

THE PROACTIVITY OF ACADEMIC ELITES: A SYSTEMATICAL APPROACH TO PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITY SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

Proactivity positively moderates the relationship between individuals' psychological strain and their performance. Proactive personality development becomes a crucial issue for academia in a university setting typically while they encounter high pressure, workload, and challenges resulting from social high expectation of academic exploration and pioneering knowledge. This paper systematically reviews the current phenomena of elites in Taiwan and the emerging needs of proactivity to deal with increasing competition in current environments. Furthermore, it constructively proposes three approaches including self-starting as the internal approach as well as supportive environment building and purposive training program development as external approaches, so that faculty members' proactivity can be constructed and enhanced. Faculty members' academic achievement can be promoted according to their proactivity enhancement.

Keywords: *Faculty Development, Proactive Behavior, Supportive Environment Construction*

INTRODUCTION

Proactivity was first proposed by Swietlik in 1968 through the integration of various theories on personality structure as "reacting personality" or "proactive personality" (Grant & Ashford, 2008). It was defined as people's active performance to improve the existing situations in positive directions, rather than passively adopt the current conditions, even if they have to suffer ill-being and/or worse (Crant, 2000; Strauss, Parker & O'Shea, 2017). Since then, the proactive personality has become more critical in organizational life, and studied in many professional fields such as proactivity of employees in pharmacy (Arefin et al., 2015), international airlines (Baba et al., 2009), agricultural organizations (Hashemi et al., 2012), research and development (R&D) companies (Kim et al., 2010), and manufacturing industries (Lantz & Friedrich, 2014).

People with proactive personalities usually turn adverse situations into good results. Organizations intensively need active employees to build a harmonious and aggressive team, and thus produce innovative products or services to further achieve their business goals (Batistic et al., 2016). Several studies revealed that proactivity positively predicts an individual's job performance (Baba et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2010). It also encourages an employee to increase their job's resources and challenges, leading to higher work engagement with the company (Bakker et al., 2012). Individuals with high proactive personalities will likely have high networking ability, inter-personal relationships, and the ability to observe the non-verbal behaviors of others, fostering career adaptability and in-role performance advancement (Shi et al., 2011). Students who have a high proactive behavior can deal with their challenging stress and attain a greater academic achievement (Zhu et al., 2017). Empirical studies confirmed the importance of proactive behavior in encouraging individuals' favorable outcomes and ultimately contributing to organizational or institutional performance and achievement. This proactive attitude is crucial in current times, especially for the professional and elite communities.

Faculty members in higher educational institutes are a group of social elites who usually serve as the locomotive that hauls the train of human civilization to a new horizon through their intellectualism and professionalism (Wu et al., 2013). As professionals within academic settings, they principally receive social respect (Gappa & Austin, 2010), and possess full flexibility and autonomy in their knowledge exploration and professional exertion (Rafnsdottir & Heijstra, 2013). Consequently, faculty members take more responsibility for their own performance and achievement, accordingly they are under high pressure from both internal resources and external ones.

Furthermore, with the increasing emphasis on a knowledge-based economy and globalized competitiveness, society expects universities and their academia to take on more responsibility in academic exploration, social development, and knowledge pioneering (Etzkowitz et al., 2012; Leydesdorff & Meyer, 2013). The greater expectation on academia to productively conduct research, teaching activities, and community services creates more workload and more extended working hours (Gappa & Austin, 2010), and subsequently affects their job burnout (Lackritz, 2004) and work satisfaction (Rafnsdottir & Heijstra, 2013). The complexity of the academic career promotion process also creates a lack of growth opportunities and recognition, and subsequently leads to a lower score in the faculty members' work satisfaction (Bhatia & Sharma, 2016; Wu et al. 2013). They consequently feel exhausted, unsatisfied, and deficient when presented with these circumstances.

Previous studies declaimed that proactive personality positively moderated the relationship between individuals' work burnout and their performance, both in an academic and industrial settings (Zhao et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2017). It might happen because highly proactive people can manage their psychological strain and focus on their personal goals (Harvey et al., 2006). Therefore, this study purports to explore the nature of proactive behaviors and depositions needed for faculty members, and practical approaches to enhance their proactivity in a campus culture dominated by meritocracy, so that they can reach higher academic achievements and recognition.

METHODOLOGY

This article used a systematic literature review including selected the central topic and collected, analyzed, and synthesized the literatures (Cronin et al., 2008). Firstly, it discussed the contemporary characteristics and phenomena of faculty members in Taiwan. Second, it described the definitions, major contents, and the factors influencing individual's proactivity. Finally, it proposes the proactive behavior model to improve academia's proactivity in the university setting.

Communal Characteristics and Phenomena of Faculty Members as Social Elites

Elites are defined as the limited number of people who have significant influence over society (Burton et al., 2013; Winters, 2011). Elites usually possess top talents and/or superior performance, which the use to lead the majority of the general public (Ma & Schapira, 2017; Hunter, 2010). They might arise in many areas such as business, educational institutions, bureaucracy, and even religions (Burton et al., 2013; Leftwich, 2010; Ukoli, 2007), due to their personal intelligence, willpower, vision, and/or hereditary backgrounds. Historically, the elite community frequently dominates the development and even dignity of the whole society in either a positive or negative direction.

Faculty members in the universities can be considered as social elites in the community because they play crucial roles in educating human capital, academic exploration, knowledge pioneering, and public opinion, enabling them to significantly affect the social, cultural, economic, and even political situation of a nation (Mirkamali & Thani, 2011; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Ukoli, 2007). They differ in many ways from other elites such as politicians, business managers, and other highly educated professional workers (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011), because a university is a place where many intelligent individuals from various fields gather and collaborate to create or disseminate knowledge (Macfarlane, 2011; Schussler, 2003). Professors in higher education are highly motivated for self-fulfillment to achieve excellence in their academic career, and to be one of the elites in the society (Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Wu et al., 2013). They can achieve this through sustainable productivity in teaching, research, and community services that boost and secure the development of the community

(Lee, 2007). However, they also need to compete with other professors to pursue those achievements intensely.

Additionally, previous studies revealed that faculty members' achievement also results from the reviews of their performance through meritocracy systems, or through individuals hierarchically, based on the talents, accomplishments, achievements, and contribution to the university (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Gappa & Austin, 2010). Consequently, faculty members in Taiwan are continuously under pressure from the competition to achieve academic recognition (Chou et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2013).

A university campus also has autonomy and is ruled by one of its selected professors (Thomas & Hewitt, 2011). Furthermore, the degree of democracy in a university is reflected by its in-group regulation, based on a collective and communal consensus among the faculty members and other academics (Manning, 2017; Porter, 2007). Consequently, the university and its faculty members' success highly rely on their self-discipline, motivation, and performance (Gappa & Austin, 2010). Wu et al. (2013) indicated that such competition may lead to increased motivation or, conversely, create anxiety and stress.

Proactivity

Definitions of proactivity

Proactivity is (1) individuals' change orientation, anticipatory action, and self-initiation for promoting or creating changes in an organization (Arefin et al., 2015; Hu et al., 2011); (2) individuals' ability to make things happen, anticipate and prevent problems, and take opportunities (Parker et al., 2010; Rehnstrom & Lychage, 2016); (3) peoples' engagement with the environment in various ways to achieve higher levels of their performance (Baba et al., 2009); (4) individuals' ability to set up and reach a goal at a viable cost and through effective ways, based on their perceptions of self-efficacy and sufficient control over the process (Batistic et al., 2016). Hence, proactive people are individuals who have the personality or behavior to actively change the current status and/or feelings toward the positive side for personal, interpersonal, and social accomplishment, through future self-initiation and perception remodeling. In academic settings, proactive faculty members enthusiastically attempt to improve their academic career accomplishments through continuously conducting high-quality research, teaching activity, and community service, as well as fostering recognition for both individual and university achievements.

Major constructs of proactivity

Proactivity is about taking control and bringing transformation or innovation within an organizational environment such as how to make work procedures more effective and efficient (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010; Major et al., 2012). Subsequently, proactive people are able to act in advance of future situations because they have a long-term focus (*clear vision*) (Schwarzer, 1999). They are effortlessly responsible for their assignments (*taking charge*), speak up for constructive change and modification (*active voice*), are involved in innovative creation and implementation (*individual innovation*), and they are self-regulatory active in anticipating the reoccurrence of similar problems (*problem prevention*) (Parker & Bindl, 2017; Parker & Collins, 2010).

In addition, individuals with a high level of proactivity actively analyze the environment both inside and outside their group to ensure that their organizations have the correct policies (*proactive scanning*) (Ellis, 2012; Parker & Collins, 2010). They also actively look for feedback directly from their colleagues, and indirectly from observing situations around them (*feedback inquiry and monitoring*) (Ashford et al., 2003), and actively attempt to enhance their personal and professional careers (*personal initiative*) (Seibert et al., 2001; Seibert & Kunz, 2016). Moreover, proactive people keep fighting to reach their goals although problems and obstacles may occur continuously (*overcoming barriers*) (Frese et al., 1997).

Based on the aforementioned paragraphs, it can be concluded that the major constructs of proactivity have a clear vision of their personal and organizational future. Positive assets include taking charge, active voice, individual innovation, problem prevention, proactive scanning, feedback inquiry and

monitoring, initiative, and survival ability when problems come. Talented elites in the education institutions who can identify their long-term goals, actively analyze problems encountered, actively speak up to their colleagues about them, generate new ideas/methods to solve the problems, and implement innovative ideas/methods to improve current conditions that will likely enable better performance in their individual and professional academic works.

Influential Factors of Proactivity

The dynamic challenges in the global world are transforming proactive behavior from a novelty into a necessity for both individuals and their communities (Thomas et al., 2010; William et al., 2010). Hence, it is crucial to identify the factors that lead to a persons' proactive personality development. Furthermore, previous theoretical and empirical studies have revealed that proactive behavior is affected by a combination of individual and environmental factors (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Collins, 2010; Tornau & Frese, 2012).

Internal individual factors

Parker and Collins (2010) declaimed that individual personality traits such as responsibility felt for change, goal orientation, and role breadth self-efficacy could positively predict one's proactive behavior. Proactivity is also positively related to individual self-efficacy (Hashemi et al., 2012), emotional stability, extraversion, and openness (Thomas et al., 2010), and future orientation (Herhausen, 2011). Future goal orientation makes people tend to engage in adaptive behavior to explore, make a plan, and try to pursue personal development (Tolentino et al., 2014). It will motivate people to proactively do things if they are also individual and environment change-oriented (Montani et al., 2014). Moreover, a person's belief in their ability to perform a specific task (self-efficacy) and broader tasks (role breadth self-efficacy) will further foster people's willingness to perform more activities beyond what is formally required (Hashemi et al., 2012; Ohly & Fritz, 2007). These studies indicated that proactive behavior development should be initiated through individual self-initiation based on a person's clear vision about their future and character recognition.

Common situational factors

An organizational atmosphere has a significant effect on people's proactivity (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Tornau & Frese, 2012). The adoption of a high-performance work system (HPWS) or a concept of management practice that attempts to create a supportive environment in an organization makes its employees recognize that their capabilities are valued, nurturing them to be more responsible, performing their tasks even better than the desired level, and finally fostering their proactivity (Arefin et al., 2015). Paracha et al. (2014) suggested implementing this method not only in manufacturing industries, but also in educational settings.

The other situations that lead to improving proactive behavior include empowering leadership. This type of leadership encourages employees to actively participate and express their ideas, and to continuously take responsibility for the related assignments (Arefin et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2013). Furthermore, if an employee has more autonomy on their job, being involved in the decision process, and becoming an important part of the team, their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and feeling of responsibility will be strengthened, leading to increased proactivity (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Tummers et al., 2015). Accountability, or a situation where an individual has to clearly explain their thoughts, emotions, and behavior will likely improve their proactive behavior because of the attention received if they perform below the standard of expectation (Grant & Ashford, 2008). It seems that proactivity will likely arise if an employee sees a benefit on the job, values their own competence to do the job, has a sense of responsibility to do it, and finally takes an initiative action.

Purposive intervention factors

Additional factors related to proactive behavior at work except for individual personality and work environment is a purposive intervention factor. Training to facilitate individuals' proactivity development comes from an assumption that it is possible to enhance a person's level of proactivity through several specifically-designed training programs (Kirby et al., 2002; Mensmann & Frese, 2017). Several empirical studies revealed types of training which lead to enhanced proactive behavior including: (1) the art of strategic thinking (Kirby et al., 2002); (2) personal initiative training (Frese et

al., 2016); (3) workplace emotional intelligence enrichment (Guseh et al., 2015); (4) problem-focused intervention (Strauss & Parker, 2018); and (5) vision focused interventions (Strauss & Parker, 2018).

The contents of the intervention programs that purportedly improve individual proactivity consist of: SWOT analysis, setting a goal (long, middle, and short-term goal), developing professional competencies, adaptability, and dealing with the problem encountered. SWOT analysis trained participants to recognize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats both to themselves and to their organization (Frese et al., 2016; Kirby et al., 2002; Mensmann & Frese, 2017). The training approaches including lecturing, discussion, practice, and reflection (Frese et al., 2016; Kirby et al., 2002; Mensmann & Frese, 2017). Those approaches were implemented in a group of people with similar professional backgrounds. The training might be applied for at least three days to deliver the program content. The participants are asked to implement all the coaching's materials for one month (Kirby et al., 2002) to one year (Mensmann & Frese, 2017) when their performances will be evaluated.

Based on the above, it can be confirmed that an individual's level of proactivity might be affected by internal and external factors. This paper concluded that a person's level of proactivity results from collaborative dispositions of individual cognitive and mental willingness (self-raising), situational environments, and intervention programs (Figure 1).

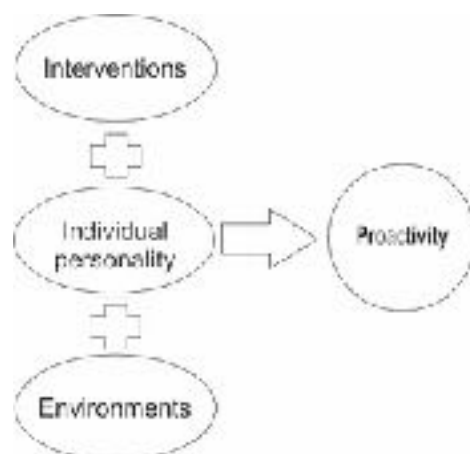


Figure 1. Individual's proactivity resulting from collaboration of individual, environment, and intervention factors

The Approaches to Enhance the Proactivity of Faculty Members

Dweck (2006; 2016) declaims that there are two types of human mindset: fixed and growth. People with a fixed mindset believe that intelligent is static, while those with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can be developed through life-long active learning, regardless of their genetic background, talents or even social class (Delost, 2017; Dweck, 2016). In academic settings, individuals with a growth mindset can achieve higher because they believe they can and motivate themselves to conduct a vigorous intended action continuously (Claro et al., 2016; Rattan et al., 2015).

The social cognitive theory states that there are active and triadical interactions among each individual's personal factors (cognitive, affective, and biological events), the environment, and their behavior (Bandura, 1999). Individuals actively select the stimulus to create an intended action. Schunk (1989) also states that individuals observe their behaviors, make a judgment between their performances toward goal attainment, and finally encourage/discourage their motives for performing an action (Schunk, 1989). These three processes—namely self-regulation theory—mediate people's emotions to achieve a higher performance (Mega et al., 2014).

Therefore, underlying the growth mindset theory (Dweck, 2016), self-regulation theory (Schunk, 1989), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; 1999) and proactive behavior category (Parker &

Collins, 2010), this study elaborates three strategies: (1) self-raising, (2) supporting environments, and (3) professional training programs to improve faculty members' proactivity (Figure 2).

Self-Raising for a Faculty's Proactivity

This is a better way to improve a person's proactivity, starting from themselves, because those who show initiative and take action have better outcomes (Baum et al., 2014; Hibbard & Greene, 2013; Schunk, 1989). Covey (2013) declaims that there are three steps to stimulate self-raising of an individuals' proactivity including paradigm shift, being independent, and being interdependent. Faculty members who believe that they can be a future distinguished professor or university president, are actively developing their academic competency, and are continuously working together in a progressive team, will likely have highly proactive work, strategic, and environment-fit behavior.

Paradigm shift

People think and act based on their paradigms or the way they see things (Covey, 2013; Wu et al., 2012). That is, paradigms, whether positive or negative, are the sources of personal behavior and attitude (Dweck, 2016). Covey (2013) illustrated paradigms as a map. No matter how hard people try, and how their positive attitude keeps them happy, if they have an incorrect map, they will be lost. That is, in order to self-raise faculty members' proactivity, a paradigm shift is needed, if it no longer fits the practical reality (Stark, 2015; Sundel & Sundel, 2017).

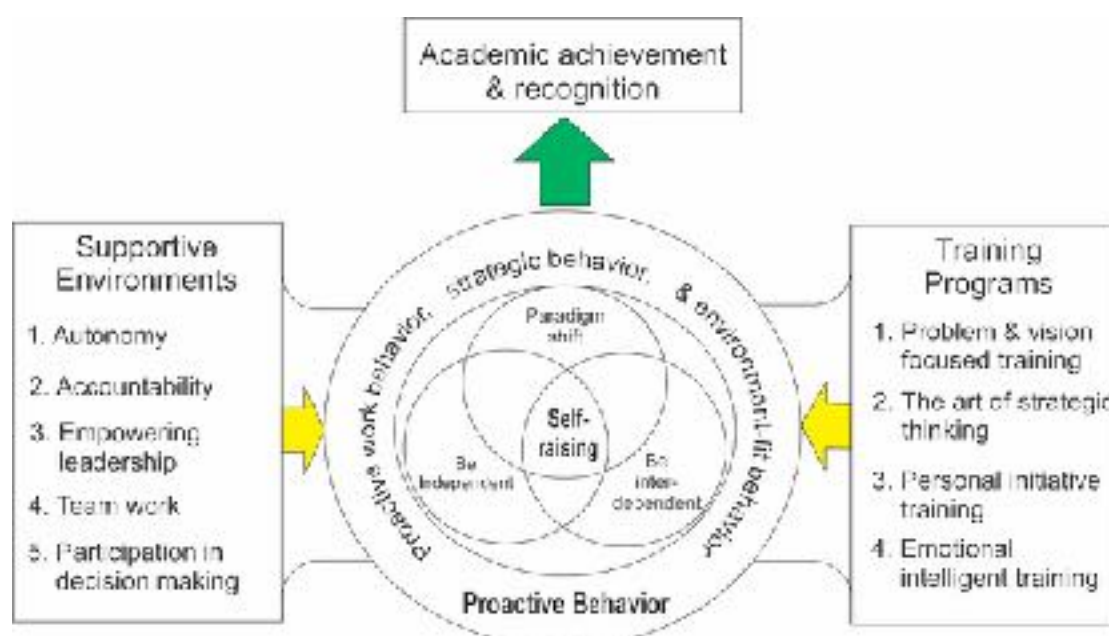


Figure 2. Faculty members' proactivity development and enhancement

To change academia's paradigm, first of all, it is necessary to understand some basic principles or guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have permanent value, essentially unarguable, and self-evident (Covey, 2013). Afterward, a constructive viewpoint on a crucial event is needed for further proactivity development (Dweck, 2016). For instance, academic cooperation is one of the basic principles of academia in Taiwan for pursuing personal and professional achievement in higher education (NTU, 2011).

In a realistic environment, professors in university usually judge others' opinions with a right or wrong conclusion (Anderson & Jap, 2005), which might lead to psychological and cognitive rigidity among their group personnel (Wu, Tseng, Chuang, & Hsu, 2012). However, although this collaborative work might have a dark side effect, faculty members need this academic cooperation for a long-life career employment if they desire to achieve professional recognition in their respective fields.

Be independent

Be independent means mastering and developing yourself through (1) taking responsibility for yourself, (2) deciding what you want for their future, (3) doing and living by what you have already set, and put first things first (Covey, 2013). Most of the academia can imagine what the top career of a faculty member for their academic and management career is (Beigi et al., 2016). For instance, the highest academic career for a teacher in a university is to become a full or even distinguished professor, or the president of a university, or even a greater recognition such as a Nobel Prize. Therefore, it suggested to faculty members to decide on their future orientation, to be responsible for their choice, and to believe that it might be fully accomplished (Kwiek & Antonowicz, 2014).

This will foster an initiative to take further action to reach the expected goal (Dweck, 2016; Schunk, 1989). This awareness is aligned with earlier studies which stated that goal orientation and felt responsibility are both positively related to individual proactivity (Herhausen, 2011; Parker & Collins, 2010). Moreover, the higher their position, the more responsibility faculty members should endure. Hence, professionals in higher education need to mentally and intellectually prepare themselves for new environments and requirements whenever they move forward to the next level of their academic career, keeping their proactive personality growing (Frese et al., 1997; Thomas et al., 2010).

Be interdependent

To be interdependent people, the faculty members should be aware that the highest quality of academic achievement might be achieved through a mutual collaboration among scholars (Al-Sawai, 2013; Liao, 2011). Academic careers can be characterized as long-term careers because takes more than 10-20 years to achieve the highest position (Beigi et al., 2016). Hence, faculty members should actively develop collaboration with peers and students to conduct research, teach, and serve to produce greater productivity in their professions (Kukulaska-Hulme, 2012; Wu et al., 2012).

Environment situations that foster faculty members' proactivity

Bandura's social cognitive theory of personality reveals that environments play a crucial role in the individual's personality and behavior development (Bandura, 1999). The supportive work environments in a university which might influence faculty members' proactivity are autonomy, accountability, empowering leadership, teamwork, and participation in decision-making (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Martin et al., 2013; Tummers et al., 2015). The five situations were chosen because they are closely related to the common traits of university environments.

Job autonomy

Job autonomy is an individual's perception of their capacity to decide what they need to do on their job (Tummers et al., 2015). Autonomy refers to an individual's freedom to choose ways to accomplish the task (Bandura, 1999; Covey, 2013). Faculty members have greater autonomy to decide on programs, materials, and schedules related to their job (Rafnsdottir & Heijstra, 2013). Consequently, the university and its faculty members' success highly rely on their self-discipline, motivation, and performance (Wu et al., 2013).

Therefore, the university administrators need to make sure that this higher job autonomy will lead to greater responsibility for the job, and also to an improvement in all of academia's proactive personality (Fuller & Marler, 2009). For instance, a future distinguished professor needs to balance their teaching and research activities through avoiding teaching-learning activities, and by focusing on research activities as well as writing at least one day a week (Beigi et al., 2016).

Accountability

Accountability is a circumstance in which others expect people to justify, explain, and report their thoughts, visions, and career plans so that they can be personally responsible for their action (Alrazi et al., 2015; Grant & Ashford, 2008). It fosters a mutual observation and evaluation among the academia in their academic path based on their own decisions and actions, fostering positive image benefits and leading to a higher proactivity.

Empowering leadership

Empowering leadership is the process of sharing the leader's power to the employees by providing additional resources, support, and responsibility, so that they have more authority to make decisions related to their job (Arefin et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2013). Universities have unique hierarchical organizations because of their collegial systems, or cooperative interaction and shared authority among colleagues (Freedman, 2009; Sahlin & Zetterquist, 2016).

Each professor has the same possibility of achieving some administrative role in the university. Subsequently, there is a possibility of role-changing, for instance, this period professor A become the leader and professor B did not have any administrative role. However, their positions change in the next period: professor B becomes the leader and professor A does not have a structural position. Therefore, empowering leadership should be well implemented in the university setting, which leads to faculty members' proactive work and strategic behavior.

Teamwork

A greater feeling that individuals are a part of a team enhances their engagement and sense of belonging, stimulates a feeling of shared responsibility, and contributes to the improvement of their proactivity (Tummers et al., 2015). In this inter-connected global era, faculty members are encouraged collaborate with colleagues, both within and across organizations, to fulfill their academic duties (Saglam & Oral, 2010; Tien, 2007). This type of collaboration might run well if some basic principles such as commitment and trust are implemented (Wu, Tseng, Chuang, & Hsu, 2012). Therefore, there is a connection between the first strategies, and the self-starting of proactivity, with faculty members' inter-collaboration.

Participation in decision making

Involvement in decision making means that people have a voice in the decisions, policies, and goals of the organization (Erkutlu, 2012; Tummers et al., 2015). Faculty members consist of intelligent individuals from various areas, which makes it possible for them to take part in an important meeting actively. Therefore, the existing leader should empower them to more actively participate in the decision-making process. It is true that this process will take longer than if the leader decides by him/herself, however, faculty members' participation will stimulate them to be more responsible, invest more effort in conducting their task, and finally lead to higher proactivity (Hulsheger et al., 2009).

Training programs to improve faculty members' proactivity

Previous studies (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Frese et al., 2016; Strauss & Parker, 2018) have suggested that enhanced investment in training and coaching may increase individuals' proactive work behavior. Faculty members should receive this type of training to reshape their understanding on current and future trends of higher education, so that they can actively participate in further action. The training might be implemented for at least two to three days to deliver the contents (Frese et al., 1997; Fay & Frese, 2001).

Alternatively, it can be delivered during regular meetings to achieve effective and efficient results. Furthermore, the participants are asked to implement all the coaching's materials for one month to one year, and their performances will be self-observed and in-team evaluated regularly in order to achieve a higher effect on their self-regulation improvement.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to comprehensively review theories related to proactivity, and to propose strategies for faculty members' proactive behavior development. It concludes:

- (1) Faculty members' striving for excellent academic achievement and recognition in the face of global competition need a proactive personality to avoid negative effects such as work deficiency, dissatisfaction, and even burnout which arise due to meritocracy and intense pressure in university environments.

- (2) This study recommends developing faculty members' proactivity in Taiwan to deal with the long and winding atmospheres surrounding their path to academic achievement and recognition. First, faculty members' proactive behavior is developed through self-initiation, or through one's self-recognition of one's character, existing competencies, and future orientation. Second, management of the university should encourage the development of a supportive environment to improve the sense of belonging and sense of profitability among its academia, or the perception that the university's achievements will benefit them, and vice versa. Third, infrequent professional training and regular meetings should be addressed to supportively inspire academia to develop a higher level of academic achievement, to organizing a plan to achieve it, and to endeavor when a problem is encountered.

Although this literature review study revealed the nature, type, function, and influential factors of proactivity, and also proposed strategies to facilitate faculty members' proactive behavior development, a further empirical study on the relationship between proactivity and academia's achievement is intensely needed.

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