

Interns proactively shaping their organizational experience: The mediating role of leader member exchange

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Proactive dispositions are increasingly becoming a prerequisite qualification for employment across occupations, whilst concurrently internships are increasingly viewed by employers and graduates as a preferred entry point into a range of professional occupations. To date, however, these two contemporary trends have not been examined simultaneously. This study investigates how intern proactive dispositions interact with intern-supervisor exchange relationships, to produce key internship outcomes. The study collected two waves of longitudinal data from both interns and supervisors, representing 303 intern-supervisor dyads (n=303). The findings indicate that an intern's proactive dispositions predicted high quality intern-supervisor exchange, and consequently this exchange mediated the influence of intern proactive personality on both intern in-role performance and intern-satisfaction. These findings highlight important parallels between interns and newcomer employee's experiences of organizational life, and advocate the re-conceptualization of internships from a host organization perspective as an employee recruitment and selection context. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 2016, 17(3), 309-323*)

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It has been asserted by business leaders that finding talented employees is the predominant management challenge of this decade, necessitating that organizations implement proactive talent management initiatives (Manpower Group, 2012; Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013). Internships can be regarded as one such proactive talent management initiative, as they are progressively being used by more organizations globally, as a means by which to attract and identify talented future employees, to the point where internships are becoming the primary pathway into a range of entry level positions (Gerdes, 2009; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2013). Internships distinctive strength when applied in recruitment and selection capacity is that they provide a unique opportunity for host organizations to evaluate potential job applicants in an actual workplace setting, prior to making a formal commitment to their employment, reducing the risk of the large organizational costs associated with incorrect employee selection decisions (Cascio, 2006; Rose 2013a). Whilst, from a recruitment perspective, internships provide interns with the opportunity to evaluate a potential employer prior to making the decision to accept a job offer, therefore also enhancing future employees fit with both the organization and job (Resick, Baltés, & Shantz, 2007; Rose, 2013a).

Despite the apparent suitability of internships as a recruitment and selection tool, the majority of previous internship literature has largely conceptualized internships as a learning experience for interns rather than from the host-organizations Human Resource Management (HRM) perspective (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2001). However there is an emerging stream of literature which has begun to redress this imbalance (Newman, Rose & Teo, 2016; Rose, Teo, & Connell, 2014; Zhao & Liden, 2011). Correspondingly the HRM selection literature has also traditionally focused on a narrow range of selection methods, including interviews, resumes and personality tests (Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002), and to a lesser degree bio-data (Breaugh, 2009), situational

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judgment tests (Whetzel & McDaniel, 2009) and assessment centers (Thornton III & Gibbons, 2009). However, the ability of these methods to predict post-employment behaviors, such as employee performance, has been questioned (Breugh, 2009; Thornton III & Gibbons, 2009), leading to calls to broaden the scope of selection research, to include alternative selection methods (Breugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991). In particular, the selection methods which evaluate candidates in a typical performance settings (Arthur, Glaze, Villado, & Taylor, 2009), a type of evaluation well suited to internships given that they take place in the actual work setting over an extended period of time.

However, before internships can be developed into an enhanced selection context a better understanding of how key organizational variables interact with the context of internships is required, as past reviews of the internship literature have highlighted the dearth of any theoretical base driving internship studies (Bartkus, 2007). Due to the lack of empirical work extending theories developed in other employment contexts to internships, little is known about how contextual variables present within internships, which may influence established organizational theories. Such variables may include interns' unique role expectations, as they are in transition between student and employee roles (Miller & Form, 1951; Ng & Feldman, 2007). In addition internships are unique in terms of their short duration (Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2009). Hence, internships may both require interns to learn and adapt to the workplace differently from regular employees. As a result, further studies are required in order to understand how the distinct employment setting of internships shapes outcomes, to enable the enhancement of internships as talent management tool.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Individual employee dispositions have long been acknowledged to play a central role in predicting desirable workplace behaviors and attitudes (Hurtz & Donovan 2000; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Consequently, personality tests have been widely used as a selection method (Rothstein & Goffin, 2006). The predictive validity of personality tests relative to some post-employment behaviors such as job performance has however been questioned, due largely to their susceptibility to faking when administered within an employee selection context (Morgeson et al., 2007). Therefore, internships may provide a selection context in which future employees' personalities can potentially be more accurately evaluated, given that the evaluation of intern dispositions can take place over an extended period of time within the actual workplace context prior to employment. However, such evaluation first necessitates a better understanding of how particular personality dispositions manifest themselves within the relatively unique employment setting of internships.

A particularly desirable characteristic amongst new hires is proactive disposition, which is increasingly becoming a prerequisite employee disposition for many occupations (Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010), as in a contemporary rapidly changing organizational environment, the ability of employees to proactively adapt, identify opportunities, and anticipate problems, is widely regarded as key to organizational competitive advantage (Grant & Ashforth, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010). Therefore, providing insights into the manifestations of intern proactive personalities during internships, contributes to building internships into an effective method of selecting future proactive employees. These insights are particularly important, as to date it remains unknown how the unique employment context of internships impacts the manifestation of interns' proactive personalities during internships.

Although, proactively during internships has not previously been studied it can be presumed that an intern's experience has parallels with that of organizational newcomers, during their organizational socialization. In particular it has been established that the interaction between newcomers and organizational insiders is critical in the process of newcomer socialization, as insiders are an important source of information and the support required for effective organizational adaptation (Moreland & Levine, 2001; Morrison, 2002). Consequently, proactive newcomers will direct behaviors towards understanding organizational norms and expectations (Crant, 2000; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). One such newcomer proactive behavior is the forging of relational linkages with organizational insiders particularly supervisors (Li, Liang, et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005), facilitating access to valuable work-related information, resources, knowledge, and experience (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004) required for successful adaptation into their workplace roles. Therefore, like proactive newcomers interns are more likely to direct behavior towards developing high-quality Leader Member Exchange (LMX). The main premise of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is that leaders develop differential relationships among the subordinates who report directly to them in their work groups, a practice referred to as LMX differentiation. The differential relationship associated with high quality LMX facilitates trust and in-group status in supervisor-subordinate dyads, these relationships are characterized by more tangible and intangible resources being exchanged within dyad, for example, respect, trust, reciprocal obligation, which in turn facilitate the subordinates enhanced access to information and resources, necessary for successful adaptation into their organizational roles (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998).

Furthermore, proactive interns have a further motivation for directing their proactive behaviors towards developing high-quality LMX, as previous research has identified that proactive employees are more likely to actively engage in activities orientated towards advancing their careers (Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006; Thompson, 2005). Therefore, high-quality intern-supervisor exchange is likely to be beneficial for both a proactive intern's adaptation into work roles and future career advancement. Thus, proactive interns may quickly identify opportunities to improve the quality of exchange with their immediate supervisor, whilst they are also less likely to passively accept low-quality intern-supervisor exchange relations, and proactively act to rectify low-quality intern-supervisor exchange. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: The intern's proactive personality is positively related to the quality of intern-supervisor exchange during internships.

Research on proactive dispositions in regular employee settings suggests that a proactive personality is a necessary but insufficient condition for proactive behavior (Converse, Pathak, Depaul-Haddock, Gotlib, & Merbedone, 2012; Li, Liang, et al., 2010). Therefore, Fuller, Marler and Hester (2006) suggest that for individuals high in proactive personality to engage in proactive behaviors is dependent on the opportunities to be proactive. However, the number of investigations into the influence of intervening variables on the outcomes of proactive personalities remains limited to date. A particular limitation of previous research on the topic of mediators of proactive personalities is the limited number of studies attempting to capture the intervening role of relational linkages (Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012). There are a number of characteristics of internships, including an intern's short tenure within an organization, their limited work experience, and intern's low organizational status in the organization, which would suggest that the intern-supervisor relationship will play a

particularly influential role within the context of internships. Hence it can be presumed that proactive interns will have limited means to achieve their desired outcomes, independent of their supervisors. In past work, the mediating role of the supervisor-subordinate relationship between antecedents and work place outcomes, has been commonly captured by LMX (Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2009; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005). Thus, it is generally accepted that LMX operates as a mechanism through which antecedents' impact on outcomes in the workplace (Erdogan & Liden, 2002). Outcomes potentially mediated by LMX include those which have previously been established as direct outcomes of regular employee proactive personalities, such as increased job performance (Crant, 2000), increased job satisfaction (Ng et al., 2005). Hence, given the established and pivotal role of the intern-supervisor relationships during internships (e.g., Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Lam & Ching, 2007; Masumoto, 2004), intern-supervisor exchange can be expected to act as a crucial mechanism through which proactive interns achieve desired outcomes. Therefore, the following mediated hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2a: The quality of intern-supervisor exchange mediates the relationship between the interns' proactive personality and their in-role performance.

Hypothesis 2b: The quality of intern-supervisor exchange mediates the relationship between the interns' proactive personality and internship satisfaction.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The study's intern participants were recruited through the career offices of three universities located in the South-East of China. All participants were required to undertake internships of three to four months in duration, as a component of their degree program. Participants were selected from undergraduates within the business school, as this facilitated sampling of a wide range of internship experiences, relative to more narrowly defined degree courses such as engineering. At the time of recruitment participants were students who had received an offer but had not yet started the internship. A paper-based survey was distributed to interns eight weeks after the commencement of the internship. At the same time they were asked to provide their demographic information, information on the organization in which the internship was conducted, and the e-mail contact details of their supervisor. At time-2, two weeks prior to the conclusion of the internships, we contacted their supervisor, asking them to fill out a survey online. The study was approved by the relevant research ethics review committee prior to commencement of the study. Both the interns and supervisors were provided with a covering letter ensuring them confidentiality and outlining the voluntary nature of the survey. With regard to the variables of intern-supervisor exchange and internship satisfaction, responses were collected from the intern during the internship at Time-1 and the data the intern's in-role performance, was gathered from the intern's immediate supervisor at Time-2.

At Time-1, a total of 1019 surveys were distributed with 506 responses. Of the 506 surveys distributed at Time-2, 309 supervisors' responded. The final sample consisted of 303 interns of which 65.4% were female, and their mean age was 21.30 years. Among the 303 supervisors, 37.3% were female, and their mean age was 35.33 years. The supervisors responses were examined for potential non-response bias in the supervisor's responses by examining the unmatched Time-1 intern responses for differences with the matched surveys using T-tests, and no significant differences were found.

In regards to characteristics of the host organizations of the internships, the host organizations in the sample represented a range of ownership structures: state owned (25.9%), domestic privately owned (54.7%), government departments (4.2%) foreign-owned (8.1%), and joint ventures (7.1%). The host organizations in the sample also belonged to a range of industry sectors, including Manufacturing (13.6%), Information Technology, (3.6%), Finance/Banking (29.7%), Hospitality/Tourism (14.2%), Civil Service (5.5%), International Trade (9.1%), Retail (3.6%), and Education (4.2%).

Further, descriptive data was collected regarding other basic characteristics of the internships in the sample. A vast majority of interns reported that their internship positions were obtained through personal networks (at 77%), whereas only 11.3 % of internships were reported to be part of a formal arrangement between the intern's university and the host organization. In regards to payment, 54.4% received some form of payment for their internships, with only 6.5% receiving a payment over 2000RMB per month, which approximates to an average monthly salary for a new university graduate (Han, 2010). The mean length of the internships was 3.21 months (sd = .35).

Measurement Instruments

The quality of the intern-supervisor exchange was measured using the seven-item LMX scale adapted from Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell (1993). Sample items are "My immediate supervisor understands my problems and needs", and "How would you characterize your working relationship with your immediate supervisor?" Responses indicated on a Likert scale ranged from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and 1 (very negative) to 7 (very positive).

Internship satisfaction was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Hackman and Oldman's (1975) scale, which had previously been modified to reflect internship satisfaction by D'abate, Youndt, and Wenzel (2009). Sample items are "Generally speaking, I was very satisfied with my internship", and "I frequently thought of quitting my internship". Responses indicated on a seven-point Likert scale ranged from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Intern in-role performance was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Farh and Cheng's (1999) scale. The items were adapted to reflect internships by substituting 'subordinate' with 'intern'. Sample items are "This internee makes an important contribution to the overall performance of their work unit", and "The performance of this intern always meets my expectations". Responses indicated on a seven-point scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Intern proactive personality was measured using the six-item scale adapted from Bateman and Cant's scale (1993), The scale has previously been used in China to measure proactive personality (Li, Crant, & Liang, 2010). Sample items are "If I see something I don't like, I fix it." and "I excel at identifying opportunities". Responses indicated on a seven-point scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Control Variables

Previous research has indicated that the quality of LMX may be impacted on the convergence in the leader and followers demographic characteristics (Bauer & Green, 1996). As in previous studies (dis)similarity in age was controlled for, by operationalizing age as an absolute difference score, and similarity in gender, by the use dummy variables with 0 =

different gender and 1 = *same gender* (Zhang et al., 2012). Company tenure and dyad tenure have also been shown to impact LMX (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). However, in the current study the length of the internships was standardized at under 6-months, thus tenure was not controlled for.

Analysis Plan

The study's data was primarily analyzed utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM), in AMOS 20. Established goodness-of-fit indices we used to assess model fit as including comparative fit index (CFI), $> .90$ acceptable, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), $.05 - .10$ acceptable, Tucker Lewis index (TLI), $> .90$ acceptable and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), $< .08$ acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999) and the normed Chi-square (χ^2 / df) upper threshold 3.0 (Kline, 2005) criteria. The main analysis was conducted in three stages. Firstly, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was undertaken on all items corresponding with the factor structure of the proposed measurement model, and contrasted with other factor structures. Performing a CFA allows verification of whether the items captured the intended constructs, prior to conducting the main SEM analysis. The second stage of SEM was used to assess the hypothesized model, via the aforementioned fit indices, as well as accessing the significance of the direct paths in the model. The third stage of analysis tested the hypothesized mediating role of PIS in the model, by assessing the presence of the conditions recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986), requiring the comparison of the partially mediated model, with the hypothesized fully mediated model, and a non-mediated model as recommended by (Kelloway, 1998). Then chi-squared difference tests were performed to determine the best model fit. Additionally to ensure the presence of a mediating effect in the Model, AMOS 20 was also used to examine the 95% upper and lower limits of bootstrap-generated bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI), of indirect effects, conducted with a bootstrap of 1,000 replications, as recommended by Cheung and Lau (2008)

RESULTS

The low bivariate correlations reported in Table 1 indicate that control variables and multicollinearity are unlikely to bias the study's results, whilst the relatively high alphas indicate the internal reliability of the measures. In addition, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also undertaken on five alternative measurement models, the hypothesized 4-factor measurement model provided best fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 147.96$, TLI = $.96$, CFI = $.97$, RMSEA = $.05$, SRMR = $.04$), given the significant deterioration in chi-square and degrees of freedom when contrasted with alternative factor structures including the single factor model further evidencing adequate discriminant validity between the measures in this study.

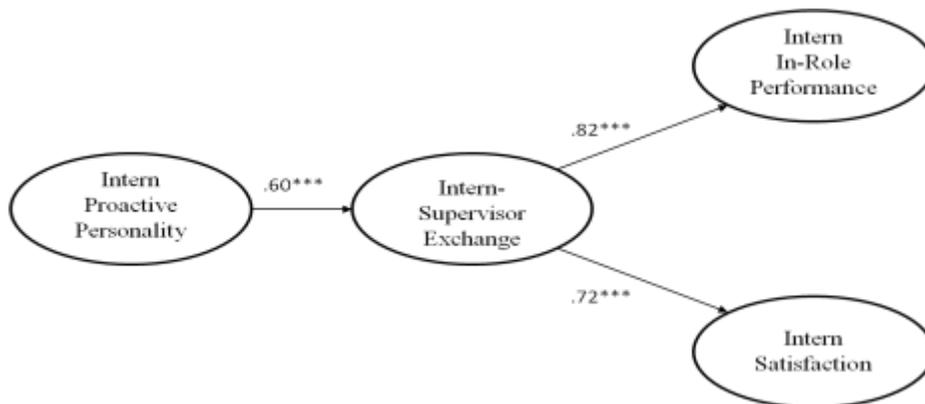
The data supported the first hypothesis by indicating a significant direct relationship between intern proactive personality and intern-supervisor exchange ($\beta = .60$, $p < .000$), as presented in Figure 1. Furthermore results strongly supported the mediated hypotheses, by following Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure for testing mediation, presented in Table 1, the results indicating the non-mediated model yielded a decrease in goodness-of-fit relative to the hypothesized mediated model ($\chi^2 = 156.42$, TLI = $.96$, CFI = $.96$, RMSEA = $.05$, SRMR = $.04$). This was accompanied with significant paths from proactive personality to the endogenous variables of in-role performance ($\beta = .63$ $p < .000$), and Intern satisfaction ($\beta = .51$, $p < .000$), thereby satisfying the first condition of mediation, also direct paths between the intern-supervisor exchange and the dependent variables of in-role performance ($\beta = .82$ $p <$

.001), and intern satisfaction ($\beta = .72, p < .001$). Echoing these results the partially mediated model's goodness-of-fit indices, are largely equivalent with the hypothesized fully mediated model, and the chi-square difference test produced a non-statistically significant improvement between the fully and partially mediated models. Finally, the partially-mediated direct paths between proactive personality and the relevant endogenous variables, which were strongly significant at the level of $p < .000$ in the non-mediated model, became insignificant in the partially mediated model.

TABLE 1: Correlations for variables including control variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	0.64	0.45							
2. Age (dissimilarity)	14.02	7.40	.049	-.067					
3. Gender (dissimilarity)	0.44	0.49	----	-.053					
4. Proactive Personality	4.88	1.05	-.102	-.053	.045	(.82)			
5. Intern-Sup Exchange	4.33	0.94	.073	.052	-.023	.371**	(.77)		
6. Internship Satisfaction	4.93	1.17	.036	.027	-.082	.307**	.478**	(.83)	
7. In-Role Performance	4.77	1.07	.023	.080	.050	.414**	.526**	.530**	(.82)

Notes: $N=618$ (303 intern-supervisor dyads) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, reliability alphas are reported on the diagonal



Notes: $N=618$ (309 intern-supervisor dyads) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, β standardized

FIGURE 1: Hypothesized model for the current study estimated standardized coefficients

TABLE 2: Structural equation modeling for models, determining indirect effects

Models	χ^2	df	$\Delta \chi^2$	Δ df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Fully mediated	156.42	85	—		.96	.93	.05	.05
Partially mediated	152.39	83	.86	2	.96	.93	.05	.05
Non-mediated	275.26	85	122.97**	2	.91	.89	.12	.10

Notes: All alternative models were compared with the hypothesized model. Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, β standardized

Further, support for the fully-mediated model was provided by the results of the bootstrap-generated bias-corrected confidence intervals (Cheung & Lau, 2008), presented in Table-3. These bootstrapped results corroborated the presence of the hypothesized indirect effects of proactive personality through LMX, to in-role performance ($\beta = .45$, 95% CI = .27 - .66) to internship satisfaction H7c ($\beta = .53$, 95% CI = .31 to .80). All of the indirect effects were significant at the level $p < .01$, providing further support for the four mediated hypotheses in this study.

TABLE 3: Mediation analysis via bootstrapping (Bias-corrected confidence intervals)

Mediated Hypothesis	Indirect effect	S.E	CI	P
H2a.	.45	.09	.27-.66	.001
H2b.	.53	.13	.31-.80	.002

Note: Standardized estimates are shown; 1000 bootstraps were used; Two-tailed significance. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, CI= 95% Confidence Intervals

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the literature in several ways. Firstly, this study is the first to establish a positive link between intern's proactive personalities and the development of high quality intern-supervisor exchange. An important implication arising from this finding is that interns, in common with newcomers, proactively undertake behaviors to reduce uncertainty and adapt to their organizational environment (Ashforth & Saks, 2000; Wanberg & Kammeyer-mueller, 2000). In particular, like their proactive regular employees counterparts, proactive interns direct their proactive behaviors towards forging relational linkages with superiors, in order to facilitate their effective adaptation to the workplace and career advancement (Li, Liang, et al., 2010; Thompson, 2005).

Moreover, this finding corroborates assertions that employee personalities are relatively enduring determinants of employee behaviors, across time and employment contexts (Illies & Judge, 2003; Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986). In addition, given the uniqueness of internships as an employment context, the finding supports the argument that individuals with proactive personalities are particularly not influenced by the contextual variables (Crant, 2000). This is a particularly notable finding, given the low organizational status of interns and their short tenure, which could have been expected to suppress intern's proactive dispositions. Thereby, this finding lends support to assertions that an employee's proactive personality plays an instrumental role in determining workplace outcomes irrespective of

organizational status or tenure, (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011), and countering arguments that proactive behaviors are suppressed by factors such as low status in the organizational hierarchy or length of tenure (Fuller, Marler, & Hester, 2006; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998)

In regards to the mediated hypotheses, the data strongly supports the intervening role of intern-supervisor exchange on intern's proactive dispositions. This was the first study to investigate LMX within the internships, thereby providing a previously missing empirical substantiation, of assertions in the internship literature regarding the instrumental role of supervisors in defining the internship experience and determining its outcomes (e.g., Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Lam & Ching, 2007; Masumoto, 2004). Also, more generally this finding substantiates the well-established intervening role of LMX on workplace outcomes into a new previously-unexplored organizational context of internships (Harris et al., 2009; Murphy & Ensher, 1999; Wang et al., 2005; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). A more particular implication for the LMX theory is that organizational tenure has previously been asserted to be positively related with the quality of LMX developed (Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). However, to date little research has been conducted, investigating the development of LMX in short-tenure and possibly transient employment. This study demonstrates that it is possible to develop LMX of sufficient quality during short relationships within internships that is capable of influencing outcomes which has implications for other temporary employment relationships, beyond intern supervisor relationships.

A further notable implication stemming from the results of the mediated hypotheses is the support provided for the argument that employees' proactive dispositions have to be coupled with strong interpersonal relationships in the workplace in order for desired outcomes to be fully realized from proactive employees (Thompson, 2005). Furthermore, by establishing the influence of proactive personalities within the unique employment context of internships, this study contributes to answering calls to test the boundary conditions which may shape the outcomes associated with proactive personalities (Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Fuller et al., 2006). Particularly, this finding builds on the small number of studies which assert that interpersonal relationships in the workplace are a crucial mechanism for allowing proactive personalities to impact on outcomes (Thompson, 2005; Zhang et al., 2012).

The findings have further theoretical implications for employee proactivity research, as they establish important parallels between a newcomer and an intern's organizational experience, as proactive newcomers are also known to actively shape their organizational entry experience, impacting on key workplace outcomes, including their performance (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Miller & Jablin, 1991). In particular, this study establishes that, in common with proactive newcomers, the interpersonal relationship with their supervisor is the key mechanism by which interns adjust effectively to organizational life (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Thompson, 2005). This suggests that internships can be theoretically conceptualized by internship researchers as an extension of the newcomer employees' organizational entry and employee induction process, rather than as an extension of their learning process as university student as is the case with much of the previous internship research.

In regards to the human resource management specific literature, the findings contribute to answering calls in the wider recruitment and selection literature to broaden the scope of recruitment and selection research (Breugh & Starke, 2000; Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012), primarily because interns' proactive personalities were shown in this study to manifest themselves in a manner consistent with that expected in regular employment settings. A

finding which suggests that internships provide a typical performance selection setting in which intern proactive behaviors and in-role performance can be evaluated prior making an employment offer. Thus, this study advocates internships as a means to overcome the longstanding weakness of traditional selection methods, which evaluate candidates in maximum performance settings. (Arthur et al., 2009; White, Young, Hunter, & Rumsey, 2008). This study's findings are particularly significant, as to date the selection literature has largely been unable to address such criticisms, primarily because it is difficult to replicate a typical performance setting outside of regular employment due to the number of variables involved. However, the behavior of the variables revealed in this study suggests that internships provide a selection context more closely mirroring a typical performance work setting.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study also have a number of timely practical implications for those involved with endeavoring to leverage internships to better facilitate the university to work transition, and for host -organizations endeavoring to better utilize internship programs as a pipeline for accessing new graduate hires. In general terms, related to organizational socialization of interns, the findings advocate that an intern's experience should more closely mirror the employee induction and organizational entry experience of other employee groups, such as organizational newcomers in order to maximize conversion outcomes via facilitating an intern's satisfaction and performance, thereby enhancing the probability transitioning to regular employment with the host organization. Moreover, the findings of this study are of enhanced practical relevance, given that host organizations are already extensively utilizing their intern pools as a means to recruit and select future employees, particularly in China, the context of this research (Rose 2013b). This study is among one of the few studies able to provide guidance regarding how internships can be designed to extract the maximum organizational value from their substantial investment in internship programs (Newman et al., 2016). Furthermore, the recommendations offered in this section, regarding internship design, are practically feasible for managers to implement, given that host organizations have considerable flexibility when designing their internship programs to maximize their return on investment.

The study also endorses the use of internships as a selection method, which can help to reduce a manager's reliance on traditional selection methods by allowing those who seek employees with proactive personalities to evaluate actual proactive behaviors within a work setting prior to employment. In order to allow for the effective evaluation of intern proactive personalities, it is advisable that internships are designed to facilitate the manifestation of intern proactive behaviors. Specifically, internships should be designed to foster high-quality intern-supervisor exchange, in order to ensure that intern's proactive personalities will not be suppressed during internships. Additionally internships should also be designed to foster relationships between interns and supervisors, which are reflective of regular employee-supervisor relationships, rather than a student-teacher relationship, as interns who are treated as students rather than temporary employees may take a more passive learning role during their internship, hence masking key selection criteria such proactive dispositions amongst interns.

The study also highlights the pivotal role of intern-supervisor exchange in influencing internship outcomes. Which, in turn, endorses that interns' should be assigned supervisors with a proven capability to mentor and develop high-quality exchange relationships with

junior employees. In addition as quality social exchange relationships take time to develop, it is also important that the host organizations formally recognize the responsibilities associated with supervising an intern. This practice may require reassigning some of the supervisors' regular employment duties so that they have adequate time and motivation for developing high-quality relationships with interns. In addition, host organizations should also formally incorporate activities, which strengthen the intern-supervisor relationship; for instance feedback sessions and opportunities for social interaction between interns and their supervisors.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the findings of this study have a number of distinct empirical strengths when contrasted with a majority of previous work investigating internships, in common with all empirical research, this study also has several limitations which should be noted, and which point to avenues for future research. Firstly, a longitudinal research design, which utilizes additional intervals of data collection and levels of analysis, would strengthen the findings. However, the design of this study allows for a reasonable degree of confidence in its findings, primarily by the steps taken to mitigate threats from common method variance (CMV), by drawing the data from two sources at multiple time intervals.

In regards to the study's sample population, the generalizability of the findings to non-Chinese internship contexts is unknown without further testing in alternative national contexts. For instance, it is plausible, given China's relationship orientated culture (Farh, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998), that the impact of intern-supervisor exchange in the model may have been amplified. However, a degree of generalizability of the findings to non-Chinese internship contexts is probable given that there is an increasing body of research demonstrating convergent research results between Western and Chinese sample populations (Chen, Tjosvold, & Liu, 2006; Li et al., 2011), coupled with the converging values with the West of the generational cohort comprising this study's sample (Gu, Wang, Sun, & Xu, 2010). However, it would still be of interest for future research to empirically validate to what degree the results of the current study may be culturally specific.

A final note regarding the limitations of this study, the addition of multi-level analysis in future studies would be advantageous, particularly the addition of a team-level of analysis, as it is plausible that the intern's team influenced some outcomes included in the hypothesized model (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). In addition, future work building on the model tested in this study could also explore additional unmeasured variables, which may help to explain the pattern of results detected.

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Research reports should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry, a description and justification for the methodology employed, a description of the research findings-tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance for practitioners, and a conclusion preferably incorporating suggestions for further research.

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