

## Person-job fit and proactive career behaviour: A dynamic approach

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### ABSTRACT

This two-wave study among 637 employees explores how individuals' perceived demands-abilities fit may change over time by virtue of career initiative (i.e., the proactive management of one's career and professional development). Using a parallel growth model, we found that (between-person) career initiative was related to (between-person) perceived demands-abilities fit. In addition, increases in (within-person) career initiative over time were associated with increases in (within-person) perceived demands-abilities fit over time. The findings furthermore indicate that such improvements in perceived demands-abilities fit occur among those who change jobs as well as among those who stay in their current job. Comparing individuals who had switched jobs between wave 1 and wave 2 to those who had not, we found that turnover was i) preceded by lower levels of perceived demands-abilities fit; ii) accompanied by an increase in the level of career initiative; and iii) associated with greater improvement in perceived demands-abilities fit. This study advances our understanding of temporal dynamism in person-job fit and the findings support the idea that by employing a proactive approach towards their career, individuals can both attain and enhance the alignment between their abilities and the demands of their job.

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Person-job fit and proactive career behaviour: A dynamic approach Although the achievement of important work-related outcomes may not be fully under the focal employee's control, the current careers literature, and in particular the boundaryless and protean careers paradigms continue to place significant emphasis on personal agency in achieving desired outcomes (Akkermans, Seibert, Mol, 2018). Seen from the contemporary focus on lifelong learning and sustainable employability on the one hand, and computerization of jobs, delayering, downsizing, and project-based work on the other, this individual agency is increasingly likely to be directed at establishing, enhancing, maintaining and/or restoring the alignment of one's knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) to perpetually changing job demands. An important question for individuals and organizations alike is thus what employees can do to attain, adapt, and sustain their fit to such ever-changing job demands. Clearly, an important part of the answer lies in the recognition that in the contemporary labour market such demands-abilities fit is more often volatile than stable, and that individuals can and do succeed in proactively enhancing their fit over time, either within their current job (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018), or by changing jobs.

Demands-abilities fit has been found to be related to a host of important outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to quit, and overall job performance (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Accordingly, demands-abilities fit may be considered to be a critical antecedent that benefits individuals as well as their

employing organization. However, in contrast to the many studies on the outcomes of demands-abilities fit, limited attention has been devoted to its antecedents, and particularly those individual differences that instigate between-job or within-job changes in perceived demands-abilities fit. In the studies that have, the focus has primarily been on organizational entry, which is reflected in studies on recruitment, selection, and early socialization tactics (Cable & Judge, 1997; Caldwell, Herold, & Fedor, 2004; Carless, 2005; Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Kristof-Brown, 2000). Since most people spend most of their adult life within a limited number of jobs, however, it is imperative that we understand how individuals may take initiative in optimizing their person-job fit, not only by moving from one job to the other (as a last resort), but also within the confines of a single job, for instance by proactively engaging in a resolution strategy that involves changing either the environment or the self (Follmer, Talbot, Kristof-Brown, Astrove, & Billsberry, 2018).

Most earlier studies on demands-abilities fit, and this is true of the larger person-environment fit paradigm as well, have employed a static approach toward fit in which characteristics of the person and work environment are conceptualized and operationalized as stable entities, and investigated with predominantly cross-sectional research designs (for notable exceptions see Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Caldwell et al., 2004; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004; Devloo, Anseel, & De Beuckelaer, 2011; Schneider, 2001; Simmering, Colquitt, Noe,

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& Porter, 2003). This static approach, however, may neglect non-trivial temporal dynamism in both the work environment and the individual (Frese & Fay, 2001), both of which are likely to impact changes in actual and perceived demands-abilities fit, as argued earlier.

Taking an agentic perspective and conceptualizing the compatibility between an individual and his or her job as an ongoing and dynamic process (e.g., Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Shipp & Jansen, 2011) thus yields the need to study fit and its individual-level antecedents over time. The objective of the present study, therefore, is to examine how both inter-individual (between-person) and intra-individual (within-person) differences in career initiative are related to inter-individual and intra-individual differences in perceived-demands-abilities fit. That is, this study sets out to contribute to the extant literature not only by investigating how those people who are higher on career initiative (as compared to those who are lower) perceive higher demands-abilities fit and growth therein over time (cf. Bay-Smith & Griffin, 2018), but also by investigating how those who exhibit higher *growth* in (within-person) career initiative over time perceive higher growth in demands-abilities fit over time, and investigating how turnover (i.e., job change) plays into this process. Specifically, we present a two-wave study focused on how individual differences and changes in career initiative, which Parker and Collins (2010) classify as a proactive person-environment fit behaviour, are related to perceived person-job fit over time. In the pages that follow, we develop our hypotheses pertaining to the inter- and intra-individual relationship between career initiative and demands-abilities fit. Furthermore, we explore changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time among individuals who remained, as well as individuals who switched between jobs. Specifically, we focus on the role of proactive career behaviour as a mechanism by means of which individuals can and do manage their compatibility with their job. We thus aim to contribute to the extant literature on perceived demands-abilities fit by integrating the concept of career initiative.

### Current developments in the nature of work

The work environment is becoming increasingly dynamic and decentralized (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Parker, 2009). In order to keep pace with global competition, technological advances, and the fast rate of innovation, many organizations nowadays rely on employees to initiate change and adapt to new situations rather than having them perform strictly defined tasks (Campbell, 2000; Crant, 2000; Grant & Parker, 2009). As a result, job roles are becoming more flexible, and tasks continuously develop and change as organizations address shifting demands and opportunities (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007; Frese & Fay, 2001). All these developments require employees to cope with uncertainty on an ongoing basis and to adopt flexible roles to be able to function in these decentralized and dynamic work environments. As a consequence, individuals must proactively develop and update their knowledge, skills, and abilities so as to seize opportunities and meet shifting demands (Grant & Parker, 2009).

From a contemporary career perspective too, individuals are increasingly challenged to adopt a proactive approach. Most

modern careers no longer comprise lifetime employment within a limited set of organizations. Instead, modern careers are characterized by increased mobility and a higher variety of competencies (Frese & Fay, 2001; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Waterman, 1994). This implies a shift in terms of responsibility regarding one's career such that rather than (solely) the employing organization, individual employees themselves need to proactively manage their careers and their employability to obtain and sustain employment over time (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; Hall, 1996). The need to act proactively regarding one's employability and career becomes even more pressing in light of the rise of temporary and project-based employment as opposed to 'traditional' job-based work that provides more job security (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Employees' altering expectations also imply a more proactive stance to their careers (Grant & Parker, 2009; Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). For example, with roles becoming more flexible, expectations arise regarding tailor-made and personally meaningful jobs (Grant & Parker, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006). This spurs behaviours such as job crafting (e.g., Tims & Bakker, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), role adjustment (e.g., Clegg & Spencer, 2007) and the negotiation of idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau et al., 2006), that are targeted at modifying the boundaries of work, seeking out tasks that best fit the individual, and personalizing employment arrangements (Grant & Parker, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2006).

Taken together, the above developments suggest that the work environment changes continuously, and that individuals can and do both affect and shape this environment and develop themselves to keep meeting job demands and to capitalize on opportunities. Accordingly, the (perceived) compatibility between an individual's abilities and the demands of his or her job, i.e., demands-abilities fit, is inherently an ongoing and dynamic process (see also Edwards, 2008; Follmer et al., 2018; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Shipp & Jansen, 2011). To date, research in the demands-abilities fit domain, however, has addressed the characteristics of the person and the job that bring about such perceptions as stable entities (Latham & Pinder, 2004). By applying a perspective on perceived demands-abilities fit that incorporates the tenets of individual proactive career behaviour, the current study sets out to contribute to our understanding of how perceived demands-abilities fit is achieved and maintained by the individual employee (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Frese, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010; Simmering et al., 2003).

### Perceived demands-abilities fit

The 'fit' between a person and his or her work environment is commonly defined in terms of supplementary fit or complementary fit (Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Supplementary fit occurs when a person's characteristics are similar to, or match, those in the environment. This type of fit has been applied to capture person-organization fit (P-O fit) and is primarily operationalized in terms of value congruence or goal congruence between the individual and the organization (Chatman, 1989; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991). In contrast, complementary fit occurs when "individuals' characteristics fill a gap in the

current environment or vice versa" (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 288). This type of fit has mostly been applied to capture demands-abilities fit (P-J fit) and to capture the fit between an individual and his or her group (Seong, Kristof-Brown, Park, Hong, & Shin, 2015). P-J fit is typically operationalized in terms of two different dimensions, namely needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit. These types of fit respectively refer to the congruence between the needs, desires, and preferences of an individual with the environmental supplies provided by the job, and the (perceived) congruence between the KSAOs of an individual with the requirements of the job (Edwards, 2008; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In light of the contemporary emphasis on developing and sustaining individual employability in modern careers (Smith, 2010), with the onus for attaining important career outcomes now resting on the individual as opposed to the organization, perceived demands-abilities fit can be considered to be a particularly pertinent gauge of where an individual employee stands in developing his or her KSAOs vis-à-vis the changing demands of his or her idiosyncratic and dynamic environment. The current study, therefore, set out to shed light on both the antecedents and consequences of (changes in) demands-abilities fit over time.

Demands-abilities fit has been found to relate to several fundamental attitudinal and behavioural criteria including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, strain and job performance (De Crom & Rothmann, 2018; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In the current study, we focus on perceived (as opposed to actual) demands-abilities fit. Specifically, we consider fit as a psychological phenomenon and focus on the perceived, or subjective, level of demands-abilities fit. Although it would be worthwhile to objectively assess attributes of the environment and the individual separately, as this would allow for the direct identification of changes in either the environment or the person, this may be problematic given that even an assessment where the 'P' and 'E' are separately administered, has been argued to reflect implicit comparisons between individual and environmental characteristics (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006). In addition, the interaction between the person and the environment does not in effect reflect the (in)compatibility of the two dimensions, which is essential to the assessment of fit (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Moreover, previous studies show that the subjective evaluation of fit is a stronger predictor of employee attitudes and behaviours than objective fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Carless, 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Hence, the perceived level of fit is a more proximal driver of employee-related behaviour and outcomes than the 'actual' situation. Finally, 'objective' or 'indirect' approaches to assessing demands-abilities fit imply an idiosyncratic approach to the operationalization of demands-abilities fit because the constituent demands and abilities that are salient in a particular context may vary from person to person, and even within jobs. Thus, such an approach would impede between-subjects hypothesis testing since the aggregate fit scores would not be comparable from person to person. In the present study, we, therefore, relied on the individual's appraisal regarding their match with the environment rather than assessing the environment and individual as separate dimensions.

In contrast to what is known about the critical outcomes of demands-abilities fit, research on how to achieve or maintain this perceived fit through individual actions or organizational practices is scarce (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). To the extent that studies focused on what makes people "fit" with their work environment, research has mainly relied on the matching process during organizational entry and has largely been drawn from Schneider's (1987) attraction selection attrition (ASA) framework. The ASA framework was originally developed to explain homogeneity in organizations (Schneider et al., 1995) and depicts the process by which people are attracted to, selected by, and ultimately remain in or leave the organization. It holds the premise that a good "match" between the individual and job or organization results in long-term effectiveness whereas a mismatch should result in turnover (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Schneider, 1995, p. 1998). In other words, employees who "fit" will stay, and those who do not will leave.

Although the ASA framework has been successfully applied to explain homogeneity in organizations, researchers have argued that this framework is too limited to explain and identify factors that may prompt changes in perceived fit at the individual level (DeRue & Morgeson, 2007; Devloo et al., 2011; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). It overlooks, for example, whether and if so how and why the perceived demands-abilities fit of incumbents might change over time, and the role individuals can fulfil in these processes, by, for example, resolving misfit (see also Follmer et al., 2018) or by anticipating changing work demands.

Specifically, the ASA model implies that individuals leave the organization in case of misfit and inherently does not build on the idea that individuals may proactively manage their abilities or environmental demands to enhance or establish (re)alignment between themselves and their current and future jobs. Particularly given the nature of today's work, which is characterized by ongoing developments and the growing importance of proactive employees who effect change and self-direct their working conditions (Devloo et al., 2011; Grant & Parker, 2009; Simmering et al., 2003), a dynamic approach to the investigation of perceived demands-abilities fit may help to account for changes in such fit and facilitate a better understanding of the drivers of such changes. The present study departs from the notion that individuals can act as agents who proactively promote their ability to meet work demands by engaging in proactive career behaviours thereby developing their knowledge and skills or altering characteristics of the job. It addresses this issue by investigating how career initiative (a type of proactive career behaviour) and perceived demands-abilities fit covary over time, both within a single job and prior to and after acquiring a new job.

### Career initiative

The literature on proactive career behaviour provides a framework for understanding how perceived demands-abilities fit can be enhanced or maintained. Proactivity has become a topical issue in a variety of research domains over the past years (Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010; Crant, 2000; Belschak & Den

Hartog, 2010b; Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker & Bindl, 2017). Proactive behaviour is generally considered to consist of self-initiated anticipatory action that is aimed at changing oneself or the situation. It typically refers to an agentic approach that challenges the status quo to bring about positive change (Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Proactivity has been conceptualized as either a trait, i.e., proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993), or as a more general or more specific type of proactive behaviour (Grant & Ashford, 2008). An example of the more general form of proactive behaviour is personal initiative, whereas examples of more specific forms of proactive behaviour include voice behaviour, feedback seeking, and career initiative (e.g., Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b; Parker & Collins, 2010). Generally speaking, proactive personality, as well as distinct forms of proactive behaviors, have been found to benefit both the individual and their organization (e.g., Fuller & Marler, 2009; Crant, 2000; Thomas et al., 2010; see Tornau & Frese, 2013, for a meta-analysis). In the present study we focus on behaviour rather than personality, as the dispositional nature of proactive personality has limited applications in the management of human resources beyond personnel selection, whereas for incumbent employees, behaviours such as proactive career behaviour may be more amenable to change, and therewith more sensitive to individual and organizational interventions.

In a taxonomy outlined by Parker and Collins (2010), a diverse set of proactive behaviours were categorized corresponding to the primary intended target of impact. This resulted in three-higher order categories; (i) proactive work behaviour focused on the internal environment of the organization; (ii) proactive strategic behaviour focused on the organization's alignment with its external environment; and (iii) proactive person-environment fit behaviour focused on the individual's fit with the work environment (Parker & Collins, 2010). In the current study, we concentrate on the third dimension, which is defined in terms of "self-initiated behaviours that aim to change oneself or the situation to achieve greater compatibility between one's own attributes and the organizational environment" (Parker & Collins, 2010, p. 640). In particular, we address proactive career behaviour, also commonly labelled career initiative, which is a key indicator of this higher order category (Fuller & Marler, 2009; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999).

Career initiative is defined as an individual's active attempt to promote his or her career and involves proactive behaviours such as career planning and skill development (De Vos & Soens, 2008; King, 2004; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Tharenou & Terry, 1998). It refers to an entrepreneurial approach one may adopt towards one's employability and career. This type of behaviour is not necessarily confined to one's present job or employing organization, but rather involves a broader scope of actions that can occur within as well as outside the context of the present job or employing organization. Empirically, proactive career behaviour has been linked to objective career success, namely career progression and performance, as well as to subjective career success, i.e., career satisfaction (Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005).

While there has not been much empirical research on the relationship between career initiative and fit (for a notable

exception in the related job crafting field see Lu, Wang, Lu, Du, & Bakker, 2014), theoretically, individuals who engage in proactive career behaviours should achieve higher levels of success in their career as their proactive approach should help achieve and maintain a better personal fit with their work environment, which allows them to better play to their strengths (Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker & Liao, 2016; Roberts et al., 2005; Seibert et al., 2001; Tims & Bakker, 2010). For instance, authors have proposed that individuals who engage in proactive career behaviour may seek out better fitting jobs that better fulfil their needs (Yu & Davis, 2016). Furthermore, individuals who proactively manage their fit with the work environment may also be more likely to take initiative in gathering feedback regarding their performance, capitalize on the degrees of freedom in their job, negotiate about assignments and role expectations, identify career opportunities, and/or engage in career planning and consultation (Ashford & Black, 1996; Roberts et al., 2005; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Such behaviours should promote the fit between job demands and individual abilities. Moreover, individuals who proactively manage their career take initiative in developing their skills and knowledge, which should keep them more employable and make them more capable of acting on altering job demands than people who are less inclined to behave proactively (Parker & Liao, 2016). Hence, individuals who act more proactively vis-à-vis their career (as compared to those who do not) are expected to perceive greater fit. In line with this, at the between-person level, we hypothesize that individuals who engage in more career initiative will achieve higher levels of demands-abilities fit by impacting their work environment, themselves, or both (Parker & Collins, 2010).

Hypothesis 1: People with higher career initiative will generally report higher perceived demands-abilities fit than people with lower career initiative.

It is important to note at this point that in this study we distinguish between i) between-person hypotheses, such as the above, where the relationship in question is solely specified in terms of a (cross-sectional) comparison *between* people, ii) within-person hypotheses, that pertain to how *within-person changes* in career initiative over a particular time period are associated to *within-person changes* in perceived demands-abilities fit over that time period; and iii) between-to-within-person hypotheses where *between-persons* differences in career initiative and actual turnover are proposed to be related to the magnitude of within-person changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time. The crux to understanding the difference between the between- and within-person perspectives incorporated in this study thus lies in an appreciation of who the referent other is (respectively, a different person at the same point in time or the same person at a different point in time). It should be noted that the latter operationalization yields the strongest practical implications, a point we will return to in the discussion.

Turning now to the role of time, and drawing in particular on the anticipatory, self-starting, and behavioural nature of career initiative as a perpetual driving force to enhance the fit of one's abilities to the demands of the environment (see hypothesis 1), we

propose that the relationship of career initiative with perceived demands-abilities should not only become manifest in between persons-

comparisons but also within the person over time. Specifically, we hypothesize that those higher on (between-person) career initiative (i.e., those who report more career initiative behaviours relative to their peers) should exhibit a greater within-person growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time than those lower on career initiative.

Furthermore, and heeding, in particular, the behavioural (as opposed to dispositional) nature of the career initiative construct we propose that the magnitude and valence of within-person changes in career initiative should relate to the magnitude and valence of within-person changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time. Indeed, and in light of the nature of "tomorrow's job" (Frese & Fay, 2001), individuals who do not manage to sustain a proactive approach to managing their careers may experience difficulties in maintaining their perceived demands-abilities fit over time since they will be less capable of anticipating and acting on the continuous changes demanded by the work environment. Hence, we not only hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2:** Career initiative affects changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time such that the higher one's career initiative is (i.e., relative to other people), the greater that person's growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time.

But also that:

**Hypothesis 3:** Change in one's career initiative (i.e., relative to an earlier time) is positively related to change in one's perceived demands-abilities fit, so that positive change in the former is associated with positive change in the latter, and vice versa.

## Turnover

In line with research on PE fit and the ASA model, we expect that perceived demands-abilities fit will be negatively related to turnover (see also Boon & Biron, 2016). This applies both to voluntary and involuntary turnover as individuals with a low demands-abilities fit are more likely to be motivated to leave their job (Lee & Mitchell, 1994) and are more likely to be pressured to do so (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984; Schneider, 1987). While individuals may improve their fit within their current job through career initiative, we expect that as the level perceived demands-abilities fit is lower, individuals are more motivated to reach outside the boundaries of their current job and seek a different work environment that provides a better fit (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996). Similarly, Lee and Mitchell (1994) argue that misfit may result in voluntary turnover when a certain acceptability threshold is passed and Follmer et al. (2018) indicate that resignation is one of the responses to misfit, in particular when other strategies to overcome misfit have failed. At the same time, individuals who do experience a certain degree of fit are, in line with

the ASA framework, likely to stay (and are also likely more welcome to stay) in their current job. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 4:** Perceived demands-abilities fit affects turnover such that the higher one's perceived demands-abilities fit is at time 1 (i.e., relative to other people), the lower the likelihood of having left one's organization at time 2.

In relation to turnover we further hypothesize that job transitions are accompanied by increases in the level of career initiative for that period of time as job mobility and related activities such as networking, job search, negotiation, onboarding, and socialization, will generally require greater effort and initiative from the individual compared to those who remain in the same job.

**Hypothesis 5:** Turnover affects career initiative over time such that those who switch jobs exhibit greater growth in career initiative over time than those who do not.

We further argue that job change is likely to result in improved levels of perceived demands-abilities fit. Specifically, perceptions of poor demands-abilities fit that result in turnover (H3) are likely to instigate a two-way selection process vis-à-vis the subsequent job (Schneider, 1987). Not only is the individual likely to seek out a new job with demands that are more commensurate with his/or her abilities but also the (new) organization is likely to evaluate the applicant's abilities against (recently benchmarked) job requirements. We, therefore, argue that employees who change jobs will exhibit a larger positive change in the level of demands-abilities fit than those who do not. This line of argumentation is further supported by the fact that those who stay in their jobs may already perceive high demands-abilities fit (with likely limited room for improvement) and/or more limited opportunities for improvement than the demands-abilities fit "reset" that those who take a new job experience. Finally, the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) suggests that individuals who have gone through the process of exiting the organization and selecting a new job may be more likely to perceive a better fit as part of a post-hoc justification, thereby potentially further strengthening the growth in perceived levels of person-job fit.

**Hypothesis 6:** Turnover affects growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time such that those who switch jobs exhibit greater growth in perceived demands-abilities fit over time than those who do not.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

To test our hypotheses a secondary dataset was used that comprised a two-wave panel study among employees working in the Dutch healthcare and welfare sector. Respondents were panel members who received an email in which they were invited to participate in a research project on

employability. At Time 1 the sample consisted of 702 employees. Two years later, Time 2, questionnaires were again distributed among the respondents which resulted in 637 matched responses. A prerequisite was that respondents needed to have a job at both times of administration. Among the matched responses, 454 individuals had remained in the same job between Time 1 and Time 2, whereas 183 individuals had acquired a new job between the measurements.

The sample consisted of primarily women (82%), which is representative for the labour force in the healthcare and welfare industry to which the survey was targeted. The average age at Time 1 was 34.9 years ( $SD = 10.5$ ). Most of the participants had a permanent (as opposed to fixed-term) job contract (67.7%) at their employing organization. The sample comprised 437 individuals who were working as operational staff and 200 individuals who performed support and management tasks. Among the participants, 38.0% held a bachelor's or master's degree and 30.3% a degree in lower vocational education.

As data collection was part of larger project, only short measures were incorporated.<sup>1</sup> Career initiative was assessed using a two-item scale. Items are "I actively develop my skills and knowledge" and "I do a lot to manage my career". Perceived person-job demands-abilities fit was assessed with the single-item "My current job fits my knowledge and skills". Career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit were both assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 using a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

To test whether our two-item measure of career initiative and our single item measure of demands-abilities fit showed convergent validity with established measures, additional data were collected in a separate study among 191 employees. Results showed adequate correspondence between the two item career initiative measure and the validated measure of career initiative of Tharenou and Terry (1998), ( $r = .61$  (.76 when corrected for unreliability),  $p < .01$ ) and the single item perceived demands-abilities fit measure showed substantial correspondence with the validated perceived demands-abilities fit measure of Cable and DeRue (2002), ( $r = .71$ , (.73 when corrected for unreliability),  $p < .01$ ). These findings are in line with Carlson and Herdman's (2012) recommendation that convergent validity should exceed ( $r = .70$ ) in order to curtail the odds of predictor–outcome relations varying from predictor measure to predictor measure.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed a reasonable fit for the hypothesized 2 factor model in which the items of perceived demands-abilities fit were set to load on factor one and the items of career initiative were set to load on factor two ( $\chi^2 = 95.95$ ,  $df = 34$ ,  $p = < .01$ ; CFI = .96, RMSEA = .09). The RMSEA was on the high side considering the general rule of thumb (RMSEA < .08), however SEM models with a small sample size ( $N < 200$ ) are known to inflate the RMSEA fit index (Chen, Curran, Bollen, Kirby, & Paxton, 2008; Kenny, Kaniskan, & McCoach, 2015; Kim, 2005). Overall, these results may be taken as evidence that the measures employed in this study correspond to accepted measures of career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit. In addition, reliability analysis revealed

acceptable values for career initiative at Time 1 ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and Time 2 ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

Turnover was assessed at Time 2 with the question "Did you switch between jobs in the past two years?" (0 = no, 1 = yes). In addition to these measures, several demographic characteristics were indicated by the respondent. These were age, gender, educational level, job type (operational staff versus support and management), and job contract (permanent versus fixed-term employment).

## Results

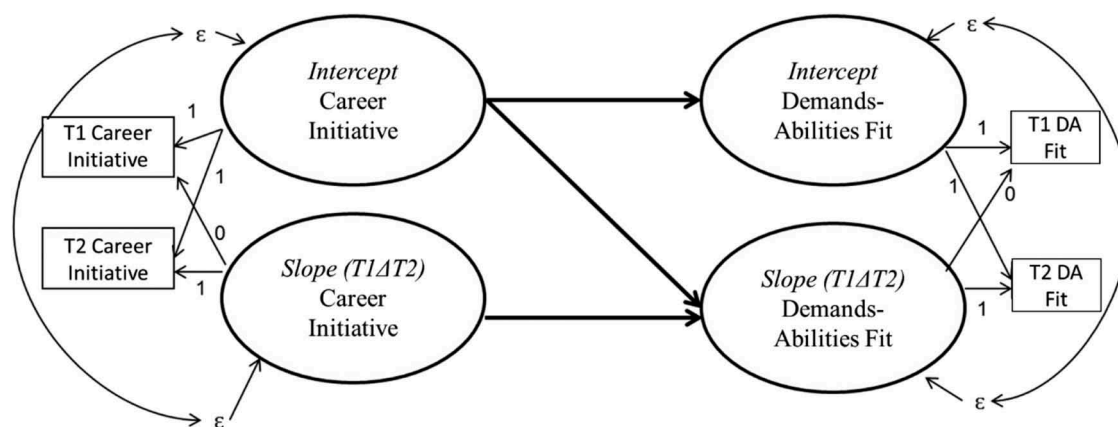
### Hypothesis testing

The hypothesized paths were estimated in a parallel growth model using structural equation modelling (SEM) (Byrne, 2001; MacCallum & Austin, 2000). This model comprised a within-person model and a between-person model. It allows for the simultaneous examination of change in multiple dimensions (Kline, 2005; Willett & Sayer, 1995). In the present study these dimensions are i) the level of perceived demands-abilities fit and ii) the level of career initiative over time. As we explore whether changes in these dimensions are also related to each other, these analyses are also referred to as cross-domain analyses (Willett & Sayer, 1995).

### Measurement model

A parallel growth model was constructed in which the intercept and slope for career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit were modelled as latent factors (see Figure 1). Values of the intercepts were constrained to one and are thus indicative of "initial status", i.e., the measurement at Time 1. These intercepts reflect between-person differences in the starting point against which the growth for a particular individual is benchmarked. Values of the slope were, respectively, set to zero (Time 1) and one (Time 2) reflecting the rate of within-person change over time (Kline, 2005; Willett & Sayer, 1995). Intercepts and the corresponding slopes were allowed to covary to model the latent process. Residual variance of career initiative at Time 1 and career initiative at Time 2 were set to be equal as these are measures of the same construct at different moments in time (Landis, Edwards, & Cortina, 2009). The same applied for perceived demands-abilities fit. In this model the relation between career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit is modelled at different levels; on the one hand by assuming a relation between the intercept of career initiative and the intercept of perceived demands-abilities fit (i.e., Hypothesis 1), and, on the other hand, by assuming a relation between the separate slopes (i.e., Hypothesis 3) as well as a relation between the intercept of career initiative and the slope of demands-abilities fit (i.e., Hypothesis 2).

Age, gender, job type (i.e., operational staff versus support and management) and type of contract (permanent versus fixed-term) were added to the model as control variables. These control variables were modelled on the endogenous variable career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit at both Time 1 and Time 2.



**Figure 1.** Parallel growth model for career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit.  
 Note. Control variables were omitted for reasons of parsimony. Only the structural part of the path diagram is shown.

**Career initiative – perceived demands-abilities fit dynamics within jobs**

The goal of the first part of this study was to explore to what extent perceived demands-abilities fit may change while remaining in the same job. In order to do so, the model was tested with a subset of the sample that comprised only those individuals who remained in the same job between Time 1 and Time 2. This yielded a sample of 454 respondents, i.e., 71% of the participants had remained in the same job between Time 1 and Time 2. Subsample means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables are presented in Table 1 the diagonal. Indices of fit showed that the model fit the data well ( $\chi^2 = 2.91, df = 2, p = .23; CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03$ ).

A significant and positive relationship (see Table 2) was found between the intercept of career initiative and the intercept of perceived demands-abilities fit. Results thereby support our hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) by showing a positive association between the between-person level of career initiative and the between-person level of perceived demands-abilities fit. No significant association was found between the intercept of career initiative and the slope of demands-abilities fit. This indicates that, for those who did not change jobs between Time 1 and Time 2, the data did not support hypothesis 2, which anticipated those higher on between-person career initiative to exhibit higher within-person growth in

perceived demands-abilities fit over time. Final, a significant relationship was found between the slope of career initiative and the slope of demands-abilities fit. This means that, for those individuals who remained within the same job, a within-person increase in career initiative was positively related to a within-person increase in perceived demands-abilities fit over time, thereby yielding support for Hypothesis 3.

With respect to the control variables, a significant negative association was found between age and career initiative, i.e., the older respondents were, the lower the level of career initiative was ( $B = -.01, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = -.16$  at Time 1 and  $B = -.02, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = -.19$  at Time 2). This is in line with other studies indicating negative relationships between age and engagement in developmental activities (Boerlijst, Van der Heijden, & van Assen, 1993; Warr & Fay, 2001). Age was also significantly and positively related to perceived demands-abilities fit at Time 2 ( $B = .01, SE = .004, p = .01, \beta = .13$ ), which is similar to findings of Singh and Greenhaus (2004). For the control variable gender, it was found that males reported higher levels of career initiative as compared with females ( $B = .20, SE = .12, p = .08, \beta = .08$  at Time 1 and  $B = .26, SE = .12, p = .03, \beta = .10$  at Time 2). This corresponds to other studies on proactive behaviour which have consistently found that males, as compared with females, are more likely to behave proactively and may indeed be more expected to do so (Kidder & Parks, 2001). With respect to

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	M	SD
1. Age	34.86	10.51	-	.16**	-.11*	.26**	-.18**	.03	-.21**	.13**	36.19	10.66
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	.15**	-	-.13**	-.03	.05	-.06	.06	-.02	-	-
3. Job type <sup>b</sup>	-	-	-.11**	-.15**	-	.08	.04	.14**	.08	.07	-	-
4. Job contract <sup>c</sup>	-	-	.32**	.02	.08*	-	-.17**	.03	-.13**	.10*	-	-
5. Career initiative T1	3.81	0.93	-.23**	.06	.03	-.22**	-	.16**	.48**	.06	3.72	0.93
6. Perceived DA fit T1	4.28	0.95	.09*	-.07	.19**	.07	.12**	-	.09*	.33**	4.41	0.87
7. Career initiative T2	3.80	0.96	-.19**	.07	.06	-.13**	.47**	.05	-	.10*	3.68	0.97
8. Perceive DA fit T2	4.36	0.95	.14**	-.03	.04	.08*	.06	.32**	.10*	-	4.37	0.94
9. Job change <sup>d</sup>	-	-	-.20**	.07	-.09*	-.21**	.15**	-.21**	.20**	-.03	-	-

Below the diagonal N varies between 633 and 637 due to missing cases. Above the diagonal N varies between 451 and 454 due to missing cases. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

<sup>a</sup>Male was coded as one. Female was coded as zero.

<sup>b</sup>Operational staff was coded as one. Support and management were coded as zero.

<sup>c</sup>Permanent contracts were coded as one. Fixed-term contracts were coded as zero.

<sup>d</sup>Turnover was coded as one. No turnover was coded as zero.

**Table 2.** Hypothesized paths estimated in a parallel growth model using structural equation modelling for Sample 1 (subset of the sample including only participants who remained in the same job between T1 and T2) N = 454 and Sample 2 (total sample including turnover, N = 637).

	B	SE	p	B
<i>Sample 1</i>				
Career Initiative (Intercept) U+ → Perceived DA Fit (Intercept)	.17	.04	<.01	.18
Career Initiative (Intercept) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	-.02	.06	.81	-.01
Career Initiative (T1ΔT2) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	.10	.05	.04	.10
<i>Sample 2</i>				
Career Initiative (Intercept) → Perceived DA Fit (Intercept)	.19	.04	<.01	.18
Career Initiative (Intercept) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	-.02	.05	.71	-.02
Career Initiative (T1ΔT2) → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	.11	.04	.01	.10
Turnover → Career Initiative (T1ΔT2)	.26	.08	<.01	.12
Turnover U+ → Perceived DA Fit (T1ΔT2)	.40	.10	<.01	.16

Intercept (denotes between-person differences), T1ΔT2 = slope (denotes within-person change over time),

contract type the outcomes indicate a significant relation between fixed-term versus permanent job contracts and the level of career initiative at Time 1, such that individuals with a fixed-term contract reported higher levels of career initiative compared to individuals with a permanent job contract ( $B = -.27, SE = .10, p < .01, \beta = -.13$ ). Final, regarding the control variable job type, it was found that operational staff reported higher levels of perceived demands-abilities fit compared to individuals with management and support tasks ( $B = .27, SE = .09, p < .01, \beta = .14$ ).

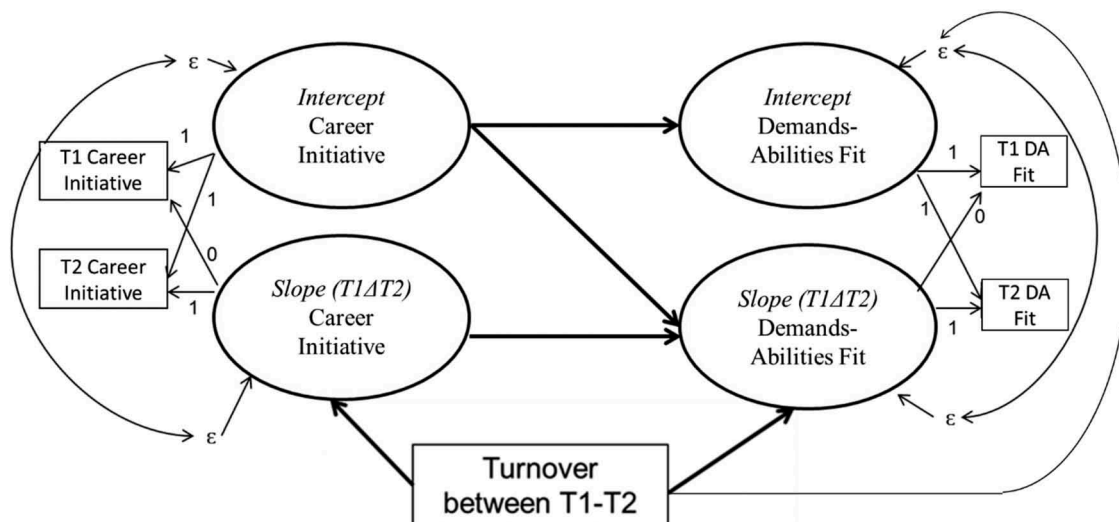
**Career initiative – perceived demands-abilities fit dynamics including turnover**

In order to address the role of turnover (between Time 1 and Time 2) in relation to within-person changes in career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit, a second model was tested. A duplicate of the parallel growth model from the previous part of the study was constructed for the entire sample, hence including individuals who had switched jobs. Turnover was included as a factor that was allowed to relate to the slopes of career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit (corresponding to hypotheses 5 and 6, respectively). Furthermore, turnover was also set to covary with the error

term of perceived demands-abilities fit (see Figure 2 for the structural part of the model).

Control variables were allowed to covary with turnover such that permanent versus fixed-term contracts were allowed to relate to turnover. Age was also allowed to relate to turnover as older employees are less likely to change jobs as compared to younger employees. Final, job type was allowed to covary with turnover as employees who conducted support and management tasks more frequently changed jobs compared to operational staff. The model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 8.87, df = 4, p = .06; CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04$ ). For the entire sample ( $N = 637$ ) means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables are presented below the diagonal in Table 1.

Findings indicate a significant and positive relationship between the intercept of career initiative and the intercept of demands-abilities fit (See Table 2), meaning that, in this larger sample that included respondents who had changed jobs between Time 1 and Time 2, between-person career initiative is positively associated to between-person perceived demands-abilities fit. Results thereby corroborate the previous outcomes and support Hypothesis 1. No significant effect was found for the relationship between the intercept of career initiative and the slope of perceived demands-abilities fit



**Figure 2.** Parallel growth model for career initiative and demands-abilities fit including turnover. Note. Control variables were omitted for reasons of parsimony. Only the structural part of the path diagram is shown.



(See Table 2). This means that again there is no support for hypothesis 2, which stated that between-persons career initiative affects changes in within-person perceived demands-abilities fit over time. The slope of career initiative, however, exhibited a positive and significant relationship with the slope of perceived demands-abilities fit (See Table 2), thereby indicating that a within-person increase in the level of career initiative over time is associated with a within-person increase in the level of perceived demands-abilities fit over time. Hence, hypothesis 3, pertaining to changes in career initiative being related to changes in perceived demands-abilities fit was further supported in this larger sample.

Due to modelling constraints, Hypothesis 4 could not be tested directly using the parallel growth model, since the arrow from the intercept of perceived demands-abilities fit to our one item turnover measure that it would require, would entail the turnover item effectively being modelled as a third indicator of perceived demands-abilities fit. Reversing the arrow (to point from turnover to the perceived demands-abilities fit intercept) was also not deemed a viable analytical strategy, as this would entail modelling an antecedent as an outcome of its consequent (i.e., turnover occurred sometime between the Time 1 and Time 2 measurement waves). A separate hierarchical logistic regression analysis to predict turnover was therefore conducted with the Time 1 measure of demands-abilities fit entered in the second step after the control variables (contract type, age, job type, gender, and education) were entered in the first. Results indicated that above and beyond the constant and control variable only model, the block in which Time 1 demands-abilities fit was entered was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 16.78, p < .001, df = 1$ ), indicating that it accounted for significant variance in turnover, with Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  indicating a weak combined effect of the control variables and perceived demands-abilities fit on turnover. In the final model, it was found that the Wald criterion was significant ( $p < .05$ ) for age, contract type, gender, and perceived demands-abilities fit with all variables exhibiting a weak negative relationship with turnover and an overall prediction success of 72.5% (18.6% for those who changed jobs and 94.3% for those who did not). These results therewith provide support for hypothesis 4.

Returning now to the parallel growth model, both within-person increases in career initiative and within-person perceived demands-abilities fit were found to be significantly related to turnover. Specifically, results show a positive and significant relationship between turnover and the slope of career initiative (See Table 2). Considering that if people reported to have changed their jobs this referred to a switch between Time 1 and Time 2, this means that a larger increase, i.e., more growth in the level of career initiative between Times 1 and 2 was found for those individuals who had changed their jobs during that period of time as compared to those individuals who had remained in the same job. Thus, generally speaking, switching jobs was associated with larger within-person increases in career initiative over time, providing support for Hypothesis 5. With regard to changes in demands-abilities fit, a positive and significant relationship between turnover and the slope of demands-abilities fit was found (See Table 2). This result shows that job change

generally relates to larger, positive, changes in demands-abilities fit as opposed to not changing jobs (Hypothesis 6). To summarize, individuals with a poorer initial perceived demands-abilities fit were not only more likely to change jobs, but also more likely to report larger improvements in their level of perceived demands-abilities fit as compared to people with a higher initial level of perceived demands-abilities fit.

Regarding the control variables for the relationships onto turnover, it was found that, as expected, contract type covaried significantly with turnover such that individuals with a permanent contract changed jobs less often between Time 1 and Time 2 as compared to individuals with a fixed-term contract ( $B = -.04, SE = .01, p < .01, \beta = -.21$ ). Furthermore, age was significantly associated with turnover such that the older respondents were, the less likely they were to change jobs ( $B = -1.0, SE = .19, p < .01, \beta = -.21$ ). With respect to job type, it was found that operational staff were less likely to change between jobs as compared to employees holding support and management tasks ( $B = -.02, SE = .01, p = .03; \beta = -.08$ ).

Regarding the control variables for the relationships onto the endogenous variables career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit at Time 1 and Time 2 it was found that the age of the employees negatively impacted the level of career initiative at Time 1 ( $B = -.02, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = -.19$ ) and Time 2 ( $B = -.01, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = -.15$ ). Age was also found to significantly relate to perceived demands-abilities fit such that the older employees were, the more likely they were to report higher levels of perceived demands-abilities fit ( $B = .01, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = .11$  at Time 1 and  $B = .02, SE = .004, p < .01, \beta = .18$  at Time 2). Regarding gender, this model too showed that males generally reported higher levels of career initiative compared to females ( $B = .23, SE = .09, p = .01, \beta = .09$  at Time 1 and  $B = .24, SE = .10, p = .02, \beta = .09$  at Time 2). Furthermore, it was again found that fixed-term job contracts were associated with higher levels of career initiative at Time 1 than permanent job contracts ( $B = -.32, SE = .08, p < .01, \beta = -.16$ ). Final, and again consistent with the previous model, a significant association was found for the control variable job type and perceived demands-abilities fit at Time 1, such that operational staff reported higher initial levels of demands-abilities fit compared to employees holding support and management tasks ( $B = .38, SE = .08, p < .01, \beta = .19$ ).

## Discussion

The current study aimed to advance a dynamic approach to perceived demands-abilities fit by investigating how changes in career initiative over time are related to changes in demands-abilities fit over time. By bridging the literature on proactive career behaviour and person-environment fit we aimed to enhance insight in the process by which individuals can actively manage their alignment with their jobs. Using a parallel growth model, hypotheses pertaining to how changes in career initiative relate to changes in perceived person-job demands-abilities fit were generally supported. In support of our hypotheses, results of the present study indicated that people with higher career initiative generally report higher perceived demands-abilities fit

than people with lower career initiative (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, we found that change in one's career initiative (i.e., relative to an earlier time) is positively related to change in one's perceived demands-abilities fit so that positive change in the former is associated with positive change in the latter, and vice versa (Hypothesis 3). Indeed, these hypotheses were supported in both the restricted (no turnover) sample and the full sample that included people who had switched jobs between Time 1 and Time 2. Hypothesis 2, pertaining to the idea that the higher one's career initiative is (i.e., relative to other people), the greater that person's growth in perceived demands-abilities fit will be over time, was not supported in either of the samples.

With regard to turnover, it was found that it was preceded by lower levels of perceived demands-abilities fit (Hypothesis 4). Findings furthermore show that individuals who had switched jobs between Time 1 and Time 2 exhibited growth in their level of career initiative (Hypothesis 5) and perceived demands-abilities fit (Hypothesis 6) over time.

In contrast to the dominant person-environment fit paradigm, which is grounded in the ASA-framework, findings of the current study indicate that improvements in perceived demands-abilities fit can be established without necessarily having to change to a new job. Though turnover was found to be associated with positive changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, improvements in fit could also be discerned whilst individuals remained in the same job, particularly for those individuals who exhibited increases in career initiative over time. Findings thus support the idea that in more proactively approaching their career, individuals can secure and enhance their alignment with the work environment.

Findings of the present study have several practical and theoretical implications for the PE fit domain in general and the perceived demands-abilities fit literature in particular. First, the current two-wave study allowed us to identify changes in the level of perceived demands-abilities fit over time, including individuals who remained in the same job. This finding thereby does justice to the idea that perceived demands-abilities fit is a dynamic construct. This study therewith underpins recent calls that have been made for adopting a more dynamic approach to studies on PE fit in order to improve our understanding and the validity of PE fit theories (Billsberry, De Cooman, Mol, Boon, Den Hartog, 2016; Edwards, 2008; Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani, & Slowik, 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Latham & Pinder, 2005). The presented framework also relates to recent work of Follmer et al. (2018) which provides insight in the actions people can take in response to misfit and indicates that exiting the organization is just one of the many strategies people can use to address misfit. From a practical perspective, these findings imply that establishing and maintaining a match between an employee and the work environment merits attention that stretches beyond the recruitment and selection stages. Rather, it is a continuous process that organizations and employees will need to manage to establish and sustain a fit between job demands and individual abilities over time.

Second, findings of the current study showed that changes in career initiative over time are related to changes in perceived demands-abilities fit over time. This finding is in line with reasoning in proactivity research which argues that proactive individuals forge a better match between themselves and the work environment which should ultimately result in career success (c.f. Parker &

Collins, 2010; Seibert et al., 1999) and may thereby inform PE fit research and theory on how specific individual behaviours can establish or even improve the perceived correspondence between individuals' KSAOs with their job demands. Whereas past research has demonstrated empirical relations between proactivity (operationalized as proactive personality as well as proactive career behaviours) with career progression and career satisfaction (Seibert et al., 2001, 1999; Ng et al., 2005), hardly any empirical evidence exists on the relation between proactive career behavior and person-job fit (see Yu & Davis, 2016, for an exception). Accordingly, the current study contributes to the extant literature by empirically demonstrating a positive relationship between career initiative, a type of proactive career behaviour, and perceived demands-abilities fit.

Moreover, by incorporating the context of time, the present study allows us to go beyond cross-sectional results and helps inform how perceived demands-abilities fit can be attained and enhanced over time. It was found that both the intercepts and the slopes of career initiative and perceived demands-abilities fit were predictably related to one another, meaning that the between-person level of career initiative relates positively to between-person perceived demands-abilities fit and that when individuals became more agentic regarding their career (i.e., within-person change), they also exhibited a larger, positive within-person change in their alignment with the work environment. Interestingly, the data indicate that it is not the absolute (between-person) level of career initiative that brought about such changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, but rather individuals exhibiting growth in career initiative over time (regardless of their initial status). This finding is somewhat challenging in that it may imply that in order to sustain correspondence with job demands, one needs to actively manage one's career on an ongoing basis. Or, in other words, it may imply that a person's fit might deteriorate over time if one does not nourish one's career initiative. From a modern career perspective, this is to be expected when job demands, as well as individuals, continuously evolve (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Regarding turnover, the present study indicated that a change between jobs was preceded by a higher degree of between-person misfit compared to individuals who remained with their job. This finding is in line with the ASA-framework and PE-fit theory which argues that misfit is a driver of turnover (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Schneider, 1995, p. 1998). Findings also indicated that individuals who switched jobs reported a larger, positive change in their level of demands-abilities fit than individuals who did not. Hence, people who experienced a larger degree of misfit were more likely to switch jobs and acquire a new work environment which they perceived to provide them with a better match. As indicated earlier, such growth in perceived demands-abilities fit may be associated with the perceived demands-abilities fit "reset" and the concomitant dual selection (re)fitting processes that a job change entails. Hence, even though the study is limited by measuring change in the perceived level of fit as opposed to change in the actual level of fit, we would expect, in line with the reasoning of Fields, Dingman, Roman, and Blum (2005), that change in perceived fit are not merely the result of altering

perceptions, but are likely to also reflect actual changes in fit given the job search and selection process that comes with a job change and the importance for both employer and employee to establish a good fit.

In addition, study results indicated that switching jobs was accompanied by an increase in the level of career initiative. This finding supports research on job transitions (Raabe, Frese, & Beehr, 2007) and newcomers' socialization and learning processes (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Kim et al., 2005) which proposes that job transitions require individuals to engage in active career behaviours.

In sum, findings indicate that individuals who increase their career initiative tend to improve their perceived demands-abilities fit either within the boundaries of their present job or by acquiring a new job, where the latter scenario is more likely to occur when the experienced level of perceived demands-abilities fit is poorer. These results suggest that individuals who proactively manage their career over time are not necessarily more likely to leave their employing organization. It thereby taps into the discussion of whether proactivity may serve as a double-edged sword when it results in the external mobility of valued employees (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010b; Bolino, Turnley, & Anderson, 2017; Campbell, 2000; Ito & Brotheridge, 2005). Though this issue merits further research attention, the present findings may add some nuance to this discussion in that the experienced degree of (mis)fit may influence whether proactive individuals are more likely to optimize their fit within or outside the boundaries of the employing organization. The current findings and the study by Follmer et al. (2018) suggest that turnover is one way to deal with poor levels of fit, but not the only way and that it potentially serves as a last resort when the degree of misfit is perceived as irreconcilable or other strategies are considered ineffective.

### **Limitations and future research**

There are several limitations to this study. First of all, by measuring the perceived level of demands-abilities fit we were able to ascertain changes in the level of perceived fit. However, we were unable to specify whether these alterations are a result of (perceived) changes in the demands of the job or in the KSAOs of the individual or both. Hence, although we identified changes in career initiative as a likely antecedent of changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, it would be interesting to know what the target of this career initiative was and the conditions under which people change themselves (e.g., through lifelong learning, or on the job training) or their job (e.g., through job crafting and indeed turnover).

Moreover, given the fact that we assessed perceived levels of demands-abilities fit because of earlier research indicating stronger associations of perceived fit with outcomes, it would be interesting and worthwhile to explore to what extent actual changes and perceptions overlap or differ. Specifically, we suggest that future research could set out to identify contextual and dispositional moderators of the relationship between the changes in actual fit and changes in perceived fit that result from career initiative. For instance, in "strong"

situations (e.g., Blake & Pfeffer, 1989) it may well be that demands are relatively constant or constrained and hence only changes in abilities will be a realistic precursor of changes in perceived demands-abilities fit, whereas in "weak" situations both changing demands (for instance through job crafting) and abilities (for instance through training or mentoring) might relate to changes in perceived fit. At the person level, individual differences such as self-monitoring, self-esteem, reframing (Follmer et al., 2018) and behaviour outside of the workplace (Vogel, Rodell, & Lynch, 2016) may also be posited to moderate or mitigate the relationship between changes in actual and changes in perceived fit.

Also, although career initiative turned out to be related to perceived demands-abilities fit, it would be interesting to explore in greater detail what specific actions and variety of things people can do to promote one's compatibility with the job, such as involvement in developmental activities, political knowledge, consulting, voice, capitalizing on the degrees of freedom in the job, or stretching the boundaries of the job (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010a; Devloo et al., 2011; Parker & Collins, 2010; Thompson, 2005; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). From an organizational perspective, it would be valuable to enhance our understanding of how organizations and managers foster employee proactive career behaviours among their employees to ensure alignment and that employees continue to add value to the organization (Fugate et al., 2004; Fuller, Marler, & Hester, 2006). Particularly the current finding that levels of change in career initiative, as opposed to initial levels of career initiative, was related to changes in fit, implies that selecting on career initiative may be less fruitful than assisting individual incumbent employees in enhancing their career initiative.

Second, from a methodological perspective, the current study is limited by the use of a single-item measure for perceived demands-abilities fit. Ideally, a validated multiple-item measure should have been used. However, the data in our separate employee sample did demonstrate a substantial correlation between the single-item measure and the multiple-item measure of demands-abilities fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002) thereby providing support for the single item tapping into the same construct. Indeed, from a content validity perspective, it would be hard to argue that our measure is tapping something very different than demands-abilities fit as assessed by Cable and DeRue's measure, due to the near synonymy of the concomitant items, respectively, "My current job fits my knowledge and skills" and "The match is very good between the demands of my job and my personal skills" (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Also, in spite of psychometric advantages of multiple-item scales, there are several research domains that identified single-item measures with adequate content validity such as on global self-esteem, satisfaction and well-being (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Robins et al. (2001) argue that single self-report measures can be adequate when pertaining to constructs that are i) unidimensional in content, ii) reflect primarily subjective experiences and iii) are highly schematized by individuals, i.e., repeatedly activated. Perceived demands-abilities fit is likely to be chronically accessible, as it is

a critical factor in a wide range of work situations. Such fit has a subjective nature and is unidimensional. If we take these points together with the findings reported in this study, this may suggest that perceived demands-abilities fit might suitably be assessed with a single-item measure. Further research on this is needed.

Furthermore, this study set out to investigate change over time. However, for truly *longitudinal* research more than two waves are needed (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Singer & Willett, 2003). Specifically, Singer and Willett (2003) argue that studies that employ two waves of data collection, such as ours, are only marginally better than cross-sectional studies because they do not allow for generating an understanding of the type of change (i.e., whether it is immediate, steady, or delayed) and because they confound true change with measurement error. With regard to the former, our study established a relationship between change in career initiative and change in perceived demands-abilities fit, however, we cannot rule out the possibility that changes in perceived demands-abilities fit preceded changes in career initiative. Indeed, from a theoretical perspective one can argue that proactive behaviours not only affect the level of perceived-demands-abilities fit, but also that fit triggers career initiative to resolve misfit (De Stobbeleir, De Boeck, & Dries, 2016; Devloo et al., 2011; Simmering et al., 2003; Yu & Davis, 2016). Our design is however not strong enough to rule out alternative explanations or reverse causality. Final, our study did not allow for the testing of non-linear growth in our independent and dependent variables. Longitudinal research is therefore needed to disentangle true growth from measurement error and to better capture the nature of the dynamic relationships between career behaviours and perceived demands-abilities fit over time (Schmitt, Den Hartog, & Belschak, 2016).

Regarding turnover, the present study allowed us to follow up individuals' perceived demands-abilities fit after acquiring a new job. The data thereby add to the literature on turnover and PE fit by allowing us to assess changes in demands-abilities fit among individuals who switched jobs. Yet the present study is limited in that we chose not to disentangle voluntary and involuntary turnover because i) this would have further complicated the modelling constraints as discussed in the results section and ii) required alternative antecedent measures, that were not measured. That is, although voluntary and involuntary turnover are both likely to be fuelled by (perceived) demands-abilities misfit, differential processes may be in effect in relation to proactive career behaviour and the acquirement of a new job that provides the individual with a better fit. A theoretical basis for such differential relations may be found in the work of De Stobbeleir et al. (2016) who distinguish between  $D > A$  Fit and  $D < A$  Fit. Future research could examine the hypothesis that the former is related to voluntary turnover and the latter to involuntary turnover. In addition, it would be interesting to explore whether personal attributes and environmental characteristics such as alternative and appealing job opportunities predict which strategy people may employ to optimize their fit, that is, either within or outside the boundaries of their employing organization.

In conclusion, the present study supports the premise that perceived demands-abilities fit fluctuates over time

and that individuals who engage in proactive career behaviours are more likely to acquire a better match with their job in the long term. This finding is relevant for both theory and practice given that perceived demands-abilities fit is a critical driver of employee behaviour and attitudes that benefit both individuals and their organizations (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Identifying changes in the degree of demands-abilities fit over time underscores the need for a dynamic approach to PE fit research. The dynamics of fit are of topical interest given that organizations increasingly rely on a flexible workforce to meet altering demands in the organization's environment and employees bear greater responsibility for ensuring their employability within these dynamic environments (Frese & Fay, 2001; Waterman, 1994). Proactive career behaviour may help to better understand how employees and their organizations can address these challenges.

## Note

1. Our study used the dataset to operationalize the constructs proactive career behaviour, perceived demands-abilities fit, and turnover (with age, gender, job type, and type of contract as controls), whereas Preenen, De Pater, Van Vianen, & Keijzer used the dataset to operationalize challenging assignments, on-the-job learning, turnover intentions, job search behaviours, and voluntary turnover (with age as a control). Hence (disregarding the control age), at both the construct and item level, the only overlap occurs for the turnover construct. However, Preenen, De Pater, Van Vianen, and Keijzer (2011) assessed *voluntary turnover* as a dependent variable, by incorporating the item "Was this a voluntary job change?", whereas we solely relied on the item "Did you switch between jobs in the past two years?" for our operationalization of *turnover* as a moderator. Note also that turnover only figures in the test of our second model.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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