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Personal Projects and Organizational Lives

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Emily loves her job as a software developer. She looks forward to work each morning, excels in her endeavors, enjoys and admires her supportive team members, and is delighted with her working life. In contrast, Robert, a manager in a large accounting firm, despises his job. He trudges reluctantly to the office day after day, works halfheartedly, feels isolated from his colleagues, and knows deeply and with some desperation that his work life is devoid of meaning. Why is one employee so satisfied and performing well, and the other neither content nor productive? Why are some Emilies and Roberts of organizations flourishing and some floundering?

The field of organizational behavior provides four alternative perspectives that help explain such differences. One focuses on personal features, a second on environmental or contextual features, and a third on the interaction of persons and their contexts. A fourth perspective, also interactional, provides a distinctive vantage point that will be the central concern of this chapter (compare with the social ecological model in Little, chap. 1, this volume).

The study of personal features as the source of delight and discontent in organizations has had a strong tradition in both personality and organizational psychology. Perhaps Emily possesses more "positive" personality traits (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002) and more positive beliefs about and orientations toward work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) so that she is bound to be happy in most tasks and surroundings. Robert, on the other hand, may be just plain miserable, no matter where he trudges.

The environmental or contextual perspective detects the sources of differential flourishing at work as being due to forces ranging from the overall macrolevel features of organizations to the microlevel aspects of work design. At the macro level, the culture and climate of Emily's smaller, more decentralized organization may be more favorable than Robert's (Ashkanasy, Wilderom, & Peterson, 2000; Rousseau, 1978). At a middle or *meso* level of analysis, we might find that the social context provides Emily with more constructive relationships with supervisors and coworkers (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and more appealing information (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Alternatively, the reward system might play a major role: Emily may receive more favorable incentives, such as compensation, benefits, promotions, and job security, than does Robert (Gerhart & Rynes, 2003). At the micro level, Emily's job may provide more autonomy, feedback, skill variety, and significance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), and Robert's role may be ambiguous, conflicted, and straining (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In short, Emily is flourishing because her work context is maximally supportive; Robert is floundering because his environment is toxic (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Frost, 2003).

Each of these explanations can only take us so far. Taken collectively, they serve to illustrate that influences on psychological experiences and behaviors in organizations are often overdetermined and change in response to multiple simultaneous causes (Hackman, 1985; Weick, 1974). However, each focuses exclusively on either attributes of the person (P) or the environment (E). A third perspective examines the interaction of persons and environments, comprising a P × E lens on people in organizations. The rise of an interactional or person–environment perspective in personality, environmental, community, and organizational psychology (e.g., Argyle & Little, 1972; Little, 1987; Mischel, 2004; Ostroff, 1993; Walsh, Craik, & Price, 2000) emphasized that as well as the "main effects" of P and E in influencing everyday behavior, the interaction (P × E) was critical. Emily may thrive at work primarily because

there is a fine fit between her sociable, excitement-seeking personality and the rather open and tolerant policies at her boutique software firm. Robert might, in fact, be even more miserable in such an environment because at least he can get lost where he currently works. Having to appear sociable on top of suffering the indignities of being underpaid and unappreciated would be a sure prescription for exhaustion. Under this view of interactionism, a good P × E fit is central to understanding the qualities of organizational life (Caplan, 1987; Pervin, 1989).

In this chapter, we apply a fourth perspective to organizational lives. It, too, is an interactional approach, but is distinctive in that it comprises a dynamic interactionist rather than mechanical interactionist perspective (Little, 1987; see Magnusson, 1999). The latter essentially adopts an analysis of variance approach to looking at person–environment interaction, whereas the former attempts to locate the interaction within a dynamic unit of analysis that carries the features of both persons and their contexts. That unit is the personal project.

The personal project (Little, 1983, chap. 1, this volume) serves as a conceptual carrier unit and as a measurement unit that inherently links persons and contexts. At work, the personal project connects individuals to their groups and organizations by examining individual pursuits that occur in conjunction with, are directed toward, and are enacted on behalf of other individuals, groups, and the organization as a whole. That is, the personal project captures cognitions, affect, and behaviors that influence and are influenced by the contexts in which they take place (Little, 2000). The personal project allows us to see Emily engaged in goal-oriented action that both expresses her characteristics and impacts her context. It affords us glimpses of Robert in action or inaction, cunningly avoiding engagement in a context he sees as demeaning.

Our goal, then, is to explore the relevance of personal projects to organizational lives. First, we define personal projects at work and explore their potential advantages over the more traditional units of tasks and jobs. Second, we draw on extant research on personal projects and related units to illustrate how projects address some of the central themes in organizational life. We show how projects enrich our understanding of work processes, contexts, and outcomes, and how projects can be both predictors of job satisfaction and performance and outcome measures in their own right. Finally, we discuss future directions for organizational research on personal projects and the applied implications of personal projects for redesigning work to enhance satisfaction and performance. Are projects replacing jobs? If so, does the quest

for increased satisfaction and improved performance entail redesigning projects rather than jobs?

DEFINING AND DISTINGUISHING THE PERSONAL PROJECT AT WORK

Defined as an "extended set of personally relevant action" (Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992; see also Little, 1989, chap. 1, this volume), the personal project encompasses both goals—cognitive representations of desired outcomes (Austin & Vancouver, 1996)—and behaviors undertaken in pursuit of goals. In the organizational context, it is important to distinguish the personal project from that described in the project management literature (e.g., Thompson, 1967). In the project management literature, a project is a formal endeavor undertaken by members of the organization, whereas a personal project is an individual's subjective construal of his or her pursuit or activity. For example, Emily's formal project, one that could be found in her job description, might be to "provide liaison with the business development team," whereas her personal project might be to "get the BD Team off our case, once and for all."

In organizational settings, we propose that the personal project offers advantages over traditional units of measurement of work processes and actions, notably tasks and jobs. A *task,* the most basic building block of work, is an assigned piece of work that an employee carries out (Griffin, 1987). A *job* is an aggregation of assigned tasks designed to be performed by one employee (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992; Wong & Campion, 1991). We believe that personal projects, which derive from and are embedded in a social ecological model of human behavior (Little, 2000, chap. 1, this volume), have the advantage of being both personally salient and pitched at a middle scale of action that situates them somewhere between tasks and jobs, as outlined in Table 8.1.

Personal Saliency

The first advantage of the personal project is its personal saliency. Because tasks and jobs are defined externally from a manager's perspective or by an organization's requirements, they may not encapsulate the actions that are personally salient and important to the employee (Taber & Alliger, 1995). In contrast, the personal project represents the actions that are most significant and relevant in the employee's experience.

TABLE 8.1
The Personal Project as a Unit of Work

Construct	*Definition*	*Personal Saliency*	*Scale of Action*
Personal Project	Extended set of personally relevant action.	Personally defined. Encompasses personally relevant actions, both assigned and voluntary.	Middle-range unit; encompasses processes and outcomes of behavior, and multiple acts and goals.
Task	Assigned piece of work that an employee carries out.	Externally defined. Encompasses only assigned actions.	Microscopic unit; focuses on the basic building blocks of work that employees carry out.
Job	Aggregation of assigned tasks designed to be performed by one employee.	Externally defined. Encompasses only assigned actions.	Macroscopic unit; focuses on the collection of activities that employees carry out.

This is important for two reasons. First, people can identify the same actions at many different levels of analysis (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). At a low level of analysis, people identify their actions in terms of how they are performed, and at a high level, they identify their actions in terms of why they are performed. For instance, some marketers describe their actions at work in terms of selling products, whereas others describe them in terms of making the world a better place (Pratt, 2000).

Second, employees in identical jobs assigned to carry out the same tasks differ substantially in their definitions of what activities are part of their jobs (Morrison, 1994; see also Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997). It appears that these differences arise when employees cognitively redefine and behaviorally reshape the boundaries of their tasks and jobs. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) described several studies that illustrate how employees carry out these "job crafting" activities. For example, hospital janitors assigned identical tasks and jobs often differ markedly in the activities that they actually carry out at work: Some janitors incorporate voluntary actions into their daily activities at work, offering help to patients and timing their work to increase efficiency for nurses, whereas others stick to narrowly defined and prescribed responsibilities.

Accordingly, an examination of employees' assigned tasks and jobs may overlook the activities that occupy the majority of their time, energy, and attention. Because employees can identify the same actions at different levels, and reshape their tasks and jobs, assessing an employee's experience on the basis of an external definition of a task or a job may not accurately capture the employee's activities, pursuits, and experiences. Conversely, a focus on the personal projects of employees highlights the activities and pursuits that are most salient in their work experiences. Whereas tasks and jobs only capture activities assigned to an employee, personal projects can include any activity in which an employee is engaged at work. Projects thus allow researchers to understand discretionary, extrarole activities as well as the assigned activities that tasks and jobs involve (Roberson, Houston, & Diddams, 1989). Indeed, Pomaki, Maes, and ter Doest (2004) found that studies based on personally salient open elicitation formats (see Little & Gee, chap. 2, this volume) have additional power to detect moderators of the relations between work variables and outcomes. Therefore, personal projects may enable researchers to understand a broader range of actions than tasks and jobs permit, and to understand the actions that are most significant in the employee's life.

Scale of Action

A second advantage of the personal project is its scale of action. Tasks are typically microscopic units of work, whereas jobs are global, macroscopic units. The macroscopic nature of jobs can pose conceptual, methodological, and practical challenges. In particular, the job unit of measurement can obscure important variations in work experiences (Mintzberg, 1973). If we merely measured job attitudes and perceptions, we might fail to notice that Emily may have a project or two that she finds discouraging, and we would fail to learn why this is the case. We might also overlook the fact that Robert, although generally miserable, seems to love one aspect of his work, which serves as his primary source of motivation. Moreover, jobs are a sufficiently global unit that employees' evaluations of them can fluctuate substantially depending on which aspects of the job are in focus at the moment of evaluation (see Schwarz, 1999). Conceptually, these findings make it difficult for researchers to discern employees' feelings from their ratings of jobs (Taber & Alliger, 1995). Methodologically, these findings leave ambiguous how job evaluations should be measured with precision. Practically,

it remains uncertain whether employees' ratings of their jobs are accurate representations of their work experiences.

More molecular units of work may therefore be advantageous. Indeed, measuring employees' ratings of tasks can predict outcomes over and above their ratings of jobs (Taber & Alliger, 1995). However, the microscopic nature of tasks poses a different set of challenges. At a conceptual level, employees carry out many tasks, and it is not clear which tasks are relevant to understanding their behaviors and experiences. At a methodological level, it is not evident how employees' ratings of tasks should be aggregated. At a practical level, it can take several hours for employees to provide ratings of their tasks (Taber & Alliger, 1995).

What organizational science may find of value are units of measurement that are more global than tasks, yet not so global that they prevent researchers from capturing important variations in cognition, affect, and behavior. We believe personal projects meet these criteria. Personal projects are middle-range units (Little, 1983, 1989) that are generally more molecular than jobs and more molar than tasks.[1] Personal projects aggregate employees' experiences into personally salient chunks and allow a large proportion of their work experiences to be encapsulated by examining the systems of activities in which they are engaged. Thorngate (1976) argued that no explanation of social behavior can be concurrently simple, general, and accurate. We believe the same is true for units of measurement of social behavior. Assessments of jobs are simple and general, but potentially inaccurate. Assessments of tasks may be simple and accurate, but tedious to elicit and not sufficiently general. These trade-offs between simplicity and accuracy involved in measuring jobs and tasks may be partially mitigated in assessments of personal projects, which enables researchers to study action at a level less global—and therefore more accurate—than jobs, but at a level more global—and therefore more generalizable and representative—than tasks.

RESEARCH ON PERSONAL PROJECTS AT WORK

We have proposed that personal projects can capture a broader range of action that is more personally salient to employees and is more amenable to accurate measurement than jobs and tasks. In line with this no-

[1]Although the personal project's home is as a middle-level unit between a task and a job, the personal project unit can be used to move up and down levels, from trivial pursuits to magnificent obsessions (Little, 1989).

tion, Cropanzano, James, and Citera (1993) argued that examining an employee's personal projects provides a wealth of information about the employe's cognition, affect, and behaviors. To explore some of this information, we turn to recent research on personal projects at work and illustrate the ways in which personal projects inform our understanding of four key issues in organizational behavior.[2] The first is how work is described and appraised: How do people identify what they are really doing? What do they find meaningful, stressful, or value congruent? Second, personal projects enable us to examine the relationships between action and context: For instance, what influence does organizational climate have on employees' goals and projects? Third, personal projects can inform an understanding of work outcomes relevant to employees: to what extent do our appraisals of work influence job satisfaction and performance? Fourth, we consider the notion that the personal projects methodology can be scaled up to explore organizational projects, not merely personal ones.

The Nature of Work: "What's Up? How's It Going?"

In this section, we describe research suggesting that the personal project unit allows us to assess the content of work, its identity and meaning, and the reciprocal impact of work on the self and the social and organizational environment.

Project Content. What people think they are doing and how they describe what they are doing are the starting points for personal projects analysis (PPA). As described in chapter 2, the first step in PPA is to elicit the projects in which people say they are engaged. Projects can then be classified in a variety of ways, enabling assessment of different aspects of work. One type of classification involves different phrasings of projects. For example, describing projects in terms of avoidance rather than approach (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997) or in terms of trying rather than doing (Chambers, chap. 5, this volume; Little & Chambers, 2004) has been found to be associated with lower levels of well-being. A second approach to describing and classifying projects is

[2]Our review addresses research on personal projects at work and personal goals at work. Although the goal-setting research in organizational behavior has focused primarily on externally assigned goals (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002), a series of important and relevant studies have been conducted on personal goals (see also Pomaki & Maes, 2002).

according to the domain or type of activity (Little et al., 1992).[3] For example, Phillips, Little, and Goodine (1996, 1997) studied the impact of reform in the Canadian government during the early 1990s that was intended to evoke a culture change to encourage greater attention to the management of human resources. They used PPA to explore assessments of the work projects of 120 managers, classifying these projects into nine activity domains.[4] If the attempts at reengineering the organizational culture were taking hold, it would be expected that projects related to managing people would be considered not only important but also personally meaningful, efficacious, and supported by colleagues and the culture generally. The analysis reflected poorly on the reform attempts and revealed some significant gender differences. Although women managers rated managing people projects higher in personal meaning, they also perceived that they had much less support for them from coworkers, superiors, or the organizational climate than did their male counterparts. Ironically, and in contrast to male managers, they felt that there was less support for managing people projects than almost any other type of project. This suggests that any culture change that was taking place was far from having the desired effects, and was likely to lead to disillusionment on the part of women managers before affecting their male colleagues (Phillips et al., 1996).

Project Identity and Meaning. Weick (1999, 2003) argued that how projects are formulated has important implications for an employee's identity and experience of meaning (see also Morrison, 1994; Roberson, 1990; Taber & Alliger, 1995; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Weick described how firefighters in the

[3]The actions that compose tasks can also be physical, psychological, and social (Wong & Campion, 1991). In studying personal projects, we can examine the physical, psychological, and social activities that are salient to the employee. For example, Taber and Alliger (1995) provided an informative demonstration of this idea by asking employees to describe what they are doing in different tasks. This suggests that employees may sometimes devote the majority of their time and attention to particular types of projects and expend little energy and effort on others.

[4]Respondents were asked in the project dump to list both work and nonwork projects. In the PPA matrix, they were asked to select five work and five nonwork projects for closer consideration. The work projects were then classified into nine domains: self-development, managing people, administration, dealing with superiors and colleagues, political and public liaison, financial management, policy or program development, policy or program implementation, and strategic planning. The PPA was also modified to include several dimensions that related directly to the supportiveness, on the one hand, and the hindrance of the organization climate, on the other hand.

Mann Gulch disaster perished because they refused to drop their tools as they attempted to escape from an unmanageable fire:

> Thus, when I ask why firefighters keep their tools and lose their lives, I may be posing the issue in a way that precludes a meaningful answer. My question fails to address their ready-to-hand mode in which tools disappear into equipment defined by its use and availableness … . If I want them to drop their tools, then I need to understand what *their* project is and then intervene in a manner that changes that project convincingly. If they are unable to see beyond their project of fire suppression, then perhaps the leader has to stop that project cold, create a defining moment, confirm that they face an exploding fire, and reset the project clearly and firmly as a race. And if the project of a race replaces the project of suppression, then speed and lightness and rapid movement toward a safe zone become the new relevancies, and anything that interferes with the project of a race now becomes visible and is discarded … . Some holdover from their prior project of suppression, or some inability or unwillingness to shift projects under pressure, may constitute absorbed coping in the world of a wall of fire. (Weick, 1999, p. 137)

This example illustrates that personal projects, not merely formal organizational projects, play an important role in shaping the meaning of an employee's actions. Firefighters clung to their role identities and defined their projects in terms of suppressing the fire. Alternatively, changing the project to escaping the fire may have transformed the meaning of their actions and saved their lives. Even for those who are not literally putting out fires, the capacity to shift perspectives on one's project in the heat of the moment may well be salutary. A key aspect of this capacity is the extent to which one has committed to a particular course of action (Staw, 1997). Indeed, the subtleties of how people commit to projects in the first place, what keeps them motivated to carry out their projects, and how they divest themselves of ones that are not going well are central topics in contemporary research on projects in organizational life (Goodine, 2000).

Further, just as Hackman and Oldham (1980) conducted job design research to ascertain the characteristics of meaningful work by analyzing data at the job level, analysis at the project level can be used to consider the characteristics of meaningful projects. Hackman and Oldham (1980) found that three core job characteristics influenced employees' experiences of meaning. One of these is task identity, the extent to which individuals were working on a whole and identifiable piece of

work from start to finish. Are the same characteristics important at the project level, or do other factors emerge as crucial? Does Emily need to feel that each of her projects is a whole, identifiable piece of work that she works on from beginning to end? Does she only need a project or two to meet this standard? Or does she need to feel that her projects combine to provide her work with a clear identity? The project level of analysis lends itself to these types of questions that—although important—have been largely neglected in organizational research.

Project Cross-Impact. In an age of multitasking, organizational researchers have devoted surprisingly little attention to understanding how individuals manage multiple activities and competing demands (Ashford & Northcraft, 2003; Locke & Latham, 1990; see also Riediger, chap. 4, this volume; Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002). The personal project offers one potential remedy to this conundrum. The cross-impact matrix in PPA asks individuals to evaluate the impact that their projects have on each other. In an examination of an employee's project system, this technique can be used to investigate the ways in which one project hinders another, a second project advances another, and so forth. For instance, Robert's project of "keeping his boss at bay" has a strong negative impact on the rest of his projects; he is so frequently attending to his corrosive relationship with his boss that he cannot effectively manage the rest of his work.

The main cross-impact challenges may not lie within work projects, but rather as spillover effects from work to the rest of one's life, or vice versa (see Rothbard, 2001). For instance, does Emily's stress in helping her mother get adjusted to a nursing home affect how she goes about her projects at work, or her desire to become more involved in her community? For Robert, who is hoping to retire soon, is the finding that his work projects have a strong negative impact on his other projects an encouraging sign that he will make a successful transition to retirement? Research applying the cross-impact matrix to investigate the interactions of project pursuit in individuals' work, home, and community lives has gone beyond time management implications to health and other effects. For instance, Karoly and Ruehlman (1996) found that conflict between personal work goals and other personal goals predicted the amount of pain that managers experienced. In a variety of ways then, personal projects can be used to understand the interrelations between different domains of work and life and to inform policy discussions around work–life balance.

Projects in Context: "How Are Things Going Around Here?"

One explanation for Emily's ability to get on with and actually enjoy her projects at work may be that she has the benefit of a supportive organizational climate. Organizations are certainly "strong" situations that have a considerable effect on employees' behaviors and perceptions of their contexts (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; cf. House, Shane, & Herold, 1996; Staw & Cohen-Charash, 2005). As units of analysis, personal projects capture what individuals think they are doing in the context of their social ecology and thus inherently integrate persons and situations into measurement. Accordingly, personal projects have been used to understand the effects of organizational climate on employees.

In the 1990s, much of the work on gender differences in the organizational science literature focused on glass ceilings and chilly climates—in particular, the notion that climates in many large organizations were less welcoming for women than men. It was in this context that Phillips et al. (1996, 1997) examined the relations between organizational climate and 112 managers' perceptions of their projects in the Canadian government, anticipating that there would be significant gender differences in how the climate was described and experienced.

Gender differences were indeed found, but not as expected. Although the climate was not described in significantly different ways by male and female managers (controlling for level in the organization), the relation between women's perceptions of the climate and perceptions of their personal projects was more than three times stronger than the relation for men. That is, women managers' feelings about their projects at work were far more sensitive to the organizational climate than men's. This could be seen as a gender effect—that women are more attuned to their environments—or as a gendered acculturation or newcomer effect (Stewart, 1982). As minorities in the senior ranks of the organization who were both younger and newer to their positions than their male colleagues, it was probably advantageous for women to be highly attentive to the norms of conduct in the organization. As Maier and Brunstein (2001) argued, "a mismatch between personal goals and behavioral opportunities at the workplace may impair newcomers' satisfaction and organizational commitment" (p. 1039; see also Rollag, 2004).[5]

[5]Further support for this acculturation effect was provided by examining the linkage effect in two municipal governments and a high-tech firm. In the two municipal governments, where women were not numerical minorities, the project–climate linkage effect decreased considerably. In the high-tech firm, where the proportion of women was even lower than in the original federal government study, the linkage effect increased (Phillips et al., 1997).

Projects and Outcomes: "How Did You Do?"

Satisfaction and performance are perhaps the two most widely studied dependent variables in organizational behavior research. Particular attention has been devoted to the nature, causes, and boundary conditions of the relation between satisfaction and performance, sometimes described as the Holy Grail of industrial-organizational psychology (Landy, 1989). Evidence on the relation between satisfaction and performance is mixed, however, indicating that this relation is sometimes positive, sometimes negative, and sometimes nonexistent (for reviews, see Cropanzano & Wright, 2001; Fisher, 2003; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). In organizational research, the personal project unit opens several new doors for understanding important questions about the determinants of satisfaction and performance as outcome variables. Further, personal projects can be used as more than predictors of other outcome measures; rather, they can be treated as outcome measures themselves.

Projects Predicting Job Satisfaction. The central tenet of the social ecological model is that well-being depends on the sustainable pursuit of core personal projects (Little, 2000). Job satisfaction is perhaps the most common measure of well-being at work (Weiss, 2002), and both well-being and job satisfaction were among the earliest foci of research adopting personal projects methods (Slack-Appotive, 1982; Yard, 1980). These studies clearly indicated that project control, efficacy, and absence of stress were key correlates of well-being and satisfaction at work.

More recent research has examined the effect of goal or project achievement on job satisfaction.[6] For example, Harris, Daniels, and Briner (2003) conducted a daily diary study and found that successful attainment of personal goals at work was associated with higher positive

[6]Job satisfaction is, of course, not the only relevant measure of subjective well-being in the organizational context. Salmela-Aro and Nurmi (2004) found that burnout increased with excessively high levels of work commitment, measured in terms of the number of personal work goals. Karoly and Ruehlman (1996) found that emotional arousal, self-criticism, and goal conflict in personal goals was a significant predictor of managers' anxiety levels. Christiansen, Backman, Little, and Nguyen (1999) found that employees who perceived their projects as low in stress, high in positive cross-impact, congruent with their identities, and likely to progress successfully reported higher levels of subjective well-being. Finally, Pichanick (2003) provided a clear example of how the construal of personal projects at work may impact aspects of human flourishing. She showed that well-being was higher among hospital workers who saw their projects as providing personal growth, rather than familiar routine, and who actively pursued projects rather than passively waiting for assignments.

affect activation at the end of the day. The relation between goal achievement and positive affect was moderated by goal importance, however, such that the relation was most robust when the individuals found the goals personally important. As Pomaki and Maes (in press) also demonstrate, the relation between goal achievement and work-related well-being is not a simple one. In a longitudinal study of nurses, they reveal an adaptive self-regulatory process at play in which perceived controllability over and efficacy in personal goals moderated the effect of goal attainment on job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and work stress. When employees perceived their goals as controllable and likely to succeed, goal attainment increased satisfaction and decreased exhaustion and stress. When employees perceived their goals as uncontrollable and unlikely to succeed, goal attainment decreased satisfaction and increased exhaustion and stress.

Another important theme in recent research has been the importance of commitment in project pursuit. Roberson (1989, 1990) found that goal commitment was related to frequency of goal-directed behaviors and to job satisfaction. Similarly, Goodine (2000) found that project commitment mediated the positive relation between competence and work satisfaction; executives in her study who felt competent in and committed to their projects tended to be highly satisfied with their work. Finally, as Phillips et al. (1996, 1997) showed, the routes to job satisfaction through project pursuit may differ somewhat by gender. In their study of managers in the public sector, they found that for women, the most important factors promoting job satisfaction were the support of coworkers, supervisors, and the organizational climate in the pursuit of their work projects ("we're in this together"). Although support was not unimportant for male managers, a substantially more important factor was the perceived absence of impedance ("just get out of my way").

The differential role of support can be further understood in relation to perceptions of project control (see also Bell & Staw, 1989). Although for both men and women managers a sense of control over work projects was positively correlated with work satisfaction, for men, control was highly correlated with support, whereas for women, control and support were not closely related (Phillips et al., 1996, 1997). This may mean that "the strategy for men is first to achieve control over their projects and then to build or bring along support of others in the organization. Women, in contrast, tend to seek out and value organizational support even if they do not control a project" (Phillips et al., 1996, p. 33). The implication is that a work environment in which there is an ab-

sence of collegial and cultural support may have a more deleterious effect on women's work-related well-being than on that of men. The fact that Emily may work in a supportive team may be of considerable consequence then. The fact that Robert is blocked at every turn, similarly, may be a key factor in understanding his bitterness.

Projects Predicting Performance. Whereas job satisfaction research focuses on subjective experience, performance is concerned with behavior and its value to the organization. Georgopoulos, Mahoney, and Jones (1957) conducted what appears to be the earliest study of employees' personal work goals and performance. They found that employees were more productive when they saw productivity as a path toward achieving their personal goals, there were few barriers to following this path, and their personal goals were salient and important to them. Thus, it seems to be not only the saliency of personal projects or goals, but also how they are construed, that matters. More recently, Audia, Kristof-Brown, Brown, and Locke (1996) conducted an ambitious laboratory experiment observing work processes and outcomes and assessing the personal goals of individuals performing a multistage assembly task. They found that when individuals set quantity goals, they were more likely to utilize work processes that allowed them to increase their production output during the work stages. Further, setting process goals predicted a higher number of process changes but lower levels of performance than setting outcome goals.

Here, too, organizational contexts have an effect. Probst, Baxley, Schell, Cleghorn, and Bogdewic (1998) found that residents and staff members in a family medicine program who perceived that their organizations supported autonomy and progress toward personal goals were rated as more effective in their teaching.[7] Their findings indicate that the organizational contexts in which personal projects and goals are carried out can play an important role in influencing employee performance.

As research indicates, there is also a temporal dimension to the relation of projects and goals to performance outcomes. Focusing on academic research projects, Daft, Griffin, and Yates (1987) interviewed researchers about their significant (those that received awards; high ci-

[7]See also Barrick, Mount, and Strauss (1993), who found that the effect of conscientiousness on job performance was mediated by autonomous goal setting and goal commitment. VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, and Slocum (1999) conducted a study of the personal goals and performance of salespeople. They found that goal intentions (level, planning, and effort) predicted sales performance, and that personal goals mediated the effect of goal orientation on performance.

tation counts; and favorable responses from colleagues, reviewers, and readers) and insignificant research projects. They found considerable variation by project stage. Significant projects were characterized by low levels of clarity and certainty in beginning stages, high excitement and commitment throughout, and the reduction of equivocality or uncertainty during the process.[8]

Finally, personal projects have been used to predict team performance as well as individual performance. Grant (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of 22 publishing teams. The teams ranged in size from two to seven members, and each team was charged with revamping, rewriting, and reorganizing a book in the span of 3 months. Grant asked the editors and associate editors who comprised these teams to generate and rate their work projects on a series of dimensions, and also asked these employees to treat their work overall as a superordinate project and rate it on the same dimensions. Because one objective of this research was to predict each team's performance in the superordinate project of creating a book, supervisors evaluated the performance of each team in this project.[9] The commitment of team leaders to this superordinate project early in the work process was a strong positive predictor of the final overall effectiveness of the entire team. Thus, Grant (2003) found that individuals' project perceptions can be predictive of the performance of teams.[10]

Projects as Outcomes. In some cases, the assessment of project pursuit is more than a predictor of performance, satisfaction, or other indicators of well-being; it is itself an outcome measure. Such measurement, as we illustrate, has been undertaken at the system, the domain, and the dimensions levels. At the system level, we might ask what effects

[8]Another outcome variable studied in relation to personal projects and work is success in finding jobs. Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, and Koivisto (2002) studied individuals in the transition to jobs from vocational school. They found that the greater their emphases on personal work goals, and the greater their perceptions of progress toward achieving personal work goals, the more likely the students were to find a job that matched their education and the less likely they were to be unemployed. Individuals who found a job that matched their education later rated their work goals as highly achievable and as stimulating positive emotions; individuals who were unemployed saw their work goals as less achievable and less related to positive emotions.

[9]Along these lines, Kristof-Brown and Stevens (2001) conducted a study to demonstrate the utility of examining the personal goals of individuals in project teams. They found that congruence in members' perceptions of performance goals was associated with higher satisfaction and contributions, and the strength of mastery or learning goals was an even stronger predictor of individual satisfaction.

[10]Future research should take into account the hierarchical structure of projects. Analytical methods such as hierarchical linear modeling make it possible to understand projects at different levels, from the microlevel of personal projects, to the mesolevel of dyadic, team, and group projects, to the macrolevel of departmental, organizational, and industry projects.

certain kinds of interventions, such as attempts at burnout prevention or the redesign of work, have on project pursuit. Salmela-Aro, Näätänen, and Nurmi (2004), for example, conducted a longitudinal study on the effects of two psychotherapy interventions on burnout and work personal projects. Measures of burnout were one obvious outcome measure, and the interventions did decrease burnout. However, the interventions also had interesting effects on personal projects. Compared to participants in a control group, participants in the intervention group showed an increase in perceived progress on personal projects, social support for personal projects, and effectiveness in managing emotions related to personal projects. The decrease in burnout was particularly significant for the participants who experienced a reduction in negative emotions in projects.

An alternative approach is to consider whether certain factors or interventions affect project pursuit in a particular domain. For example, in assessing the performance of a work team, a key measure undoubtedly relates to the quality of its output, but how well individuals work together as a team is also an important measure (Hackman, 1987). What enables employees to be effective in the interpersonal projects involved in teamwork? In addressing this question in his study of publishing teams, Grant (2003) used supervisor ratings of employee effectiveness in a specific project domain (interpersonal projects) as measures of performance. Although commitment of the team leader was predictive of team performance in the collective, superordinate project, Grant found that commitment was not related to performance in interpersonal projects at the individual level of analysis. Rather, a different set of factors predicted effectiveness for interpersonal projects. Team members who rated their interpersonal projects as beneficial to themselves and to others were seen by their supervisors as being effective in interpersonal projects. Notably, these factors did not turn out to be significant predictors of overall individual performance; they were only predictive of individual performance in interpersonal projects. This finding suggests that different factors may enable effective performance at different levels and in different domains of analysis.

Sealing Up: From Personal to Organizational Projects

As organizational science naturally reminds us, projects are not merely personal. We have made a careful and important distinction between personal and formal, organizational projects. Nevertheless, the projects methodology can be used to study the latter, thereby crossing—or mov-

ing up and down between—levels of analysis, as Hackman (2003) urged us to do. An illustration of the use of PPA to scale up to organizational projects is a study of 33 women's social movement organizations (Phillips, 1992). A key issue at this level of analysis is whose projects we are measuring. When different respondents rate their organization's projects, they might have quite disparate understandings of what these projects are in the first place, making any further analysis difficult. However, Phillips (1992) found quite remarkable independent consensus between the senior staff and elected board members of these women's groups regarding what constituted the project systems of their organizations. As with personal projects, organizational projects were classified by domains appropriate to this type of organization (e.g., lobbying and advocacy, image building, membership service, fund raising, etc.) and were compared on project factors similar to those derived for the analysis of personal projects. What stood out for these types of organizations were enormous difficulties experienced in one particular domain—fund raising—that was low in efficacy, support, and visibility, and particularly high in stress.

In organizational science, there is obviously considerable opportunity for taking such an approach much further. For instance, the projects methodology could be used to compare members' or employees' ideal or "ought" projects—what they think their collective's or their organization's projects could or should be—with their perceptions of what its core projects actually are. This may reveal important information about the sources of the organization's progress, satisfactions, and discontents. In addition, this approach could be adapted to study the interdependencies of group members' pursuits by applying the cross-impact matrix to understand how employees support and undermine each other's projects.

WHEN ORGANIZATIONS BECOME PROJECTS: NEW DIRECTIONS AND APPLIED RESEARCH

We have explored the implications of the project unit of measurement for understanding organizational behavior. The illustrations provided in this chapter suggest that personal projects offer several advantages in organizational research. First, projects can be fruitful in predicting outcomes of relevance to individuals and organizations. Second, they can be measured as outcomes of relevance to individuals and organizations. Third, in line with Hackman's (2003) recommendations, pro-

jects allow researchers to cross, span, link, and integrate multiple levels of analysis.

We now turn in a more speculative manner to the applied implications of the project for changing, as well as understanding, organizational behavior. We believe that the distinctions among projects, jobs, groups, and organizations are becoming increasingly blurred. For example, much work is now organized around projects, rather than jobs. An employee's "job" may often be a collection of disparate or sequential projects that are performed under the auspices of an organizational context. In addition, intraorganizational and interorganizational networks and advances in communication allow for project groups to be formed beyond the boundaries of departments and organizations.

Our own work in academia is an instructive example of this phenomenon. Each of our organizational lives is comprised of a collection of research, teaching, writing, advising, consulting, and administrative projects. We collaborate with scholars at universities across the country and the globe, and we form project groups on an ad hoc basis at conferences. This very volume, a work project about projects, fits this description. It was formed across the boundaries of universities, nations, and oceans. Although the book began as a set of individual personal projects, it grew beyond the personal into a dyadic, group, and organizational project.

Our observations about the ways in which projects have affected jobs, groups, and organizations give rise to ideas for redesigning work that venture beyond understanding, predicting, and explaining organizational phenomena into the territory of change. Rather than merely explaining such change, how can project redesign help individuals, groups, and organizations accommodate to the newly project-oriented world of work?

From Job Redesign to Project Redesign

According to Hackman and Oldham (1980), due to the challenges of changing the person and the context, redesigning the job is more feasible. However, researchers have found that restructuring an entire job is also challenging, and it often entails trade-offs between individual and organizational objectives, particularly in terms of satisfaction and performance (Morgeson & Campion, 2002).

Imagine that we were to promise to the CEO of an automotive company that we could enhance car quality and employee satisfaction by

redesigning jobs to provide employees with task identity. Each employee will work on a whole car, rather than merely a small component. That CEO has no doubt that the employees will be more motivated, satisfied, and careful, as various experiments in such forms of production have shown (Maccoby, 1997), but would probably reject our proposal. Even if the quality of the company's products increased, the concern would be that decreased productivity might cause the quantity to suffer drastically. Relinquishing the efficiency of specialization and division of labor would entail considerable organizational sacrifices in terms of profitability. The redesign of work thus poses a conundrum, particularly once we move from standardized production lines to more complex work environments. How is it possible for an organization to improve employees' work experiences without sacrificing its performance objectives?[11]

We propose project redesign interventions as a potential solution to this dilemma. The project is a tractable construct (Little, 2000); people regularly change, complete, and discard existing projects, and adopt new ones. Project redesign may involve the adoption of new projects or the tweaking of some aspects of existing ones. As such, it may be more feasible to redesign individuals' projects than their entire jobs, which are considerably less malleable. Instead of redesigning Robert's entire job, we can examine his system of projects to determine which projects are most flexible. We might begin by determining whether we can eliminate any of his most stressful or frustrating projects without undermining his performance. We could also encourage him to proactively take on extrarole projects that benefit others and the organization (see Grant, in press) without detracting from assigned responsibilities. Project redesign is a practical alternative to job redesign that may facilitate the improvement of individuals' work experiences without detracting from their performance.

CONCLUSION

We have pursued several projects in this chapter. First, we described potential advantages of personal projects over the traditional units of tasks

[11] Task redesign may be a viable alternative to job redesign. However, we see two problems with this idea. First, like jobs, tasks are often designed toward optimal efficiency. The redesign of tasks thus faces constraints similar to the aforementioned limitations of job redesign. Second, because an individual's work often subsumes a large number of tasks, the practical challenges of redesigning a large enough proportion of tasks to make a difference would likely be overwhelming.

and jobs. Second, we reviewed existing research relevant to personal projects at work. These studies illustrate the relevance of personal projects to understanding the nature, the contexts, and the outcomes of work. Third, we discussed new directions for the project in a changing world of work.

By applying the project unit of measurement to organizational research, we begin to understand the complexities, intricacies, and nuances of Emily's and Robert's thoughts, moods, preferences, and behaviors at work. The social ecological framework within which projects have a central role accords a place for stable trait influences and stable contextual elements (Little, 2000). More important, it calls attention to the way in which projects are in dynamic interaction with both of these sources of influence and offers a way in which some traction might be gained in trying to enhance the quality of lives in organizations.

The framework also calls attention to the small, but potentially vital exceptions to the general trend of an individual's stance toward work. Emily may be a delightfully engaged and productive employee, but we should be alert to any project that might serve as a tipping point for overall system change. For example, buoyant as she may be, to really understand Emily, we need to be aware of the continuing importance of her "take care of Mom" project or the newfound saliency of her "take care of my health" project. Like many core interpersonal projects, they may pulse into significance at unpredictable times, putting both Emily and her work team at risk.

What about Bob? Although Robert might be known throughout his organization as a miserable, bitter old man, a close friend may see a side of him that only emerges when he is engaged in certain projects; these pursuits, despite his overall misery at work, help him to muddle through. These projects may be furtive or far out, but they may also form the foundation for his retirement years. Were Robert to let his guard down and let Bob emerge occasionally, or were the climate of his firm to engender greater openness, his core projects might have a chance to be enacted before the day his coworkers toast his departure with raised glasses and strained smiles.

In the final analysis, personal projects provide meaning, structure, and community in the lives of people in organizations, and they also have impacts on those organizations. Personal projects, in short, are acts that have impacts and leave imprints. Personal projects, in this sense, are not merely personal. They are the connective tissue that keeps organizations functioning, for better or for worse.

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