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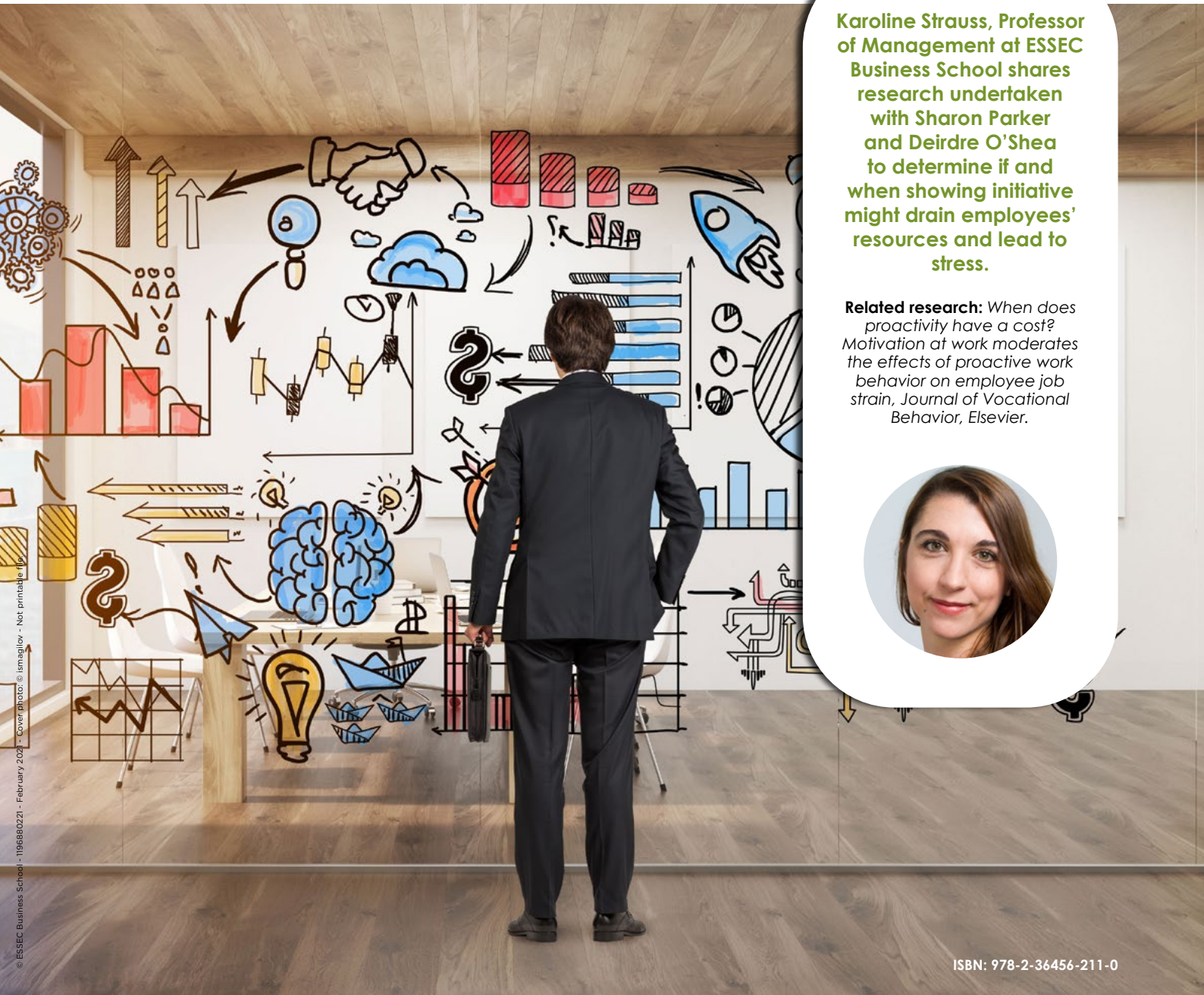
Research Pods© Series

How to Manage Proactivity to Avoid Employee Stress and Strain

Karoline Strauss, Professor of Management at ESSEC Business School shares research undertaken with Sharon Parker and Deirdre O'Shea to determine if and when showing initiative might drain employees' resources and lead to stress.

Related research: *When does proactivity have a cost? Motivation at work moderates the effects of proactive work behavior on employee job strain, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Elsevier.*

An alliance with a purpose

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THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD

PERCEIVE
with a set of key takeaways

PROJECT
with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context

PERFORM
by putting it all into practice using action tips

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Research Pods® Series

- As organizations face uncertainty and rapid change, encouraging a proactive workforce that takes initiative, anticipates changes, contributes to innovation and competitive advantage is critical.

- However, attempting to bring about change in an organisation requires effort, cognitive skills, and commitment. It comes at a cost for employees that can sap their personal resources as outcomes of their efforts are uncertain, because of potential resistance and conflict with others, because of the need to manage one's emotions while trying to stay on course, or because difficult decisions have to be made.

- Individuals are motivated in their work through either controlled and autonomous motivation, or a combination of the two.

- Controlled motivation involves being driven by both external pressures such as gaining rewards or avoiding punishments, and internal pressures such as gaining approval, recognition or avoiding feelings of guilt and shame.

- Autonomous motivation, on the other hand, reflects a sense of interest in, and enjoyment of, an activity, or the value it provides.

- Being proactive can indeed be stressful—but only when employees feel they have to or ought to be proactive (high controlled motivation) and also do not really enjoy it or believe in its value.

Read the full feature article:
https://bit.ly/2N6W0Qo

	High controlled motivation	Low controlled motivation
High autonomous motivation	▶ **No job strain** Benefits of hAM balance hCM Less likely to experience failure and setback ▶ **Likely good performance**	▶ **No job strain** Lower fear of failure Boost in ownership Boost in energy and willpower More aptitude to plan processes More aptitude to set goals ▶ **High performance**
Low autonomous motivation	▶ **Job strain** Likely negative impact on employee wellbeing (loss of motivation, absenteeism, illness) ▶ **Likely poor performance in the long-term**	▶ **No job strain** Lack of focus Lack of motivation Low or minimal effort ▶ **Poor performance**

PROJECT
with food for thought

- Would you consider yourself proactive in your work? To what extent do you believe this proactivity is due to external and internal pressures or genuine (autonomous) self-interest?

- Does your organization actively seek to foster proactivity in its employees? How does it do so?

- How could you help your organization more appropriately foster proactivity in a way that does not increase stress levels? Are there initiatives that you can take in your role to improve your company's efforts?

Thoughts

PERFORM
by putting it all into practice

CHECKLIST

☐ **1. Promote high levels of autonomous motivation** through job design and goal-setting that encourage employees' sense of meaning, competence, impact, and choice.

☐ **2. Analyse how your organization encourages** proactivity and the motivating factors that steer employees from the "have to" to the "want to".

☐ **3. Avoid generating "controlled motivation"** as the positive effects of increased workforce proactivity will be negatively compensated by increased levels of stress.

☐ **4. Set up a monitoring and "alert system"** via your organisation's HRM, Welfare Officer, or Health & Safety Committee to prevent or deal with any cases of undue employee stress or strain.

☐ **5. Consider how you can reduce your own stress** while remaining proactive. How could you find a better path forward with your organisation's leadership?

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