

A Conceptual Study to Show the Role of Proactive Behavior in an Organization

¹Dr. Preetha F. James & ²Mr. Praveen Kumar

¹Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Bishop Appasamy College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore (India)

²Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Bishop Appasamy College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 03 Oct 2018

Keywords

Proactive Behaviour

*Corresponding Author

Email: preethafjames[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Today's firms are overpopulated by people who are often passive and not adequately proactive. As a successful U.S. entrepreneur told, "A reactive person waits for someone to call and say, 'I have a problem, can you help me with it?' Most workers are trained to be reactive." With the clear warning that people throughout the firm should focus their energies on broad organizational goals, they can often be allowed more freedom to pursue those goals in fruitful, creative, innovative ways. Relaxing the over controlling tendencies of many company policies and structures. But for proactive individuals, their behavior ultimately is like any other motivated behavior: If it is rewarded, it will thrive.

1. Introduction

One recent strategy for studying personality, found that people are not 'passive recipients of environmental pressures' (Buss, 1987, p. 1220). They influence their own environments.

According to George Bernard Shaw the world has three kinds of people, one those who make things happen, those who watch what happens, and those who wonder what happened states strategy gurus Hamel and Prahalad (1994). On the road to the future, there are drivers, there are passengers, and there is road kill. The key differentiator among these distinctions is the extent to which behavior of people and firms is proactive. Managers everywhere are urged to "be proactive," and companies are urged to create their futures proactively. Most recently, Robert Kelley (1998) highlights proactive behaviors as the keys that distinguish star performers from average performers.

To be proactive is to change things, in an intended direction. Proactive behavior distinguishes individuals from the group, and organizations from the rest of the marketplace. Proactive individuals create change, not merely expecting it. To be proactive is to take the initiative in improving business. Behavior that is not proactive includes sitting back, letting others try to make things happen, and passively hoping that externally imposed change will "works out okay."

People can make conscious decisions to leave and enter situations, as and when they take a new job, make acquisition or divestment decisions, or enter new markets. This is a form of proactive behavior; it places people and firms in different environments. Most important here is people can intentionally and directly change things through the creation of new circumstances, or the active alteration of current ones. This is what is meant by true proactive behavior.

Proactive people persist in their efforts. They don't back off from the obstacles, they don't take no for an answer, they don't settle for less, and they aren't satisfied with being able to say after a defeat, change must not merely be thought about or attempted, but achieved.

As expected, the intelligent, experienced, conscientious, extraverted sales agents were successful on the job. However, none of these things is the same as being proactive and proactive behavior predicted success even more highly. Clearly, this is a unique and desirable quality in professional salespeople.

2. What is Proactive Behavior?

Proactive behavior is behavior that directly alters environments. The proactive dimension of behavior is rooted in people's needs to manipulate and control the environment (White, 1959; Langer, 1983). Maddi (1989) categorizes some individual behaviors as transcendent, that is, they transform environments rather than adjust or acquiesce to them. Individuals can be active rather than passive in the role-making process (Graen, 1976), and they can create 'ecological change' in their environments (Weick, 1979). Hirschman (1970) described how workers passively withdraw or actively try to change working conditions as they adapt to dissatisfying work environments. In general, then, there exists great potential for assigning to the individual a more proactive role in models of employee behavior (Brief and Aldag, 1981) and for developing techniques of measuring proactive behavior.

Proactive behaviour is protective behaviour with the aim to influence either oneself or the work environment (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Proactive behavior is defined as the "taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions" (Crant, 2000). Employees change the environment by approaching their work with an initiative to create conditions which are favorable for them. The environment can control the behavior but the behavior also controls the environment (Bowers, 1973; Schneider, 1983).

3. Proactive Personality

The proactive personality, are unconstrained by situational forces, and who effects environmental change. Other people, who are relatively passive - they react to, adapt to, and are shaped by their environments. Proactive people scan for

opportunities, show initiative, take action, and persevere until they reach closure by bringing about change. They are pathfinders (Leavitt, 1988) who change their organization's mission or find and solve problems. They take it upon themselves to have an impact on the world around them. People who are not proactive fail to identify, let alone seize, opportunities to change things. They show little initiative, and rely on others to be forces for change. They passively adapt to, and even endure, their circumstances.

It is used to identify the differences between people's tendency to influence their environment. They are undisturbed by situational forces and have a great effect on changing the environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). They identify the opportunities and show initiative to persist until meaningful changes are achieved (Bateman & Crant, 1993). People with low proactive personality tend to do not identify opportunities, cannot use them to cause changes and behave only passive and reactive on situational forces. They rather accept and adapt circumstances than change them (Crant, 1995). The roots of the proactive personality concept in proactive behavior lie in the interactionist perspective; this means that people are able to create their own environments. Behavior of people is viewed as being both internally and externally influenced and situations which influence them are as much a function of person as vice versa (Schneider, 1983).

4. Characteristics of Proactive Person

Proactive person can directly and intentionally change their current circumstances, social and non-social. Their behavior directly alters environments. Bandura (1986) stated that these people create environments and set them in motion.

5. Impact of Proactive Behaviour to an Organization

Proactive work behaviour is related to increased individual and organizational performance, such as overall performance, career-related outcomes, sales, and organizational success (Fay & Frese, 2001; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006; Raabe, Frese, & Beehr, 2007), it is beneficial for organizations. Organizations might achieve a competitive advantage if they were able to motivate their employees to behave in a proactive manner.

More specifically, employees need to become more flexible and active and they need to attack occurring problems in a proactive way instead of just fulfilling their jobs and reacting passively to new situations (Parker, 2000; Swan & Fox, 2009). The goal of this dissertation is to extend research on proactive work behaviour by examining antecedents as well as outcomes of proactive work behaviour using different methodological approaches.

Traditionally, researchers as well as practitioners supposed that employees might rather be passive and solely following instructions of their supervisors would be sufficient to grant good performance and organizational success (Frese, 2008). Due to changes in the work environments, these traditional views have changed towards a more proactive point of view.

6. Expectations from Employee for Sustainable Development

Today's jobs are typically characterized by rapid changes and decentralized work structures. Therefore, it is increasingly important that employees do not just fulfil their jobs and react passively to new situations but that they become more flexible and active, and that they attack occurring problems in a proactive way.

Today's employees are often confronted with rapid changes in their jobs, including the need to deal with innovations and new technologies, and to work in companies with decentralized management (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Campbell, 2000; Howell & Higgins, 1990; Schilling & Steensma, 2001; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). Typically, job stress is increased, for instance by job stressors such as job demands, obstacles, role conflicts, and uncertainty (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Härenstam et al., 2004; Jimmieson, Terry, & Callan, 2004). Moreover, proactive working is demanded, i.e., employees have to become more flexible and active, and have to approach occurring problems in a proactive way (Parker, 2000; Swan & Fox, 2009). Proactive behaviour, which is typically seen as anticipatory behaviour with the aim to influence either oneself or the work environment (Grant & Ashford, 2008), is beneficial for the organization as it is related to increased individual and organizational performance, such as overall performance, career-related outcomes, sales, and organizational success (Fay & Frese, 2001; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006; Raabe, Frese, & Beehr, 2007).

7. Antecedents and Outcomes of Proactive Behavior

Research has focused on the antecedents and outcomes of proactive behaviour. Studies done by Crant (2000) showed that individual differences (e.g., proactive personality, role breadth self-efficacy, job involvement, goal orientation, need for achievement) and contextual factors (organizational culture and norms) act as antecedents of proactive behaviour. The research has found out that antecedents distinguished between individual factors (age, gender, knowledge, abilities, readiness to change, and learning goal orientation) and situational factors (job autonomy, complexity, job stressors, leadership, climate).

Prior research has showed outcomes were associated with proactive behavior. The outcomes of proactive behavior found out through research are individual job performance, career success, well-being, identification, role clarity, team effectiveness, and organizational success (Bindl & Parker, in press; Crant, 2000; Fay & Frese, 2001).

It is important to determine the relationship between proactive personality and affective commitment. Jobs stressors occur in every work environment. Particular job stressors which appear in jobs are stressors, such as role conflict and role ambiguity and workloads (Spector, 2006). These are the job stressors which are researched in this study. There is a relationship between proactive personality and job stressors which might influence the relationship between proactive personality and affective commitment. Job stressors have different effects on people with high proactive personality than on people with less proactive personality (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997).

At first glance, these positive relationships between job stressors and proactive behaviour are surprising: Why should

employees engage in extra proactive efforts when being confronted with stressors at work? Intuitively, one might rather think that if employees are confronted with job stressors, fulfilling the required tasks should be more demanding and should require more task-related effort (Frese & Zapf, 1994; Hockey, 1997). Therefore, time and resources for additional proactive actions should be scarce. One possible explanation for these surprising results might lay in the methodology of the previous research: Studies that showed positive relationships between job stressors and proactive behaviour measured proactive behaviour with self ratings. Therefore, relationships might have occurred because of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) or might reflect an individual perception of activation.

People who are able to change their environments are seen to be more effective in work performances. To prove this Bateman and Crant (1993) developed the Proactive Personality Scale which measures the construct of proactive personality. The Proactive Personality Scale was used in several studies to identify the effects of proactive personality on different work outcomes. Outcome variables like individual job performance

(Crant, 1995), career outcomes (for example career success, salary, number of promotions) (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999), leadership (Crant & Bateman, 2000), organizational innovation (Parker, 1998), team performance (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999) and entrepreneurship (Becherer & Maurer, 1999) were studied and positive correlations were found.

This states that proactive personality is an important variable in the effectiveness of performance and achievement for organizations and individuals. As mentioned before Bateman and Crant (1993) mentioned that not all effects of proactive personality are positive and as it can also lead to negative outcomes. In a study about proactive personality and its outcomes, Chan (2006) shows that situational judgment skills are important moderators of proactive personality and if lacking it could lead to maladaptive outcomes. In this study we will concentrate on the outcomes of affective commitment. This could be interesting for an organization with the idea that a proactive employee leads to more positive work outcomes.

Items to be Studied

Proactive behavior

1. I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life.
2. Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change.
3. Nothing is more exciting than seeing my ideas turn into reality.
4. If I see something I don't like, I fix it.
9. If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen.
5. No matter what the odds, if I believe in something I will make it happen.
6. I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition.
7. I excel at identifying opportunities.
8. I am always looking for better ways to do things.
10. I can spot a good opportunity long before others can

Role conflict

1. I do not feel certain about how much authority I have.
2. Clear, planned goals and objectives do not exist for my job.
3. I know that my time is not dividend properly to do different tasks.
4. I am not sure what my responsibilities are.
5. I am not sure exactly what is expected of me.
6. It is not clearly explained that what has to be done.
7. I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it.
8. I work on unnecessary things.