

Can work ambition explain the relationship between proactive personality and career
success?

R.K.H. Veenstra

ANR: 341910

Supervisor: dr. Y.M.J. van Osch

2nd Assessor: dr. B.G. Adams

Master Thesis WOP

Tilburg University

March 15, 2019

Abstract

The question this study tried to answer was: Can work ambition explain the relationship between proactive personality and career success? Previous research has shown that there is a relationship between proactive personality and both indicators of career success, namely; promotions and salary. It was thought that vertical ambition, which is the drive/striving to successfully complete work-related goals in order to be rewarded in terms of status, power, promotions and money, could explain the relationship between proactive personality and career success. A questionnaire, including the proactive personality scale, vertical ambition scale and two indicators of career success, was distributed to a large sample of employees ($N = 295$). The results replicated the findings of previous research about the relationship between proactive personality and career success, but only for promotions. In addition, a relationship between proactive personality and vertical ambition has been found. Ambition was not found to be a mediator in the relationship between proactive personality and career success.

Keywords: Ambition, motivation, drive, vertical ambition, proactive personality, career success, salary, promotions.

Proactive personality, work ambition and career success: Can work ambition explain the relationship between proactive personality and career success?

Proactive personality is known to have a positive effect on career success. Proactive people have more career satisfaction, reach higher positions in an organization and have larger salary growth (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999; Seibert, Kramer & Crant, 2001). However, personality and motivation are different constructs (Humphreys & William, 1984; Biernat, 1989), which means that someone with a proactive personality does not have to be motivated in order to have career success. It seems to be important that someone with a proactive personality also has the motivation or the ambition (i.e. drive) to have career success, in order to behave proactively. This research tries to provide evidence for the importance of work ambition in the relationship between proactive personality and career success.

Proactive personality and career success

Bateman & Crant (1993) describe individuals with a prototypical proactive personality as people who are overall not restricted or limited by situational forces and who want to change the environment. Proactive people identify opportunities, act on these opportunities, show initiative, and persevere until they bring out meaningful change (Bateman & Crant, 1993). In work settings, proactive people transform organizations' mission, find and solve problems, and take it on themselves to have an impact on the work environment around them. Less proactive people tend to adapt to circumstances rather than change them, so they are rather passive and reactive (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999). Bateman & Crant (1993) viewed proactive personality as a stable disposition towards proactive behavior. Personality is also found to be important in determining career success, because careers unfold over time and are often driven by someone's attitudes and behaviors

(Boudreau, Boswell, Judge & Bretz, 2001). Moreover, a career development plan is important to reach career success and is often guided by someone's internal attitudes and personality (Feldman, 2002).

Career success is defined as the accumulation of positive psychological and work-related outcomes resulting from someone's work experiences (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001). Career success can be operationalized in one of two ways. The first includes variables that measure subjective or intrinsic career success. An example of such a variable is career satisfaction. This captures individuals' subjective judgements about their career attainments (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). The second way to operationalize career success is by variables that measure objective or extrinsic career success. Examples of these variables are salary attainment and the number of promotions in one's career. These indicators of career success can be seen and therefore evaluated objectively by others (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). Several authors indicated a positive relationship between proactive personality and career success (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Seibert et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005; Maurer & Chapman, 2013). These studies either used both types of career success or focused solely on one of the two types.

This research focused on objective career success, because this works best in the model that has been studied. This will be explained in more detail later. A positive relationship between proactive personality and objective career success has been found by Crant (1995), Seibert et al. (1999) and Byrne, Dik, & Chiaburu (2008). It is expected that this research can replicate this effect and will find a positive relationship between proactive personality and objective career success as well.

Hypothesis 1: Proactive personality is positively related to objective career success.

Proactive behavior is not only driven by proactive personality, but also by motivational processes (Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010). Parker, Bindl & Strauss (2010) described a model in their research with motivation processes for proactive behavior and antecedent that influence proactive motivation and behavior. This model, for example, concludes that motivational states, goal generation, goal striving, and quality of goal processes are important predictors of proactive behavior. This means that a proactive personality does not always necessarily has to lead to proactive behavior. Therefore, it is important to have a proactive personality in combination with a certain motivation/goal, in this case the motivation or the goal to reach promotions and attain higher salaries (i.e. objective career success), to lead to proactive behavior. Day and Allen (2004) found the importance of (career) motivation to reach career success. They found a positive effect of career motivation on current salary and performance. From these studies it can be concluded that proactive personality, motivation and goals play an important role in the expression of proactive and achieving behavior. In occupational setting, the motivation to achieve something can be described in terms of work ambition, which will be explained below.

Ambition

Ambition is usually described as a strong desire to do or to achieve something (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). To fulfill this drive or desire, it has to be directed at a specific goal to move towards. In this research the focus is on work-related ambition. Ambition may thus be defined as a drive to successfully complete work-related goals. According to Judge et al. (2012) ambition is ‘the persistent and generalized striving for success, attainment and accomplishment’. Based on this information, Kortekaas-Mertens (2018) distinguished between two types of work ambition: (1) horizontal ambition: drive/striving to successfully complete work-related goals in order to be rewarded in terms of self-development, gaining expertise and attaining communal goals, and (2) vertical ambition: drive/striving to

successfully complete work-related goals in order to be rewarded in terms of status, power, promotions and money.

Because the indicators of objective career success (promotions and salary growth) seem to be in line with the goals of vertical ambition (status, power, promotions and money), this study only focused on vertical ambition.

The relation between proactive personality, objective career success and ambition

As mentioned before, there is a relationship between proactive personality and career success (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001). However, this personality trait is not the only predictor for certain behavior. Motivation is important for people with a proactive personality to actually behave proactively (Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010; McCormick, Guay, Colbert & Stewart, 2018). Furthermore, motivation is also important to achieve career success (Day & Allen, 2004). Because of the fact that this study focused on work related goals and drive (i.e. motivation) to achieve career success, the term ambition is used. Judge et al. (2012) found a positive relationship between ambition and income, which indicates a relationship between (vertical) ambition and career success. In addition, because of the commonalities between the indicators of objective career success and the goals of vertical ambition, this research is focused on the explanation of the relationship between proactive personality and objective career success by vertical ambition. So, proactive personality is positively related to vertical ambition and vertical ambition is positively related to objective career success. In other words, it is expected that the relationship between proactive personality and objective career success is mediated by vertical ambition.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between proactive personality and objective career success is mediated by vertical ambition.

It is expected that vertical ambition partially mediates the relationship, because previous research shows also relationships with other constructs. For example; proactive personality was positively related to innovation and career initiative, which in turn had positive relationships with salary growth and the number of promotions (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001). These constructs are not proven to be mediators, but their relationships suggest that there are more influences on the relationship between proactive personality a career success, and that vertical ambition can thus only partially mediate this relationship. By taking these hypotheses into account, a model was developed which shows the expected relationship between proactive personality, vertical ambition and objective career success (Figure 1). According to the expectations, it would mean that a combination of proactive personality and vertical ambition is important to reach objective career success.

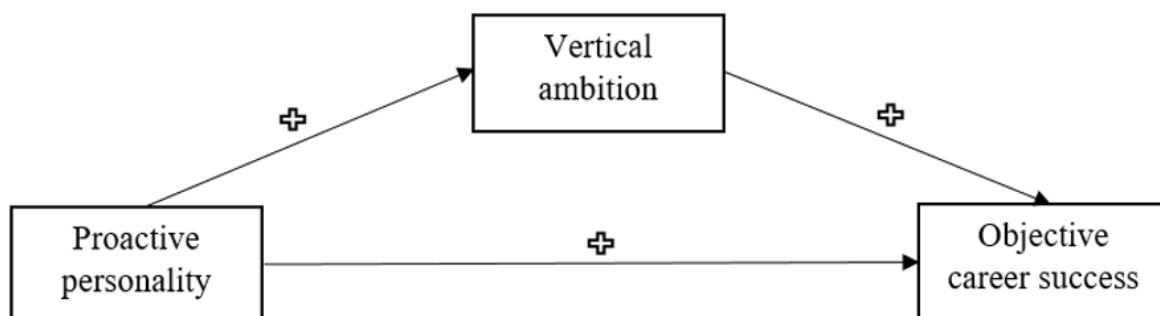


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

Method

Participants

We only approached employed participants because all psychological constructs of interest reflect occupational matters. Only Dutch employees were asked to participate, to control for cultural differences. Data was collected in three ways: Companies were asked to reach large groups of employees. And, online snowball sampling was used as well through social media (Facebook and LinkedIn). In addition, people in our direct environments and

working in companies within our neighborhoods were contacted in person or approached via e-mail and were invited to fill out the online survey. Although participation was on voluntary basis, a lottery was added to encourage people to participate. People were free to subscribe for the lottery, which included 2 X €20 online gift cards to be redeemed at Bol.com.

According to Fritz and MacKinnon (2007) a total sample size of $N=118$ is needed to detect the mediation effect, based on partial mediation with a small direct effect ($t'=.14$), a medium indirect effect and a power of .8. A total of two hundred and ninety-five participants completed the survey. Participants who indicated that they didn't have a job ($n=8$), only had a side-job ($n=14$) or described their job different from full-time or part-time ($n=23$) were eliminated from the data set. In addition, people who indicated that they are self-employed without staff ($n=3$) or described themselves not as working for an employer or as an entrepreneur ($n=13$) were eliminated from the data set as well. As a result, the final sample set¹ consisted of two hundred twenty-nine participants (79 male, 150 female; $Age = 35.86$ years, $SD = 13.09$). An overview of the demographic characteristics of the final sample set is summarized in Table 1.

Procedure and design

An online questionnaire was used for this research. The questionnaire was available online in Qualtrics. Participants were able to complete the study from any computer, tablet or phone with access to the internet during the time the questionnaire was available.

Before the start of the questionnaire participants were asked to prove informed consent. Participants were also informed of the general purpose and procedure of the study. After that, the participants were presented with the items of the questionnaire. In order of

¹ Final sample set is with elimination of participants with extreme values on career success, which will be explained in more detail in the result section.

appearance; six items about proactive personality, twenty-four items about vertical ambition, two items about career success, and the questionnaire ended with some demographic information. After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked for completing the study and were given a debriefing. There was also an option to leave a comment at the end of the survey and to participate in the Bol.com lottery. For participation in the lottery, people were sent to a different survey which could not be linked to their answers on the previous questionnaire. The second survey only recorded their email address in order to get in touch with participants in case they would be one of the winners of the lottery. In total, the survey took about ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

With the data obtained from the questionnaire, the proposed model in this study was tested by the use of the statistical program SPSS. To test the mediation effect of vertical ambition on the relationship between proactive personality and career success, the PROCESS macro (model 4) analysis was used.

Measures

Proactive personality. Proactive personality was assessed with a shortened version of Bateman & Crant (1993) 17-item Proactive Personality Scale (PPS). Bateman & Crant (1993) presented evidence for the scale's reliability and convergent, discriminant and criterion validity. Claes et al. (2005) tested and found evidence for a shortened version of the scale by selecting 6 items. They also made a professional Dutch translation of the scale, which was used in this study. Respondents indicated their levels of agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) to each of the statements whether or not it was an 'accurate description of themselves'. All items were presented in randomized order. Sample items include: 'I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition' and 'I am always looking for a better way to do things'. Due to an unknown technical problem,

there is no data of the last item. So, all analyses were done with 5 items. The factor analysis indicated one factor with an Eigenvalue over 1. This factor explained 52% of the variance. The scree plot also suggested a cut-off after one factor. The scale proved to be reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$)

Vertical ambition. Vertical ambition was assessed with a 24-item scale (Kortekaas-Mertens, 2018). This scale is based on the subcomponents that originate from the definition of vertical ambition: status, power, promotion and money. The items were indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). All items were presented in randomized order. Sample items from this scale are: 'I am careful not to lose my status' and 'It is my constant wish to earn more and more money'. The factor analysis indicated five factors with an Eigenvalue over 1. The first factor explained 40% of the variance, the second 8%, the third 6%, the fourth 5%, and the fifth 4%. The scree plot suggested a cut-off after one factor. The scale proved to be reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$)

Objective career success. Objective career success was measured by two self-report questions: promotions and salary. Respondents were asked to report the number of promotions they had received over their entire career. Promotions was defined as 'any increase in level and/or any significant increases in job responsibilities or job scope' (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999). Respondents also indicated their current net salaries per month in euros (excluding bonuses and 13th month). This way of measuring both indicators of objective career success has previously been used in various studies, for example in Seibert & Kraimer (2001) and Seibert, Crant & Kraimer (1999). The analysis was done for both indicators of objective career success separately. It is often thought that self-report data are prone to a number of distortions. However, Podsakoff and Organ (1986) noted that factual information, information likely to be in the possession of the participant, and potentially verifiable information is less likely to suffer from such problems. For example, Judge et al.

(1995) proved this by reporting a difference of 1% between self- and archival reports, in a sample of 1,338 executives.

Demographic and control variables: At the end of the questionnaire, some demographic and control information were asked, which included gender (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*), age, educational level (1 = *no education*, 7 = *university*) tenure in years, current level in the organization (1 = *highest level*, 7 = *lowest level*) (Van der Meij, Schaveling & van Vugt, 2016) and contractual hours per week.

First, it is important to control for gender because it can influence vertical ambition (Verstraeten, 2017). Also, someone's age can influence work motivation and work engagement (Kooij et al., 2008 & De Wind et al., 2017) and therefore it might influence someone's drive to behave proactively in order to achieve career success. Age also has a direct influence on career success (Igbaria & Chidambaram, 1997). It is important to control for tenure and job type because both can influence career success. Someone who has been working for more years (tenure) or someone who is working more hours (contractual hours) for an organization, might have had more opportunities for promotions and salary growth. Lastly, someone's level in an organization influences motivation and career success. Hierarchy in an organization serves a motivational function, because a higher rank sometimes affords greater material and psychological rewards and comfort (Magee, 2008). Achieving a high rank brings greater opportunity than a low rank to satisfy another set of desires that influence for example power (Magee, 2008).

Results

Correlations

After correcting for missing and odd values and doing the analyses with and without extreme values (i.e. outliers), it was decided to eliminate people with extreme values on

career success within both analyses (correlation and mediation analysis); promotions > 10 ($n=3$) and salary > 10000 ($n=4$). Correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of relationships between all variables. Proactive personality and vertical ambition were positively and significantly related to one another, $r(227) = .25, p < .001$. In addition, the two indicators of career success were positively and significantly correlated, $r(227) = .30, p < .001$. Lastly, proactive personality and career success (salary) were positively and significantly related to one another, $r(227) = .15, p = .025^2$.

Regarding the control variables, age and tenure were found to be positively related to career success (promotions and salary) and negatively related to vertical ambition. Because age and tenure were positively related to one another, $r(227) = .77, p < .001$, and age was more strongly related to career success than tenure, it was decided to include age, and not tenure, as a control variable. In addition, sex and contractual hours were positively related to vertical ambition, proactive personality and career success (salary). Because sex and contractual hours were positively related to one another, $r(227) = .36, p < .001$, it was decided to include sex as a control variable. Next, educational level was found to be positively related to ambition and career success (salary) and negatively related to career success (promotions). Because of this, it was decided to include educational level as a control variable. Lastly, organizational level was found to be negatively related to proactive personality and career success (promotions and salary), so it was decided to include organizational level as control variable as well. In summary, age, sex, educational level and organizational level were included as covariates in the mediation analysis³. An overview of the correlations between these variables is summarized in Table 2.

Mediation analysis

² The correlations with salary were only found after removing the outliers.

³ Correlation analysis was also done with outliers. In both analyses the same covariates are found.

To test the hypothesized model with the direct effect of proactive personality on objective career success and the mediation effect of vertical ambition, PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013), model 4, was used ($X = \text{proactive personality}$, $M = \text{vertical ambition}$, $Y = \text{objective career success}$). PROCESS macro assessed all paths in the mediation model separately. Sex, age, educational level, and organizational level were entered as covariates in this analysis. A significance level of $p < 0,05$ was used for path c (X on Y) (hypothesis 1), and for the other direct effects, path a (X on M) and path b (M on Y). Path c' (indirect effect of X on Y through M) (hypothesis 2) is significant in case zero would not fall within the 95% confidence intervals. This analysis was done twice, for the two different dependent variables of career success (promotions and salary).

The first analysis was performed with promotions as dependent variable. The results show a significant effect of proactive personality on ambition, $B = .20$, $t(227) = 2.92$, $p = .004$ (path a). The effect of ambition on career success (promotions) was found not to be significant, $B = .07$, $t(227) = .59$, $p = .556$ (path b). The total direct effect of proactive personality on career success (promotions), however, was found to be significant $B = .30$, $t(227) = 2.44$, $p = .016$ (path c). Lastly, the indirect effect (path c'), which includes the mediator, was not found to be significant. Because zero did not fall within the 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (lower CI = $-.04$ and upper CI = $.07$), it was concluded that there was no mediation effect.

The second PROCESS Macro analysis was performed by using salary as dependent variable. The results show the same significant effect of proactive personality on ambition as in the first analysis, $B = .20$, $t(227) = 2.92$, $p = .004$ (path a). The effect of ambition on career success (salary) was not found to be significant, $B = 56.88$, $t(227) = 1.36$, $p = .177$ (path b). The total direct effect of proactive personality on career success (salary) was also found not to be significant $B = 81.19$, $t(227) = 1.94$, $p = .054$ (path c). Lastly, the indirect effect (path

c'), which includes the mediator, was not found to be significant either. Because zero did not fall within the 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (lower CI = -4.42 and upper CI = 32.97), it was concluded that there was no mediation effect⁴.

These analyses have shown that hypothesis 1 is partly supported. A significant direct effect was found between proactive personality and the number of promotions. However this effect was also found for salary in the correlation analysis, this effect disappeared after controlling for the covariates in the mediation analysis. In addition, we found no support for hypothesis 2 because there is no mediation effect of ambition on proactive personality and career success.

Discussion

The point of departure for this study was the need for theoretical insight in the relationship between proactive personality and objective career success. According to the literature research, vertical ambition seems to be related to proactive personality and (objective) career success. The goal of this research was to find out whether work ambition could explain this relationship. To answer this research question, a proactive personality and a vertical ambition questionnaire were used. Objective career success was measured by 2 indicators; promotions and salary. The questionnaire was distributed to a large sample of employees. The results demonstrated a relationship between proactive personality and promotions, but not between proactive personality and salary. Furthermore, it was shown that there was a relationship between proactive personality and vertical ambition. There was no mediation effect of vertical ambition found between proactive personality and objective career success.

⁴ Both PROCESS Macro analyses were also done including the outliers. The same results are found with outliers. The only difference is that the confidence intervals became smaller in the analysis without outliers.

Interpretation of the results

In previous research (Seibert et al., 1999; Crant, 1995; Byrne, Dik, & Chiaburu, 2008), a relationship between proactive personality and objective career success has been found. Although this research only found this relationship for promotions, the relationship with salary showed a trend in the expected direction ($p = .054$). There are several reasons that might explain the relationship between proactive personality and objective career success. According to Crant (1995) proactive people tend to create situations that are consistent with high career success. People who score high on proactive personality can better anticipate on future changes, because they are able to better understand the opportunities in their environment. As a result, they are able to identify situation in which they can improve themselves for a future promotion (Seibert et al., 1999 & Crant 1995). Because promotions is one of the indicators of career success, this could be an explanation why people with a high proactive personality are more likely to obtain career success than people with a low proactive personality. In addition, people with a high proactive personality are able to influence their environment (Seibert et al., 1999). This can offer advantages, for example in having a voice over their own pay or promotions, which can lead to higher objective career success (Zanen, 2016). According to Ng et al. (2005) proactive people show extra-role behavior. In this way they add more value to the organization, which is more likely to lead to rewards in the form of promotion or increased paychecks. Seibert et al. (1999) also mention that proactive people are more likely to show extra-role behavior, such as spreading organizational information, networking and showing personal initiative. Lastly, proactivity is perceived as an indicator of leadership potential (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Ng et al., 2005). That is why Seibert et al. (1999) argue that individuals with a proactive personality are more likely to obtain career support and receive sponsorship within the organization, which can

involve more income or a promotion, which in turn results in higher objective career success (Seibert et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005; Zanen, 2016).

This study also found a positive relationship between proactive personality and vertical ambition. Based on their correlation ($r(227) = .25, p < .001$), it can be concluded that their relationship is not very strong (Field, 2013), which means that there are important differences between the two constructs. One of the differences between proactive personality and ambition can be found in their levels of personality. Although they are both related to corresponding personality traits (for example: conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and general mental ability) (Major, Turner & Fletcher, 2006; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012), they fall under different levels within personality. Bateman and Crant (1993) identify proactive behavior as a relatively stable behavioral tendency or a personal disposition. This concept of proactive personality was shown to be different among individuals, and to distinct from other personality traits. According to McAdams & Pals (2006) this suggests that proactive personality is a level I personality variable. Level I includes dispositional traits, which are described as ‘broad individual differences in behavior, thoughts, and feelings that account for general consistencies across situations and over time. These individual differences are relatively stable over time’ (McAdams & Pals, 2006). However, ambition seems to be a middle-level or level II personality variable, because all ambition definitions involve strivings in the context of success (McAdams, 1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006). Level II includes characteristic adaption, which are described as ‘more specific motivational social-cognitive, and developmental variables that are contextualized in time, situations, and social roles (e.g. goals, values, coping strategies, relational patterns, domain-specific concerns). Some characteristic adaptations may change over the life course’. Cantor (1990) described level II personality variables as ‘units that take an individual’s standing on abstract dispositions and give concrete form to their diverse expressions’. Individuals have level I

traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness or proactivity, but the midlevel side of personality is concerned with the things that individuals do with personality in a situation (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). It should be emphasized that middle-level traits, like ambition, are indeed traits, which means that they are stable across situations within a given domain and consistent over time, but they are more contextualized than level I traits (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

The fact that there are important differences between proactive personality and vertical ambition can also be seen within the results of this study; their different relationships with career success. There is a positive relationship between proactive personality and career success (for promotions and a trend towards salary), but this relationship has not been found for vertical ambition and career success. An explanation of these different relationships can be found in the influence of the situation. Proactive people tend to create their desired situation, whereas people who are vertically ambitious can be obstructed by the situation in reaching their goals. Bateman & Crant (1993) describe individuals with a prototypical proactive personality as people who are overall not restricted or limited by situational forces, and who want to change the environment. According to Humphreys & Revelle (1984), however, motivation (like ambition) is a state that results from a combination of individual needs and desires with the stimulus properties of the situation. They describe the importance of situational moderators, which are the characteristics of the situation which when combined with motivation evoke particular states (Humphreys & Revelle, 1984). This suggests that only a motivation or desire to achieve something is not enough, the situation plays an important role. Vertical ambition is such a motivation to successfully complete work-related goals. Because, according to Humphreys & Revelle (1984), the situation stimuli are important in combination with motivation, people can be vertically ambitious, but not get promotions or rise in salary (career success) if the situation does not give them the

opportunities. Santos (2016) found in his research multi-level barriers for people when trying to succeed in their careers. These are, for example, the lack of organizational support and the career progression standards and expectations. These barriers have been found to be important barriers in career success (Santos, 2016). So, the goal of people with a proactive personality and vertical ambition can be the same, which makes the constructs related, but the findings that situation is an important factor in motivation can explain their different relationships with career success. Proactive people tend to create situations to reach their goals whereas vertical ambitious people might be obstructed by the situation.

Theoretical and practical implications

This research is a useful contribution to the existing literature, because it is a first step in investigating a specific motivation (i.e. vertical ambition) as a possible mediator in the relationship between proactive personality and career success. However vertical ambition is not found to be a mediator, an important relationship has been found between proactive personality and vertical ambition, which might be useful for future research. Taking into account the finding and the limitations, this study can be seen as a good basis for future research into possible mediators.

Besides the theoretical implications, there are also some practical implications that can be indicated. Since employees have become more responsible for obtaining their own career success (Hall, 1996; Crant, 2000), the relationship between proactive personality and career success can be relevant for individuals. It is important to know that employees can become more successful in their career by increasing their own proactivity. This can lead to individual advantages, such as obtaining more promotions and receiving a higher income. Individuals' personality is a relatively stable factor (Seibert et al., 1999), which means that individuals do not have much influence on their personality. However, proactive personality

is found to be linked to proactive behavior (McCormick et al., 2018). Because individuals do have an influence on their behavior, employees can reinforce proactivity by developing their proactive behavior (Seibert et al., 1999).

Next to the individual relevance, the relationship between proactive personality and career success can also be practically relevant for organizations. Individual career success can lead to overall organizational success, which in turn could lead to competitive advantages (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen & Barrick, 1999). Because the relationship between proactive personality and career success is found for promotions (and a trend in the expected direction for salary), it can be useful for organizations to maximize the level of proactivity within the organization in order to improve organizational success (Zanen, 2016). A way to do this is to execute a test on future employees to test their level of proactive personality in order to select employees with high levels of proactive personality. This can increase the likelihood of obtaining organizational success (Zanen, 2016).

The results of the insignificant relationship between vertical ambition and career success are also practically relevant for organizations. Organizations always ask for ambitious people, but the findings of this study indicate that being ambitious is not enough to also be successful. It might be useful for organizations to support ambitious employees. Career motivation can be supported by giving opportunities for achievement and input and career motivation can also be enhanced through career development support (Day & Allen, 2003).

Limitations

This research was subject to several limitations. First, due to an unknown technical problem there was no data received from the last question of the proactive personality part of the questionnaire. Because the original questionnaire consists of 17 items and the scale is

already shortened to 6 items, it might have had an influence on the results that there are only 5 items in this research. The content of this items is: 'If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen'. Although the reliability of the scale was still good (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$), it would have been better if the last question was included.

A second limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size ($N=229$), which might not be sufficient. According to Fritz and MacKinnon (2007) the sample size is big enough to detect the mediation effect with a medium effect size, but most studies on this subject are based on a bigger sample size. For example, the results of Seibert et al. (1999) are based on a sample of $N=496$ employees. This might explain why the relationship between proactive personality and salary is found in previous research, but shows only a trend in the expected direction in this research.

The third limitation of this study is that there was no question about the size of the organization the respondents work for. Researchers have argued that larger firms have more promotion opportunities because they have a greater number of job vacancies available (Dalton & Kesner, 1985; Whitely et al., 1991). This might have had an influence on the relationship between vertical ambition and career success. When people are motivated to have career success (vertically ambitious), but they do not get the opportunity to receive promotions or grow in salary they cannot use their motivation to reach their goals.

A last limitation that might have had an influence on the results is the choice to only include objective career success in the study. However vertical ambition and objective career success seemed to fit very well, there was no relationship found, which indicates that there is something missing. Next to the possible influence of the situation that can explain this insignificant relationship, it might also be an explanation that those vertical ambitious people feel satisfied in their career, regardless of their number of promotions and their salary. This

means that the relationship between vertical ambition and career success can probably be found with the inclusion of subjective career success. Subjective career success reflects peoples' feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment (Judge et al., 1995). Although they might be expected to be positively but moderately associated, objective and subjective career success do not necessarily covary (Judge et al., 1995). People who are extrinsically successful (objective career success) may not feel satisfied with their achievements, and the other way around; people who feel satisfied with their achievements may not be extrinsically successful. Thus, it might be better to consider both objective and subjective career success.

Suggestions for future research

Future research is needed to replicate and extend the current findings. For future research it is recommended to look again if ambition works as a mediator in the relationship between proactive personality and career success. Judge and Kammer-Mueller (2012) also expect that ambition will serve as a mediator between the more abstract and general dispositions and characteristics and indicators of success. It is important to take into account the limitations of this study. This would mean that future research must also include subjective career success, since it has been found to be better to consider both; objective and subjective career success. Next, it is important to include a question about the size of the organization participants work for, to control for opportunities that employees do or do not have to be successful. Some occupations may not allow one much latitude for proactive behavior and being ambitious in order to be successful. Because Judge and Kammer-Mueller (2012) propose that middle-level traits serve as the interface where traits and context come to manifest themselves in the environment, it is recommended to conduct a study to examine in which particular situations/contexts employees are able to behave proactively and have the drive to be successful in their career. It might also be fruitful to examine other behaviors that mediate the relationship between proactive personality and career success.

Conclusion

This study tried to answer the question: Can work ambition explain the relationship between proactive personality and career success? The study replicated the relationship between proactive personality and career success, but only for promotions. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that there is a relationship between proactive personality and vertical ambition. However, vertical ambition did not relate to objective career success and it could not explain the relationship between proactive personality and objective career success. From these findings it can be concluded that besides commonalities there are other important differences between proactive personality and vertical ambition. In addition, the relationship between vertical ambition and objective career success might not be as obvious as the indicators show, there seem to be other factors that influence this relationship.

References

- Ambition. (n.d.). In *Oxford dictionary* online. Retrieved from <http://en.oxforddictionar.com/defenition/ambition>
- Bateman, T. S. & Crant, J. M. (1993). The proactive component of organizational behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 14, 103-118.
- Biernat, M. (1989). Motives and values to achieve: different construct with different effects. *Journal of Personality*, 57(1), 69-95.
- Boudreau, J. W., Boswell, W. R., Judge, T. A. & Bretz, R. D. (2001). Personality and cognitive ability as predictors of job search among employed managers. *Personnel Psychology*, 54, 25-50.
- Byrne, Z. S., Dik, B. J. & Chiaburu, D. S. (2008). Alternatives to traditional mentoring in fostering career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72(3), 429-442.
- Cantor, N. (1990). From thought to behavior: “Having” and “doing” in the study of personality and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 45, 735–750.
- Claes, R., Beheydt, C. & Lemmens, B. (2005). Unidimensionality of abbreviated proactive personality scales across cultures. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 54(4), 476-489.
- Crant, J. M. (1995). The proactive personality scale and objective job performance among real estate agents. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80(4), 532-537.
- Crant, J. M. (2000). Proactive behavior in organization. *Journal of management*, 26(3), 435-462.

- Dalton, D. R., & Kesner, I. F. (1985). Organizational performance as an antecedent of inside/outside chief executive succession: An empirical assessment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 28, 749-762.
- Day, W. & Allen, T. D. (2004). The relationship between career motivation and self-efficacy with protégé career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(1), 72-91.
- De Wind, A., Leijten, F. R. M., Hoekstra, T., Geuskens, G. A., Burdorf, A., & Van der Beek, A. J. (2017). "Mental retirement?" Trajectories of work engagement preceding retirement among older workers. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health*, 43, 34-41.
- Feldman, D. C. (2002). Stability in the midst of change: A developmental perspective on the study of careers. In Feldman D. C. (Ed.), *Work careers: A developmental perspective* (pp. 3-26). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Field, A. (2013). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics: And sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll*. Sage: Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC.
- Fritz, M. S. & MacKinnon, D. P. (2007). Required sample size to detect the mediated effect. *Psychological Science*, 18(3), 233-239.
- Hall, D. T. (1996). Protean careers of the 21st century. *Academy of Management Executive*, 10(4), 8-16.
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York, NY: The Guilford.
- Humphreys, M. S. & Revelle, W. (1984). Personality, motivation, and performance: A theory of the relationship between individual differences and information processing. *Psychological Review*, 91(2), 153-184.

- Igbaria, M. & Chidambaram, L. (1997). The impact of gender on career success of information systems professionals: A human-capital perspective. *Information Technology & People, 10*(1), 63-86.
- Judge, T. A., Cable, D. M., Boudreau, J. W., & Bretz, R. D. (1995). An empirical investigation of the predictors of executive career success. *Personnel Psychology, 48*, 485-519.
- Judge, T. A., Higgins, C. A., Thoresen, C. J., & Barrick, M. R. (1999). The big five personality traits, general mental ability and career success across the life span. *Personnel Psychology, 52*(3), 621-652
- Judge, T. A. & Kammeyer-Mueller, J. D. (2012). On the value of aiming high: The causes and consequences of ambition. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 97*, 758-775.
- Kooij, D., De lange, A., Jansen, P. & Dikkers, J. (2008). Older workers' motivation to continue to work: five meanings of age. *Journal of managerial Psychology, 23*, 364-394.
- Kortekaas-Mertens, F. (2018). Measuring work ambition: the development of the horizontal and vertical ambition questionnaire. Tilburg University: Master Thesis WOP.
- Magee, J. C. (2008). Social hierarchy: the self-reinforcement nature of power and status. *Academy of Management Annals, 2*(1), 351-398.
- Major, D.A., Turner, J.E. & Fletcher, T.D. (2006). Linking proactive personality and the big five to motivation to learn and development activity. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(4), 927-935.
- McAdams, D. P. (1995). What do we know when we know a person? *Journal of Personality, 63*, 365–396.

- McAdams, D. P., & Pals, J. L. (2006). A new Big Five: Fundamental principles for an integrative science of personality. *American Psychologist*, *61*, 204–217.
- McCormick, B. W., Guay, R. P., Colbert, A. E. & Stewart, G. L. (2018). Proactive personality and proactive behavior: Perspectives on person-situation interactions. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*.
- Maurer, T. J. & Chapman, E. F. (2013). Ten years of career success in relation to individual and situational variables from the employee development literature. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *83*(3), 450-465.
- Ng, T. W. H., Eby, L. T., Sorensen, K. L. & Feldman, D. C. (2005). Predictors of objective and subjective career success: a meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, *58*(2), 367-408.
- Parker, S. K., Bindl, U. K. & Strauss U.K. (2010). Making things happen: A model of proactive motivation. *Journal of Management*, *36*(4), 827-856.
- Podsakoff, P. M., & Organ, D. W. (1986). Self-reports in organization research: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Management*, *12*, 531-544.
- Santos, G (2016). Career barriers influencing career success. *Career Development International*, *21*(1), 60-84.
- Seibert, S. E., Crant, J. M. & Kraimer, M. L. (1999). Proactive personality and career success. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *84*(3), 416-427.
- Seibert, S. E., Kraimer, M. L. & Crant, J. M. (2001). What do proactive people do? A longitudinal model linking proactive personality and career success. *Personnel Psychology*, *54*(4), 845-874.
- Van der Meij, L., Schaveling, J., & van Vught, M. (2016). Basal testosterone, leadership and dominance: A field study and meta-analysis. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *72*, 72-79.

Verstraeten, R. C. E. (2017). Ambition as a two-sided sword. Two types of ambition in order to get a better picture of gender differences in ambition. Tilburg University: Master Thesis WOP.

Whitely, W., Dougherty, T. W., & Dreher, G. F. (1991). Relationship of career mentoring and socioeconomic origin to Managers' and professionals' early career progress. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34, 331-351.

Zanen, D. (2016). The relationship between proactive personality and objective and subjective career success: the role of proactive behavior and P-E fit: a literature review. Tilburg University: Bachelor Thesis Human Resource Studies.

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics*

Variable		Male	Female
		79 (34.5%)	150 (65.5%)
Age	25 or younger	25 (31.6%)	51 (34%)
	26-40	27 (34.2%)	46 (30,7%)
	41-50	11 (13.9%)	21 (14%)
	Older than 50	16 (20.3%)	32 (21.3%)
Education	No education	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Primary school	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	VMBO	1 (1.27%)	6 (4%)
	HAVO	6 (7.59%)	9 (6%)
	VWO	2 (2.53%)	3 (2%)
	MBO	20 (25.32%)	32 (21.3%)
	HBO	34 (43.04%)	57 (38%)
	University	16 (20.25%)	43 (28.7%)
Job type	Full-time	73 (92.4%)	77 (51.3%)
	Part-time	6 (7.5%)	73 (48.7%)
Organizational level	7 Highest level	2 (2.5%)	4 (2.7%)
	6	9 (11.4%)	2 (1.3%)
	5	19 (24.1%)	30 (20%)
	4	16 (20.2%)	50 (33.3%)
	3	21 (26.6%)	35 (23.3%)
	2	10 (12.7%)	24 (16%)
	1 Lowest level	2 (2.5%)	5 (3.3%)

PROACTIVE PERSONALITY, WORK AMBITION AND CAREER SUCCESS

Table 2 *Results of the correlation Analysis*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Vertical ambition	3.50	.99	1							
2. Proactive personality	4.98	.93	.25**	1						
3. Promotions	2.22	1.96	-.12	.10	1					
4. Salary	2180.48	671.99	.05	.15*	.30**	1				
5. Sex	.34	.48	.18**	.20**	-.00	.17**	1			
6. Age	35.86	13.09	-.37**	-.11	.51**	.28**	.00	1		
7. Educational level	6.67	1.24	.19**	.04	-.13*	.26**	-.03	-.36**	1	
8. Organizational level	4.24	1.31	.01	-.18**	-.29**	-.35**	-.11	-.25**	-.03	1

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Appendix

Appendix A. Survey and survey construction

Dear Participants,

First of all, we would like to thank you for your participation in this study. In order to graduate (Master Social Psychology at Tilburg University), we are investigating the importance people attach to different aspects and characteristics of work.

In this study, we ask you to complete a questionnaire, which consists of 6 components with different statements concerning your perception of different aspects of work and some demographics questions. Completing the questionnaire will take you approximately 10-15 minutes. Thanks again for taking part in this study.

Kind Regards,

Robin Veenstra, Pieter Koemans, Kaja Sepec & Kim Verburgh

Before starting the questionnaire, it is important that you have read and agree on the information below:

- I give permission for the statistical analyses of my anonymous answers.
- I understand that my anonymous answers will only be used for research purposes and that nobody other than the experimenters will have access to them.
- I understand that the collected data will be stored for a maximum of ten years in a database of the University of Tilburg.

- I understand that all information will be processed anonymously.
 - I am aware of the fact that I can end my participation at any moment without this having any consequences.

 - o I hereby declare that I have read the above information and agree on it.
 - o I hereby declare that I do not agree on the above information.
-

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

I spend a great deal of my energy on securing a promotion

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

My aim is to increase my income

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I am careful not to lose my status

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

My goal is to outperform my colleagues

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I would rather earn more money doing less interesting work than earn less money doing more interesting work

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

It is my constant wish to earn more and more money

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I want to move up in order to be seen

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

When I accept tasks, I give priority to tasks that increase my chances of promotion

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

My goal is to receive higher rewards than my colleagues

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

It is important for me to hold a position that is higher than the positions of others

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

My goal is to achieve the highest possible position

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I like to be respected for my work status

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

My aim is to achieve a higher position

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

If the wages were lower, I would make less of an effort

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

My aim is to be in my manager's good books

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I expect others to give me recognition for what I have done

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

For me, wage level is an important expression of appreciation

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I attach great value to obtaining the highest possible status

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

If I reach my goals, I think I should be rewarded for that

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I find it important that others can see what I have achieved

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I always make sure that my name is clearly connected to a successful project

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

If I perform better than others, I want this to be publicly known

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

In my opinion, good work should be rewarded with a higher wage

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I work hard so that I can ask for higher wages every year

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements. Note, the answers are given on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree.

If I see something I don't like, I fix it

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

Not matter what the odds, if I believe in something I will make it happen

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I excel at identifying opportunities

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

I am always looking for better ways to do things

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

How many promotions have you received over your entire career? Promotions are defined as: any increase in level and/or any significant increases in job responsibilities of job scope.

(indicate your number of promotions with a grade, for example: 0, 1, 2, 6)

.....

Indicate your current net salary per month (exclusive bonuses and 13th month) in whole euros?

..... Euro

What is your gender?

- male
- female
- Anders

What is your age (in years)?

.....

What is your highest level of education?

- No education
- Primary school
- VMBO
- HAVO
- VWO
- MBO
- HBO
- University

Do you have a job?

- Yes
- No

How would you characterize your job? In case you have multiple jobs, choose the answer that provides the bulk of your income.

- Full-time job
- Part-time job
- Side job (for example: besides being a student, you work to earn some money)
- Other, namely.....

Do you work as an employee, are you entrepreneur, freelancer or...?

- I work as an employee

- I am an entrepreneur
- I am a freelancer
- Other, namely.....

How long do you work in the organization where you are currently working (rounded in whole years)?

.....

What is your number of contractual hours per week?

.....

Suppose your organization consists of 7 scales (Scale 7 represents the highest function within your company). Which scale best represents your situation?

- Scale 7 (Highest function)
- Scale 6
- Scale 5
- Scale 4
- Scale 3
- Scale 2
- Scale 1 (Lowest function)

You have now come to the end of the questionnaire.

The purpose of this study is to investigate two types of ambition. In doing so, we distinguish between vertical ambition in which people are driven by status, promotion and money, and

horizontal ambition in which people are driven by inner growth, helping others and gaining expertise. So far, research has only focused on vertical ambition. We look at how these two types of ambition are related to perceived work outcomes (e.g., career success, employee satisfaction).

Thank you for your participation!

Please click on the blue arrow in the lower right corner to complete the questionnaire and save your response.

** You will then automatically be redirected to a separate web page where you can leave your e-mail address to participate in the lottery. With that you can win one of the two Bol.com gift vouchers worth € 20. (Participation is entirely without obligation, so your e-mail address will be processed separately from the answers given by you in order to guarantee anonymity). **

If you have any questions regarding this research, please send an e-mail to:

----- or leave your remark in the text box below.