Helping people to ‘make things happen’: A framework for proactivity at work

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“There are three ways people behave at work: making things happen, watching what happens, and wondering what happened.”

How do you (your staff) behave in your work?

Which kind are you?

How does your leadership influence your staff’s proactive behavior?
Does proactivity matter? (for change?)

What is proactivity?

What motivates proactivity?

Is proactivity born or made? (If made, how do you make it?)

Is proactivity always good?
Made things happen

Wondered what happened
Does presidential proactivity matter?

YES!

• Proactivity of presidents predicted historian ratings of
  – Effectiveness
  – Making great decisions
  – War avoidance
Proactivity also matters....

- For **job performance** across a range of jobs

- For **individual career success**

- For **innovation, intrapreneurship, and entrepreneurship**

- For **emergent / bottom-up change**

Crant, 1995
Proactivity and change

“The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker”
Does proactivity matter? (for change?)

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Is proactivity always good?
What is proactivity?

“Being proactive involves self-initiated efforts to bring about change in the environment and/or oneself to achieve a different future (Parker, et al., 2010)

Stephen Covey (2004, 2009)
7 Habits of Highly Effective People
WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO SHOW SOME INITIATIVE, FINLEY?

WHEN YOU TELL ME TO, SIR!
“On a few occasions if there’s something that’s not working or is causing a duplication of work then I’ve challenged it. One incident is that there was a process not so long back where we’d send out a letter to a customer and also leave a message on their phone. So what we did - we evaluated that - so to leave a message first then, if there’s no response, send a letter rather than doing both at the same time. I know it’s only a little thing, but it saves a lot of time.” (Call centre agent; Bindl & Parker, 2010)
Proactive safety

Taking charge of change

Crafting jobs

Proactively seeking feedback

Improving work methods

Speaking up with ideas

Actively sculpting careers
Categories of Individual Proactivity

- **Aimed at changing the organization’s fit with the environment**
  - Proactive Strategic Behaviour
    - Strategic scanning
    - Issue selling
  - Proactive Work Behaviour
    - Taking charge
    - Individual innovation
    - Problem prevention
  - Proactive Career Behaviour
    - Feedback seeking
    - Career initiative
    - Job-role negotiation

- **Aimed at changing the internal org. environment**
- **Aimed at changing the individual’s fit within the org. environment**

Parker & Collins, JOM, 2010
Does proactivity matter?

What is proactivity?

What motivates proactivity?

Is proactivity born or made? (If made, how do you make it?)

Is proactivity always good?
Proactivity can be risky & uncertain

“A lot of the time (proactivity) is seen as being overly competitive or pointing out weaknesses or an inability to let things sit as they are... Basically, whenever you are suggesting improvement, the flip side of that coin is that you can be seen as criticising the status quo... Being proactive is extremely difficult to do effectively.”
(Manager, Consulting Organization)

For example study
See Grant, Collins, Parker (2009)
“A ‘take charge’ guy would be nice but I’m looking for more of the ‘take blame’ type.”
Proactive motivation

*Can do*
- Self-efficacy

*Reason to*
- Internalized motivation

*Energized to*
- Activated positive affect

Based on Parker, Bindl, Strauss (2010)
Can do motivational pathway

"I am not fit for this office and never should have been here"

"I think it is getting yourself established in the business and getting yourself known and then getting your confidence to speak out and say ‘this is an issue’ and say why... If you’re hesitant, it’s not going to be heard..."

Warren Harding

New manager
Can do pathway

• Many studies show self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ proactivity

To what extent *do you try to bring about improved procedures in your work place*?

![Bar chart showing percent with high scores for low and high self-efficacy.](chart)

N = 500 nurses (Parker et al., in prep.)
Proactive motivation

**Can do**
- Self-efficacy

**Reason to**
- Internalized motivation

**Energized to**
- Activated positive affect

Based on Parker, Bindl, Strauss (2010)
You get back to that goddamn cubicle and start thinking outside the box!
Reason to pathway

Some examples of *internalized* motivation:

• “Because I enjoy the challenge”
• “Because I believe it’s important”
• “Because it’s ‘my job’”

Parker et al. 2006; Ohly & Fritz, 2007; Dorensboch, et al., 2005
Reason to **pathway**

“Because its part of who I am (and who I want to be)”

My future work self spends a lot of time teaching, explaining complex issues to students. My future self works collaboratively with other researchers in other disciplines … My future self is not constantly reminded of the need to be competitive. My future self is allowed to lead his research on whichever topic he likes, while using whatever approach he likes. My future self is free and has the professional stability necessary to be genuinely creative.”

Graduate student in Philosophy

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**Proactive Career Behavior**

Strauss, Griffin & Parker (2012)
Proactive motivation

**Can do**
- Self-efficacy

**Reason to**
- Internalized motivation

**Energized to**
- Activated positive affect

Proactive behavior
Energised to pathway

Positive mood

Activated mood

Enthusiasm

Engagement

Inspirational

Vision

Imagination

Creativity

Innovation

Proactive behavior

See for example: Warr, Bindl, Parker, Inceoglu (N = 1121)
When it comes to motivation, I recommend a three-pronged approach...

Proactive Motivation
Can Do
Reason To
Energised To
Plan from here....

Does proactivity matter?

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Is proactivity always good?
The Work Context ("Made")

Proactive motivation

Can do
• Self-efficacy

Reason to
• Internalized motivation

Energized to
• Activated positive affect

The Person ("Born")

Proactive behavior
Work Context 1

*Enriched Jobs*

- Can do (self-efficacy)
- Reason to (flexible role orientation)
- Proactive problem solving

Parker, Williams & Turner (2006)
Example: What does de-skilling do to truck-makers proactive motivation?

“to enable people to make decisions at the lowest point of knowledge, which will increase commitment & motivation…”
(from Company Values)

Parker, SK. (2003)
Work Context 2
Leadership: Vision
Example: Who becomes more proactive during change?

- Neither self-efficacy alone nor vision alone led to growth in proactivity; both were needed

Griffin, Parker, Mason, (2010)
Work Context 3
A Supportive Climate
Example: Will support enhance the proactivity of junior doctors?

Parker, Johnson, Collins, Hong, (2010)
Greater proactivity when advance nurse provided support on the shift
You can't admit mistakes to senior doctors... junior doctors tend to shut up & don't say anything, if you want to stay or progress in this hospital. I feel OK talking to the advanced nurse” (can do)

“Will coach us through things, asking us “what equipment will you need in this situation”, and saying ‘I am a hundred percent behind you in this” Gives you a lot of confidence “ (can do)
Proactive motivation

*Can do*
- Self-efficacy

*Reason to*
- Internalized motivation

*Energized to*
- Activated positive affect

The Work Context (“Made’)
- Enriched jobs
- Leader vision
- Supportive climate

The Person (“Born”)

Proactive behavior
Interventions to enhance proactivity

• Evaluation of “Active Workforce Initiative”
  – UK Police Force and National Health Service Trust
  – Proactivity increased after 3 days training and some coaching (Strauss & Parker, under review)

• Leadership development programs at Accelerated Learning Laboratory@UWA
Coaching?

• Coaching: Individual leader/employee’s own proactivity
  – Awareness/ reflection
  – Use model to address motivational forces
    • e.g., REASON TO: Future Work Self, then identify discrepancy, then set goals
  – Encourage crafting to shape better job/ context

• Coaching: Leader’s capability to generate proactivity in others
  – Understanding the ‘risk’ involved
  – Use the model to understand motivational forces
    • E.g., CAN DO: Building self-efficacy

• Supporting diagnostic tools
Does proactivity matter?

What is proactivity?

What motivates proactivity?

Is proactivity born or made? (If made, how do you make it?)

Is proactivity always good?
Proactivity can go awry
Challenges to get proactivity right

• The “proactivity paradox”
• Lots of rules risks suppressing proactivity altogether
• Our approach is to cultivating wise proactivity

Australian Research Council project

Dr Jenny Liao
In conclusion....

“There are three ways people behave at work: making things happen, watching what happens, and wondering what happened”

The Work Context
- Enriched jobs
- Leader vision
- Supportive climate

Proactive motivation
Can do
Reason to
Energized to

Proactive behavior
“IT’S TOO COLD”
“IT’S TOO EARLY”
“IT’S TOO HOT”
“IT’S TOO LATE”

MAKE IT HAPPEN.

Habit 1
Be Proactive

I ❤️ BEING PROACTIVE

You’re in Charge!

The question isn’t who is going to let me, it’s who is going to stop me….

Ayn Rand

Take Charge of Your LIFE

Thanks for Listening!

https://sites.google.com/site/profsharonparker/