CHAPTER FOUR
PERFORMING CHALLENGING TASKS: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEES’ AND SUPERVISORS’ GOAL ORIENTATIONS

The performance of challenging tasks has many beneficial consequences for employees and organizations. Performing challenging tasks is, for instance, important for managerial development (DeRue & Wellman, 2009; Dragoni, Tesluk, Russell, & Oh, 2009; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994; Lyness & Thompson, 1997, 2000; McCauley, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 1999; McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994), career advancement (e.g., De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtold et al., 2009; De Pater, Van Vianen, Fischer, & Van Ginkel, 2009), and future job performance (e.g., Berlew & Hall, 1966; Bray, Campbell, & Grant, 1974; Campbell & Ilgen, 1976; Kaufman, 1974; Taylor, 1981). Therefore, employees could benefit from performing challenging assignments and their supervisors should encourage them to do so.

Surprisingly, extant research has hardly addressed the factors that may cause employees to perform challenging tasks in their jobs. However, it has been noted that both employees and their supervisors can be held accountable for the types of tasks employees perform (e.g., De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt et al., 2009). Employees often have the latitude to craft their jobs (Wrzesnieski & Dutton, 2001). They may initiate the performance of challenging activities if they feel attracted to these activities. Supervisors are also able to craft the jobs of their subordinates. They are often in the position to assign tasks to their subordinates and they can decide to assign them challenging or non-challenging tasks (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, 2010; Van Vianen, De Pater, & Preenen, 2008). Because both employees and supervisors can determine the content of people’s jobs, it is important to simultaneously examine employee and supervisor factors that may influence the types of tasks employees perform.

The aim of the present study is to investigate possible individual employee and supervisor characteristics that influence the amount of challenging tasks employees perform. We will focus on what we believe is a fundamental driving force of both employees’ performance of challenging tasks and supervisors’ allocation behaviors of challenging tasks, namely people’s goal orientation. Goal orientation concerns the type of goals that people adopt and pursue in achievement situations (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). People create different perceptual-cognitive frameworks for how to approach, interpret, and respond to achievement situations (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2000; Duda, 2001; Dweck, 1999; Pintrich, 2000; Van Yperen, 2003). For example, individuals with a mastery-approach goal orientation aim to further develop their competence through task mastery and the learning of new skills (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). These employees may involve themselves in
challenging activities because these activities provide them the opportunity to learn. In contrast, employees with a performance-avoidance orientation are particularly motivated to avoid demonstrating inferior competence toward others (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). These employees may want to avoid challenging tasks they do not master yet, because they have a high risk of visible failure on these tasks.

In a similar vein, supervisors’ goal orientations may affect the extent to which they motivate their subordinates to perform challenging tasks. For example, supervisors who have a mastery-approach orientation may not only wish to develop their own skills but also those of their subordinates. These supervisors may provide their subordinates with challenging assignments. It is, however, also conceivable that supervisors are mainly motivated to demonstrate their own excellence and superiority over others (i.e., having a performance approach-orientation). These supervisors may be reluctant to allocate challenging activities to their subordinates.

Based on goal orientation theory, we propose and test relationships between employees’ (assessed) goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks. In addition, we examine relationships between supervisors’ goal orientations and employees’ performance of challenging tasks. With this study, we extend existing job challenge and career research that was mainly concerned with individual and organizational outcomes rather than antecedents of job challenge. We will show that goal orientations are indeed crucial for the amount of challenging tasks that employees perform in their jobs. Moreover, we contribute to both the leadership literature and goal orientation research by linking supervisors’ goal orientations to the challenging activities of their subordinates. To date, this is the first study that examines how supervisors’ goal orientations are related to employee behavior.

**Overview of the Present Study**

Below, we first discuss the concepts of job challenge and goal orientation. Next, we develop our hypotheses about the relationships between individuals’ goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks. We first tested these hypotheses in a study (Study 4.1) among 216 respondents. In a second study, we replicated and extended our research by testing hypotheses about the relationships between supervisors’ goal orientations and the challenging tasks of employees. Study 4.2 included a sample with 39 supervisors and 193 employees.

**Theory**

**Challenging Tasks**

Job challenge has been conceptualized as “having to meet performance expectations that are reasonably high” (Berlew & Hall, 1966, p. 209), as “level of difficulty and stimulation” (Taylor, 1981, p. 255), as “the extent to which a job gives the individual a chance to use his skills or abilities” (Walsh, Taber, & Beehr, 1980, p. 255), and as “being in dynamic settings with problems to solve and choices to make under conditions of risk and uncertainty”
(McCauley et al., 1999, p. 4). More specifically, a job can be qualified as challenging to the extent that the job: (a) is new and asks for non-routine skills and behaviors, (b) tests one’s abilities or resources, (c) gives an individual the freedom to determine how to accomplish the task, and (d) involves a higher level of responsibility and visibility (Van Vianen et al., 2008).

The performance of challenging tasks has been associated with several positive outcomes such as learning, development, and career opportunities (e.g., De Pater Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, et al., 2009; McCauley et al., 1999). In addition, it is expected to lead to job satisfaction (e.g., Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2000; Kirk-Brown & Wallace, 2004), organizational commitment (e.g., Buchanan, 1974; Dixon, Cunningham, Sagas, Turner, & Kent, 2005), and higher intrinsic work motivation (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Altogether, extant literatures suggest that employees should perform challenging tasks in their jobs. Surprisingly, to date, little is known about factors that influence the amount of challenging tasks people perform in their jobs.

It has been suggested that there may be individual characteristics that predispose employees to seek challenging assignments (De Pater, Van Vianen, Fischer, et al., 2009). Moreover, research has shown that people differ in their preferences for and choice of performing challenging tasks. It was found that people’s preferences for challenging tasks were related to their achievement motives, that is, whether these were approach-oriented or avoidance-oriented (De Pater, Van Vianen, Fischer, et al., 2009; Hirschfeld, Thomas, & Lankau, 2006). Approach-oriented individuals tend to pursue beneficial outcomes, whereas avoidance-oriented employees tend to avert detrimental outcomes (Nicholls, 1984). Approach-oriented individuals are responsive to achievement cues and are more likely to perform achievement tasks. Avoidance-oriented individuals are less willing to perform achievement tasks and easily change to non-achievement tasks (Atkinson & Birch, 1974). People who were motivated to approach success were more likely to engage themselves in challenging tasks than people who were motivated to avoid failure (De Pater, Van Vianen, Fischer, et al., 2009). People’s achievement motive (approach or avoidance) represents one dimension of the four goal orientations that are distinguished in recent goal orientation theory (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

**Goal Orientations**

Goal orientation refers to the underlying goals that people adopt and pursue in learning and performance situations (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Two types of goal orientations were initially distinguished: a mastery or learning orientation and a performance orientation. Individuals with a mastery goal orientation want to develop competence, whereas individuals with a performance goal orientation want to demonstrate and validate their competence. Mastery oriented individuals are mastery focused, that is, they are eager to learn, to acquire new skills, to master new situations, and to improve themselves. Individuals with a performance orientation are ability focused, that is, they want to
demonstrate their superior competence in relation to others (Dweck, 1999; Nicholls 1984). They are motivated either to outperform others or to avoid looking incompetent (e.g., Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Covington, 2001).

Researchers have proposed to bifurcate mastery and performance goal orientations into approach and avoidance versions (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Individuals with a mastery-approach goal orientation are assumed to focus on the development of competence through task mastery and gaining new skills, which is largely in line with the conceptualization of the traditional mastery orientation. Individuals with a mastery-avoidance goal orientation strive to avoid deterioration, losing their skill, or leaving the task incomplete or unmastered. Likewise, performance-oriented individuals can be motivated either to demonstrate superior competence relative to others and obtain favorable judgments about their achievements (performance-approach goal orientation), or to avoid demonstrating inferior competence relative to others and receiving negative judgments about their achievements (performance-avoidance goal orientation) (e.g., Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Church, 1997; VandeWalle, 1997). In the present study, we will include the four goal orientations. The goal orientation literature has conceptualized the goal orientation construct in different ways. In the current study, we focus on the conceptualization of goal orientation as a rather stable individual difference variable that may be influenced by situational characteristics (e.g., Button, Mathieu, Zajac, 1996; Dweck, 1989; Farr, Hoffmann, & Ringenbach, 1993).

People’s goal orientations have mainly been studied in learning and specific performance situations to predict learning and performance outcomes (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2000; Ford, Smith, Weissbein, Gully, & Salas, 1998; Pintrich, 2000). However, goal orientations have been found to influence several other factors as well (for an overview, see Elliot, 2005; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007), such as selection (e.g., Roberson & Alsua, 2002), training (e.g., Brown, 2001), performance appraisal (e.g., VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), leadership (e.g., Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004), feedback seeking (Janssen & Prins, 2007), and goal-setting (VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999).

Although it is assumed that goal orientations will impact the amount of challenging tasks people perform (e.g., Dweck, 1986), this assumption has never been tested. Achievement motives affect people’s task choices (e.g., De Pater, Van Vianen, Fischer et al., 2009) and may thus also affect the types of tasks they perform. For example, a person with a strong mastery-approach orientation will seek for, and prefer situations that provide opportunities for learning, whereas a person with a strong performance-approach orientation will aim for situations in which he/she can show superiority toward others. By performing certain tasks, individuals are able to fulfill their motivational needs. In a first study, we examined the relationships between people’s goal orientations and the types of tasks they perform.
CHAPTER FOUR

STUDY 4.1:
GOAL ORIENTATIONS AND PERFORMING CHALLENGING TASKS

Based on the earlier findings as presented above, we hypothesized that the performance of challenging activities would be related to people’s approach and avoidance motives. Yet, we specifically expected that people with a strong mastery-approach goal orientation would pursue challenging activities, whereas people with a weak performance-avoidance goal orientation would avoid challenging assignments.

Individuals with a mastery-approach goal orientation focus on the development of competence through task mastery and gaining new skills (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Challenging assignments include the development of new strategies and skills (e.g., McCauley et al., 1994) and, thus, provide mastery-approach oriented persons an ideal opportunity to fulfill their goal. The proposed link between a mastery-approach goal orientation and the performance of challenging tasks is supported by research that examined people’s mastery orientation. It was found that individuals with a mastery orientation are open to and interested in learning from new experiences (VandeWalle, Cron, & Slocum, 2001), and perceive challenging activities as opportunities to learn (Dweck, 1986). Although these studies suggest that mastery-approach oriented individuals will perform challenging tasks, the link between goal orientations and actual task performance has never been tested.

We expected no specific relationship between a mastery-avoidance goal orientation and the performance of challenging tasks. Individuals with a mastery-avoidance goal orientation particularly strive to avoid deterioration and losing their current skills. They focus on avoidance of loss of competence and deterioration (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Hence, a mastery-avoidance goal orientation may relate to behaviors that facilitate the preservation of existing competencies and skills, whereas a mastery-approach goal orientation will relate to behaviors that foster the learning of new skills. We propose the following:

Hypothesis 1. A mastery-approach goal orientation is positively related to performing challenging tasks.

Individuals with a performance orientation (both approach and avoidance) tend to believe that people’s capacities are fixed and can hardly be developed. In their view, exerting extra effort and working hard often indicate inadequate levels of competence (e.g., Duda, 2001; Dweck, 1999; VandeWalle, 2003). The performance of challenging tasks often takes much effort to succeed as these tasks are demanding and new. Performance-approach oriented people who are eager to demonstrate their superiority to others may view putting much effort in a task as something that signifies low ability to others. In addition, they may recognize a serious risk to fail on challenging tasks and to receive negative judgments from others, which is opposed to their goal. They may, therefore, be reluctant to engage themselves in
challenging tasks and preferably perform non-challenging tasks on which they can show their abilities. Indeed, performance-approach goals appear to be most adaptive under conditions of low task difficulty or low fear of failure (Darnon, Harackiewicz, Butera, Mugny, & Quiamzade, 2007).

Alternatively, it could be reasoned that performance-approach oriented people seek opportunities to excel and, thus, may want to take up the more exceptional, challenging tasks as a means to differentiate themselves from others who perform the more routine types of tasks. In addition, they may view a challenging task as an opportunity to obtain favorable judgments from others as these tasks are often highly visible to others (e.g., McCauley et al., 1999).

The two countervailing forces as described above may keep each other in balance. This notion is supported by a recent meta-analysis that showed that a performance-approach orientation was unrelated to the difficulty levels of the goals that people set for themselves (Payne et al., 2007). Hence, we did not propose a specific relationship between a performance-approach orientation and the performance of challenging tasks.

Individuals who are performance-avoidant are concerned about their possible failure in the eyes of other people. They tend to view achievement situations as a threat to other people’s perceptions about their competence, because putting effort in the challenging task could signify low ability to others (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Hence, we expect that performance-avoidance oriented individuals want to avoid the performance of challenging tasks. Support for this suggestion can be derived from research that indicates that a performance-avoidance goal orientation prompts people to fall into a maladaptive pattern of helplessness, which precludes optimal task engagement and is not conducive to either engaging in self-regulation, performing at high levels (e.g., Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997), or the setting of high goals (Payne et al., 2007). Furthermore, the tendency to reduce effort and to withdraw after encountering setbacks and difficulty seems characteristic for individuals with a performance-avoidance orientation (Elliot, 1999; Pintrich, 2000). Based on goal orientation theory and research, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2. A performance-avoidance goal orientation is negatively related to performing challenging tasks.

Method Study 4.1

Participants and Procedure

The sample of this study comprised of two hundred sixteen students from a University in the Netherlands (169 females, 47 males). Mean age was 20.24 years ($SD = 3.22$). As part of a course requirement, they participated in several test sessions during a period of three weeks. As a procedural remedy to reduce common method bias, we collected the data at two points in time. Goal orientations and demographics were measured at Time 1 whereas performance of
challenging tasks was measured two weeks later (Time 2). The respondents filled out the questionnaires on a computer.

Measures

**Goal orientations** were assessed using a 20-item scale developed by Biemond and Van Yperen (2001). This scale is based on measures developed by Elliot and McGregor (2001) and Van Yperen and Janssen (2002), and has been used in previous studies (e.g., Janssen & Prins, 2007). Each of the four goal orientations was assessed with five items. The respondents indicated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*) how important the goal orientation statements were to them. Cronbach’s alphas were .81 for the performance-approach, .71 for the performance-avoidance, .81 for the mastery-approach, and .64 for the mastery-avoidance goal orientation. These reliabilities correspond with those that were found in earlier studies.

**Performing challenging tasks.** With a nine-item questionnaire participants were asked to what extent they performed challenging tasks in their daily life. This scale was derived from De Pater and colleagues (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, et al., 2009) and Preenen and colleagues (Preenen, De Pater, & Van Vianen, 2008). An example item is: “In my daily life, I perform tasks that are challenging.” Another example item is: “In my daily life, I perform tasks in which I have to deal with new situations and changes.”. Participants indicated their agreement with the items on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha was .89.

**Results Study 4.1**

Table 4.1 reports the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the study variables. Mean correlation among the four goal orientations was .37. Furthermore, only mastery-approach orientation was significantly correlated with the performance of challenging tasks ($r = .30, p < .001$). Age had significant but small correlations with mastery-approach orientation ($r = .14, p < .05$) and mastery-avoidance orientation ($r = -.14, p < .05$).

**Hypotheses Testing**

To test the hypothesized relationships between goal orientations and performing challenging tasks, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis in which the performance of challenging tasks was regressed on the four goal orientations. The four goal orientations together explained 11% of the variance in performing challenging tasks ($R^2 = .11, F(4, 211) = 6.23, p < .001$), see Table 4.2. As hypothesized (Hypothesis 1), a mastery-approach goal orientation was positively related to performing challenging tasks ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported. However, no significant relationship was found between a performance-avoidance goal orientation and the performance of challenging tasks ($\beta = -.12, p < .19$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 could not be supported.
Table 4.1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables of Study 1a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Genderb</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>20.24</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mastery-approach orientation</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mastery-avoidance orientation</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Performance-approach orientation</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Performance-avoidance orientation</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Performing challenging tasks</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *N = 216. Goal orientations were measured at Time 1 and performance of challenging tasks was measured two weeks later (Time 2). b For gender, female = 0, male = 1. * *p < .05, ** *p < .01.
Table 4.2

Regression of Performing Challenging Tasks on Goal Orientations\textsuperscript{a}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>(\beta)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mastery-approach orientation</td>
<td>.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery-avoidance orientation</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance-approach orientation</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance-avoidance orientation</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F(4, 211))</td>
<td>6.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a}N = 216. Standardized regression coefficients are reported. *** \(p < .001\).

Discussion Study 4.1

In a first study, we investigated possible relationships between people’s goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks. We measured the independent and dependent measures two weeks apart as a procedural means to minimize the possibility of common method bias. The relatively short temporal separation between the measurements should have reduced bias due to respondents’ consistency motives while it should not have introduced contaminating factors that mask true relationships between the variables (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

As proposed, we found that a mastery-approach goal orientation was positively related to performing challenging tasks. Apparently, a mastery-approach orientation stimulates people to perform more challenging tasks. However, no support was found for the hypothesized negative relationship between a performance-avoidance orientation and performing challenging tasks. This latter finding does not corroborate with earlier research that found that performance-avoidant individuals are reluctant to set high goals (see Payne et al., 2007) and, instead, tend to underperform (e.g., Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). Interestingly, the latter research mostly concerned evaluative specific performance contexts (e.g., classrooms, educational settings) in which people could compare their performance with the performance of others. In these situations, it can be expected that performance-avoidant individuals set lower goals, perform less, and withdraw from performing challenging activities. However, in our study, we did not specifically refer to performance contexts in which people could compare their task performances or were evaluated. This may explain why we failed to find a negative relationship between a performance-avoidance orientation and the performance of challenging tasks.

In addition, our results have shown that the performance of challenging tasks was mainly linked to the learning rather than the performance dimension of people’s goal orientations. The performance of challenging tasks seems not related to employees’ fear of failure or their wish to outperform others. In a second study, we aim to replicate and extend
these first findings in a work context. In the second study, we also examine the role that supervisors may play in the types of tasks that their employees perform.

**STUDY 4.2: PERFORMING CHALLENGING TASKS: SUPERVISORS’ GOAL ORIENTATIONS**

In Study 4.2, we again investigated the relationships between goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks, but this time with a sample of employees from a company. This sample allowed us to also examine the role of supervisors’ goal orientations as possibly related to the tasks of their subordinates.

The extent to which employees are involved in challenging tasks may not only depend on their own initiatives but on those of their supervisors as well. Supervisors have the opportunity to facilitate employees’ challenging experiences, for example, by the assignment of challenging tasks (Cianni & Romberger, 1995). Little is yet known about supervisors’ task allocation behaviors and what causes them to assign specific types of tasks to their subordinates, but supervisors’ task allocation decisions may influence the extent to which employees encounter challenging experiences in their jobs (De Pater, Van Vianen, & Bechtoldt, 2010). The delegation literature has primarily examined employee characteristics as determinants of supervisors’ task delegation (Leana, 1986; Yukl & Fu, 1999). To date, no studies have focused on supervisor characteristics that may influence the types of tasks that employees perform.

In this study, we explored the possible link between supervisors’ goal orientations and the types of tasks their subordinates perform. People’s goal orientations do not only affect their own learning and performance behaviors but may affect the outcomes of others as well. For example, a person with a performance-approach orientation, thus motivated to show superiority and outperform others, will likely engage in behaviors that maximize their own chances and minimize the chances of others to excel. An individual’s goal orientations will particularly affect the outcomes of others if their (work) relationships are highly interdependent, as is the case with supervisors and subordinates. That is, supervisors’ goal orientations will most likely affect employees’ outcomes if supervisors have a great impact on the types of activities their employees perform, whereas this influence will be less strong or absent if supervisors do not determine the content of employees’ jobs.

In this study, we proposed that supervisors’ goal orientations would be related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks, but that the strength of this relationship would depend on the extent to which employees’ work activities are determined by their supervisor, which we label as: supervisors’ task impact. Based on goal orientation theory, we reasoned that employees’ performance of challenging tasks would be influenced by supervisors’ mastery-approach, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance orientations.
Individuals with mastery-approach goal orientations focus on the development of competence through task mastery and gaining new skills (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) and they will, therefore, pursue the performance of challenging tasks as was shown in Study 1. Supervisors with a mastery-approach orientation may find the development of new competencies as important for themselves as for their subordinates. These supervisors may stimulate their employees to seek opportunities for learning and, if possible, they may provide them with actual learning experiences by assigning challenging tasks. The literature on mentoring seems to support this contention by arguing that mentors with a mastery goal orientation will provide their protégées with challenging assignments in order to stimulate their development (Kim, 2007). Employees are more likely to perform challenging tasks if their supervisor has a mastery-approach goal orientation, particularly if the supervisor has a say in employees’ tasks. We propose:

Hypothesis 1. Supervisors’ mastery-approach goal orientation is positively related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks depending on supervisors’ task impact.

Individuals with a mastery-avoidance orientation are mainly concerned with the preservation of their current skills, as we have outlined earlier. Due to its focus, this orientation seems not to affect the initiation of challenging tasks as we have argued and, indeed, found in Study 4.1. In a similar vein, there is no theoretical rationale of why and how supervisors’ mastery-avoidance orientation would relate to their task allocation behaviors. We, therefore, did not expect any specific relationship between supervisors’ mastery-avoidance orientation and the challenging tasks of their subordinates.

Performance-approach oriented individuals are motivated to demonstrate their superior competence relative to others (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Challenging tasks are often highly visible to others (e.g., McCauley et al., 1994), and they signal competence (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, et al., 2009; Humphrey, 1985). If supervisors want to look more competent than their subordinates, they may purposely withhold their subordinates challenging tasks in order to optimize their own chances to excel in the eyes of others. Similarly, these supervisors may be less likely to stimulate their employees to take on challenging tasks. They may not want their employees to ‘steal the show’ with the performance and accomplishment of challenging assignments because this could be a threat to their own superior position. Managers who use their power to aggrandize themselves and satisfy their strong need for esteem and status, seek to dominate employees by keeping them weak (Yukl, 2006). These notions are empirically supported by research that has shown that managers with a high need for achievement often prefer to retain important tasks rather than delegate them to employees (Miller & Toulouse, 1986). Performance-approach oriented supervisors may not stimulate their employees to perform challenging tasks. We propose:
Hypothesis 2. Supervisors’ performance-approach goal orientation is negatively related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks depending on supervisors’ task impact.

Supervisors who hold a performance-avoidance goal orientation will be mainly motivated to avoid demonstrating inferior competence relative to others and receiving negative judgments about their achievements (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). These supervisors may be concerned about those activities in their job on which they might fail. Because supervisors, as opposed to employees, may have the authority to delegate tasks, they may pass these risky and threatening activities to their subordinates. If, eventually, subordinates indeed fail on or withdraw from these tasks, they rather than their supervisor are to be blamed. Based on this reasoning, we assume that supervisors’ performance-avoidance goal orientation will be associated with employees’ performance of challenging tasks. We propose:

Hypothesis 3. Supervisors’ performance-avoidance goal orientation is positively related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks depending on supervisors’ task impact.

In addition to Hypotheses 1 to 3, we expected to replicate our Study 4.1 finding that employees’ own mastery-approach orientation is positively related to the performance of challenging tasks. We, thus, expected that the proposed relationships in Hypotheses 1 to 3 would hold when controlling for employees’ mastery-approach orientation.

Method Study 4.2

Participants and Procedure

All employees (N = 332) and their direct supervisors (N = 47) working for a Dutch distribution company with locations in Australia, Belgium, Singapore, the Netherlands, and United Kingdom were invited by e-mail to fill out an online questionnaire. A total of 226 employees (68%) and 41 supervisors (87%) responded. Thirty-three employees worked for a supervisor who did not fill out the questionnaire, and two supervisors participated while none of their employees had filled out the survey. They were removed from our sample, leaving a total of 193 employees (138 males, 55 females) and 39 supervisors (37 males, 2 females). On average, 4.95 (SD = 2.69) employees responded per supervisor. Each supervisor supervised on average 7.06 employees. The mean response rate per supervisor was 70%. Average age of the employees was 41.60 years (SD = 11.21). One hundred thirty-three employees held a bachelor’s or master’s degree, and 60 respondents held a professional or no degree. Mean job tenure of the employees was 5.12 years (SD = 7.81). Supervisors’ average age was 46.54 (SD = 8.34), 31 held a bachelor’s or master’s degree, and 8 held a professional or no degree. Mean job tenure was 7.98 years (SD = 7.30).
Measures

The employee survey included questions about demographics, and items that measured goal orientations, the performance of challenging tasks, supervisors’ impact on their work activities, and other measures that were part of a larger study on employees’ work experiences and attitudes. Only measures used in the present study are described. Supervisors were asked about their goal orientations.

Goal orientations. Employees’ and supervisors’ goal orientations were assessed in the same way as in Study 4.1. Cronbach’s alphas were .78 for the performance-approach, .84 for the performance-avoidance, .84 for the mastery-approach, and .67 for the mastery-avoidance goal orientation. These reliabilities correspond with the ones that were found in Study 4.1.

Performing challenging tasks. Employees filled out the same nine items to assess the performance of challenging assignments as in Study 4.1, but now participants were asked to what extent they performed challenging tasks in their job. Cronbach’s alpha was .89.

Supervisor task impact was measured by asking employees what percentage of their work activities was determined by their supervisors. Mean percentage was 32.40% (SD = 25.67).

Results Study 4.2

Table 4.3 displays the means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients among the employee variables of this study. Small to modest correlations were found among the goal orientations (mean \( r = .29 \)), which correspond with correlations that were found in earlier studies (Janssen & Prins, 2007). No significant correlations were found between performing challenging tasks and the demographic variables. Furthermore, performing challenging tasks had a significant negative correlation with supervisors’ task impact (\( r = -.25, p < .05 \)), indicating that employees reported more challenge in their jobs if their supervisor had a lower impact on their tasks.

As we collected our data from different locations and work groups, the data in this study were multilevel in nature. Hypotheses 1 to 3 were, therefore, tested with linear mixed modeling with maximum likelihood estimation. As a first step, we examined whether there were differences between the different locations. We estimated a null model without any predictors in order to test for possible variance in challenging tasks across locations. This model with random intercepts showed an intraclass coefficient (\( \rho \)) of .04, indicating that the proportion of total variance in challenging tasks explained by between-location differences was negligible. Also, there were no location effects with regard to the independent variables.
Table 4.3

*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender(^b)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>41.61</td>
<td>11.21</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tenure</td>
<td>61.47</td>
<td>93.75</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Performing challenging tasks</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mastery-approach</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mastery-avoidance</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Performance-approach</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Performance-avoidance</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Supervisor task impact</td>
<td>32.42</td>
<td>25.67</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Correlations greater than .15 are significant at \(p < .05\). \(N = 193\). \(^b\)Men = 0, women = 1.

Secondly, we estimated a null model to test for possible variance in challenging tasks across work groups. A null model with random intercepts showed an intraclass coefficient (\(\rho\)) of .13. This indicates differences between work groups which warrant multilevel regression analyses with two levels. Employees’ goal orientations and supervisors’ task impact are at the individual level of analysis (level 1) and supervisors’ goal orientations are at the group level (level 2). Prior to analyses, all the predictor variables were standardized at the grand mean of level-1 and level-2 predictors, respectively (see Kreft, De Leeuw, & Aiken, 1995).

The next mixed model regression analysis was performed to explore the relationship between employees’ goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks. A level-1 model was run to examine the contribution of each of the four goal orientations to the performance of challenging tasks. We tested whether the slopes were random or fixed by comparing the statistics of a random model with a fixed model. A random slope indicates that level-1 relations vary across groups, whereas a fixed slope indicates that level-1 relations are homogeneous across groups. A model with random slopes for mastery-approach and performance-approach goal orientations, and fixed slopes for mastery-avoidance and performance-avoidance goal orientations was better fit to the data than a model with fixed slopes for all four goal orientations (\(\Delta\chi^2\) (-2 Log Likelihood) = 6.25, \(df = 2\), \(p < .05\)). In all further analyses we first tested whether models with random slopes were better fit to the data than models with fixed slopes. A mixed model regression analysis with performing challenging tasks as the dependent variable and the four goal orientations (level 1) as the independent variables showed that only mastery-approach orientation was significantly related to the performance of challenging tasks (\(r = .60\), \(p < .001\)), see Table 4.4, model 1. This result supports the findings of Study 4.1.
In addition, we tested a second model in which we also included supervisors’ task impact and the interactions between supervisors’ task impact and employees’ goal orientations. Although not hypothesized, we wanted to explore whether relationships between employees’ goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks would be moderated by supervisors’ task impact. As can be seen in Table 4.4 (model 2), supervisors’ task impact was negatively related to the performance of challenging tasks ($\gamma = -.19$, $p < .05$), indicating that employees reported less challenge in their job if their supervisor had an impact on their tasks. There were no significant interaction effects. This means that a mastery-approach goal orientation was related to the performance of challenging tasks irrespective of supervisors’ task impact.

Table 4.4

*HLM Analysis Predicting Performing Challenging Tasks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intercept $\gamma_{00}$</td>
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<td>4.70</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mastery-approach (MAP) $\gamma_{10}$</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mastery-avoidance (MAV) $\gamma_{20}$</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance-approach (PAP) $\gamma_{30}$</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance-avoidance (PAV) $\gamma_{40}$</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor task impact (STI) $\gamma_{50}$</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MAP x STI $\gamma_{50}$</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MAV x STI $\gamma_{70}$</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PAP x STI $\gamma_{90}$</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PAV x STI $\gamma_{90}$</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mastery-approach $\gamma_{01}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mastery-avoidance $\gamma_{02}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance-approach $\gamma_{03}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance-avoidance $\gamma_{04}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x I</td>
<td>MAP x STI $\gamma_{51}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MAV x STI $\gamma_{52}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PAP x STI $\gamma_{53}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PAV x STI $\gamma_{54}$</td>
<td></td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.24*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. 
Hypotheses Testing

We hypothesized that supervisors’ goal orientations would be related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks depending on supervisors’ task impact. We expected positive relationships for supervisors’ mastery-approach goal orientation (Hypothesis 1) and supervisors’ performance-avoidance goal orientation (Hypothesis 3), and we expected a negative relationship for supervisors’ performance-approach goal orientation (Hypothesis 2). These hypotheses were tested with a mixed model regression analysis with performing challenging tasks as the dependent variable and supervisors’ goal orientations (level 2), supervisors’ task impact (level 1), and the cross-level interactions of these variables as the independent variables (see Table 4.4, model 3).

No significant effect was found for the interaction between supervisors’ mastery-approach goal orientation and supervisors’ tasks assignments ($\gamma = .08$, n.s.). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Significant effects were found for the interactions between supervisors’ performance-approach goal orientation and supervisors’ task impact ($\gamma = -.43$, $p < .01$), and between supervisors’ performance-avoidance goal orientation and supervisors’ task impact ($\gamma = .36$, $p < .01$). As shown in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, these cross-level effects were in the proposed direction: if supervisors had an impact on employees’ tasks, their performance-approach goal orientation was negatively related to employees’ task challenge (simple slope, $p < .05$) and their performance-avoidance goal orientation was positively related to employees’ task challenge (simple slope, $p < .01$). These results provide support for Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Finally, we performed a mixed model regression analysis with relevant level-1 and level-2 predictors in order to estimate whether the level-2 interaction effects would hold when including employees’ mastery-approach goal orientations. We entered employees’ goal orientations and supervisors’ task impact as the level-1 independent variables, supervisors’ performance-approach and their performance-avoidance goal orientations as the level-2 independent variables, and the cross-level interactions of supervisors’ goal orientations and supervisors’ task assignments. Table 4.2 (Model 4) shows that, in addition to the significant effects of employees’ mastery-approach goal orientations and supervisors’ task impact, level-2 interaction effects became smaller but remained to be significant.
Figure 4.1. Cross-level interaction of supervisor performance-approach goal orientation and supervisor task impact

Figure 4.2. Cross-level interaction of supervisor performance-avoidance goal orientation and supervisor task impact
**Discussion Study 4.2**

In our second study, we replicated our Study 4.1 finding that individuals’ mastery-approach orientation is positively related to the performance of challenging tasks. In addition, we showed that supervisors’ task impact and some of their goal orientations were related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks. Although not proposed, we found that supervisors’ task impact was negatively related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks. Hence, if supervisors allocate tasks to their subordinates these tasks tend to be of a non-challenging rather than challenging nature. Yet, this tendency is stronger when the supervisor has a performance-approach goal orientation whereas this tendency is weaker when the supervisor has a performance-avoidance goal orientation. Thus, employees who are dependent on their supervisors’ task assignments will perform less challenging assignments if the supervisor has a strong performance-approach goal orientation and they will perform more challenging assignments if the supervisor has a strong performance-avoidance goal orientation.

Unexpectedly, the findings did not support our proposition that supervisors’ mastery-approach goal orientation would be positively related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks. Supervisors’ own focus on learning seems not to convert into supervisory behaviors that facilitate the learning and developmental opportunities of their subordinates.

**General Discussion**

This study was motivated by a lack of research on factors that influence the amount of challenging tasks that employees perform. Examining these factors is highly important because prior research has shown that people’s challenging experiences have many beneficial outcomes (e.g., De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, et al., 2009). We investigated relationships between people’s goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks. Furthermore, in an organizational context we examined relationships between supervisors’ goal orientations and employees’ performance of challenging tasks. We have shown that employees’ as well as supervisors’ goal orientations are related to the amount of challenging assignments that employees perform. Individuals who have a strong mastery-approach goal orientation perform more challenging tasks than individuals who have a weaker mastery-approach goal orientation (Studies 1 and 2). This finding corroborates the widely accepted (Dweck, 1986) but never investigated suggestion that a mastery orientation (i.e., mastery-approach) is positively related to the performance of challenging tasks, because these types of tasks help mastery oriented persons in reaching their goal to develop competence and new skills. To date, this is the first study that provides empirical evidence for this relationship.

Individuals’ mastery-avoidance, performance-avoidance, and performance-approach goal orientations were not related to the performance of challenging tasks. These goal orientations neither stimulate nor discourage the performance of challenging tasks. This result may be due to the dualistic character of challenging tasks: on the one hand they provide
opportunities to excel and learn, but on the other hand they involve higher risks of noticeable failure.

Furthermore, we found that supervisors’ performance-approach goal orientations were related to employees’ performance of challenging tasks when supervisors had an impact on the content of employees’ jobs. This finding seems to support the idea that supervisors who have a strong wish to excel and outperform others may seek to dominate subordinates by keeping them weak and dependent (Yukl, 2006). As opposed, supervisors with a performance-avoidance goal orientation may, if possible, delegate challenging activities to subordinates. They wish not to fail and receive negative feedback and may, therefore, pass on this risk to their employees. Our results could not confirm our expectation that supervisors’ mastery-approach goals would lead to better learning opportunities for subordinates. People’s mastery-approach goal orientations seem indeed ego-focused because they concern one’s own learning opportunities and not necessarily those of others.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to three important domains of research: job challenge and career development, goal orientations, and leadership. Job challenge and career research has been mainly focused on the beneficial career outcomes of job challenge (e.g., Dragoni et al., 2009). Only recently, researchers have begun to pay attention to possible determinants (e.g., De Pater, Van Vianen, Fischer, et al., 2009) and processes (Preenen et al., 2008) of job challenge. We expect that the scientific interest in the antecedents of job challenge will further increase because career researchers have recognized its potential importance for future ‘boundaryless’ careers (e.g., Arthur, KhaPova, & Wilderom, 2005; Van Vianen, et al., 2008). Current career literatures tend to emphasize employees’ own responsibilities for planning and directing their career (Gherardi, Nicolini, & Odella, 1998; Hall, 2002). Our findings have indeed shown that people’s job experiences and subsequent development depend on their own mastery-approach goal orientations. However, the findings of this study suggest that the development and careers of employees also relate to managers’ goal orientations. Hence, employees may often be hampered in their own choice options to perform specific types of tasks if tasks are assigned to them (Van Vianen et al., 2008).

This study also contributes to theory and research on goal orientations. To date, extant goal orientation research has shown that people’s goal orientations affect their own outcomes (see Elliot & Dweck, 2005; Payne et al., 2007). However, hardly any goal orientation study has focused on interpersonal contexts (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004) and on how people’s goal orientations may influence other people’s opportunities and behaviors. Moreover, there is no previous research that has related goal orientation to the amount of challenging tasks people perform. The present study has shown that people’s performance goal orientations are related to the outcomes of others as well, particularly if they are in higher power positions in which they can influence the activities of other people. Our finding that supervisors with a
performance-avoidance goal orientation seem to facilitate employees’ job challenge sheds new light on the consequences of a performance-avoidance orientation. A performance-avoidance orientation is usually associated with negative consequences for individuals (e.g., Payne et al., 2007). Our results suggest that a performance-avoidance orientation could have beneficial consequences for others. This notion warrants further investigation because organizations may nevertheless not prefer performance-avoidant managers.

Finally, this study also adds to theory and research on leadership. Relatively little attention has been paid to managers’ daily behaviors as recent leadership studies were mostly concerned with the “heroic leader” (Yukl, 2006), such as transformational or charismatic leaders. Dyadic leadership processes have been investigated as well, but these studies primarily examined leader-member relationships, that is, the mutual trust and supportive relationships between leaders and followers (e.g., Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, “effective leaders plan and schedule activities in a way that will make better use of people, resources, information, and equipment. They assign tasks, determine resource requirements, and coordinate interrelated activities” (Yukl, 2006, p. 477). These concrete leadership skills and behaviors are obviously related to leaders’ personality characteristics, such as their goal orientations, as the findings of this study suggest.

Effective leaders in today’s changing organizations should seek to empower their employees by delegation. Indeed, most managers consider the development of employee skills and confidence as the main reason for delegating tasks to employees (Yukl & Fu, 1999). Leaders with a performance-approach goal orientation may also express this view but may nevertheless be less effective in stimulating their employees’ development. How leader goal orientations direct leadership attitudes and behaviors, and influence leader effectiveness should be further investigated in future research.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

This study has several strengths. We found similar relationships between individuals’ goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks in two studies that differed in their design and samples. Moreover, in Study 4.2 we combined measures from different sources: employees’ goals orientations and supervisors’ goals orientations. Finally, our respondents were clearly unaware of the purpose of this study and our interest in the relationships between goal orientations and performing challenging tasks, which diminishes the possibility that our findings are due to people’s tendency to respond in a social desirable or consistent way.

Yet, as with all research, also these studies have some limitations that should be discussed. First, although we believe that our study findings do not suffer from social desirability and consistency effects, common method variance among the self-report measures may still be an issue. Concerns about common method bias are a logical consequence of using self-reports which are the basis of research that studies people’s motives, goals and attitudes. The relationships between goal orientations and the performance of challenging tasks could
be flawed because our dependent variable (challenging tasks) was also based on self-reports. However, the zero-order correlations with the dependent variable vary from -.11 to .30 in Study 4.1, and from -.25 to .55 in Study 4.2, which reduces the probability “that common method variance is an inflator of correlations” (Spector, 2006, p. 224). We, therefore, assume that common method bias is not a serious problem in this study. Nevertheless, we want to encourage other researchers to include objective measures of task challenge in their future research. This could be done by employing methods for job and task analyses (e.g., Dierdorff, 2003). Another way of associating supervisors’ goal orientations to employees’ job experiences is to longitudinally collect data on employees’ development and job advancements.

A second, theoretically important limitation relates to the logic underlying our Study 4.2 hypotheses. We did not measure the processes that we described as the basis of our hypotheses and findings. For instance, we suggested that supervisors’ performance goal orientation affect the types of tasks they assign to their subordinates. Whereas our hypotheses were supported, we did not explicitly test supervisors’ allocation behaviors. Hence, there may be alternative explanations for our findings. Employees may, for example, refrain from performing challenging tasks if they know that their supervisor is eager to outperform others and, thus, may want to perform these tasks him or herself. Future research should focus on these and other explanations when studying relationships between supervisors’ goal orientations and employees’ task challenges.

Finally, future studies could pay attention to interpersonal relationships between supervisors and employees and how these affect employees’ tasks. For example, perceptions of supervisor-employee similarity may support the development of good exchange relationships between supervisors and employees. Supervisors may perceive some of their employees as more trustworthy and capable and, therefore, delegate them more challenging assignments (Bauer & Green, 1996; De Pater et al., 2010). These interpersonal factors together with supervisors’ goal orientations should be further explored.

**Practical Implications**

Mastery-approach oriented employees are eager to learn and develop. An organization’s flexibility and adaptability is highly dependent on employees’ willingness to learn (Allen & Poteet, 1999). Moreover, a mastery-approach orientation is associated with many other beneficial outcomes (e.g., Payne et al., 2007). Therefore, organizations could pay attention to applicants’ goal orientations during selection. However, although goal orientations are rather stable personal characteristics, they are not indifferent to contextual factors (e.g., Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1999; Elliot, 1999; Pintrich, 2000). Hence, organizations should create a culture that promotes mastery goal orientations in employees (Nauta, Van Vianen, Van Der Heijden, Van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009).
The sparse research on task delegation has emphasized subordinate characteristics as a determinant of a leader’s decision to delegate responsibilities and tasks to subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The findings of this study suggest that supervisors’ delegating behaviors are also determined by supervisor characteristics. Supervisors with strong performance-approach orientations may be less effective with regard to the development of their subordinates as they withhold them developmental opportunities. Organizations that have competitive cultures may seek for performance-approach goal orientations in their managers. These organizations consider their competitive values as a prerequisite for staying innovative and being able to survive in a turbulent market. Yet, this externally focused strategy may result in less development of internal human capital, which ultimately undermines an organization’s competitive strategy. Organizations are called upon to facilitate life-long employee learning in order to be able to grow and adapt, which is essential for an organization’s competitiveness (e.g., Barrie & Pace, 1998). Moreover, for an organization’s survival it is important to attract and retain competent employees. Organizations may be able to do so if they offer interesting, challenging, and meaningful jobs (e.g., Preenen et al., 2008; Slaughter, Richard, Martin, 2006). A manager’s reluctance to delegate challenging tasks could eventually lead to loss of valuable human resources. Performance-approach oriented managers seem less of a good match with organizations’ competitive strategies than many employers may assume.