INTRODUCTION

Newcomers aim to achieve better fit with their new organisation through proactive behaviour (Parker & Collins, 2010), using strategies such as monitoring and seeking feedback to change themselves to fit (Ashford & Black, 1996). In recent years, there has been a growing interest around newcomer proactive behaviour that achieves fit by changing the environment and thus challenging the status quo, such as creative behaviour (Harris, Li, Boswell, Zhang, & Xie, 2014; Kammeyer-Mueller, Livingston, & Liao, 2011). Despite progress, there remains a need to identify antecedents of newcomer proactive behaviour in general, and those aiming to change the work environment in particular (Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012). Especially since newcomers may be hired to inject fresh ideas into the organization (Harris et al., 2014), and therefore may differ from insiders, it is important to understand how patterns of individual difference contribute to or detract from successful adjustment via proactive behaviour (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011). Moreover, given that most research has been conducted in Western countries, still less is known about whether the
proactive behaviour models developed from research with Western newcomers unfold similarly for non-Western newcomers.

Accordingly, our study sheds light on these issues by investigating newcomer proactive behaviour across two cultural settings, one Western (UK) and one non-Western (China). A two-path research model was developed on the basis of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) (see Figure 1). The fundamental idea underlying COR theory is that a stressful environment leads to resource losses, but favourable events lead to resource gains. In a recent review of socialization studies, Ellis, Bauer, Mansfield, Erdogan, Truxillo, and Simon (2015) drew on COR as well as the job demands-resources (JD-R) model to argue that newcomers who lack sufficient resources to cope with uncertainty and stress are less likely to protect themselves from future resource loss, leading to disengagement and emotional exhaustion. In contrast, newcomers who have adequate resources are more likely to perceive challenging situations positively, develop positive affect and flourish. We also draw on the notion that diversity will influence newcomer adjustment, although findings to date have been limited (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011), and that context may also place boundaries on what behaviours and consequent resource acquisition are possible (Harris et al., 2014).

Specifically, we examine the impacts of an individual difference (individual differentiation) and a job design factor (work autonomy) on two proactive behavioural pathways, namely changing the work environment (change work procedures) and changing the self (monitoring), and their associated adjustment outcomes via two studies with UK and Chinese graduates respectively. We examine whether: (1) individual differentiation and work autonomy are associated with proactive behaviours; (2) whether different proactive
behaviours, one relating to changing the work environment (change work procedures) and one relating to maintaining the status quo (monitoring) are associated with the acquisition of different personal resources (positive affect) and relational resources (social acceptance); and (3) whether the accumulation of these resources will mitigate feelings of resource loss (emotional exhaustion) and similarly predict different adjustment outcomes (innovative behaviour, organisational identification).

Thus our overarching argument is that individual differentiation and work autonomy may fuel these two pathways. Firstly, we propose a change work environment pathway, where newcomers with high individual differentiation and high work autonomy will be willing to change the work environment (changing work procedures) to acquire personal resources (positive affect), which may help to reduce emotional exhaustion and support innovative behaviour.

*Hypothesis 1: Changing work procedures mediates the relationships between (a) individual differentiation and positive affect, and (b) work autonomy and positive affect.*

*Hypothesis 2: Positive affect mediates the relationships between changing work procedures and (a) emotional exhaustion, and (b) innovative behaviour.*

Secondly, we propose a change-self pathway, in which newcomers with low individual differentiation and low work autonomy are motivated to improve their fit with the new work environment by attempting to change themselves (via monitoring) to acquire relational resources (social acceptance), which can further help to reduce emotional exhaustion and enhance organizational identity.

*Hypothesis 3: Monitoring behaviour mediates the relationship between (a) individual differentiation and social acceptance, and (b) work autonomy and social acceptance.*

*Hypothesis 4: Social acceptance mediates the relationship between monitoring and (a) emotional exhaustion, and (b) organizational identity.*
In addition, based on broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001), we propose that positive affect enables newcomers to develop social acceptance as a resource. That is, positive affect enables newcomers to widen their scope of awareness and build additional resources.

_Hypothesis 5: Positive affect is positively associated with social acceptance._

**METHOD**

_Sample and procedure_

For Study 1, data were collected from recently graduated students from a university in the southwest UK: During the first month (Time 1), and then 2 months (Time 2) and 3 months (Time 3) post-entry. 161 usable, matched responses were received across all three times. This sample represented a large variety of industries (e.g., manufacturing, public services). The majority of participants were female (58.4%); and averaged 23.6 years in age.

For Study 2, data were collected from recently graduated students from a university in south China twice: Four months after graduation (Time 1), and then two months later (Time 2). Matched responses were obtained from 102 graduates, representing a variety of job sectors (e.g., finance and auditing, logistics). The majority of participants were female (68%) with an average age of 23.3 years.

**Measures**

All measures were identical across the two studies. The translation back-translation method suggested by Brislin (1986) was applied to develop the Chinese version of the survey. Likert agreement scales with 5 points were used across all measures (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”), with the exception of individual differentiation and the two proactive behaviours, which used ratings of amount (1 = “not at all” 5 = “to a great extent”).
Individual differentiation was measured using seven items from Janssen and Huang (2008), using the same item stem “To what extent are you different from the members of your team…” followed by a statement to be rated. An example end statement is “…owing to your personal opinions and beliefs”.

Work autonomy was measured using six items adapted from Breaugh (1985). An example item is “I am able to choose the way to go about my job (the procedures to utilize)”.

Monitoring behaviour was measured using three items developed from Morrison (1993). An example item is “Paid close attention to your colleagues to learn appropriate behaviour”.

Changing work procedures was measured using three items from Cooper-Thomas et al. (2014). An example item is “Changed how the work gets done to suit you better”.

Positive affect was measured using 10 items developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). Participants were asked to rate 10 adjectives, such as excited and attentive, using the last week as a reference point.

Social acceptance was measured using the 4-item scale developed by Morrison (1993). An example item is “My co-workers seem to accept me as one of them”.

Emotional exhaustion was assessed with a four-item scale adapted from Maslach and Jackson (1981). An example item is “I feel emotionally drained from my work”.

Organizational identity was measured using six items developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). An example item is “The organization’s successes are my successes”.

Innovative behaviour was measured with six items developed by Scott and Bruce (1994). An example item is “I search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas”.

Analytic strategy
Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 for descriptive analyses and Amos 22 for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM). Evaluation of goodness-of-fit to the sample data was determined on the basis of multiple criteria: The Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the incremental fit index (IFI). We conducted SEM analysis on a partial disaggregation model by constructing parcels of items (Amiot, Terry, Jimmieson, & Callon. 2006; Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy & Shalhoop, 2006), using the item-to-construct approach suggested by Little et al. (2002). We tested indirect relationships using bootstrapping procedures in Amos 22, with bias-corrected (BC) estimation across 1000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals.

RESULTS

Study 1 (UK)

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations of all variables are presented in Table 1. All correlations were significant in line with Figure 1, bar the relationship between individual differentiation and monitoring behaviour (r = -0.06, ns).

CFA specifying a 9-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data (χ² (341, N = 161) = 427.173, p < 0.01; CFI = 0.969, IFI = 0.969, TLI = 0.963, RMSEA = 0.040). Alternative measurement models were tested and provided worse fit (details available on request). The hypothesized research model also showed a good fit (χ² (366, N = 161) = 491.200, p < .001; χ² / df = 1.342; CFI = 0.954, IFI = 0.955, TLI = 0.950, RMSEA = 0.046). The standardized path coefficients are shown in Figure 2, and support most of our theoretical predictions, although not entirely. For parsimony, we refer only to the results of our bootstrapping procedures for indirect effects shown in Table 4, except to note for the one

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direct relationship proposed (H5), that positive affect would be positively associated with social acceptance, this was supported ($\beta = .41, p < .001$).

As shown in Table 4, testing Hypotheses 1 through 4, change work procedures mediated the relationship between individual differentiation and positive affect (H1a), and between work autonomy and positive affect (H1b). Also, positive affect mediated the relationship among changing work procedures and emotional exhaustion (H2a), and between changing work procedures and innovative behaviour (H2b). For the change-self pathway, monitoring behaviour was not found to mediate any relationships, and thus Hypotheses 3a and 3b were not supported. However, social acceptance mediated the relationship between monitoring behaviour and emotional exhaustion (H4a), and the relationship between monitoring behaviour and organizational identity (H4b). Overall, the change work environment pathway was supported while the change-self pathway was partly supported.

**Study 2 (China)**

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations among variables in Study 2 are displayed in Table 3. Correlations were largely in line with expectations, except that neither individual differentiation nor work autonomy were significantly associated with monitoring behaviour ($r = -.08, ns$; $r = -.04, ns$ respectively), nor was social acceptance associated with organisational identity ($r = .09, ns$).
Compared with other alternative measurement models, the CFA results showed that the measurement model with 9 factors provided a better fit ($\chi^2 (341, N = 102) = 485.090, p < .001; \chi^2/df = 1.423; CFI = 0.934, IFI = 0.936, TLI = 0.921, RMSEA=0.065$). Results for the hypothesized model also showed acceptable fit for the overall model ($\chi^2 (366, N = 102) = 540.939, p < .001; \chi^2/df = 1.478; CFI = 0.920, IFI = 0.921, TLI = 0.911, RMSEA = 0.069$).

The standardized path coefficients are presented in Figure 2 and, as before, we discuss only the direct relationship (H5), with support found for the relationship of positive affect with social acceptance ($\beta = .58, p < .001$).

Hypotheses 1 to 4 were assessed with tests of indirect effects; the results are presented in Table 4. No indirect effect was found between individual differentiation and positive affect via change work procedures, therefore Hypothesis 1a was not supported. However, a significant indirect effect was found between work autonomy and positive affect via change work procedures, supporting Hypothesis 1b. In addition, positive affect mediated the relationships between change work procedures and emotional burnout (H2a), and between change work procedures and innovative behaviour (H2b). There were no significant indirect relationships found in the change-self pathway though, and hence no support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b, and 4a and 4b.

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DISCUSSION

We examined the associations of individual differentiation and work autonomy on two proactive behaviours used by newcomers, and their associated adjustment outcomes. Results across the two samples provide evidence for the change work environment pathway as preceded by the design of the job: Changing work procedures mediated the relationship between work autonomy and positive affect. Work autonomy may enable newcomers to feel
positive at work through allowing newcomers the space and flexibility to change the undesirable aspects of work. In addition, the results support the acquisition of a personal resource, positive affect, as protecting newcomers from emotional exhaustion and encouraging innovative behaviours.

Importantly, these findings suggest that changing work procedures may form part of a positive resource cycle, in line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), with positive affect promoting newcomers’ innovative behaviours, and protecting newcomers from resource depletion in the form of emotional exhaustion. Additionally, while other researchers have suggested that proactive behaviour aimed at changing the work environment may be risky for newcomers (Cooper-Thomas & Wilson, 2011), our findings suggest either that these risks are lower in some contexts, or else the opportunity to acquire personal resources such as positive affect may help to offset any potential costs. Notably, individual differentiation was only important in predicting change work procedures in the UK sample, suggesting that work design is a more consistent predictor across contexts.

Turning to the change-self path, low individual differentiation and low monitoring did not show the anticipated relationship with monitoring in either sample. Whereas previous studies have emphasized the importance of observation for newcomer adjustment (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007), and our study supported this in showing that monitoring positively predicted social acceptance, neither individual differences (individual differentiation) nor work design (work autonomy) predicted monitoring. Further research is needed to explore other potential antecedents of newcomer monitoring behaviour.

Our results provide evidence to support the relationship of monitoring with social acceptance, and social acceptance with emotional exhaustion in both samples, but an indirect effect of social acceptance on this relationship only for UK newcomers. Overall, feeling accepted by other group members may help newcomers to reduce emotional exhaustion.
Moreover, consistent with broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) and COR’s notion of resource cycles (Hobfoll, 2001), resources enable the acquisition of additional resources – with the relationship between positive affect and social acceptance supported across the two studies.

Apart from these similar findings across two data sets, our results also reveal that there are cross-cultural differences in newcomer proactive behaviour. For example, the positive relationship between individual differentiation and changing work procedures was only found among UK graduates, suggesting that newcomer’ individual differentiation may not motivate changes to work procedures among Chinese newcomers. In collectivist contexts, people tend to constrict their personal needs and desires in order to avoid interfering with the needs and goals of significant others (Triandis, 1995), and may thus refrain from initiating changes to the work environment regardless of their differences from colleagues. Moreover, employees in China may be particularly careful in initiating change because if change fails, it may threaten their feelings of competence, and result in losing “face” (mian zi), that is their prestige, dignity and standing among colleagues (Hwang, 1987). Consequently, newcomers may subjugate their individual desires for change because of these greater cultural costs.

Moreover, it is surprising to find that the relationship between social acceptance and organizational identity was not significant for Chinese newcomers, but was for UK newcomers. Given the collectivist orientation of Chinese culture (Hofstede, 1980), it might be expected that this would be a stronger relationship for newcomers in China compared to the UK. It may be that other factors, perhaps specific to the collective Chinese context, are more important in developing organisational identity than social acceptance among colleagues.

Conclusion
This research examined antecedents and adjustment outcomes of newcomer proactive behaviour across two samples. Our theorizing and empirical findings contribute insights, both with regard to the resource gain cycles proposed by COR theory among newcomers, as well as interesting similarities and differences across Western and non-Western contexts.

REFERENCES


