Emotion and Proactivity at Work

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Organizations are increasingly looking for ways to motivate their employees to be self-starting and to act in advance (Campbell, 2000). With increasing uncertainty, technological change, and competition, leaders simply cannot prescribe in advance what employees need to effectively carry out their jobs (Griffin, Neal, and Parker, 2007). Organizational scholars have spent considerable time investigating the antecedents of proactivity, defined as ‘anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments’ (Grant and Ashford, 2008, p 8). Parker, Bindl, and Strauss (2010) developed a prominent model guiding research on proactivity, describing can-do, reason-to, and energized-to motivational pathways. The can-do pathway, involving employees’ perceptions of whether they feel capable of proactivity, is well established. For example, several studies demonstrate that self-efficacy is a primary antecedent of a wide range of proactive behaviours (for example, Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Parker and Collins, 2010; Parker, Williams, and Turner, 2006). Similarly well-established is the reason-to pathway, involving perceptions that being proactive is worthwhile. In particular, studies demonstrate the important role of felt responsibility (Morrison and Phelps, 1999) and organizational commitment (Rank et al, 2007) in motivating proactive behaviour.
However, less is known about the energized-to pathway, which involves the affective energy to be proactive. A recent review found significantly fewer studies on this pathway compared to the can-do and reason-to pathways (Cai et al., 2019). Furthermore, the limited research on the energized-to pathway has produced mixed results. For example, while Bindl et al. (2012) found that positive affect predicted multiple aspects of proactive behaviour, Hong et al. (2016) found no relationship between positive affect and personal initiative. Not only is there less empirical research on the energized-to pathway, there is also less conceptual development describing why certain energized-to states should impact proactivity. For example, Parker, Bindl, and Strauss (2010) provide substantial detail describing the reason-to pathway via a number of mechanisms, including expectancy and intrinsic motivation, but only describe one theoretical pathway in regard to energized-to motivation (that is, core affect). This limitation significantly narrows the theoretical focus to positive affective states and also ignores alternative theories—such as discrete emotions theory—that can provide additional insights into the energized-to pathway. Because of the mixed empirical results and a lack of conceptual development, we believe that the time is right for a closer examination of why and how the energized-to pathway motivates proactive behaviour.

The purpose of this chapter is to enhance our understanding of proactive behaviour at work by adding more conceptual development to the energized-to pathway. First, we argue that future research should move beyond conceptualizing energized-to motivation as core affect and towards a focus on how discrete emotions may impact proactivity (Bindl, 2019; Lebel, 2017). As argued below, doing so sheds light on a wider range of emotional states, including negative ones, that can motivate proactivity (Lebel, 2016; Oh and Farh, 2017). Second, we argue that the role of work engagement as an energized-to mechanism should be clarified. Work engagement is a major source of cognitive, physical, and emotional energy for employees (Rich, Lepine, and Crawford, 2010), and thus has clear links to the energized-to pathway. However, proactivity scholars have muddied the waters by describing the effect of engagement on proactivity in terms of both affect and cognition (for example, Cai et al., 2019). Thus, we examine the link between work engagement and proactivity in greater detail, specifying when engagement supplies the affective or cognitive motivation to be proactive.

In this chapter, we will describe how the energized-to motivational state has been conceptualized in the proactivity literature, briefly review...
findings from research examining the effects of this ‘hot’ pathway on proactivity, and then describe potential avenues to enhance theory and research on this topic.

**Current conceptualizations of energized-to proactive motivation**

Defining affect

Beginning with Parker, Bindl, and Strauss’s (2010) model of proactivity, scholars have primarily described energy in terms of affective, or emotional, forces. Affective experience can take a number of forms, including state and trait sources of emotion (Barsade and Gibson, 2007). Feeling states include discrete emotions and moods. Discrete emotions (including anger, fear, guilt, sadness, and happiness) are elicited by a specific cause or event, involve physiological reactions, and are short-lived, relatively intense experiences (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). In contrast, moods are relatively more diffuse emotional states involving more global positive or negative feelings (Watson and Tellegen, 1985). Trait affect involves a person’s dispositional, or stable, tendency to experience positive and negative emotional states, and is generally referred to as positive and negative trait affect (Barsade and Gibson, 2007). In this chapter, we focus on emotional states, rather than traits. Interested readers can see Cangiano, Bindl, and Parker’s (2017) recent book chapter for a review on trait affect and proactivity.

A conceptual focus on core affect

Following Parker, Bindl, and Strauss’s (2010) lead, the vast majority of proactivity research examining the energized-to pathway has built on theories of core affect, defined as ‘momentary, elementary, feelings of pleasure or displeasure and of activation or deactivation’ (Seo, Barrett, and Bartunek, 2004, p 424). Theories of core affect describe emotional experience as falling along two dimensions: valence (pleasant versus unpleasant feelings) and activation (high versus low); crossing these two dimensions results in four quadrants (Russell, 2003). A recent review reveals that proactivity research has primarily focused on only two of these quadrants – activated positive and activated negative affect – and mostly on positive core affect (Cangiano, Bindl, and Parker, 2017).
The role of positive emotional states

Theoretically, proactivity scholars provide a number of reasons why highly positive and activated affective experience should supply the energy to be proactive, or to exhibit self-starting, anticipatory, and persistent behaviour (Frese and Fay, 2001). First, positive core affect activates an approach action tendency (Seo, Barrett, and Bartunek, 2004), which is necessary for employees to be self-starting (Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). Second, positive emotional states broaden our thought processes (Isen, 2001) and are associated with future-oriented thinking (Foo, Uy, and Baron, 2009), both of which help employees think of ways to act in advance and anticipate changing job demands. Third, being proactive often requires setting challenging goals and then persisting despite obstacles (Frese and Fay, 2001; Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010), which requires high levels of energy. By definition, positive core affect is a highly activated and pleasant state that ‘provides the energy necessary for engaging and persisting in proactive work behaviour’ (Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015, p 809), fuelling employees to overcome setbacks and accomplish proactive goals. Fourth, positive affect helps employees view their current course of action in a positive light (Seo, Barrett, and Bartunek, 2004), which energizes them to follow through when obstacles arise during their proactive efforts (Hong et al, 2016).

Research generally supports a positive association between positive affect – in terms of state positive affect – and proactivity (Cangiano, Bindl, and Parker, 2017). These findings appear to be robust; for example, Bindl et al (2012) found that highly activated and positive mood was positively associated with several aspects of the proactivity process – including envisioning, planning, executing, and reflecting on proactive behaviour. Other notable studies have found that feelings of state positive affect increased the time spent on proactive tasks at work (Fay and Sonnentag, 2012) and whether employees implement ideas at work (Sonnentag and Starzyk, 2015). Furthermore, employees’ state positive affect stemming from leader behaviour can increase the extent to which employees speak up and take initiative at work (Lin et al, 2016; Liu et al, 2017). In summary, there is both theoretical and empirical support for the argument that positive and high activated emotional experience influences proactivity.

The role of negative emotional states

While positive affect is generally associated with employee proactivity, relatively less is known about how negative affect may shape proactivity.
Theoretically, proactivity scholars have made competing arguments as to the role of negative affect and proactivity. On the one hand, Frese and Fay (2001) argued that it is often negative affect, such as dissatisfaction, that can stimulate a desire to change and challenge the status quo. This follows from theories suggesting that negative affective states signal a need for change and function to motivate behaviour to effectively address a situation (Elfenbein, 2007; George, 2011). In support of this line of thinking, Sonnentag and Staryzk (2012) argued and found that experiencing negative affect is positively associated with proactively identifying work-related issues. However, others have argued that negative affect is likely to reduce employees’ proactive efforts. Since the experience of negative affect narrows cognitive processing, it could preclude employees from thinking of ways to anticipate customer needs or proactively find solutions to existing problems (Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). Additionally, negative affect can elicit an avoidant, rather than approach, orientation, making proactivity less likely (Bindl et al, 2012). Moreover, negative affective experience can exhaust employees and deplete their self-regulatory resources, inhibiting one’s physical ability to carry out proactive efforts (Bindl et al, 2012).

Given these competing theoretical arguments, the mixed and inconsistent results from the limited number of studies examining negative affect and proactivity are not surprising. Results from these studies variously suggest a positive relationship (Sonnentag and Staryzk, 2015), a negative relationship (Fay and Sonnentag, 2012), or no relationship (Bindl et al, 2012; Fritz and Sonnentag, 2009) between state negative affect and proactivity. In summary, the role of negative affect in shaping proactivity is less clear than the role of positive affect, from both a theoretical and empirical standpoint.

The role of work engagement

Scholars also argue that work engagement is an energized-to antecedent of proactivity (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2009; Sonnentag, 2003). A primary reason for this is that work engagement, as a ‘persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment’ (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001, p 417) supplies energy, enthusiasm, and vigour to be self-starting and proactive. Empirical research supports this notion as, for example, Salanova and Schaufeli (2008) found that job engagement mediated the relationship between job resources (for example, control and feedback) and personal initiative. Sonnentag (2003) argued and found that employees able to recover from the stress and strain of work felt more engaged at work and thus reported
taking more personal initiative at work. Additionally, Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) argued and found that employee work engagement, as a positive emotional state, mediated the relationship between leaders displaying ethical behaviour and employee personal initiative. Making similar arguments, Schmitt, Den Hartog, and Belschak (2016) found that work engagement indirectly mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and proactivity in the form of personal initiative and voice.

While work engagement is frequently linked to proactivity, there is evidence to suggest that work engagement may not be limited conceptually to the energized-to pathway. While noting that work engagement likely drives proactivity via positive emotional forces, Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) and Schmitt, Den Hartog, and Belschak (2016) both argue that engagement can cognitively drive proactivity in the form of absorption and dedication. Furthermore, a recent review of proactive behaviour also suggests that there may be both affective and cognitive components of work engagement that influence proactivity (Cai et al, 2019). This suggests that work engagement may not cleanly link to the energized-to pathway.

Limitations of current conceptualizations of energized-to proactive motivation

While research linking core affect and work engagement to proactivity sheds important light on the motivation for this behaviour, this research is limited in a number of important ways. First, researchers have primarily focused on two dimensions of core affect: high activation positive states and moods (for example, active, energized, and excited) and high activation negative states and moods (for example, distressed, nervous, and hostile). A focus on these two dimensions is incomplete, as there are four dimensions of core affective experience (Russell, 2003; Seo, Barrett, and Bartunek, 2004). An important step in correcting this omission comes from Bindl et al (2012), who argue that proactivity scholars should not only consider the valence of the emotion, but also the activation level of the emotion to examine each of the four quadrants. Applying this idea, Bindl et al’s research suggests that different quadrants may have distinct effects on proactivity; for example, they found that while high positive affect was associated with proactivity, low activated positive affect was not. They also found that low activated negative affect was associated with envisioning proactivity. These intriguing findings suggest that there is theoretical utility in applying the four dimensions of core affect, as a narrow conceptual
focus on only two dimensions of activated positive and activated negative affect has likely limited the ability to detect the effects of emotion on proactivity. Because of this, it is important for proactivity scholars to theoretically and empirically specify which quadrant of core affect will impact proactive behaviour.

A second and related limitation is that focusing on core affect lumps together a number of similar, but distinct, positive or negative emotions. For example, most studies (for example, Liu et al, 2017; Sonnentag and Staryzk, 2015) arguing that high activated positive or negative affect impacts proactivity measure emotional experience by employing the PANAS (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988). This measure lumps together positive emotions such as interest and pride, and negative emotions such as anger and fear, which are similar conceptually in terms of valence and activation, but distinct in a number of ways (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 2011). More specifically, discrete emotions arise from certain appraisals of events and are accompanied by distinct physiological and behavioural reactions (Shaver et al, 1987; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). Anger, for example, differs greatly from fear in motivating approach versus avoidant behaviour (Lerner and Keltner, 2001). Similarly, excitement is likely to elicit a different behavioural reaction than pride (Roseman, 2013). Therefore, proactivity scholars lose predictive ability when they lump together negative or positive core affective states, which is likely one major reason why research on negative emotions and proactivity has produced mixed results (Lebel, 2017).

A third limitation is that applications of the energized-to pathway also suffer from unclear theoretical arguments. For example, Hong et al (2016, p 691) classify activated positive affect as an energized-to state and then argue that it ‘may influence personal initiative through shaping individuals’ expectancy, utility, and process judgment’. This argument clearly confounds the reason-to motivational state based on utility judgments with the energized-to state based on positive emotion. Moreover, a recent review seemed to blur the lines between cognition and affect by describing the effect of engagement on proactivity in terms of emotion, noting that states of engagement ‘arguably provide positive and activated affective states that stimulate proactive behaviour’ (Cai et al, 2019, p 212). However, these authors then classify engagement as an ‘other’ mediating mechanism and do not classify it as an energized-to motivational force. This classification serves to muddy the waters, as the authors clearly make energized-to arguments based on core affect (for example, ‘positive and activated affective states’), but then classify engagement as a motivational force
separate from energized-to forces. Given that work engagement is an important driver of proactive behaviour, it is imperative that we correctly classify the mechanisms through which work engagement stimulates proactivity.

**Ways forward: Clarifying the energized-to pathway**

Given these limitations, we suggest a number of ways to improve theory and research on the energized-to pathway. First, we argue that proactivity scholars should apply discrete emotional theories to capture important nuances among negative and positive emotional states. Second, and similarly, we argue that proactivity scholars should better delineate when and how negative emotional states impact proactivity. And, third, we argue that proactivity scholars should scrutinize the engagement to proactivity link so that it remains theoretically consistent with multidimensional conceptualizations of the construct (for example, Kahn, 1990), and specify which dimensions of the construct do and do not participate in the theorized pathway. See Table 2.1 for a summary of these suggestions.

**Table 2.1: Summary of suggestions for future research linking energized-to motivators to proactivity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitation</th>
<th>Suggestions for proactivity research</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A narrow conceptual focus on two of the four core affective states.</td>
<td>• Examine all four core affective states (for example, Bindl et al, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptually and empirically lumping together similar, but distinct, emotions.</td>
<td>• Apply discrete emotional theories to predict proactive behaviours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competing theoretical arguments for the role of negative emotions on proactivity.</td>
<td>• Focus on contingent effects, rather than main effects.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Clarify which stage of proactivity is most likely to be affected by a specific emotional state (for example, planning, envisioning, or enacting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear theoretical arguments describing how work engagement is linked to proactivity.</td>
<td>• Specify which dimension of work engagement is of theoretical interest (vigour, absorption, or dedication) and link to the appropriate motivational pathway (energized-to, can-do, or reason-to).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Alternatively, conceptualize work engagement more broadly and consider the role of all three dimensions theoretical development.</td>
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Focusing on discrete emotions

One reason for proactivity scholars to utilize discrete emotions is that ‘when we theoretically treat all negative (or positive) emotions as functionally the same, we lose sight of the fact that different processes drive each of them, and that different outcomes can result from them too’ (Gooty, Gavin, and Ashkanasy, 2009, p 835). Indeed, discrete emotions, in contrast to core affective states and moods, arise from a unique set of antecedents and are associated with distinct motivational, physiological, and behavioural consequences (Ekman, 1992; Lazarus, 1991). Regarding antecedents, how an employee appraises a workplace event determines which discrete emotion they experience (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). For example, anger arises when employees are certain about an event’s cause and also feel a sense of control, whereas fear arises from perceptions of uncertainty and a lack of ability to do something about the situation (Shaver et al, 1987).

Discrete emotions are also distinct from core affective states and moods because of their corresponding action tendencies, or states of action readiness, which involve motivational goals to address a given situation (Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure, 1989; Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz, 1994). Action tendencies prepare a person to take action when necessary, as ‘emotions are meant to move us’ (Elfenbein, 2007, p 346). Each emotion has a unique behavioural signature, as discrete emotions supply and direct one’s energy via specific action tendencies (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). For example, anger’s action tendency motivates behaviour to change the situation, correct a perceived wrong, or move against a person or situation (Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz, 1994), whereas fear’s action tendency motivates behaviour directed at safety from a threat or protection in a situation (Izard and Ackerman, 2000). Thus, discrete emotional theories suggest that even though both anger and fear fall into the same core affective state (that is, negative valence and high activation), they significantly vary in the behaviours they elicit in terms of approach versus avoidance (Lerner and Keltner, 2001).

Following this, we now describe how distinguishing among discrete emotions has important implications for how and when certain emotions may motivate proactive behaviours.

How: Identifying different effects on the form or stage of proactivity

Discrete negative emotional states are likely to motivate different forms of proactivity because of their unique action tendencies, which
function to address challenges, stressors, or social situations (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Proactive behaviours can take a variety of forms (Grant and Ashford, 2008), including feedback-seeking, taking charge, and voice. Therefore, we recommend that proactivity scholars clearly specify the action tendency of a particular discrete emotion as it applies to motivating proactive behaviour. For example, anger’s action tendency towards approach to move against the source of harm and fear’s action tendency to protect by avoiding perceived threat are likely to elicit different proactive behaviours (Lebel, 2017). Anger’s energy to correct a perceived wrong is likely to energize employees to speak up and challenge the status quo (Geddes and Callister, 2007). Similarly, employees angered by injustice may be motivated to identify problems and speak up on behalf of others, or blow the whistle on inappropriate work practices (Lindebaum and Geddes, 2016). In contrast, given fear’s function to protect the self, employees afraid of losing their job may proactively seek feedback to improve their performance and thus secure their job.

Other negative discrete emotions may also be linked to other forms of proactivity. For example, scholars have suggested that guilt is ‘associated with a desire to proactively repair a bad situation’ and thus act in advance to prevent a negative result or to improve upon prior mistakes (Bohns and Flynn, 2012, p 1158). In this way, guilt may lead to proactive problem prevention (Parker and Collins, 2010), or feedback-seeking to correct previous mistakes (Roseman, 2011). As another example, frustration with a work process can motivate proactivity because the employee ‘wants to change something for the better’ (Frese and Fay, 2001). Thus, frustration, with its action tendency to overcome obstacles, is likely to be associated with proactive behaviours such as improving upon, or correcting, existing work practices characteristic of taking charge (Morrison and Phelps, 1999).

The unique action tendencies of discrete emotions also suggest that positive discrete emotions are linked to different forms of proactivity. For example, the discrete emotional state of excitement is associated with an action tendency to move towards an outcome or situation, including instrumental action such as approaching goals and incentives (Roseman, 2011). Therefore, employees in an excited state are energized to think about ways to achieve their proactive goals and take career initiative to move up the corporate ladder (Parker and Collins, 2010). As another example, feeling pride is associated with an action tendency of exhibiting and asserting the self to ‘show what you can do’ (Roseman, 2011, p 439). Thus, an affective state of pride could motivate an employee to proactively create positive
impressions or speak up with new ideas to make themselves look good (Bolino, 1999).

Specific discrete emotions may also have unique effects on different stages of proactivity. When viewed as a process, proactivity can involve envisioning, planning, enacting, and reflecting on this behaviour (Bindl et al, 2012; Grant and Ashford, 2008). Research suggests that the discrete emotions of sadness and despair are associated with employees envisioning proactive behaviours, but not the other stages of proactivity (Bindl et al, 2012). Others suggest that frustration may be crucial to identifying issues and problems to be corrected (Bindl, 2019; Frese and Fay, 2001), and thus important for the planning stage of proactivity. Feelings of regret may also be linked to the planning stage, with employees identifying previous mistakes that could be corrected in the future (Roseman, 2013). Once issues are identified, more highly-activated discrete emotions such as anger or excitement may then drive employees to be proactive in addressing those issues (Kish-Gephart et al, 2009). Taken together, proactivity scholars may benefit from linking specific discrete emotions to a particular stage of proactivity, and/or by developing integrative theoretical models to explain how each stage of proactivity may be influenced by discrete emotions.

When: Focusing on contingent factors linking negative emotions to proactivity

We have described how one solution to addressing the mixed findings from research examining negative emotions and proactivity is to focus on discrete emotional states rather than core negative affect. Another solution is to focus on contingent relationships, rather than main effects. Discrete theories of emotion suggest that emotion-driven behaviour is dependent on contextual factors (Frijda, 1986; Parrott, 2001), or ‘dependent on the joint occurrence of an emotion and specific external or internal stimulus conditions’ (Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz, 1994, p 216). For example, the experience of anger can lead to counterproductive, uncivil, or vengeful behaviour, or to constructive problem resolution (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Averill, 1982), while fear can lead to withdrawal, silence, or defensive effort (Öhman, 2008). Therefore, the behavioural consequences of discrete emotional experience can vary depending upon the situation, with employees exhibiting a range of behaviours after experiencing negative emotions.

Therefore, the question is not whether, but when negative emotions will spark proactivity (Lebel, 2017; Lindebaum and Jordan, 2012). Accordingly, proactivity scholars should adopt functional discrete
theories of emotion (for example, Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure, 1989) to develop theoretical models describing those conditions under which a particular discrete emotion can spark proactive behaviour. For example, Lebel (2016) argued and found that employees’ fear of job loss was positively associated with speaking up, but only when employees also perceived their supervisor as open to input. From a functional perspective, the protective action tendency resulting from fear of job loss motivated action to improve the current state of affairs (speaking up), but only when this action was perceived as leading to change (perceptions of supervisor openness). When employees viewed their supervisors as not open to input, fear of job loss motivated action to protect the self by remaining silent.

Existing theory on proactivity provides a number of other contingent factors that may influence when negative emotions, such as anger and guilt, may result in proactive behaviours. For example, anger’s action tendency to correct a perceived wrong is likely to spark employees to speak up about an issue when anger’s energy is combined with other-focused, or prosocial, motives (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Lindebaum and Geddes, 2016). Taking a functional perspective, these authors argue that when employees are more focused on benefiting others, the tendency of anger to motivate behaviour to lash out or get revenge is weakened, and the tendency to motivate approach-related behaviours to address the situation is strengthened (see also Carver and Harmon-Jones, 2009). Other scholars have argued that employees must regulate their anger to be proactive (Lebel, 2017; Oh and Farh, 2017). From this perspective, anger’s high level of negative energy is likely to lead to retaliation when employees are unable to regulate their emotions, but anger’s approach-focused energy can produce proactive efforts to secure resources or speak up when employees are able to control and regulate their emotional experience (Grant, 2013). In regard to guilt, Bohns and Flynn (2012) argue that autonomy and the specificity of performance feedback are two important contingent factors shaping when this emotion may spark proactive effort. When employees receive specific feedback or perceive high levels of autonomy, these authors argue, guilt’s action tendency to redress a situation takes the form of proactivity, as employees know exactly what needs to be done or feel they have enough control to change their job situation. In contrast, when employees receive vague feedback or perceive low autonomy, their guilt may turn into feelings of confusion and helplessness, lowering proactivity.

There are likely to be a number of additional contingent factors, whether at the individual, group, or organizational level that influence
when a particular negative emotion may or may not motivate proactive behaviour. We believe that the time is right to expand on the ideas described above and to explore potential contingencies in greater depth. Applying functional theories of emotion provide a template for future proactivity research. More specifically, a number of scholars have applied a discrete emotion’s unique action tendency, and then explain the conditions under which this tendency may be strengthened or weakened (for example, Lebel, 2017; Lindebaum and Geddes, 2016; Oh and Farh, 2017). We believe that following this approach will be fruitful for research on proactivity.

Clarifying how work engagement shapes proactivity

*Engagement as more than an energized-to state*

As described above, work engagement has been overwhelmingly construed as an antecedent that exclusively utilizes the energized-to pathway. However, this restriction undermines the role of work engagement in enhancing proactivity. Work engagement is not a singularly emotional construct; it has clear cognitive and physical components (Kahn, 1990; Rich, Lepine, and Crawford, 2010). By underutilizing the mechanisms of work engagement, current theorizing of what motivates proactive behaviour among employees and workers remains incomplete.

In Kahn’s (1990) seminal work on engagement, he conceptualized engagement as the integration of one’s personal self into their work role performances. In a state of engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. In this interpretation, engagement is about psychological presence (Rothbard, 2001), enacted through physical, cognitive, and emotional means. Engagement therefore necessitates strong cognitive and physical considerations; employees must make judgements about the role they wish to play in their work, about the congruence of their and their organization’s values, and conduct repeated self-evaluations to match their desired work selves with their current work selves (Rich, Lepine, and Crawford, 2010).

Further research has advanced and clarified Kahn’s model, and isolated three main dimensions to the work engagement construct. These are: vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al, 2002). We posit that each dimension of work engagement maps neatly onto each of the three pathways to proactivity; vigour, which is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience
while working likely operates through the energized-to pathway; dedication, which is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge, likely operates through the reason-to pathway; and absorption, which is the act of being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in the work, is likely to operate through the can-do pathway.

**Vigour and the energized-to pathway**

The energized-to pathway represents a state of activated positive affect, such as feeling enthusiastic, excited, or passionate. Parker, Bindl, and Strauss (2010) suggest that a high degree of activation increases the amount of effort put into a behaviour by increasing the experience of energy. This is consistent with the vigour dimension of work engagement. When an individual demonstrates vigour, they expend large amounts of effort towards their work, sustaining their level of energy and enthusiasm even in the face of difficulties (Schaufeli et al, 2002), and experiencing positive perceptions about their work and their organizations (Salanova, Agut, and Peiró, 2005). Such energy is needed for employees to proactively approach and overcome, rather than avoid, challenges at work (Frese and Fay, 2001). In this way, vigour is compatible with how proactivity scholars have articulated the relationship between work engagement and proactivity (for example, Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). Given that vigour is a critical dimension of work engagement, it is not wrong to insist that work engagement leads to proactive behaviour through the energized-to pathway. However, it is incomplete to insist that work engagement leads to proactive behaviour solely through the energized-to pathway. As we outline below, the other two dimensions of work engagement are more suited to alternative pathways to proactivity.

**Dedication and the reason-to pathway**

Proactivity scholars have suggested that intrinsic forces are important drivers of self-directed behaviour, perhaps even more so than external or situational ones (Griffin, Neal, and Parker, 2007). Proactivity implies that the goals one is striving towards are discretionary, with uncertain or ambiguous outcomes, and take place with no strong compulsion from others. In the absence of strong external cues toward action, there must be strong internal reasons why an employee should be proactive. Such intrinsic motivational forces are a primary aspect of reason-to proactive motivation (Parker, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010).
The dedication aspect of work engagement supplies reason-to-motivation, involving feelings of task significance and of believing that your job is important, valued, and worth investing time in (Schaufeli et al, 2002). It is the result of an internalization process where individuals feel ownership in their roles, that their personal values align with the tasks they must accomplish, and that the future success of the task is indicative of a personal success, not just a professional one. Dedication is not simply about the act of being engaged, but about the choice to be engaged. This concept explains why an individual becomes engaged enough to be proactive, because one’s commitment to work is based on autonomous, intrinsic decisions (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008). When an individual feels dedicated, they feel as though their work is valuable enough to accept risk or ambiguity, that their personal selves are imbued into their work roles, and that the joy or pride they experience in doing the work is sufficient reward (Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008). We therefore suggest that the dedication dimension of work engagement leads to proactive behaviour through the reason-to pathway, where the employee is intrinsically motivated to take action towards a goal.

Absorption and the can-do pathway

The can-do pathway involves perceptions of self-efficacy, as well as appraisals and attributions of control at work (Parke, Bindl, and Strauss, 2010). In order to take proactive action, one must believe that they are physically capable of reaching the desired outcome. Absorption is the state of being engrossed and deeply attached to a work activity (Schaufeli et al, 2002). This involves both physical and cognitive actions, including executing the task itself, carrying out the actions involved in it, and physically interacting with the task with enough frequency that one becomes engrossed in the process (Langelaan et al, 2006). Absorption is only possible by physically carrying out the work – tackling the task in a tactile and tangible way, with enough repetition the employee increases their sense of competence and self-efficacy in the task at the centre of their engagement. These appraisals of competence and self-efficacy can in turn increase the individual’s vigour and dedication, making them even more engaged in their work than they used to be (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al, 2011).

Thus, the physical act of being in charge of and repeating a core work task can foster engagement, such that one feels greater compulsion to indulge in proactive behaviour and increase their confidence in attaining positive outcomes associated with it. We therefore suggest
that the absorption dimension of work engagement leads to proactive behaviour through the can-do pathway, where a virtuous cycle of self-efficacy motivates people to pursue proactive goals.

**Linking work engagement to proactivity**

Moving forward, we recommend that if scholars are interested in exploring how work engagement utilizes the energize-to pathway, they must focus not on work engagement as a whole, but on one property of work engagement: vigour. On the other hand, if scholars are more interested in determining how effective work engagement is as an antecedent to proactive behaviour, they must be prepared to consider proactive action enacted through all three pathways, where the vigour component of work engagement operates through the energized-to pathway, the dedication component of work engagement operates through the reason-to pathway, and the absorption component of work engagement operates through the can-do pathway. By ignoring the cognitive and physical aspects of work engagement, that is, by limiting our view of engagement to its affective constituents, we reduce it to a third of its efficacy, and impose artificial constraints on its propensity towards proactivity. As a broader call to action, we hope that researchers appropriately match the theoretical underpinnings of their constructs of interest to the pathways that motivate proactivity.

**Conclusion**

**Implications and future directions**

We hope readers draw a number of conclusions from this chapter. First, that proactivity scholars have generally utilized only half of the model of core affect when linking emotional states to proactive behaviour, focusing on activated positive and/or activated negative affect. In many ways, this is understandable, as a number of studies suggest that activated positive affect is related to proactivity (Cangiano, Bindl, and Parker, 2017). However, recent research suggests that other dimensions of core affect can influence different stages of the proactivity process (Bindl et al, 2012). The solution for proactivity scholars seems clear: to follow Bindl et al’s (2012) lead in clearly specifying the role of each aspect of core affect and its relationship to proactive behaviour.

Second, that a focus solely on core affect has limited progress to understand how emotions spark proactivity. This is especially the case in research examining negative emotions and proactivity, which
has produced conflicting theoretical arguments and mixed results. Applying theories of core affect lumps together several emotions (such as anger and fear) that are likely to motivate different forms of behaviour (Lerner and Keltner, 2001). Therefore, future research should utilize discrete theories of emotion to better specify the link between specific negative emotions and proactivity (for example, Lebel, 2017; Oh and Farh, 2017). Applying discrete theories of emotion is likely to influence researchers’ choices regarding methodology and study design. In particular, discrete emotions, as relatively intense, short-lived emotional experiences, may be best captured with event-sampling designs on a daily or weekly basis (for example, Liu et al., 2017), rather than with cross-sectional surveys, which can lump emotional experience over longer time periods (for example, Lebel, 2016). Alternatively, researchers could utilize qualitative methods to best capture how these more momentary emotional experiences spark proactivity (for example, Bindl, 2019).

Third, that there is ample opportunity to understand the contingent effects of emotions on proactivity. It is our view that one major reason for mixed results in research linking emotions to proactive behaviour is that researchers have focused on main effects and neglected contingent effects. Indeed, discrete theories of emotion explicitly state that emotion-driven behaviour is dependent on situational factors (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz, 1994). Therefore, our recommendation is to apply discrete theories of emotion to identify the specific contextual factors likely to elicit certain behaviours based on each emotion’s action tendency. Such an approach reflects what Weiss and Cropanzano (1996, p 23) had in mind when they advocated for the development of classification schemes to specify environment–emotion–behaviour chains at work. Scholars could also consider employing appraisal theory (Smith and Ellsworth, 1985) to better understand the conditions under which discrete emotional states arise to motivate proactivity. Adopting these approaches provides a clear road map for future proactivity research.

Fourth, any applications or investigations regarding proactivity benefit from consistency and clarification. In particular, scholars are urged to scrutinize the theoretical match between the construct in question and the pathway through which it seems to motivate proactive action. We use the example of work engagement to illustrate that the pathway through which work engagement affects proactivity is likely dependent on the particular dimension of work engagement being activated. We suggest that future studies of work engagement and proactivity specify whether they are conceptualizing the overarching
construct of work engagement or more specific aspects of this construct. If scholars wish to study the construct of work engagement as a whole, they must be cognizant of the fact that any combination of all three pathways may activate proactive behaviour, rather than just one. If scholars are focusing on a particular proactive motivational pathway, then they should link their arguments to the appropriate aspect of engagement: vigour (energized-to pathway), dedication (reason-to pathway), or absorption (can-do pathway). Future research may also try to determine whether the various dimensions of work engagement differentially impact proactive behaviour, and whether there is a pattern of activation with the dimensions and their respective pathways indicative of a particular causal ordering.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to help clarify the role of energized-to motivation in shaping proactivity at work. We first summarized theory and research on the energized-to pathway along with limitations of current conceptualizations of energized-to motivation. We then described a number of ways for proactivity scholars to move beyond and extend existing theoretical approaches to the energized-to- pathway. In particular, we argue that scholars should increasingly use theories of discrete emotion to link specific emotional states to a range of forms and stages of proactive behaviour. We also argue that, given mixed empirical results, proactivity scholars should focus on contingent, rather than main, effects to better understand when discrete emotional states impact proactivity. We then argued that research linking work engagement and proactivity has muddled the waters by making both cognitive and affective motivational arguments, and that future research should theoretically and empirically specify which aspect(s) of work engagement may motivate proactivity. In tandem, adopting these suggestions will help add to theoretical and empirical precision to better understand when emotions do (or do not) motivate proactivity.

References


