MULTILEVEL CONTINGENCIES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL INITIATIVE AND JOB PERFORMANCE OF MIDDLE MANAGERS (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

MULTILEVEL CONTINGENCIES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL INITIATIVE AND JOB PERFORMANCE OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

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Principal Topic

This study examined how contingencies operating at multiple levels combine to influence the relationship between personal initiative and job performance. Analyses of multisource and multilevel data collected from 383 middle managers operating in 34 business units indicated that individual autonomy strengthened the relationship between personal initiative and performance whereas individual risk-taking propensity weakened the focal link. For managers with high risk-taking propensities, the relationship between personal initiative and performance was positive when their unit’s performance management context was strong but negative when it was weak. Consideration of person-organization fit may thus help to better understand when personal initiative enhances or limits managerial performance.

Method and Results

By adopting a multilevel perspective, this study extends prior work on personal initiative by uncovering previously overlooked individual characteristics and contextual factors that condition the performance benefits associated with personal initiative. Previous studies in this area have tended to focus on the direct link between personal initiative on job performance, arguing that initiative taking will generally be beneficial for performance (Thompson, 2005). By contrast, our study suggests that personal initiative can be detrimental to performance when middle managers lack autonomy and exhibit high levels of risk-taking. In addition, our results suggest that taking into account higher-level contingencies such as the organization’s performance management context may improve understanding of when engagement in high-risk initiatives may contribute to or detract from job performance. Second, this study extends prior work that has mainly employed samples of lower-level employees (e.g. Frese et al., 1996) by examining the link between personal initiative and job performance among middle managers. In so doing, we make a contribution by testing the applicability of previous findings to the context of middle managers working in a large multinational organization. By focusing on middle managers, our study also generates new insights into how organizations may create favorable conditions for managers with a critical strategic role to engage in initiatives and attain higher job performance.

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