



PROACTIVE PERSONALITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON LEADERSHIP AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The present study investigates the predictive role of proactive personality in career success among government college teachers, while also exploring the mediating effects of social desirability (denial, attribution) and motivation to lead (affective identity, non-calculative, social normative). Employing a correlational research design and a quantitative methodology, data were collected from a sample of 300 college teachers using purposive sampling. Standardized scales were used to measure the study variables. Findings revealed that proactive personality significantly predicts career success. Regression analyses indicated that denial and attribution negatively predict career success, while social normative motivation positively predicts it. Affective identity and non-calculative motivation did not show significant direct predictive effects. Hierarchical regression and Sobel tests on mediation model showed that the effect of proactive personality on career success is mediated by attribution and social normative significantly. The analysis by Gender showed huge differences in proactive personality, leadership motivation but there was no significant gender difference in the career success as a whole. The results of the research also point to the fact that proactive characters and socially committed leadership motives should be encouraged in educational institutions to improve outcomes within their career activities.

Keywords:

Proactive Personality, Career Success, Social Desirability, Motivation to Lead, Government College Teachers, Leadership Motivation, Mediation Analysis

Introduction

In the current academic society where everything is changing so fast, being able to lead and bring about change is key to survival in institutions of higher learning. Proactive personality is one of the most important psychological constructs that can enhance such success because it is a dispositional tendency of an individual to take initiative and change things around in the environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). With educational institutions growingly valuing the concepts of changeability and innovativeness, it is said that positive minded people become the keenest movers of leadership and career growth.

Aspects of personality are no longer considered as a fixed predictor of performance but researchers have changed their views to understand and realize that personality plays the dynamic process through which career paths can be led and forms of leadership attained (Crant, 2000). In particular, individuals high in proactive personality not only anticipate future challenges but also act to address them, even in the absence of immediate prompts (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999). These individuals are thought to seek opportunities, persist through challenges, and proactively generate favorable conditions for success.

The Five-Factor Model of Personality (also known as the Big Five), introduced by Digman (1990) and widely utilized in organizational research (Hogan & Roberts, 1996), includes traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and neuroticism. Studies have shown that proactive personality shares significant overlap with traits such as



conscientiousness and extraversion, and occasionally with openness and neuroticism, but not with agreeableness (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Judge et al., 2002).

The concept of proactive personality has gained empirical attention for its predictive power in various occupational outcomes, including creativity (Kim, Hon, & Crant, 2009), job performance (Crant, 1995; Thompson, 2005), career satisfaction (Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010), and overall career success (Seibert et al., 2001). However, much of the current literature has focused on subordinate roles, with limited focus on how proactive personality manifests in leaders themselves and contributes to group-level outcomes (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013). This research aims to address that gap, particularly within the context of higher education institutions.

Proactive individuals are not passive recipients of their environment but are active agents of change. As noted by Crant (2000), they shape their surroundings, identify opportunities, and persist in their efforts until meaningful outcomes are achieved. They are often described as self-starters who set high expectations and utilize available resources to meet those expectations (Lee & Peterson, 2000). This active orientation has been shown to enhance workplace effectiveness, particularly in leadership roles where the capacity to inspire change and solve problems is paramount (Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b).

In educational settings, the presence of proactive educators can significantly contribute to institutional success. Proactive teachers tend to take initiative in classroom management, fostering positive student behavior rather than reacting to disruptions (Henley, 2006). They are also more likely to take responsibility for student development and adopt creative solutions to challenges (Brophy, 1983). These behaviors align with broader organizational goals and foster a culture of innovation and resilience.

Critical thinking and problem-solving are additional competencies linked with proactive personality (Crant, 2000). Individuals who exhibit proactive traits tend to be self-confident, reflective, and courageous in the face of adversity (Rosenberg, 1989; Heppner & Baumgardner, 1985). These cognitive-behavioral skills are vital for navigating complex educational and administrative challenges. As Koç, Terzi, and Gül (2015) suggest, such individuals are more adept at managing change, leading teams, and achieving career advancement.

Notably, academic leadership positions being required in the current context are associated with not only the ability to know and experience but also to support and contribute to innovations and transformation (Wu & Wang, 2011). Proactive leaders have higher chances of doing proactive behaviors or rather vision-oriented behaviour which motivates their teams and institutes (Crossley et al., 2013). They are driven from within to be initiatives, question the status quo and initiate positive changes and this is what makes them successful in any competitive education platform.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory views people as working towards earning and preserving resources, and can be adopted by active leaders as a resource producer in an organization (Hobfoll, 2001). They tend to behave in a way that alleviates group stress, improves motivation and leads to the overall achievement of their departments or institutions. With the constant change of higher education, the role of proactive personality as an influencing factor on leadership and promotion in career perspectives becomes highly essential.

Social desirability is another construct that could be presented in the context of this discussion and could be described as a tendency of individuals to portray themselves in a way that could be perceived as favorable by other people (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Another group of researchers



belief is that social desirability is more than just a bias because it is a stable characteristic of personality associated with well-being and self-perception (McCrae & Costa, 1983; Pavot & Diener, 1993). Nonetheless, the interaction between social desirability and proactive attributes in leadership is still not understood.

The study thus aims at exploring the implication of proactive personality on leadership styles and professional stuff in particular among college/ university teachers. It seeks to find out how proactive people manoeuvre through institutional hierarchies, team leadership, problem solving, and achieving career success. By so doing, it aims at providing a bigger picture of the psychological characteristics, which are the foundation of successful leadership within higher education.

Literature Review

Proactive personality is a term that has received a lot of attention in the organizational psychology and leadership literature. Bateman and Crant (1993) defined proactive personality as a dispositional tendency of the individual to carry out actions, to influence the surrounding world, and stick to it until some significant changes would occur. Highly proactive individuals are never bound by forces of situations rather they search and create chances and opportunities to positively change things. On the other hand, low proactive individuals are more likely to be flexible, dynamic and less challenged by the circumstances compared to those who are proactive (Crant, 1995). The origin of this construct is rooted in the interactionist perspective that suggests that individuals are creations and creators of the surroundings (Schneider, 1983).

Another step towards developing the clarity about proactive personality was made by Belwalkar and Tobacyk (2018) who proposed the three-dimensional model which included perceptions (the ability to identify the opportunities), implementation (planning and executing change), and perseverance (sustaining efforts until the change takes place). Their paper included the construction and the validation of a 14 item scale which was found to have greater predictive effect on the task performance when compared with the common one dimensional scale. In their study, they showed that such triadic structure helps to understand the concept of proactivity on a more subtle level and distinguish it with similar constructs such as optimism or personal initiative.

Johnson (2015) presents research on proactive personality in a leadership perspective via cadets of the U.S. Air Force Academy. Through the application of the mixed-method approach, Johnson discovered that proactive cadets scored higher in terms of organizational support, quality in leader-member exchanges, emotional commitment, job satisfaction, and military works. Notably, the results of the study discovered that social desirability mediated the linkage between proactive personality and turnover intentions. Interview answers given by cadets on an open-ended basis indicated that the concept of proactiveness was considered as the focal point of leadership development thus strengthening the perception that proactivity plays a crucial role in developing leaders of character.

A study by Bertolino, Truxillo, and Fraccaroli (2011) explored the moderating effect of age between the proactive personality and the training outcomes such as training motivation, the perception of the improvement in career, and intentions of learning. This requirement of the survey was met since their sample of 252 civil service employees showed a positive connection between training outcomes and proactivity reading higher in younger workers than older employees. This



implies that there are possibilities of age affecting the extent to which proactive learners embrace the opportunities of learning and career development by engaging in the same.

Similarly, Joo and Lim (2009) have also examined the interplay of the proactive personality with the processes of organizational learning and job complexity in determining an individual intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment. They found out that employees who proactively had a high personality and the perceptions of having more complex job tasks were more motivated and felt devoted to their institutions. In part, it was discovered that job complexity mediated the connection between proactive personality and intrinsic motivation. Their article made it clear organization learning conditions and job constructions are significant forces in enabling manifestation of personality traits of proactive personalities and thus increased leadership potential and devotion.

Thompson (2005) tested network building as a mediator in the correlation of proactive personality and the performance in a job. Thompson investigated 126 employee-supervisor pairs and hypothesized that proactive people develop social capital (relationships and connections) that can access resources and support that is required to perform at the highest levels. With structural equation modeling, the researcher confirmed that network construction and engagement were the mediating factor between proactivity and job performance. This highlights the fact that proactive behaviors are not only an attribute of the inner dispositions but are also enabled by external social systems.

When aggregated together, the current set of studies finds that proactive personality is a consistent individual difference variable that powerfully predicts a broad domain of leadership-related criteria, such as motivation, commitment, learning, and performance. Another literature finding which sustains the practice is that the features or circumstances of the context like age, organizational culture, job design, and the social desirability could either promote or temper the expression and outcome of the proactive behavior. Specifically in the sphere of higher education, the sphere in which leadership presupposes working with intricate social, intellectual and bureaucratic contexts, proactive personality is expected to establish itself as a comprehensive facilitator in career success and contribution of the institution.

Integration of these insights will achieve a gap that exists between proactivity of the individuals and collective progress of leadership in educational institutions through the current research. Although proactive personality has received a lot of association with success in business and military contexts, little has been done to establish its influence on leadership and career development in higher education. This relationship can be critical on the implications of the professional development programs and leadership training services at colleges and universities.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The correlational research design was used in this study to determine relationship between proactive personality, social desirability, leadership motivation, and career success among the college teachers as professionals. Being a quantitative research, the methodology entailed the numeric interpretation of responses to standardized test results to statistically determine the level of the relationship between the variables. This choice of design comes due to the fact that the naturally occurring relationships can be studied without any control over any of the variables and



therefore can be conductively used to study the behavioral and psychological disposition related to the field of education.

Sampling Strategy

In this study, a non-probability purposive sampling method was employed to pick the participants. In this approach, the method of identifying the research participants is predetermined by given attributes that apply to the research objective and opinion of the researcher. Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) state that purposive sampling (judgmental or selective sampling) can especially be fit when a researcher needs to find interested persons who have devoted particular attention in the phenomenon under study or have experience related to that phenomenon. Only these individuals, who are teaching at the college level in public or privately owned institutions of higher learning were included in the current study.

Sample

The sampling ended with a final sample of 300 college teachers- with 152 males (50.7 percent) and 148 females (49.3 percent) aged between 25 and 60 years. The sample average was 41.25 and the standard deviation was 7.42. The participants varied in terms of academic ranks, instructional areas, study experience, and professional experience in the institution of higher learning.

Operational Definition

Proactive Personality:

As defined by Bateman and Crant (1993), proactive personality refers to individual differences in the tendency to take initiative across a wide range of situations. Individuals high in proactive personality are inclined to influence their environments by identifying opportunities, initiating action, and persisting until meaningful change occurs.

Measures

Demographic Proforma

A structured demographic questionnaire was developed to gather personal and professional information about the participants. The demographic items included:

- **Personal data:** Age, gender, marital status, education level, and family system (nuclear/joint).
- **Professional data:** Current academic rank, years of teaching experience, teaching faculty (e.g., humanities, commerce, sciences), and average working hours.

Proactive Personality Scale (PPS)

The Proactive Personality Scale (PPS) developed by Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer (1999) was employed in its abbreviated 10-item form. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scale in this study was $\alpha = .82$, indicating strong internal consistency. Sample items include statements like "I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life" and "I excel at identifying opportunities."



Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 300)

Characteristic	f (%)	M (SD)
Gender		
- Male	152 (50.7%)	
- Female	148 (49.3%)	
Age (years)		41.25 (7.42)
Education		
- Master	104 (34.7%)	
- MPhil/Ph.D	196 (65.3%)	
Family System		
- Nuclear	142 (47.3%)	
- Joint	158 (52.7%)	
Marital Status		
- Married	274 (91.3%)	
- Unmarried	26 (8.7%)	
Academic Rank		
- Lecturer	124 (41.3%)	
- Assistant Professor	104 (34.7%)	
- Associate Professor	31 (10.3%)	
- Professor	41 (13.7%)	
Years of Experience		
- 1–5	28 (9.3%)	
- 6–10	84 (28.0%)	
- 11–15	40 (13.3%)	
- 16–20	59 (19.7%)	



Characteristic	f (%)	M (SD)
- 21–25	38 (12.7%)	
- 26–30	35 (11.7%)	
- 31–35	16 (5.3%)	
Faculty		
- Humanities	206 (68.7%)	
- Commerce	53 (17.7%)	
- Sciences	41 (13.7%)	
Working Hours (per day)		5.68 (0.76)

As shown in **Table 1**, the sample consisted of approximately equal representation from male and female college teachers. The majority were married and lived in joint family systems. Most respondents held MPhil/Ph.D. degrees, were employed as lecturers, and primarily taught humanities subjects. The most frequently reported teaching experience was in the 6–10 year range.

Data Analysis

This section presents the findings derived from statistical analysis performed on the collected data. The results are organized in the following sequence: descriptive statistics and psychometric properties of scales, correlation analysis, regression analyses for direct and mediated effects, Sobel test for mediation significance, and gender-based differences using independent sample t-tests.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	K	M	SD	α	Potential Range	Actual Range
Proactive Personality	10	55.15	7.24	.85	10–50	18–48
Social Desirability						
Denial	8	3.32	1.50	.50	0–8	0–8

Variables	K	M	SD	α	Potential Range	Actual Range
Attribution	5	3.20	1.11	.52	0–5	0–5
Motivation to Lead						
Affective Identity	9	31.19	6.46	.80	9–45	10–44
Non-calculative	9	29.79	3.17	.61	9–45	20–42
Social Normative	9	34.75	3.79	.60	9–45	22–44
Career Success	5	21.49	2.50	.75	5–25	10–25

Interpretation:

Table 2 indicates that all scales demonstrate acceptable reliability, with the **Proactive Personality Scale** showing strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$), and **Career Success** showing good reliability ($\alpha = .75$). The subscales of **Social Desirability** (Denial and Attribution) showed relatively **lower reliability coefficients** (.50 and .52 respectively), while the **Motivation to Lead** subscales ranged from **moderate to good reliability** (.60–.80).

Pearson Inter-Correlations among Demographics and Major Study Variables (N = 300)

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (Complete table omitted for brevity)

Interpretation:

- **Gender** had a weak **positive correlation** with **affective identity**, **motivation to lead**, and **career success**, and a **negative correlation** with **proactive personality** and **non-calculative** traits.
- **Proactive personality** had significant **positive correlations** with **motivation to lead** (especially affective identity and social normative) and **career success**, while showing **negative correlations** with **denial**, **attribution**, and overall **social desirability**.
- **Denial** and **attribution** both had significant **negative associations** with **career success** and components of **leadership motivation**.
- **Motivation to lead**, especially the **social normative** dimension, was **positively associated** with **career success**.

Table 3

Simple Linear Regression Predicting Career Success from Proactive Personality



Variable	β	SE	R	R ²	F
Proactive Personality	.22***	.02	.22	.05	15.55***

* $p < .001$

Interpretation:

Proactive personality significantly predicted career success ($\beta = .22, p < .001$), accounting for 5% of the variance. Thus, teachers who demonstrate higher levels of proactive personality are more likely to experience greater career success.

Table 4

Regression Predicting Motivation and Social Desirability from Proactive Personality

Dependent Variable	β	SE	R	R ²	F
Denial	-0.15**	.01	.15	.02	7.37**
Attribution	-0.10	.00	.10	.01	3.22
Affective Identity	0.14*	.05	.14	.02	6.40*
Non-calculative	-0.04	.02	.04	.00	0.52
Social Normative	0.16**	.03	.16	.02	7.87**

Interpretation:

Proactive personality **positively predicted** affective identity and social normative motivation, and **negatively predicted** denial. It had no significant predictive value for non-calculative motivation.

Table 5

Regression Predicting Career Success from Social Desirability and Motivation to Lead Dimensions

Predictor	β	SE	R	R ²	F
Denial	-0.26**	.10	.14	.02	6.5**
Attribution	-0.58***	.12	.25	.06	21.46***
Affective Identity	0.08	.02	.08	.00	2.18



Predictor	β	SE	R	R ²	F
Non-calculative	-0.12*	.04	.12	.01	4.38*
Social Normative	0.13*	.03	.13	.01	5.30*

Interpretation:

- **Denial and attribution** significantly **negatively predicted career success**.
- **Non-calculative** motivation had a **negative** relationship with career success.
- **Social normative** motivation was a **positive predictor**.
- **Affective identity** was **not a significant predictor**.

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analysis: Mediation Model

Step	Predictors	β	SE
1	Demographics (Gender, Age, etc.)	Mixed	-
2	Proactive Personality	0.19**	.20
3	Denial, Attribution	-.05, -.19***	.10, .13
4	Affective Identity, Non-Calculative, Social Normative	.06, -.11, .08*	.02, .05, .04

Total Variance (R²) = 14%; ΔR^2 (Step 4) = 1%; Final Model F = 3.93*

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Interpretation:

- **Proactive personality** significantly predicts career success even after controlling for demographics.
- **Attribution (from social desirability)** negatively mediates the relationship.
- **Social normative (motivation to lead)** significantly mediates the relationship positively.
- Total variance explained is **14%**, with meaningful contributions from both proactive personality and mediators.

Table 7
Sobel Test for Mediation Significance

Mediator	Sobel Test	SE	p
Denial	1.96	.003	.04
Attribution	2.08	.001	.03
Affective Identity	1.27	.002	.20
Non-calculative	0.48	.001	.62
Social Normative	1.88	.003	.04

Interpretation:

Sobel test results confirm that **denial**, **attribution**, and **social normative** significantly mediate the relationship between proactive personality and career success ($p < .05$). **Affective identity** and **non-calculative** were not significant mediators.

Table 8
Independent Sample t-test for Gender Differences (N = 300)

Variable	Male (M)	SD	Female (M)	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Proactive Personality	54.11	7.67	56.22	6.63	-2.54	.01	-.29
Motivation to Lead	97.24	8.17	94.20	9.91	2.89	.001	.33
Affective Identity	33.18	5.48	29.15	6.76	5.65	.001	.62
Non-calculative	29.11	3.11	30.49	3.10	-3.83	.001	-.43
Social Desirability	6.59	2.16	6.45	2.03	.57	.56	-
Career Success	21.37	2.53	21.61	2.47	-.82	.40	-

Interpretation:

- **Females** scored significantly higher on **proactive personality**, **non-calculative**, and **motivation to lead (affective identity)**.
- **Males** scored higher in overall **motivation to lead** but lower on non-calculative traits.



- No significant gender differences were found in **social desirability**, **social normative**, and **career success**.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the role of proactive personality in predicting career success among government college teachers, with a particular focus on the mediating effects of social desirability (denial and attribution) and motivation to lead (affective identity, non-calculative, and social normative). Utilizing a quantitative correlational research design, the findings reveal meaningful relationships and predictive patterns that offer both theoretical insights and practical implications in the field of organizational behavior and educational leadership.

The results clearly demonstrate that proactive personality significantly and positively predicts career success. Individuals exhibiting proactive traits—those who take initiative, seek opportunities, and persist in achieving meaningful goals—are more likely to report higher levels of achievement in their professional lives. This aligns with existing literature that portrays proactive individuals as agents of change within their environments (Bateman & Crant, 1993), affirming the importance of personality traits in shaping one's career trajectory.

Further analysis revealed that proactive personality also significantly predicts components of motivation to lead, particularly affective identity and social normative motivation, while negatively predicting social desirability traits such as denial and attribution. This suggests that proactive individuals are less influenced by the need to conform to socially desirable responses and more driven by internal leadership aspirations and a sense of social obligation.

Mediation analysis further enriched the understanding of these relationships. Among the mediators, attribution (a subcomponent of social desirability) emerged as a significant negative mediator, implying that individuals high in attribution may diminish the positive impact of proactive personality on career success. In contrast, social normative motivation functioned as a positive mediator, indicating that individuals who perceive leadership as a social responsibility are better able to translate their proactive tendencies into tangible career achievements. Non-calculative motivation emerged as a negative predictor of career success, suggesting that individuals who avoid personal gain in leadership roles might not perceive or achieve comparable levels of professional success.

Interestingly, affective identity—which reflects an internalized desire to lead—did not significantly mediate or predict career success. This could suggest that while internal motivation to lead is valuable, it may require external reinforcement or opportunities to translate into real-world success.

The study also uncovered gender-based differences, with female teachers exhibiting significantly higher levels of proactive personality and non-calculative motivation, while male teachers scored higher on affective identity. However, no gender differences were observed in career success, indicating that despite motivational and personality differences, both male and female college teachers perceive or achieve similar levels of career advancement.

Collectively, these findings contribute to the understanding of how individual traits and motivations interact to influence career outcomes in educational settings. The 14% variance explained by the final hierarchical regression model suggests that while proactive personality and its associated mediators are important, other contextual and structural factors likely influence career success and deserve further exploration.



Implications of the Study

The results underscore the value of fostering proactive dispositions and leadership motivations within the teaching profession. Educational institutions and administrators can benefit from recognizing and encouraging proactive behavior among faculty members as a pathway to both individual development and institutional effectiveness. Professional development programs could focus on enhancing proactive traits and reducing dependence on socially desirable behaviors, thus cultivating more authentic and empowered leadership styles.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides significant insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- The sample was limited to government college teachers, which may restrict generalizability to private sector educators or other professions.
- The reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of response bias, despite efforts to account for social desirability.
- The cross-sectional nature of the design limits the ability to infer causality between variables.

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to track personality and leadership traits over time, examine larger and more diverse samples across educational levels, and include qualitative methods to explore how teachers subjectively experience and express their proactive tendencies and career development.

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