Proactivity researchers consider individuals to be active agents who engage in proactive work and career behaviors to satisfy their own personal career needs, as well as the needs of their employing organizations. Although these behaviors are primarily intended to have a positive impact on individuals and their employing organizations, the contrary might also occur if organizations do not offer the support that individuals need to have to freely engage in these behaviors. This dissertation suggests that in particular ambitious employees have the desire to engage in proactive behaviors and know how to benefit themselves and their employing organizations.

To provide evidence for the abovementioned, this dissertation focuses on examining how both types of proactive behaviors (i.e., career proactive behaviors and work proactive behaviors) influence individual and organizational outcomes. In addition to ambition, age was used as another key concept in one of the research studies. In total, four empirical studies were conducted using a variety of research methods (i.e., systematic literature review, longitudinal quantitative research designs and qualitative research). To begin with chapter 2, this chapter seeks to better understand how the complex process of proactivity is likely to occur at different organizational levels (i.e., individual, team and organizational) by identifying the effects of interactions and interdependence among individual-level and contextual determinants of proactivity. The findings show that proactivity is the outcome of a complex process that is codetermined by individual-level and contextual variables, especially on the individual level. These results recognize the importance of selecting proactive individuals and placing them in a work environment that supports and stimulates proactivity.

Chapter 3 addresses one of the research recommendations of chapter 2. It examines how the contextual variable compensation influences proactive behavior and its subsequent impact on
the individual outcome career satisfaction. I find that ambitious employees take more charge at work (i.e., proactive behavior) and are more satisfied when they receive higher compensations. On the contrary, a low compensation does not have this effect on the taking charge behavior and career satisfaction of ambitious employees. With regard to less ambitious employees, neither low nor high compensations increase their taking charge behavior and career satisfaction.

Chapter 4 builds on chapter 3 and aims to study the organizational consequences of ambitious employees’ taking charge and networking behaviors (i.e., proactive behaviors). In this chapter, I propose that employees’ ambition is directly linked to the organizational core competencies, capabilities and connections. I further propose that the proactive behaviors taking charge and networking (i.e., instrumental and psychosocial) mediate the direct relationships. The results demonstrate that ambitious employees contribute to a) strengthening organizational capabilities by taking charge at work and b) expanding organizational connections through instrumental networking. This chapter provides evidence that employees engage in proactive career and work behaviors to shape their own careers, and that this same behavior also benefits their employing organization.

Finally, chapter 5 explores the job crafting behaviors and motivations of older and younger employees in a socially oriented non-for-profit organization in the Netherlands. The findings reveal that there are differences and similarities in how older and younger employees engage in job crafting behaviors and what drives them to do so (i.e. job crafting motivations). I assume that the similarities between the job crafting behaviors and motivations could be ascribed to the purpose or vision of the non-for-profit organization. Both groups of employees have chosen to work for this organization, and it is fair to assume that their own work values are in line with the values of the organization. Therefore, they might have engaged in job crafting
behavior to help support and achieve the organizational goals and mission. Taken together, the findings presented in this dissertation demonstrate that in order for individuals to be active agents and to engage in career and work behaviors, they must possess traits that allow them to do so (i.e., being ambitious), they must be motivated to engage in the behaviors and they must work in an organization that supports and stimulates their behavior. When these conditions are met, both the individuals and their employing organizations reap the benefits. This dissertation recognizes the importance of its findings for both researchers and practitioners, and hence, interesting theoretical and practical challenges are discussed in detail in chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.