Journal of Applied Psychology
2009, Vol. 94, No. 4, 913–926

0021-9010/09/$12.00 DOI: 10.1037/a0014494

Self-Interest and Other-Orientation in Organizational Behavior: Implications for Job Performance, Prosocial Behavior, and Personal Initiative

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In this article, the authors develop the *self-concern and other-orientation as moderators* hypothesis. The authors argue that many theories on work behavior assume humans to be either self-interested or to be social in nature with strong other-orientation but that this assumption is empirically invalid and may lead to overly narrow models of work behavior. The authors instead propose that self-concern and other-orientation are independent. The authors also propose that job performance, prosocial behavior, and personal initiative are a function of (a) individual-level attributes, such as job characteristics when employees are high in self-concern, and (b) group-level attributes, such as justice climate when employees are high in other-orientation. Three studies involving 4 samples of employees from a variety of organizations support these propositions. Implications are discussed for theory on work behavior and interventions geared toward job enrichment and team-based working.

Keywords: self-interest, prosocial behavior, job performance, personal initiative, justice

Perhaps humans are born with an innate tendency to be concerned with their self-interests, and their primary motive underlying (social) behavior is to safeguard and improve their self-interest. It is not unlikely that this tendency to be concerned with the self is habitual, automatic, and oftentimes exercised without conscious thought. However, this does not exclude alternative, potentially more powerful motives (Miller, 1999). Religious writings of various origins and popularity emphasize the importance of considering other's needs and interests and of taking care of the weak and the poor. The majority of fairytales we tell our children focus on the downsides of blatantly pursuing self-interests and the upsides of considering others' needs and interests. Put differently, across the globe people teach each other the value of considering others' needs and concerns. It is not unlikely that such other-orientation is equally habitual, automatic, and exercised without conscious thought.

That humans are driven by both self-interest and by other motives including other-orientation is an issue that social scientists and philosophers have pondered for many centuries, and it permeates organizational psychology and organizational behavior in a multitude of ways (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2005; De Dreu, 2006; Ferrero, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005; Godfrey, 2005; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004, 2007; Miller, 1999; Rocha & Ghoshal, 2006; Solomon, 2004). For example, work on leadership (Blake & Mouton, 1964) and dispute resolution (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994) distinguishes between concern for self and concern for other, and it shows how these motives alone and in combination drive leader behavior and conflict management. In work on self-construal, self-determination theory, and individualism–collectivism, it is commonly assumed that people view themselves either as independent and autonomous individuals or as interdependent with others (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Applications of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to work motivation indicate that the more people base part of their identity on features and characteristics of their work group or department, the more they are concerned with group welfare and the harder they work to benefit the group (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004).

The Self-Concern and Other-Orientation as Moderators (SCOOM) Hypothesis

In the present study, we build on these and related works to extend the understanding of the functions of self-concern and other-orientation in terms of information-processing tendencies and concomitant implications for work behavior. We develop and test the SCOOM hypothesis. Employees differ in the strength of self-interest motives (self-concern) and, likewise, in the strength of their other-orientation. Self-concern and other-orientation are conceptualized as independent, orthogonal dimensions so that individuals can be high (or low) on one or both dimensions. Self-concern is known to stimulate information search and processing of individual-level attributes and self-relevant consequences, and we suspect that these attributes and consequences thus have stronger relationships with a variety of work behaviors when self-concern is high rather than low. Other-orientation, in contrast, is known to focus information search and processing on group-level attributes,

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This research was financially supported by the Van der Gaag Foundation, and by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research Grant NWO-407.07.701 awarded to Carsten K. W. De Dreu. We thank Guurtje van Sloten and Karolus Kraan for their help in collecting the data.

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social cues, and consequences, and we suspect that these attributes and consequences thus have stronger relationships with a variety of work behaviors when other-orientation is high rather than low. Below, we further develop these ideas and connect them to related research areas. Derivates of the SCOOM hypothesis were tested in four studies with samples of employees and their supervisors representative of a variety of jobs and organizations.

Origins of (Co-)Variations in Self-Concern and Other-Orientation

For quite some time, scholars in both psychology and the organizational sciences assumed self-concern and other-orientation to represent the end points of a bipolar continuum. Even contemporary work on other-orientation assumes that having higher other-orientation implies a lower self-concern (e.g., Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004, 2007). The SCOOM hypothesis proceeds on the basis of a rather different assumption. Building on a growing body of theoretical and empirical work, we suspect that self-concern and other-orientation are orthogonal and independent. Thus, variation in self-concern does not necessarily affect other-orientation and vice versa—someone can be high in self-concern and other-orientation, low in both, or high on one dimension and low on the other.

Some first support for this proposition follows from considering the antecedent conditions of self-concern and other-orientation. Accumulating evidence indicates that variation in self-concern may be due to temperament, socialization, or situational demands and constraints. For example, the more individuals see themselves as independent and autonomous, the more likely they are to have high self-concern (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Likewise, individuals with higher dispositional achievement motivation and a stronger performance orientation may have higher self-concern (e.g., D. C. McClelland, 1985; also see Moon, Kamdar, Mayer, & Takeucki, 2008). In negotiation and conflict, self-concern can be raised by setting higher aspirations (see, e.g., Druckman, 1994), and work on social dilemmas showed that people have higher self-concern when prospective outcomes are framed as losses rather than gains (Brewer & Kramer, 1986). Finally, employees have higher self-concern when they have good rather than bad alternatives to their current job contract (Giebels, De Dreu, & Van de Vliert, 2000; Thau, Bennett, Stahlberg, & Werner, 2004).

As with self-concern, variations in other-orientation may be due to temperament, socialization, or situational demands and constraints; however, importantly, these are quite different from the ones determining self-concern. Thus, the more individuals see themselves as interdependent and part of a social system, the higher their other-orientation will be (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Higher other-orientation is higher among individuals with high concern for others (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987), high dispositional empathy (Batson, 1998), high perspective taking ability (Davis, 1983), and high agreeableness (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996). A meta-analysis by De Dreu, Weingart, and Kwon (2000) further suggests that other-orientation is higher when employees are told that payment depends on how well they do as a group rather than as a person, when they anticipate future interaction with each other, when shared rather than different group membership is emphasized, or when others are friends rather than strangers.

Notwithstanding these arguments and evidence, in situ, self-concern, and other-orientation may be correlated—people working under a *grading on the curve* performance system may develop a high self-concern and a low other-orientation (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). The other way around, specific traits may yield a correlation between self-concern and other-orientation. For example, someone with a chronic prosocial value orientation combines high self-concern with high other-orientation (Nauta, De Dreu, & Van der Vaart, 2002), and conscientious people tend to combine high performance striving (high self-concern) with high duty striving (high other-orientation; Moon, 2001; Moon et al., 2008). Finally, assessment methods may affect the correlation between both dimensions. For example, ipsative methods force a trade-off between values and concerns (M. A. Korsgaard, personal communication, May 2007). Thus, in specific contexts, self-concern and other-orientation may be correlated positively or negatively. Across situations (and studies), however, we expect these two dimensions to be uncorrelated, and the current study provides a first-time opportunity to test this prediction.

Motivated Information Processing

Growing evidence suggests that self-concern and other-orientation not only drive behavior, such as helping, but also impact information processing tendencies (e.g., Camac, 1992; De Dreu, 2007; De Dreu, Beersma, Stroebe, & Euwema, 2006; De Dreu & Boles, 1998; Thompson, 1995; Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2002). Self-concern stimulates the individual to consider personal characteristics and qualities (e.g., competency needs, need for autonomy), personal inputs, and individual outcomes and successes. Other-orientation, in contrast, leads the individual to consider collective (group/organization) characteristics and qualities (e.g., relatedness), joint inputs and outcomes, and collective success (for further elaboration and review, see De Dreu & Carnevale, 2003; De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008).

That self-concern and other-orientation drive employees to focus their information search and processing on self-serving versus group-related cues means that these different cues will be more or less influential in driving work-related cognitions, motivations, and behaviors. Because self-concern focuses information search and processing on self-related information (e.g., individual attributes, preferences, and personal states and desires), task-related cognitions, motives, and behaviors should be influenced more by these self-related cognitions when self-concern is high rather than low.

The biasing effects that self-concern and other-orientation have on information processing have been tested; the implication that self-concern and other-orientation therefore moderate the impact of a variety of environmental cues on organizational behavior has not been tested. The interesting implication is that well-known models of organizational behavior have stronger predictive validity among employees high rather than low in self-concern, whereas other models have stronger predictive validity among employees high rather than low in other-orientation. For example, in the valence–instrumentality–expectancy (VIE) model (e.g., Erez & Isen, 2002; Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996; Vroom, 1964), work motivation is considered to be largely driven by personal outcomes that the individual employee anticipates or receives. Likewise, most need-satisfaction models of job attitudes are "similar to the rational economic man model of decision making, which argues that people make decisions consistent with the extent to which choice alternatives satisfy or do not satisfy their preferences of

self-interests (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977, p. 437). Recent work on task autonomy and work performance takes a similar perspective: "The combination of perceived benefits and costs associated with task autonomy . . . will subsequently affect the motivational effect that such autonomy will have. Giving autonomy to an employee who perceives great benefits and little cost to autonomy is likely to be motivating" (Langfred & Moye, 2004, p. 936). Our reasoning implies that these and similar theoretical propositions are valid among employees high in self-concern more than among those low in self-concern.

Our reasoning also implies that variations in other-orientation do not moderate the predictive power of the above models. Rather, other-orientation is expected to moderate the influence of such group-level constructs as team climate, working relationships, and opinions and beliefs held by others. For example, we know that individuals prefer fair treatment of both oneself and one's colleagues, and we also know that perceived justice climate (Naumann & Bennett, 2000) predicts work-performance (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002) as well as prosocial citizenship behavior (e.g., Liao & Rupp, 2005). We suspect that these relationships will be stronger among employees high rather than low in other-orientation (and variations in self-concern will have little to no moderating impact).

Overview of the Present Study

Figure 1 shows the SCOOM hypothesis in its entirety. Work behavior is operationalized here in terms of the three constructs assessed in the current study—task performance (Studies 1a–1b), prosocial behavior (Study 2), and personal initiative (Study 3). These interrelated work behaviors are all assumed to be a function of both individual-level attributes—such as personal consequences, including pay and prestige and job characteristics (the focus in the current study)—and group-level attributes, such as opinions and beliefs held by colleagues and supervisors or the justice climate (the focus in the current study).[1] Figure 1 further shows that the extent to which individual-level attributes and consequences predict work behavior depends on the strength of someone's self-concern (a proposition tested in Studies 1 and 3), and that the extent to which group-level attributes and consequences predict work behavior depends on the strength of someone's other-orientation (a proposition tested in Studies 2 and 3). Importantly, Figure 1 also shows that other-orientation does not moderate the extent to which individual-level attributes and consequences predict work behavior and, similarly, that self-concern does not moderate the extent to which group-level attributes and consequences predict work behavior (propositions examined in Studies 1–3 and Studies 2–3, respectively).

Before moving on, it is important to note that the SCOOM hypothesis is related to the theory of other-orientation (TOO), which proposes that the higher other-orientation is in employees, the less work motivation and job satisfaction is grounded in rational and deliberate consideration of job characteristics (Korsgaard, Meglino, & Lester, 1996; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). This argument is inconsistent with the SCOOM hypothesis, which predicts the job attributes–job performance relationship to be moderated by self-concern, not by other-orientation. However, in their empirical assessments, Meglino and colleagues (Korsgaard et al., 1996; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004) used ipsative measures of values in which self-concern and other-orientation were traded-off, and it is thus difficult to tell whether effects should be attributed to higher other-orientation, lower self-concern, or perhaps some combination (De Dreu, 2006). Only by taking separate measures of self-concern and other-orientation can we establish whether it is variation in self-concern, or in other-orientation, that moderates the relationship between individual job attributes and work-related outcomes, such as job attitudes and work behaviors.

SCOOM and the Job Attributes–Performance Relationship: Studies 1a–1b

Starting with the classical work by Hackman and Oldham (1975), research has supported the idea that high-quality performance is a function of five "core" job dimensions—skill variety, task identity, task significance, job autonomy, and feedback. In Studies 1a–1b, we expected to replicate this finding, with the exception that we focused on skill variety, job autonomy, and feedback (the type of work and jobs studied in Studies 1a–1b were all quite high and homogeneous in terms of task identity and task significance). However, because job characteristics are individual-level attributes, the SCOOM hypothesis implies that they impact work performance more among individuals high rather than low in self-concern. Put differently, we expect job characteristics (job autonomy, skill variety, feedback) to relate positively to job performance, especially among employees high rather than low in self-concern. Furthermore, and consistent with the SCOOM hypothesis outlined in Figure 1, we did not expect other-orientation to moderate the relationship between job characteristics on the one hand, and job performance on the other.[2]

[1] Our decision to focus on job characteristics as an individual-level attribute and justice climate as a group-level attribute was guided by the desire to remain firmly embedded in existing literatures clearly demonstrating a moderate relationship between these predictors on the one hand, and some relevant indicator of organizational behavior on the other. There are other models and perspectives that we discussed, such as VIE or need satisfaction models of job satisfaction, and there is no particular reason to give priority to one over the other. For an excellent overview of other individual and group-level predictors that may be similarly affected by self-concern and other-orientation, see Chen and Kanfer (2006).

[2] This predicted pattern is similar to the idea that growth need strength moderates the relationship between job attributes and work motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Langfred & Moye, 2004; Loher, Noe, Moeller, & Fitzgerald, 1985; Spector, 1985). More generally, one may wonder how self-concern and other-orientation relate to other constructs in social and organizational psychology, such as growth need strength, in-(ter)dependent self-construal, dispositional agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Pilot testing revealed moderate (no) correlations among self-concern (other-orientation) and independent self-construal, growth need strength, and the achievement component of conscientiousness; likewise, we found moderate (no) correlations among other-orientation (self-concern) and interdependent self-construal, agreeableness, and the duty component of conscientiousness. Thus, both self-concern and other-orientation are related yet distinct from these other constructs. Specifically, self-concern is not the same as growth need strength, and, as far as we know, the moderating effect of growth need strength is not explained in terms of information processing tendencies, as is the moderating influence of self-concern. As such, we suspect (but did not test) that self-concern and growth need strength may have similar effects but through different mechanisms.

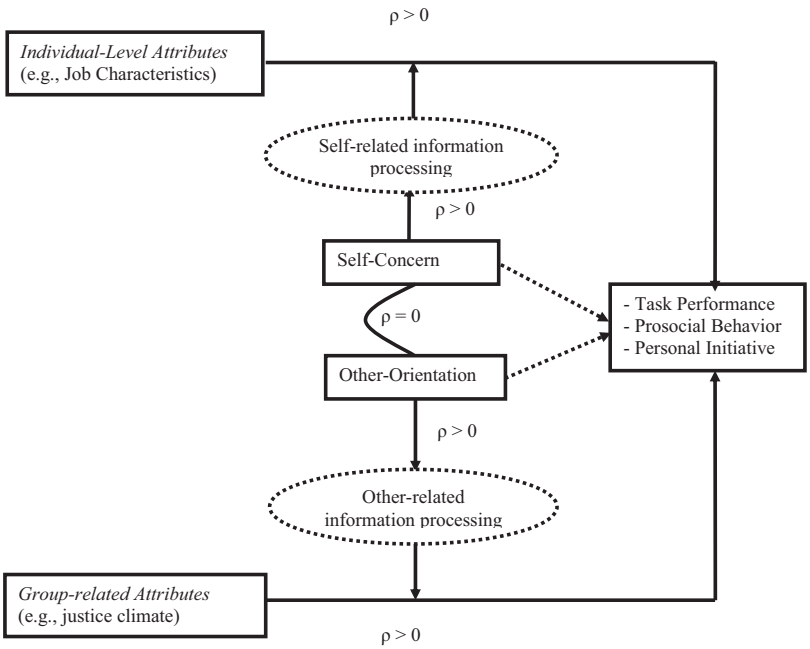

Figure 1. The self-concern and other-orientation as moderators (SCOOM) hypothesis applied to task performance, personal initiative, and prosocial behavior. The dotted lines reflect that self-concern and other-orientation not only influence information processing tendencies but also directly feed into work behavior, such as task performance, personal initiative, and prosocial behavior. Although not of central interest here, and not measured in the current studies, the SCOOM hypothesis allows for the possibility that specific traits and states drive work behavior through their influence on self-concern and other-orientation.

Method

Participants and procedure. In Study 1a, we approached members of an online research panel of a market research agency (PanelClix, see www.panelclix.com) who had indicated that they supervised people at work (N = 1,525). They were asked by e-mail to participate in a research project on employment relations funded by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Spring 2005). The sample was representative for the Dutch labor force. Potential respondents were asked whether they were willing to invite one of their employees to fill out a comparable questionnaire. They were assured that the employee would not get any information about their own answers nor would they be able to see their employee's answers (both here and in subsequent studies, we ensured no employees shared the same supervisor, thus guaranteeing statistical independence). This resulted in a total of 144 supervisor–employee dyads.[3] Sixty-five employees and 35 supervisors were female. Employees averaged 34.42 years of age (SD = 10.02), and supervisors averaged 39.04 years of age (SD = 9.35). Employees (supervisors) were in their current job for an average of 5.22 years (SD = 7.43).

In Study 1b, a total of 250 supervisors and their employees employed within the health care industry were invited by their human resources (HR) director to participate in a survey on employee–employer relationships. Following this initial contact, the employee and supervisor were asked to independently fill out a paper–pencil questionnaire and to return it within 2 weeks to the researchers using a prestamped envelope. Up to a maximum of three e-mail reminders were sent in the following 4 weeks. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. Counting only those in which both employee and supervisor responded, the total response rate was 57%. Excluding cases with more than 10% missing values slightly reduced the sample to N = 129 employees (79 men) and N = 129 supervisors (102 men). Employee–supervisor pairs worked in small (<100 employees; 26%) or relatively large (>100 employees; 74%) organizations. The employees averaged 39 years of age (SD = 9.82); 33% had a high school degree, and 28% had a university degree. They had an average job tenure of 8 years (SD = 6.67), and they worked with their direct supervisor for an average of 3.22 years (SD = 2.89). As is quite typical in this industry, and within Dutch society, 33% of the employees worked full-time, and 67% of the employees worked part-time. Most respondents performed jobs that involved working with people (e.g., clients, patients; 53%) or administration (25.4%).

Materials. In both studies, we used the same materials. All measures used 5-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). *Self-concern* was assessed with the following items: "at work . . . I am concerned about my own needs and interests/my personal

[3] The net response rate thus is 9%, which is low. However, a much higher percentage agreed to proceed, but we were unable to locate their employees, or we did not obtain a response. It thus is difficult to assess nonresponse. Because in Study 1b (self-)selection bias is less of a problem, yet similar patterns of results were obtained, we assume this specific procedure and resulting low response rate not to be a validity threat.

goals and aspirations are important to me/I consider my own wishes and desires to be relevant." *Other-orientation* was assessed with "at work . . . I am concerned about the needs and interests of others such as my colleagues/the goals and aspirations of colleagues are important to me/I consider others' wishes and desires to be relevant." Job characteristics were assessed with three items each, modeled after the original Job Diagnostic Survey. Sample items included the following: "The work activities provide direct and clear information about the effectiveness (e.g., quality and quantity) of my job performance" (feedback); "The job requires me to use a number of complex or high-level skills" (skill variety); and "The job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work" (job autonomy). Finally, we included several control variables. Respondent sex was included to account for the possibility that men and women differ in their self-concern and other-orientation. Job tenure was included to account for the possibility that longer job tenure may come with different jobs and variation in job characteristics. In both studies, exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analyses provided support for discriminant validity and revealed that the two concern dimensions and the three job attribute dimensions were assessed as intended. Further details can be obtained from Carsten K. W. De Dreu.

Job performance was rated by the employee's direct supervisor on a three-item scale: (1) "Does this employee's performance match the organization's standards and requirements?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *beyond call of duty*); (2) "Have you had, in the past year, problems with this employee regarding his or her performance?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much so*; reverse coded); and (3) "Please rate this employee's performance in the past 4 weeks" (1 = *very poor*, 7 = *excellent*). Ratings were averaged into one job performance index.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics. The few missing values were replaced by the scale mean. Table 1 gives descriptive statistics for Study 1a and Study 1b (below and above the diagonal). It shows that self-concern and other-orientation are moderately and positively correlated, and that job autonomy consistently correlated with supervisor ratings of job performance.

SCOOM. We tested predictions using moderated multiple regressions; we centered predictor variables on the mean, and we interpreted interaction effects by testing for simple slopes at ±1 standard deviation from the mean. Supervisor ratings of job performance served as the dependent variable. In Step 1, control variables (employee's gender, job tenure, age) were included. In Step 2, we entered main effects for job attributes (autonomy, skill variety, feedback) and self-concern and other-orientation. In Step 3, we entered interactions among job attributes on the one hand, and other-orientation on the other hand, as well as the interactions among job attributes on the one hand, and self-concern on the other. (We explored whether including other two-way interactions and all possible three-way interactions altered the results and conclusions. This was not the case.)

Final regression results are summarized in Table 2. In Study 1a (left-hand column), the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .21$, $F(14, 129) = 2.42$, $p < .05$. The control variables in Step 1 did not account for a significant proportion of the variance, $R^2 = .01$, $F(3, 129) < 1$, *ns*. However, the main effects in Step 2 did, $\Delta R^2 = .12$, $F(5, 129) = 4.02$, $p < .025$. Table 2 shows that this effect was due to job autonomy and feedback. Step 3 explained further variance, $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $F(6, 129) = 2.29$, $p < .04$. Table 2 shows that this is primarily due to the significant interactions among job autonomy and self-concern, and skill variety and self-concern (as well as the unanticipated interaction among other-orientation and skill variety; this was not replicated in Study 1b and is ignored). Simple slopes analyses showed that as job autonomy increases, supervisor ratings of job performance are higher, especially among employees with high self-concern, $B = 0.27$, $t = 2.28$, $p < .025$. When employees are low in self-concern, there is no relationship between job autonomy and job performance, $B = 0.01$, $t < 1$, $p > .89$. Further, as skill variety increases, supervisor ratings of job performance tend to be higher, especially among employees with high self-concern, $B = 0.10$, $t = 1.64$, $p < .051$ (one-tailed). When employees are low in self-concern, skill variety did not predict job performance, $B = -0.05$, $t < 1$, $p > .40$.

Turning to Study 1b, a similar pattern of results emerged (see right-hand column in Table 2). The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .23$, $F(14, 115) = 2.43$, $p < .005$. The control variables in Step 1 did not explain a significant proportion of the variance, $R = .023$, $F(3, 115) = 1.19$, *ns*. However, the main effects in Step 2 did, $\Delta R^2 = .09$, $F(5, 115) = 2.81$, $p < .020$. This was due to job autonomy. Step 3 explained a significant proportion of the variance, $\Delta R^2 = .09$, $F(6, 115) = 3.26$, $p < .025$. Table 2 shows that this is due to the significant interactions among job autonomy and self-concern, and among skill variety and self-concern. Figure 2 (top panel) shows that among employees with high self-concern, increases in job autonomy associate with higher supervisor ratings of job performance, $B = 0.93$, $t = 3.13$, $p < .001$. When employees are low in self-concern, there is no relationship between job autonomy and job performance, $B = 0.19$,

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics (Studies 1a–1b)

Variable	M_{1a}	SD_{1a}	M_{1b}	SD_{1b}	α_{1a}	α_{1b}	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-concern	3.67	0.62	3.11	0.69	.81	.82	—	.25**	.04	−.07	−.02	.04
2. Other-orientation	3.86	0.63	2.97	0.63	.79	.87	.37**	—	.09	.06	.05	.10
3. Feedback	3.88	0.38	4.32	0.22	.69	.69	.26**	.33**	—	.14*	.21**	−.01
4. Skill variety	3.24	0.79	3.66	0.49	.78	.83	.32**	.10	.02	—	−.02	−.02
5. Job autonomy	3.94	0.81	3.21	0.53	.81	.79	.46****	.38****	.38****	.21**	—	.26**
6. Job performance[a]	5.05	0.56	2.11	0.87	.76	.90	.15*	.19**	.29**	.06	.25**	—

Note. $N = 144$ in Study 1a; $N = 129$ in Study 1b. Correlations in Study 1a are below the diagonal; correlations in Study 1b are above the diagonal.
[a] Supervisor ratings.
* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. **** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Regression of Job Performance on Job Attributes, Self-Concern (SC), Other-Orientation (OO), and Their Interactions (Studies 1a–1b)

	Study 1a			Study 1b		
Step	*B*	*t*	ΔR^2	*B*	*t*	ΔR^2
Step 1						
Age	0.002	<1	.01	−0.21	−1.19	.023
Gender	0.06	<1		0.06	<1	
Job tenure	0.00	6 < 1		0.03	1.56	
Step 2						
SC	−0.04	<1	.12****	−0.03	<1	.10****
OO	0.03	<1		0.00	<1	
Feedback	0.16	2.50****		0.44	1.19	
Skill variety	0.02	<1		0.22	1.06	
Job autonomy	0.14	1.96**		0.86	2.89****	
Step 3						
Feedback × OO	0.03	<1	.12****	−0.67	−1.01	.09**
Skill Variety × OO	−0.22	−2.68****		−0.40	<1	
Job Autonomy × OO	−0.09	<1		0.53	1.22	
Feedback × SC	0.07	<1		0.10	<1	
Skill Variety × SC	0.20	2.40****		0.87	1.85**	
Job Autonomy × SC	0.21	1.96**		1.15	2.33****	

Note. $N = 144$ in Study 1a; $N = 129$ in Study 1b.
** $p < .05$. **** $p < .01$.

$t < 1$, $p > .65$. Figure 2 (bottom panel) shows that, likewise, as skill variety increases, job performance is higher among employees with high self-concern, $B = 0.69$, $t = 2.18$, $p < .031$. When employees are low in self-concern, skill variety did not predict job performance, $B = -0.23$, $t < 1$, $p > .53$.

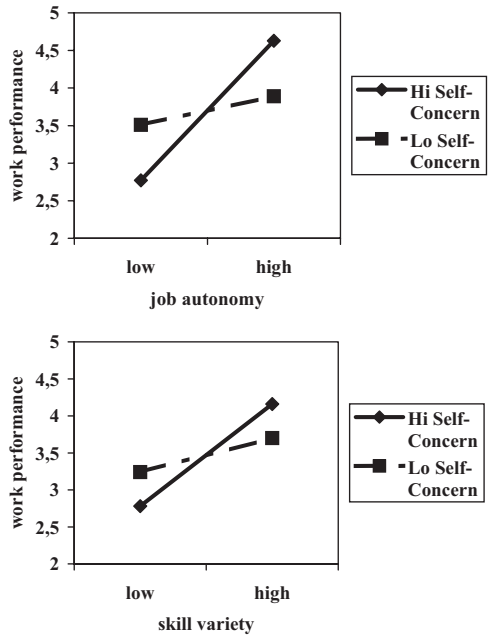

Figure 2. Regression of job autonomy (top panel) and skill variety (bottom panel) on task-performance for individuals with high (Hi; +1 *SD*) versus low (Lo; −1 *SD*) self-concern in Study 1b.

Together, across both studies there is support for the SCOOM hypothesis that job attributes such as autonomy and skill variety predict performance better among employees with high self-concern than among employees with low self-concern. That effects for feedback were not moderated by self-concern may be due to restriction of range, which reduces the likelihood of detecting moderators (also see Table 1). In general, and also consistent with SCOOM, other-orientation did not interact with job attributes (the exception being the interaction with skill variety in Study 1a, but this was not replicated in Study 1b). Thus, overall, Studies 1a and 1b provide good support for the SCOOM hypothesis.

It is important to emphasize that although self-concern has a similar moderating effect as growth need strength in Hackman and Oldham's (1975) model on job characteristics, growth need strength and self-concern are not the same, and the mechanisms underlying their moderating effect may be quite different (see also Footnote 2). Future work is needed to more fully uncover the similarities and differences between self-concern and growth need strength. Here at least we can conclude that apart from providing new evidence for some of the main effect predictions in Hackman and Oldham's model, Study 1 contributes the new insight that variations in other-orientation do not moderate the relationship between job characteristics and work performance. Although not part of the job characteristics model, it is consistent with the SCOOM hypothesis.

Study 2: Other-Orientation Moderates Climate–Prosocial Behavior Relations

Study 1 did not provide a test of the notion that other-orientation moderates the impact of group-level rather than individual-level attributes and characteristics. It is precisely this notion that was the focus of Study 2. Whereas the SCOOM hypothesis and related notions—such as the TOO—have been tested, thus far with regard

to job attitudes (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2007) and job performance (current Study 1), the model has implications for other forms of organizational behavior as well. One example is prosocial behavior at work. Often seen as a form of organizational citizenship behavior, prosocial behavior at work is discretionary and voluntary in that it is not explicated in a job contract (Borman & Motowidlow, 1993). It encompasses a range of activities, including helping coworkers (e.g., calling attention to a potential error, sharing supplies), protecting the organization (e.g., reporting a fire hazard, alerting security to a suspicious individual), and spreading goodwill (e.g., telling friends about how happy one is to work for one's company; George & Brief, 1992).

Prosocial behavior is a function of many different variables, some residing at the individual level and some residing at the group level (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005).[4] Of particular interest in the current context is recent work demonstrating that prosocial behavior at work is positively related to the justice climate within the employee's work unit or organization. Justice climate is defined as a cognition regarding how fairly people within one's team, unit, or organization are treated (Colquitt et al., 2002; Mossholder, Bennett, & Martin, 1998; Naumann & Bennett, 2000; Roberson, 2006). Consistent with the relational model of justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988), work has shown that the more employees perceive others being treated just and with respect and dignity, the more inclined they are to perform prosocial behavior (e.g., Ehrhart, 2004; Liao & Rupp, 2005; Naumann & Bennett, 2000). However, in terms of the SCOOM hypothesis, this relationship between perceived justice climate and prosocial behavior should be stronger among employees with high rather than low other-orientation. When other-orientation is high, employees are particularly likely to attend to and process the way others are treated, and thus they are more likely to be influenced by it.[5]

Method

Participants and procedure. We employed the same procedure as in Study 1b, except that employees and supervisors in the service industry were approached. A total of 287 employees and their direct supervisors were invited to participate. Counting only those in which both employee and supervisor responded, the total response rate was 45% (N = 128 employees [63 men], and N = 128 supervisors [85 men]). The employees averaged 42 years of age (SD = 9.21), and 37% had a university degree. They had an average job tenure of 6 months (SD = 3.21), and they worked with their direct supervisor for an average of 3.22 months (SD = 3.11).

Materials. Self-concern and other-orientation were measured as before (Cronbach's αs > .79). Perceived justice climate was assessed with five items based on past work on justice climate (e.g., "key players in this organization are open and trustworthy"; "colleagues and supervisors are honest and fair"; and "people in this organization are fairly treated"; 1 = *fully disagree*, 5 = *fully agree*; α = .79). Prosocial behavior was assessed by asking supervisors to rate their employee on four items derived from Moorman and Blakely (1995), including (1) "voluntarily do things beyond call of duty"; (2) "help colleagues to solve work-related problems"; and (3) "serve and protect the reputation of our organization" (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *certainly*). As before, principal component analysis and confirmatory factor analysis supported discriminant validity; Carsten K. W. De Dreu can provide more detail.

Results

Treatment of the data and descriptive statistics. Occasional missing values were replaced by the scale mean. Table 3 shows that self-concern and other-orientation were not correlated but that they both were moderately correlated with perceived justice climate. Interestingly, perceived justice climate, self-concern, and other-orientation were not correlated with supervisor reports of prosocial behavior.

Test of hypotheses. The analytical procedure was the same as before; control variables were employee's age, gender, job tenure, and weekly working hours. Results revealed a marginally significant overall regression model, R^2 = .10, $F(7, 120) = 1.72$, $p < .10$ (see also Table 4). Neither the control variables in Step 1 nor the main effects in Step 2 accounted for a significant proportion of the variance, ΔR^2 = .021, $F(2, 120) = 1.42$, $p < .24$, and ΔR^2 = .03, $F(3, 120) = 1.78$, $p < .16$, respectively. This notwithstanding, inspection of the regression weights showed that other-orientation related positively to supervisor ratings of prosocial behavior, B = 0.21, $t = 2.26$, $p < .025$. Furthermore, the interactions between perceived justice climate, self-concern, and other-orientation entered in Step 3 explained additional variance, ΔR^2 = .05, $F(2, 120) = 3.37$, $p < .05$. Inspection of the regression weights in Table 4 revealed a nonsignificant effect from the Self-Concern × Perceived Justice Climate interaction, $B = -0.06$, $t < 1$, *ns*, and a significant Other-Orientation × Justice Climate interaction, B = 0.39, $t = 2.37$, $p < .025$. Figure 3 shows that perceived justice climate predicted prosocial behavior among employees with high other-orientation, $B = 0.25$, $t = 2.15$, $p < .033$, but not among employees with low other-orientation, $B = -0.19$, $t = -1.07$, *ns*.

Study 3: Job Characteristics, Justice Climate, and Personal Initiative

Studies 1 and 2 support the SCOOM hypothesis, and the evidence is consistent across different samples, measures, and methods. However, a limitation is that in each case, a study provided positive evidence for only part of the model. In essence, however, the SCOOM hypothesis holds that work behavior is a function of

[4] Because prosocial behavior may or may not serve personal interests, it may or may not be driven by such self-concerns. Thus, people may perform prosocial acts because it somehow serves their personal interests and/or because they "simply can," because they feel morally compelled, or because they are genuinely concerned with the potential beneficiaries. As such, one may expect a positive relationship between self-concern and prosocial behavior, as well as a positive relationship between other-orientation and prosocial behavior.

[5] It may be important to distinguish between individual perceptions of features and characteristics of their group, work unit, or organization on the one hand, and the shared perceptions within a group, work unit, or organization of these group attributes on the other (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Whereas the SCOOM hypothesis applies, in principle, to both individual perceptions of the group and shared representations of group attributes, only the former is presently examined. The analytic focus here thus is at the individual level, and conclusions do not necessarily generalize to group-level (or cross-level) influences.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics (Study 2)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Self-concern	2.98	0.81	.80			
2. Other-orientation	3.11	0.76	.06	.83		
3. Perceived justice climate	4.00	0.87	.28****	.27****	.79	
4. Prosocial behavior[a]	3.71	0.74	−.07	−.06	.04	.76

Note. Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) are on the diagonal; $N = 128$.
[a] Supervisor ratings.
**** $p < .01$.

both individual attributes (such as job characteristics) and group attributes (such as perceived justice climate). We designed Study 3 to test the hypothesis in full. In addition, we focused on a criterion that is intermediate between job performance and prosocial behavior, namely personal initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001). Personal initiative is defined as proactive, self-starting, persisting behaviors that workers enact to achieve work goals (Frese & Fay, 2001). Taking initiatives may lead to better working conditions, better functioning machineries, and more efficient work processes, which should facilitate job performance. Indeed, there is reason to expect job characteristics to relate to the emergence of personal initiative. Fay and Kamps (2006) used data from more than 300 individuals on perceptions of work characteristics (job control, complexity, task completeness, prescription of one-best-way of doing the job) and found that individuals who held jobs characterized by high complexity, task completeness, and control displayed more personal initiative. Along similar lines, one could argue that jobs characterized by high skill variety and high job autonomy are more likely to give rise to personal initiatives than jobs lacking these motivating characteristics. In other words, we expected personal initiative to be a positive function of skill variety and job autonomy. However, in keeping with the SCOOM hypothesis, we also expected these relations to be stronger for individuals with high self-concern.

Table 4
Regression of Prosocial Behavior on Perceived Justice Climate (PJC), Self-Concern (SC), Other-Orientation (OO), and Their Interactions (Study 2)

Step	*B*	*t*	ΔR^2
Step 1			.02
Gender	0.36	1.64*	
Age	−0.01	<1	
Tenure	0.04	<1	
Working hours per week	0.01	<1	
Step 2			.03
SC	−0.14	−1.34	
OO	0.21	2.26***	
PJC	−0.01	<1	
Step 3			.05
PJC × SC	−0.06	<1	
PJC × OO	0.39	2.37***	

Note. $N = 128$.
* $p < .10$. *** $p < .025$.

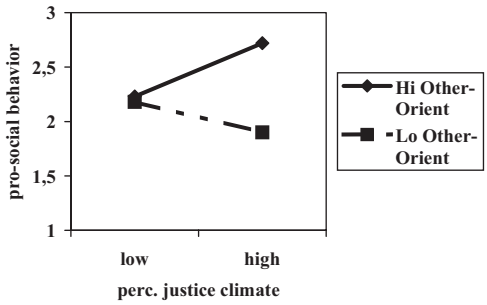

Figure 3. Regression of prosocial behavior on perceived (perc.) justice climate when other-orientation (Other-Orient) is high (Hi; +1 *SD*) versus low (Lo; −1 *SD*) in Study 2.

Personal initiative is not only a function of individual-level attributes, such as job characteristics. Consistent with Study 2, and the idea that perceived justice climate not only motivates prosocial behavior but also task-performance (Colquitt et al., 2002), we expected personal initiative to be a function of perceived justice climate (cf. Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, our SCOOM hypothesis further suggests that the positive relationship between perceived justice climate and personal initiative should be stronger among employees with high, rather than with low, other-orientation.

Method

Participants and procedure. We approached by e-mail a total of 1,534 members of the PanelClix online research panel (see Study 1) and asked them to participate in a research funded by TNO (Netherlands Institute for Applied Research) to examine HR practices and self-management. After 1 week, a reminder was sent to 404 members who had not opened the link. Three weeks later, 1,043 members had filled out the questionnaire (68% response). We excluded those whose job was described as "freelancer" or "self-employed," who had more than 10% missing values, or who fell two standard deviations below the average time-on-task (thus completing the survey exceedingly fast). The final sample size was $N = 854$ (415 men). Age ranged between 20 and 64 years, with 78% of the sample being between 25 and 54 years of age. Over 26% had a university degree, 51% had received vocational training, and the remaining 23% had received lower level (mostly technical or administrative) training. The majority of the respondents (78%) had a tenured position, and 20% had managerial responsibilities. The type of jobs involved included production (17%), administration (28%), sales-related activity (15%), or policy consulting and research (8%). Of the members, 50% worked in organizations with more than 100 employees.

Materials. All materials were the same as before, except the assessment of personal initiative, which was modeled after Fay and Kamps (2006). The scale has eight items, including "I immediately take initiatives, even when my colleagues don't do so"; "I am actively searching for possibilities to improve my work situation"; and "I tend to do more than is required of me" (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much so*).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics. Table 5 gives the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations. Given the large sample size, most correlations are significant. However, focusing on those of at least moderate strength ($r > .30$) shows that self-concern and other-orientation are moderately correlated, and that both concerns are positively related to both individual-level job characteristics and to perceived justice climate. This confirms the patterns found before. Also, both predictor variables (job autonomy, skill variety, and justice climate) and moderator variables (self-concern and other-orientation) are positively related to personal initiative. Importantly, correlations are moderate at best, indicating that common-method variance is not a critical problem (Spector, 2006).

Hypotheses tests. We expected that personal initiative is a function of job autonomy and skill variety, especially among employees with high self-concern (Studies 1a–1b), and of justice climate, especially among employees with high other-orientation (Study 2). A moderated multiple regression was computed, with personal initiative as the dependent variable. In Step 1, we entered control variables (gender, age, time-on-task), and in Step 2, we entered main effects for job autonomy, skill variety, justice climate, self-concern, and other-orientation. In Step 3, we entered the interactions among job autonomy and self-concern, skill variety and self-concern, and justice climate and self-concern, as well as the interactions among job autonomy and other-orientation, skill variety and other-orientation, and justice climate and other-orientation. (As before, we explored the effects of further adding higher order interactions, but this did not influence results.)

The overall regression model explained a significant amount of variance in personal initiative, $R^2 = .51$, $F(14, 840) = 61.79$, $p < .001$. The control variables in Step 1 explained some variance, $\Delta R^2 = .005$, $F(3, 840) = 2.85$, $p < .05$: Longer time-on-task was associated with lower scores on personal initiative. Step 2 explained additional variance, $\Delta R^2 = .459$, $F(5, 840) = 156.45$, $p < .001$. Table 6 shows that except for justice climate, all other main effects were positively and significantly related to personal initiative.

Consistent with our findings in Study 2, the interactions with self-concern and other-orientation in Step 3 led to a significant increase in explained variance, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(6, 840) = 3.16$, $p < .005$. Table 6 shows that personal initiative is a function of the interaction between job autonomy and self-concern, and between skill variety and self-concern, but not of the interaction between justice climate and self-concern. Figure 4 (top panel) shows that job autonomy was related to personal initiative more when employees were high in self-concern, $B = 0.61$, $t = 6.13$, $p < .001$, than when they were low in self-concern, $B = 0.21$, $t = 2.36$, $p < .018$. Likewise, Figure 4 (bottom panel) shows that skill variety was related to personal initiative more when employees were high in self-concern, $B = 0.35$, $t = 11.45$, $p < .001$, than when they were low in self-concern, $B = 0.18$, $t = 1.69$, $p < .10$.

Table 6
Regression of Personal Initiative on Job Attributes, Perceived Justice Climate (PJC), Self-Concern (SC), Other-Orientation (OO), and Their Interactions (Study 3)

Step	*B*	*t*	ΔR^2
Step 1			.005
Gender	0.036	<1	
Age	−0.27	−1.69*	
Time-on-task	−0.13	−2.23**	
Step 2			.46
SC	0.17	6.52***	
OO	0.24	8.17***	
Job autonomy	0.11	5.88***	
Skill variety	0.29	12.81***	
PJC	0.04	1.58	
Step 3			.011
Job Autonomy × SC	0.06	2.53***	
Skill Variety × SC	0.08	2.64***	
PJC × SC	0.02	<1	
Job Autonomy × OO	0.01	<1	
Skill Variety × OO	−0.04	−1.61	
PJC × OO	0.05	1.97**	

Note. $N = 854$.
* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .025$.

Table 6 shows that other-orientation did not moderate the effects of job autonomy and of skill variety. However, the interaction between perceived justice climate and other-orientation was significant—Figure 5 shows that perceived justice climate related to personal initiative among people high in other-orientation, $B = 0.07$, $t = 2.46$, $p < .014$, but not among those low in other-orientation, $B = 0.003$, $t < 1$, *ns*.

Taken together, the results of Study 3 provide new support for the SCOOM hypothesis. We found that self-concern moderates the relationship between job characteristics and personal initiative, and that other-orientation moderates the relationship between perceived justice climate and personal initiative. Most important is, however, that we showed these relationships within one and the

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics (Study 3)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-concern	3.11	0.79	.82					
2. Other-orientation	2.89	0.76	.34	.76				
3. Job autonomy	3.46	1.07	.23	.22	.73			
4. Skill variety	3.75	0.98	.33	.43	.35	.81		
5. Perceived justice climate	4.14	0.98	.10	.30	.25	.39	.77	
6. Personal initiative	3.88	0.72	.45	.49	.39	.60	.25	.76

Note. Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) are on the diagonal; correlations > .12 are significant at $p < .001$ ($N = 854$).

same sample, thus supporting our contention that one construct (e.g., personal initiative) may be a function of both individual-level attributes (when self-concern is high) and of group-level attributes (when other-orientation is high).

Conclusions and General Discussion

With self-interest and self-concern being such powerful and omnipresent motivational drivers of human endeavors, we may sometimes overlook that other equally powerful motives, including other-orientation, play a role as well. This notwithstanding, many theories and models of work behavior incorporate, one way or the other, the idea that human behavior is driven by self-concern as well as by broader concerns, including other-orientation (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Deci & Ryan, 1985; De Dreu, 2006; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). In the present article, we built on previous analyses around motivated information processing (e.g., De Dreu et al., 2008) and developed and tested the SCOOM hypothesis. Our studies support five core propositions: (1) self-concern and other-orientation are independent constructs; (2) variation in self-concern moderates the relationship between individual-level attributes such as job characteristics on the one hand, and task performance and personal initiative on the other; (3) variation in other-orientation does not moderate the effects of these variables;[6] (4) variation in other-orientation moderates the relationship between group-level attributes such as perceived justice climate on the one hand, and prosocial behavior and personal initiative on the other; and (5) variation in self-concern does not moderate the effects of these variables.

Implications for Theory and Avenues for Future Research

Our first proposition was that self-concern and other-orientation are independent and orthogonal dimensions. First, as we have been harping on, self-concern moderates effects not influenced by other-orientation, and vice versa. Second, across studies we found weak to moderate correlations between these two measures. This may reflect a social desirability tendency for people to rate other-orientation higher than it really is. However, close inspection of the means and standard deviations for other-orientation shows it is not much higher than those for self-concern, which renders a social desirability bias somewhat less plausible. In fact, it may well be that across work settings people see their own personal goals to be moderately and positively linked to those of their colleagues, and to some extent the positive correlation between self-concern and other-orientation may reflect either enlightened self-interest, genuine concern for one's colleagues, or some combination. In addition, the positive correlation may point to the presence of some latent variable, most likely something similar to "level of engagement." Further work would be useful to fully understand the meaning of this relationship.

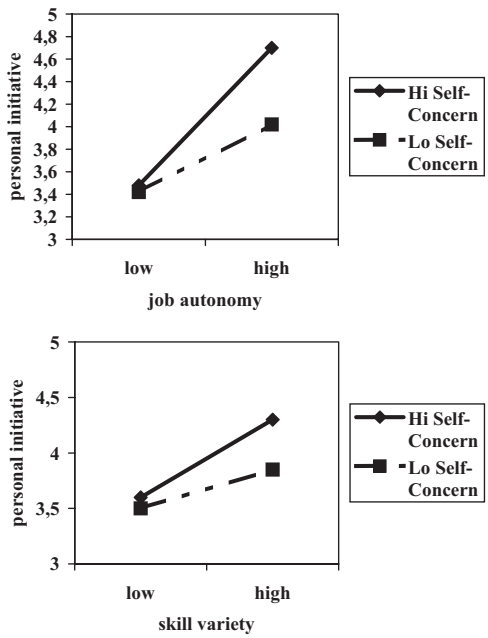

Figure 4. Regression of personal initiative on job autonomy (top panel) and skill variety (bottom panel) when self-concern is high (Hi; +1 *SD*) versus low (Lo; −1 *SD*) in Study 3.

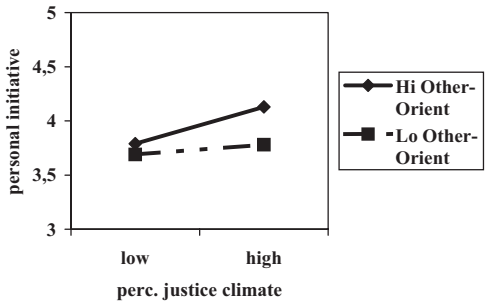

Figure 5. Regression of personal initiative on perceived (perc.) justice climate when other-orientation (Other Orient) is high (Hi; +1 *SD*) versus low (Lo; −1 *SD*) in Study 3.

To understand when and why self-concern and other-orientation do correlate, either positively or negatively, Deutsch's (1973) theory of cooperation and competition may provide a useful starting point. In this theory, a distinction is made between three types of goal interdependence. People may perceive own and other's goals to be positively linked, in which case a positive correlation between self-concern and other-orientation is to be expected. Alternatively, people may perceive own and other's goals to be negatively linked, in which case a negative correlation between self-concern and other-orientation is to be expected. Finally, people may perceive own and other's goals to be independent, in which case no correlation between self-concern and other-orientation is to be expected. Positive goal interdependence, or cooperation, is more likely when there are collective rather than personal incentives, when there is a cooperative climate, when there are abundant resources, when people expect to work together in the future, and so on. Negative goal interdependence, or competition, is more likely when there are personal, or even relative incentives (as in "grading on the curve"), when there is a competitive climate, when there is resource scarcity, and so on.

[6] The exception was a significant interaction between skill variety and other-orientation in Study 1a. This interaction effect was not predicted or replicated in Study 1b or Study 3 and, thus, most likely was due to a Type I error.

Two other issues with regard to self-concern and other-orientation require some attention. First, we argued that each concern could be both trait-based and state-based. In the current studies, however, we measured self-concern and other-orientation without knowing whether these measures tap into short-lived states, more enduring traits, or some combination. Clearly, more research is needed to settle this issue, although the above discussion of Deutsch's (1973) theory of interdependence structures suggests that self-concern and other-orientation may at least refer to states at work. Second, we did not deal with the long-standing question whether other-orientation is, in the final analysis, nothing more than instrumental to self-interest or, alternatively, an end-state in and of itself. Answering this question is beyond the scope of this article and perhaps even beyond our skill and ability. Without denying its importance, we wish to note that with regard to the SCOOM hypothesis, the question is of lesser relevance. The present studies, along with many others, clearly show that other-orientation matters and has effects different from those triggered by self-concern. Future research could investigate, however, whether other-orientation stemming from instrumental self-concern has similar, or different, effects than other-orientation less clearly tied to instrumental self-concern (Gillespie & Greenberg, 2005; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002).

Our propositions were well supported by our data and have several implications for core theories in organizational psychology. First of all, we add to the job characteristic model and related notions by showing that the motivating effect of job characteristics is particularly strong when employees are self-concerned (Langfred & Moye, 2004; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2007). Importantly, however, Studies 1 and 3 also revealed that other-orientation has little to do with the motivating effect of job characteristics. Put differently, we now know why task autonomy and skill variety are not the answer for everyone. If organizations wish to benefit from investments in job enrichment, they need to increase employee self-concern and concomitant focus on self-relevant information. Second, we add to accumulating work on justice climate by showing that it matters more to those employees with high rather than low other-orientation, and that variations in self-concern have little to do with the relationship between justice climate and, for example, prosocial behavior at work. If organizations wish to increase prosocial behavior among their employees, they may achieve this by establishing a climate in which people are treated fairly and with respect. However, our results show that such interventions are particularly likely to affect those employees with high other-orientation.

Models of work behavior assuming either self-interest, or other-orientation, are too narrow and only address half of the picture. Our results clarify that at work both self-concern and other-orientation play a role, albeit in varying degrees across individuals and situations. Task-performance, prosocial behavior, and personal initiative are a function of (a) individual-level attributes, such as job characteristics when employees are high in self-concern, and (b) group-level attributes, such as justice climate when employees are high in other-orientation. We believe that the SCOOM hypothesis adds to what practitioners often come across when they try to implement measures based on OB studies, such as granting employees more task autonomy or implementing self-managing teams. Often these organizational changes fail and meet with unexpected problems. For example, the implementation of self-managing teams often fails and employees continue working alone and individually. Resistance to change and poor implementation procedures may provide viable explanations for such failures. However, it may well be that implementing team work fails because a majority of employees score low on other-orientation and hence they do not benefit from these group-level interventions. Thus, Grant (2008) showed that the effects of task significance (an individual-level job characteristic) can be bolstered by explicit reference to the job's social consequences to other people. This works, however, for people with prosocial values more than for those who lack such values.

TOO and Motivated Information Processing

At the outset, we mentioned some differences between the SCOOM hypothesis and the TOO developed by Meglino and his colleagues (e.g., Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004, 2007). First, the current perspective assumes that self-concern and other-orientation are independent constructs, whereas the TOO assumes these two to be antagonistic (at least in most situations; see Meglino & Korsgaard, 2007). We believe the current research, as well as other work (for a review, see De Dreu, 2006), favors an independence assumption. Second, and more important, is that the SCOOM hypothesis assumes self-concern but not other-orientation to moderate relationships between individual-level variables such as job attributes on the one hand, and task motivation and performance on the other. The TOO assumes, however, that it is other-orientation that moderates this relationship, and research seems to support this proposition (e.g., Korsgaard et al., 1996; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2007). As mentioned, this research relied on ipsative methods in which self-concern and other-orientation are necessarily traded-off, and any evidence for (higher) other-orientation as moderator could be interpreted as equally sound evidence for (lower) self-concern as moderator (De Dreu, 2006). At the very least, the current research renders more plausible the latter interpretation.

The SCOOM hypothesis derives in part from work on motivated information processing in groups (De Dreu et al., 2008). Core in this work is the idea that social motives drive information processing and search. Self-concern and other-orientation combine into particular social motives—high self-concern with low other-orientation is typically referred to as a proself motivation, and a high self-concern with high other-orientation is typically referred to as prosocial motivation (De Dreu, 2006; De Dreu et al., 2008; Van Lange, 1999). A critical assumption in studies on motivated information processing is that related constructs—such as in(ter)dependent self-construal, individualism–collectivism, and dispositional agreeableness—all have the same biasing effect on information search and processing. The current study can neither support nor disconfirm this core idea, and future work is needed to see whether these related constructs indeed drive individuals toward or away from individual-level or group-level attributes and cues. Such future work could additionally examine whether self-concern and other-orientation explain variance over and beyond these related constructs. If true, SCOOM may turn out to be an important building block in a more general theory of (social) motivation in work settings.

Study Limitations and Conclusions

Across studies, we surveyed a large number of employees and their supervisors coming from a variety of industries (e.g., health care, service industry, public administration, and governance) and performing a great number of different jobs. With the exception of typical "blue-collar" work and production jobs, we obtained a fairly representative sample of the (Dutch) working force. This means that our conclusions are relatively context-free and should not be taken as informing us about typical jobs or industries.

Three issues constrain our conclusions. First of all, common-source variance provides a validity threat in Study 3. However, because the main findings closely correspond to those of the other three studies, in which we used data from multiple sources, common-source variance seems an unlikely alternative explanation in this particular case. Second, there is the issue of common-method variance—we assessed all independent and dependent variables using the same method. However, we took care in using validated and reliable measures, and zero-order correlations among critical constructs were small to moderate, which is generally taken as evidence against common-method variance. Finally, common-method variance provides a more serious validity threat to conclusions about main effects than to conclusions about interaction effects. In fact, common-method variance undermines the possibility to detect interaction effects (G. H. McClelland & Judd, 1993). Thus, although we cannot exclude common-method variance as a validity threat, we built in a number of mitigating factors (Spector, 2006) and note that our focus on interactions reduces this concern.

Second, the proportion of variance explained across studies was rather small. One explanation is that we used heterogeneous samples of employees in a variety of functions and roles. Relatedly, testing for interaction effects in regression analysis is a rather conservative approach, which may also have contributed to the relatively small proportion of variance being explained (see, e.g., G. H. McClelland & Judd, 1993). Third, it cannot be excluded that self-concern and other-orientation do in fact explain a significant but small amount of variance in the various relationships that we studied. Obviously, this begs the question about relevance—although we have an empirically supported theory, other interventions may be much more powerful. It is important to note, however, that our theoretical perspective was not developed to design system interventions but, instead, to better understand when and why employees are, or are not, influenced by situational cues regarding the jobs they perform, the group they work in, and so on. We thus were not interested in uncovering the most powerful intervention to combat low work motivation, or lack of personal initiative, or unacceptably low levels of prosocial behavior. Our theoretical perspective is, however, potentially useful in fine-tuning interventions that appear less successful than desired.

Third, the cross-sectional designs we employed prohibit causal inferences and permit alternative explanations in terms of third variables. Although we included control variables (age, gender, job tenure) in the reported analyses, and in some studies we explored (but did not report) the possible influence of other factors such as type of job and organizational size, new research is needed to address specific third variables. To make causal and directional inferences, experimental designs are needed. The current support for the SCOOM hypothesis with employees from a large variety of organizations performing different jobs provides a sound basis for such experiments to be designed, and we see this as an important direction for new research on the SCOOM hypothesis.

Concluding Thoughts

In principle, the SCOOM hypothesis applies to all individual-level attributes and to all group-level attributes (for a review, see Chen & Kanfer, 2006). We would expect the VIE model of work motivation (Vroom, 1964) to have greater predictive validity among employees high rather than low in self-concern. We would also expect social-information processing accounts of job satisfaction (e.g., Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977) to have greater predictive validity among employees high rather than low in other-orientation.

These possibilities notwithstanding, the studies support three general conclusions. First, self-concern is conceptually and empirically different from other-orientation. Second, self-concern moderates the effects of individual-level variables, such as job characteristics on work behavior. Third, other-orientation moderates the effects of group-level variables, such as perceived justice climate on work behavior. Thus, an exclusive focus on self-concern and self-interest leads to incomplete theories in organizational psychology. Including other, broader concerns, such as other-orientation, is less parsimonious but leads to a more accurate and sophisticated understanding of all kinds of work-related behaviors, including task performance, prosocial behavior, and personal initiative. It allows for theoretical integration, and it provides tools for understanding, directing, and improving system design and organizational interventions.

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Received January 31, 2008
Revision received September 30, 2008
Accepted October 7, 2008 ■