



FB 06 Psychology
and Sport science

Work- and Organizational
Psychology

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Measuring Personal Initiative

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I) Education initiative

II) Overcoming barriers

III) Active approach

IV) Initiative at work: retrospective initiative

V) Interviewer evaluation

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Frese, M., Kring, W., Soose, A., & Zempel, J. (1996). Personal initiative at work: Differences between East and West Germany. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 37-63.

Validity of the instrument:

Frese, M., Fay, D., Hilburger, T., Leng, K., & Tag, A. (1997). The concept of personal initiative: Operationalization, reliability and validity in two German samples. *Journal of Organizational and Occupational Psychology*, 70, 139-161.

Fay, D., & Frese, M. (2001). The concept of personal initiative: An overview of validity studies. *Human Performance*, 14(1), 97-124.

In the meantime, we have developed a new questionnaire of Personal Initiative as a Situational Judgment Test of Personal Initiative. If you are interested to received this test, please write to Michael.frese@psychol.uni-giessen.de for the test and for permission to use this test

I. Education initiative

In the longitudinal study the last measurement wave was used as a point of reference “... in the last 12 months”. Accordingly, the point of reference ranged between 6 months (wave 2) and 24 months (wave 6).

The subject is asked about past and future / current education initiative.

Interviewer: Write the answers as verbatim as possible, to make re-rating possible.

Questions to the interviewee:

Did you participate in some continuing education in last 12 months?

What was it exactly?

Was it your decision to follow this education? Or were you asked to do so by your boss / unemployment agency?

Do you intend to participate in some further education?

What do you want to do? Is that your own decision?

Have you done something concrete to accomplish this? What? Where have you been? What is the next step?

Do you have long term plans for your occupational future?

Ratings for education initiative

Past initiative: Based on own decision?

- 1=company or unemployment agency demanded it
- 2= there was official demand but also interest by the subject
- 3=middle
- 4=there was an interest by the subject but also company interest
- 5=it was solely achieved by subject even against resistance of company

Past initiative: Quantity of participation in further education

- 1= no participation: did not follow any course
- 2= low participation (small course of few days)
- 3=middle
- 4=high participation (longer-term qualification or longer course; 3 - 6 months)
- 5=very high participation (started a longer requalification training or study)

Future / current initiative: Intention?

- 1=probably no
- 2=probably yes

Future / current initiative: Concrete steps taken?

- 1= no
- 2= few concrete steps (asked a colleague but not an official institution)
- 3= some concrete steps (filled in application)
- 4=many concrete steps (precise time is fixed)
- 5=participates at the moment

Long-range plans for occupational future?

- 1=no plans
- 2=abstract plans
- 3=middle
- 4=certain degree of concreteness
- 5=high degree of concreteness

II. Overcoming barriers - a measure of persistence

The subject is confronted with four difficult situations, for which he / she is asked to present solutions.

Instruction: "I will present you now a number of difficult situations. Tell me, what one could do in such a situation; use your creativity."

Interviewer

- present the first situation, this is the first barrier
- when the barrier is overcome, reply: "Imagine, this doesn't work out."
If the subject is not satisfied with it, give a more specific barrier - see below
- when the second barrier is overcome, reply again: "Imagine, ..."
- if this third barrier is overcome, don't give another barrier, but ask only: "Do you have any more ideas, what one can do?"
- when the subject does not have any more ideas, start again with the second situation.

If a barrier is not overcome, don't present a new barrier. Repeat the question / barrier again. If there is no answer, don't go further, but start with a new situation.

The same applies, if the subject repeats (a small variation) of a previous solution: e.g. first solution was: "I ask the supervisor for help", after the subsequent barrier, the subject answers "I look for another supervisor". Ask for a different solution "what else can one do?". If no new solution comes, stop. Start with a new situation.

Write a detailed protocol of both subject's answers and your barriers.

After the interview, you count on the basis of the protocol the number of barriers overcome.

Per situation, you have one item, ranging from 0 to 5:

0	1	2	3	4	5
no barrier overcome; refused to answer	1 barrier overcome	2 barriers overcome	3 barriers overcome	4 barriers overcome	5 or more barriers overcome

The "difficult situations" = the first barrier and suggestions for subsequent barriers

1) Pretend for a moment, that you are dismissed from your job. What will you do?

- Your legal steps against your employer are not successful
- No job placement agency can offer you anything else.
- You don't find anything in the newspapers.

2) Pretend for a moment, you want to do some further education. What will you do?

- The official offices within the company or the state can't help you.
- Your company doesn't offer anything of your interest.

3) Pretend for a moment, your unemployment compensation money is reduced. What do you do?

- The consultant / office worker responsible for you is on leave.
- You are told, that everything is alright.

4) Pretend for a moment, your landlord gave you a notice that you would be kicked out of your apartment; you have to leave within two months. What do you do?

- You can't afford a lawyer.
- Offers from the newspapers are too expensive.

5) Pretend for a moment, your colleague always does his / her job so sloppily that you have to do additional work. What do you do?

- Your boss doesn't feel responsible.
- Colleagues don't want to get involved.

6) Pretend for a moment, that you work as a blue-collar worker on a machine and your machine breaks down. What do you do?

- The maintenance personnel is too busy.
- Colleagues can't help either.
- You don't find your boss.

7) Pretend for a moment, you submitted a suggestion to improve work, but your boss does not react. What do you do?

- The secretary doesn't let you speak to the boss.

- The boss' superior doesn't respond either.

8) Pretend for a moment, that you depend on supplies from another unit, and the supply is not delivered. What do you do?

- You are not allowed to leave your work place.
- You don't know anybody from the unit personally.
- You don't know, where the responsible unit is situated.

III. Active approach (on overcoming barriers)

For each situation the interviewer makes a rating on how actively the barriers were overcome. This should be done as quickly as possible after the interview, but not in the presence of the participant. "Actively" means: the degree to which the participant tried to solve the problem him-/herself, instead of delegating it to someone else (getting a book to read up the legal aspects oneself vs. delegating the problem to a lawyer).

	1	2	3	4	5	
She/he is active						She / he is passive

Thus, this item is filled in four times, once for each situation.

No re-rating is done on these items.

Recode items.

IV. Initiative at work: retrospective measure

This interview aims at assessing specific acts of past initiative at work.

Instruction to interviewer:

- use the following criteria to assess, whether it is initiative or not:

is it self-started / does it go beyond normal duties in the job?

prompt: Is the reported action part of your job? Is that typical for your job, do your colleagues do that too? Would / do other people in your job look also into these problems? Did you do that on request of someone else?

- make a rating of:
 - quantitative initiative: how much energy went into the activity? 5 point scale
 - qualitative initiative: how much did the activity go beyond what is expected from the person in that job? (e.g. addressing new problems, new ideas, new goals, strategies). 5 point scale

	0 no initiative	1 very little	2	3	4	5 very much
quantitative initiative						
qualitative initiative						

- Assign a zero "no initiative" for quantitative and qualitative initiative if the interviewee does not report any action
- when the action is not possible in the job of the interviewee (e.g. question 2: this is not possible if the interviewee has no boss, because he or she is self-employed) assign a missing value. The decision however, whether an action is "not possible in his / her job" is made by the interviewer, not by the interviewee. This implies, if the subject claims, that a certain activity cannot be done in his /her job, get more information on that issue. If the interviewer comes to the conclusion that a certain activity is in principle possible, assign a zero (= no initiative)
- rating is done after the interview, based on the protocol of the interview
- Participants in highly professional jobs tend to answer: "of course, everything is part of my job" Find out, whether professionals in the same field would act in the same way, if no, it is initiative; if yes, but the activity presented is exceptional, score "quantitative initiative" only, and assign the lowest score in qualitative initiative (but not zero).
- The same applies to small scale entrepreneurs.
- What needs to be scored, if the interviewee presents several situations (e.g. several suggestions made to improve work, or went several times to see the boss, etc.)? Ratings should then be based on the situation in which the interviewee showed most initiative
- for some situations, we made additional ratings (in addition to the qualitative and quantitative initiative: e.g. creativity, number of suggestions made); were not used in the Frese et al., 1996, 1997 publications

Instruction:

"I will ask you some questions on things, you do or have done at work. Some of the things you will have done, others not, as one cannot do everything at work. "

Task of interviewer:

- find out, whether activity presented is part of the job / work role or not
- write down as precisely as possible, to make re-rating possible

1 During the last year, did you submit suggestions to improve work?

What did you do exactly?

What did that suggestion look like exactly?

How much time, energy, effort went into this?

Had you been asked / requested to do so?

How many suggestions did you make?

Is that typical for you job? Do your colleagues do the same?

1_A) submitted a suggestion? yes / no / not possible in job

how many suggestions?

1_B) how much quantitative initiative necessary to do this action? 1 to 5

1_C) how much qualitative initiative necessary to do this action? 1 to 5

how creative were suggestions? 1 to 5

2 During the last year, did you go to see the boss, because there were problems in work?

What was it about? Was it about your own problem or the problem of someone else?

Had you been asked / requested to do so?

How much time, energy went into this?

How often did you do this?

Is that typical for you job? Do your colleagues do that as well?

do not code an activity here again, that has already been presented as "suggestion submitted"

2_A) went to see boss? yes / no / not possible in job

how often? 1 to 5

own problems or of other? own problem own and other problem of other

2_B) how much quantitative initiative necessary to do this action?

2_C) how much qualitative initiative necessary to do this action?

3 Can you remember a situation during the last year in which you have searched for causes for something that did not function correctly?

What was it about? What did you do?

How much time, energy went into this?

Had you been asked / requested to do so?

How often did you do this?

Is that typical for you job? Do your colleagues do that as well?

3_A) went to see boss? yes / no / not possible in job

how often? 1 to 5

3_B) how much quantitative initiative necessary to do this action?

3_C) how much qualitative initiative necessary to do this action?

4 Have you introduced changes in your work during the last year (e.g. the sequence of activities, added other activities)?

What did you do?

How much time, energy went into this?

Had you been asked / requested to do so?

How often did you do this?

Is that typical for you job? Do your colleagues do that as well?

4_A) went to see boss? yes / no / not possible in job

how often? 1 to 5

4_B) how much quantitative initiative necessary to do this action?

4_C) how much qualitative initiative necessary to do this action?

V. Interviewer evaluation

- to be filled in after the interview, not in the presence of the interviewee
- is only filled in by the interviewer, no re-rating

	1	2	3	4	5
1	she / he is self-confident				she / he is unsure
2	she / he has active interview-dialogue behavior				she / he has inactive interview-dialogue behavior
3	she / he behaves actively				she / he behaves passively
4	she / he will behave actively in the future				she / he will behave passively in the future
5	she / he is goal-oriented				she / he gets easily diverted from goal
6	she / he is independent				she / he is not independent
7	she / he is achievement oriented				achievement is unimportant
8	she / he is ambitious				she / he is not ambitious
9	she / he is motivated to act				she / he would rather not act
10	she / he wants to act quickly				she / he wants to postpone
11	she / he is internally controlled				she / he is externally controlled

Recode items!

Questionnaire measure of Personal Initiative: Self-reported initiative
German, English and Dutch version

published in:

Frese, M., Fay, D., Hilburger, T., Leng, K., Tag, A. (1997). The concept of personal initiative: Operationalization, reliability and validity in two German samples. *Journal of Organizational and Occupational Psychology*, 70, 139-161.

Dutch sample $n=403$ of university students: Cronbach's alpha = .80

German sample (working population), age range appr. 20-68 years $n=450$: Cronbach's alpha .85-.88

English sample - selfreport: LBS MBAs, $N= 127$, alpha = .71

English sample LBS MBAs peer report: $N= 83$, alpha = .86

American data set (bank) reported by Johannes Rank

- (1) Ich gehe Probleme aktiv an.
- (2) Wenn etwas schief geht, suche ich sofort nach Abhilfe.
- (3) Wenn sich Möglichkeiten anbieten, etwas zu gestalten, dann nutze ich sie aus
- (4) Ich ergreife sofort die Initiative, wenn andere dies nicht tun.
- (5) Ich nehme Gelegenheiten schnell wahr, um meine Ziele zu erreichen.
- (6) Ich tue meist mehr als von mir gefordert wird.
- (7) Ich bin besonders gut darin, Ideen umzusetzen.

trifft gar nicht zu / trifft wenig zu / trifft mittelmäßig zu / trifft überwiegend zu / trifft völlig zu

five point answer scale was used: "not true at all" (1) to "very true" (5)

- (1) I actively attack problems.
- (2) Whenever something goes wrong, I search for a solution immediately.
- (3) Whenever there is a chance to get actively involved, I take it.
- (4) I take initiative immediately even when others don't.
- (5) I use opportunities quickly in order to attain my goals.
- (6) Usually I do more than I am asked to do.
- (7) I am particularly good at realizing ideas.

- (1) Ik pak problemen op een actieve manier aan.
- (2) Als iets fout gaat, zoek ik meteen naar een oplossing.
- (3) Als de mogelijkheid zich voordoet actief betrokken te raken, benut ik deze.
- (4) Ik neem onmiddellijk het initiatief als anderen het niet doen.
- (5) Ik benut kansen snel om mijn doel te bereiken.
- (6) Ik doe meestal meer dan mij gevraagd wordt.
- (7) Gewoonlijk voer ik uit wat ik van plan was te doen.