility and attractiveness of championing behavior. We also establish, empirically, that this personality trait spurs championing efforts, over and beyond employees' exhibitionistic or cynical tendencies (Leung et al., 2010; Xie et al., 2006).

Table 1. Correlations and descriptive statistics.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Championing behavior										
2. Proactive personality	.190**									
3. Persuasion self-efficacy	.170*	.592**								
4. Job enthusiasm	.289**	.259**	.292**							
5. Social interaction	.202**	.143*	.159*	.220**						
6. Organizational support for change	.217**	.210**	.267**	.485**	.396**					
7. Gender (1 = female)	-.150*	.059	-.094	.073	-.023	-.088				
8. Organizational tenure	.154*	.117	.137	.186**	.066	.145*	-.082			
9. Narcissistic exhibitionism	.093	.015	.110	.029	.111	.029	-.226**	.036		
10. Social cynicism	-.105	.201**	.109	.000	-.102	-.071	-.058	.039	.145*	
Mean	5.248	5.810	5.143	5.581	4.242	5.555	.485	12.347	2.593	4.713
Standard deviation	1.206	1.027	1.196	1.337	1.608	1.355	.501	8.758	1.445	1.806

Note: N = 216.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Nonetheless, it would be useful to compare the role of a proactive personality with the influences of relevant Big Five personality traits – such as the inquisitiveness that is associated with openness to experience, the discretionary energy that comes with conscientiousness, or the risk tolerance that stems from low levels of neuroticism (Raja & Johns, 2010) – as well as with other pertinent personality instruments, such as the Revised Neuroticism–Extraversion–Openness Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992), the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (Saville, & Holdsworth, 1984), or the Hogan Personality Inventory (Hogan & Hogan, 1992). Such studies could assess whether the beneficial role of a proactive personality holds in the presence of various alternative traits, and also whether the different traits reinforce or substitute for one another in stimulating championing behaviors.

Second, we offer both ability and motivation rationales for why a proactive personality should spur championing behavior, and we theorize about four moderators that span two types of resources (personal and organizational) and that affect employees' ability or motivation to leverage their personal characteristics. Thus we have asserted that persuasion self-efficacy and social interaction inform the ability of employees to leverage their disposition toward initiative taking as diligent idea championing, whereas their job enthusiasm and perceptions of organizational support for change enhance the attractiveness and thus their motivation to undertake these efforts. Continued research could explicitly assess these mechanisms to establish which is most potent, as well as investigate alternative mediating mechanisms that also might underpin the translation of a proactive personality into enhanced championing behavior, such as employees' organizational commitment (Pooja et al., 2016) or work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The latter mediator might be particularly worthy of further investigations that apply the job demands–resources model as a complementary theoretical framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), in light of the acclaimed reciprocal relationship of work engagement with one of the study's focal moderators, job enthusiasm (Laguna et al., 2017; Salanova et al., 2011).

Third, we predict employees' propensity to promote innovative ideas but do not take the further step to determine if they are *successful* in these endeavors (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). A useful extension would examine whether employees' championing efforts, shaped by their proactive personalities, lead to the actual implementation or funding of innovative ideas and if these positive outcomes depend on whether employees promote their own innovative ideas or those of other members. Another set of related, valuable extensions might combine employees' self-assessments of championing behavior with assessments by other raters (peers, supervisors), check for discrepancies between them, and then investigate how such discrepancies might reflect the specific *targets* of the championing efforts.

Fourth, our focus on four contingent resources also represents a limitation; even if they represent a consistent, encompassing set, it would be useful to consider other factors that might catalyze the relationship between proactive personality and championing behavior. At the individual employee level, resilience (Bardoel et al., 2014), passion for work (Gulyani & Bhatnagar, 2017), creative self-

Table 2. Regression results (dependent variable: championing behavior).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender (1 = female)	-.188	-.246	-.276	-.222	-.186	-.313 ⁺	-.238
Organizational tenure	.015	.010	.007	.008	.007	.008	.007
Narcissistic exhibitionism	.113 ⁺	.110 ⁺	.102 ⁺	.084	.086	.100 ⁺	.072
Social cynicism	-.103 [*]	-.132 ^{**}	-.117 [*]	-.103 [*]	-.102 [*]	-.106 [*]	-.098 [*]
H1: Proactive personality		.292 ^{***}	.270 ^{**}	.402 ^{***}	.315 ^{**}	.319 ^{**}	.326 ^{***}
Persuasion self-efficacy			-.058	-.058	-.012	-.042	-.037
Job enthusiasm			.097	.112	.089	.105	.105
Social interaction			.101 ⁺	.110 [*]	.103 ⁺	.108 ⁺	.096 ⁺
Organizational support for change			.002	.003	.011	-.014	-.002
H2: Proactive personality × Persuasion self-efficacy				.122 ^{**}			
H3: Proactive personality × Job enthusiasm					.159 ^{***}		
H4: Proactive personality × Social interaction						.106 [*]	
H5: Proactive personality × Organizational support for change							.161 ^{***}
R ²	.065	.136	.173	.214	.227	.199	.235
Change in R ²		.071 ^{***}	.037	.041 ^{**}	.054 ^{***}	.026 [*]	.062 ^{***}

Note: N = 216; unstandardized coefficients (standard errors are reported in parentheses).

⁺*p* < .10; ^{*}*p* < .05; ^{**}*p* < .01; ^{***}*p* < .001 (two-tailed).

efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002), or openness to change (Devos et al., 2007) could be influential; organizational resources such as fair decision-making processes (Lee et al., 2017), the extent to which innovative behaviors are rewarded (De Clercq et al., 2011), or beliefs that an organizational climate is forgiving of individual mistakes (Guchait et al., 2016) also might be investigated. Then it would be interesting to compare the relative potency of these different personal and organizational resources, as well as establish whether the invigorating roles of our study's four focal resources hold, after accounting for all these effects.

Fifth, as we explicitly noted, we focus on one specific industry (banking) and country (Mozambique) to account for unexplained industry and country differences that might influence idea championing. But this methodological choice reduces the external validity of the results. An interesting extension would be to explicate how specific industry features might interfere with the proposed conceptual framework. For example, external pressures on organizations in very competitive markets may motivate employees to exploit their personal energy reservoirs to the fullest, such as in relentless championing efforts, to help the employer maintain its competitive positioning (Jiang et al., 2016). Other tests of the framework could include different countries. In a sense, the risk aversion that marks Mozambique's culture (Hofstede et al., 2010) ensures a conservative test of the hypotheses; employees might be hesitant to risk rejection of innovative ideas and prefer not to pursue championing efforts. Yet in such settings, the incremental value of employees' proactive personality and access to complementary resources may be especially great. Cross-country comparisons could explicate how different cultural features inform the conceptual framework, including both its baseline relationship and the invigorating effects of the four resources.

Practical implications

In noting the combined roles of employees' proactive personalities and complementary resources for spurring championing efforts, this study reveals a potential route to greater organizational effectiveness, as well as several barriers that managers need to address. In particular, championing activities are time consuming and might threaten employees' ability to meet their formal job duties, as well as sparking skepticism and obstruction (Walter et al., 2011). Therefore, decisions with respect to recruitment and retention could take into account how an energy-enhancing personal

characteristic such as a proactive personality might benefit organizations that want to mobilize innovative ideas for improvement (Rodrigues & Rebelo, 2019; T.-Y. Kim et al., 2009). An important caveat though is that any measurement instrument used to assess candidates' proactive personalities should be checked for the organization's specific work setting. That is, managers need to confirm its predictive validity for spurring performance at both individual and organizational levels. They also should consider the risk of adverse impacts of a proactive personality on performance, as might depend on the type of job. In a related sense, organizations might prefer a *mix* of employees with high and low dispositions toward initiative taking, to diminish the risk of excessive internal rivalry and resource scarcity if everyone in the organization aims to push innovative ideas. As a general recommendation, any assessment of proactive personalities among prospective and current employees should reflect an organization's carefully designed, holistic approach toward embracing individual traits and skills, in light of its strategic goals and the specific individual characteristics needed to achieve them.

This study further reveals that employees' general tendency to take the initiative might not be sufficient to guarantee dedicated championing efforts. Rather, they require pertinent, complementary resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Employees who are confident that they can convince others of their new ideas, experience their jobs as sources of personal accomplishment, maintain close personal relationships with organizational colleagues, and operate in organizational climates that embrace change are more likely to allocate their positive energy reservoirs, derived from their proactive postures, to efforts to promote innovative ideas. In turn, organizations can take pertinent measures to leverage proactive personalities toward idea championing, informed by the study's four focal moderators. In particular, they might (1) help employees develop specific skills to boost their confidence in their ability to persuade others of new ideas; (2) set challenging goals that make employees excited and personally fulfilled about executing job tasks; (3) facilitate informal exchanges among employees, inside and outside the workplace (e.g., organized coffee breaks, outdoor group activities), to help them get to know one another on a personal level and openly share their opinions; and (4) establish decision-making processes that support new ideas while also providing adequate resources to help employees solve problems in innovative ways. These measures should have value for any organization, but we recommend them particularly for organizations whose past trajectory and culture constrain work behaviors that promote novel ideas. Ultimately, these measures can render organizations more successful in exploiting the positive energy that resides within their employee ranks in sustained championing behaviors, by mitigating employees' concerns that such energy allocations might backfire on them.

Conclusion

This research has provided an explicit examination of how organizations might exploit the proactive dispositions of their employee bases to engage in persistent efforts to improve the organizational status quo through devoted championing activities. These effects are contingent on the extent to which employees can draw from complementary resources, whether extracted from their personally held features or the organization in general. By outlining these contingent effects, we have moved beyond a prevalent focus on the direct beneficial roles of such resources in spurring change-invoking work behaviors. Overall, this study grants organization scholars and practitioners new insights into the *circumstances* in which proactive personalities are more likely to translate into enhanced championing efforts. They also might serve as stepping stones for exploring further how organizations might fuel valuable, possibly controversial activities within their employee ranks, by integrating and exploiting their valuable resource reservoirs.

Notes

1. Even if a motivation to exert influence over others underpins a proactive personality, it tends to be benevolent, instead of self-centered or narcissistic in nature (Crant, 1995). In the empirical section, we control for employees' narcissistic exhibitionism or desire for self-display (Xie et al., 2006) to confirm our prediction that a proactive personality spurs championing behavior, beyond any exhibitionistic tendencies employees might have.
2. Job enthusiasm is related to but different from work engagement. As a personal resource, enthusiasm manifests as a high-activation, positive approach to work (Laguna et al., 2017; Salanova et al., 2011), whereas engagement speaks to the extent to which employees exhibit high levels of work-related vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In support of their distinctiveness, prior research cites a reciprocal relationship, such that enthusiasm, a key element of positive affectivity, spurs work engagement, which in turn can spur enthusiasm (Laguna et al., 2017; Salanova et al., 2011).
3. The study materials are available at <https://osf.io/tazhd>.
4. One item ("I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition") was removed for low reliability. Its omission helped avoid tautology concerns too, considering its overlap with the dependent variable.

Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/tazhd>.

Open scholarship



This article has earned the Center for Open Science badges for Open Data and Open Materials through Open Practices Disclosure. The data and materials are openly accessible at <https://osf.io/tazhd>.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Dirk De Clercq is Professor of Management in the Goodman School of Business at Brock University, Canada. His research interests include entrepreneurship, organizational behavior, and cross-country studies.

Renato Pereira is Integrated Researcher in the Business Research Unit and Professor of General Management in ISCTE Business School, both at ISCTE Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal. He is also Researcher in the Emerging Markets Research Center at ISCIM, Mozambique. His research interests include entrepreneurship, innovation, and international business, with a particular focus on Africa.

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