

# Preface

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A highly valued employee at any level in the modern workplace is one who goes beyond accomplishing his or her assigned responsibilities. Performance of this nature is often driven by a proactive personality which in turn leads to proactive behavior. Workers with a proactive personality are inclined to engage in proactive behaviors such as looking for opportunities to improve work processes, going beyond the job description, taking the initiative to engage in job-relevant learning, to prevent problems from happening, and going out to meet customers. The proactive worker is likely to have high job performance and at the same time contribute to organizational productivity.

## PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE BOOK

Although extensive research has been conducted about employee proactive behavior, and thousands of popular articles have been written on the topic, a book on this subject has not yet been published. The purpose of the book is to consolidate information about proactivity in the workplace that could be applied toward helping workers themselves become more proactive, and managers within organizations understand effective ways of fostering proactive thinking and behavior. The book provides a detailed description of how proactive behavior contributes to important aspects of organizations that contribute to their well-being and success. Proactivity underlies important aspects of organization success such as opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial thinking, business strategy and planning, problem prevention, and talent management.

Although much of the book is based on empirical research, it is written in a style accessible to people who are not researchers in the field of proactive personality and behavior. The book is designed to be of value to scholars, individuals within organizations, managers and leaders, and practitioners such as human resource professionals, industrial and organizational psychologists, and organization development specialists. Another audience for the book is students in organizational behavior, organizational psychology, and organizational and industrial psychology.

The book should appeal to practitioners and policy makers who seek information in a more scholarly format than a strictly trade book.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

To achieve its purposes and goals, the book is divided into 11 chapters. Chapter 1 describes the nature of the proactive personality, including nine representative characteristics of the proactive worker, such as a desire for control, and taking charge at work. A description is also provided of situational and environmental factors that influence the extent to which proactive behavior will emerge. Chapter 2 digs further into the proactive personality by describing many of the traits and behaviors associated with this type of personality, including traits within the Big Five personality factors. Other traits and behaviors linked to the proactive personality described in this chapter include organizational citizenship behavior, goal setting, and proactive motivation. Chapter 3 describes worker initiative as part of the proactive personality, in recognizing that many of the productivity benefits of proactivity stem from initiative taking. The chapter presents some of the evidence and opinion that initiative enhances job performance. The potential disadvantages of initiative taking are also described, such as being resented or working on the wrong projects as perceived by the manager.

Chapter 4 explores the vital topic of how the proactive personality is linked to job performance and satisfaction. Several studies are described that show a positive relationship between proactivity and objective, or measurable, job performance as well as with supervisory judgments of performance. A section of the chapter also describes how good performance can prompt a worker to take more initiative. Chapter 5 is a logical extension of Chapter 4 because it describes how the proactive personality is associated with career success. A key topic explored is that proactivity often prompts individuals to engage in behaviors that facilitate effective career management including finding a mentor or mentors, developing job- and career-relevant skills, and staying in good health. Proactivity is also needed to acquire power, establish a good reputation, and develop a personal brand.

Chapter 6 examines the highly important topic of how proactivity is linked to opportunity recognition and innovation. Another key topic in the chapter is how proactivity leads to seeing and seizing opportunities after searching for them. A related topic presented is how innovation has a strong component of proactive thinking and behavior. Chapter 7 describes how proactivity is part of the entrepreneurial behavior and personality. A

key theme of the chapter is that successful entrepreneurs tend to be proactive, particularly with respect to being creative and adventuresome. An analysis is also presented of how entrepreneurial leadership is linked to the proactive personality, with such personality types having a strong desire to become entrepreneurial leaders in order to create value for the firm. Social entrepreneurship is described as another manifestation of proactivity.

Chapter 8 presents the complex topic of how business strategy is facilitated by proactivity. A key point of the chapter is that the business strategist must be proactive about the future and point the firm in the right direction. The chapter looks at several ways in which proactive thinking facilitates effective strategy, including finding hidden assets within the firm and expanding its boundaries. Chapter 9 deals with another domain in which proactive thinking and behavior is essential – problem prevention. Among the areas touched upon in which proactivity helps prevent problems are identifying danger signals, making use of Murphy's Law, visualization of potential problems, crisis prevention, and disaster planning.

Chapter 10 describes how the proactive personality and behavior can contribute to productive talent management. Among the talent management activities where proactivity can be helpful are employer branding, talent management planning, initiatives for cultural and demographic diversity, employee retention, and enhancing employee wellness. Chapter 11 presents the cornerstone topic of how leaders influence or enhance the possibility of proactivity among subordinates. Among the topics described are the influence of charismatic and transformational leadership, how leader charisma can trigger initiative taking, creating a climate for creativity, creating a climate for initiative, and the encouragement of honest whistleblowing.

To help the reader focus on the personal relevance of proactive thinking and behavior, all chapters contain a self-quiz or checklist closely related to the topic at hand. A sampling of the titles of these quizzes and checklists is as follows: "My Tendencies toward Being a Proactive Personality," "The Locus of Control Self-Quiz," "A Checklist of Behaviors and Attitudes Reflecting Initiative," and "The Resiliency Quiz." Each chapter contains a section labeled "Suggestions for Application" which helps the reader apply key concepts about proactive behavior personally, or in some cases aiding others to become more proactive. Each chapter also contains a summary to help the reader integrate the chapter material.