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## **Proactive Personality Disposition and its Impact on the Start-up Actions of the Nascent Entrepreneur**

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**Objectives:** This work builds upon the small body of work which seeks to develop a greater understanding of the nascent entrepreneur. The nascent entrepreneur is an individual in the process of starting a business and represents an underdeveloped part of the enterprise literature. This work seeks to investigate the entrepreneur from the perspective of behavioural psychology using the Proactive Personality Scale (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Somewhat a Cinderella to cognitive psychology the behavioural school nevertheless may offer insights into this brief but fundamental entrepreneurial phase.

**Prior Work:** This work builds on work from this author which already looks at the nascent entrepreneurial phase from a cognitive perspective. Proactive personality has been shown to have a positive correlation with business start-up intentions Crant (1996) and career success Seibert (1999).

**Approaches:** This is an empirical study using the validated and reliable Proactive Personality Scale consists of 119 nascent entrepreneurs. These results are then compared with 138 established entrepreneurs. A number of hypotheses are developed investigating a relationship between nascent entrepreneurship, proactive personality and start-up.

**Results:** The study identified that both nascent and established entrepreneurs displayed proactive personality scores and that there was no statistical difference between these two groups. However both groups displayed a greater proclivity towards proactive personality than a control group of non-entrepreneurs.

**Implications:** Proactive personality seems to be a key indicator or entrepreneurial behaviour for both the nascent and established entrepreneur data set. The findings suggest that proactive personality could be a factor in a nascent entrepreneur's decision to research, gather information and accrue knowledge when others do not. Further this could be a factor in their subsequent decision to launch a new business.

**Value:** The decision to research this neglected field of nascent entrepreneurship and Proactive Personality means new insights have been made about the nature of the business launch decision, opportunity identification and the individuals who perform these actions. Behaviours can be learnt they can be trained and even manipulated this has implications for education, business support and workplace training. This study also opens up the possibility for an interesting juxtaposition with cognitive approaches and suggests a rich diversity of influences in the early phases of entrepreneurship.

## **Introduction**

Proactive personality has its roots in behaviouralism it is linked with the concept of social interactionism Bandura (1977). With symbiotic manipulation of internal and external factors interactionism suggests that proactive individuals create their ideal environments. This is achieved internally by initiating behaviours that control their actions and by external manipulation of situations in the external environment. In the interactionist perspective people influence situations as much as situations influence people. Bandura (1986) argued that people, environment and behaviour continuously influence one another. This means that individuals can influence their situation to make their performance more successful because they will create situations and affect their environment to make success more likely. Bateman and Crant (1993) argue that proactive behaviour directly alters environments and that individual's influence their environments through specific, deliberate processes. The intentionality of Proactive Personality is supported by Schneider (1983) who suggested that individuals select situations in which to participate. Buss (1987) develops the argument highlighting that interactionism does not just occur between the individual and their environment but that proactive behaviour can be demonstrated by intentionally evoking reactions from others and manipulating other people in order to change their social environment. Crant (1996) argues that proactivity differs from cognitive traits as proactivity involves initiating and maintaining actions that directly alter the surrounding environment. Proactivity is therefore seen as behaviour rather than a mental construct.

The proactive nascent entrepreneur will therefore search out the situations and people that can help them identify the information and opportunities they seek. By a series of deliberate choices they will invoke actions that change given the situational context. This requires a flexibility of behaviour to react to situations but also the manipulative skills required to change the situation. This suggests a combination of flexibility in behaviours and tenacity to succeed. This research seeks to investigate if this is true by researching proactive personality within nascent and established entrepreneurs. Finally the research will identify if a proactive disposition leads to success in moving from the nascent stage through the creation of new businesses into trading status.

## **Nascent Entrepreneur**

Nascent entrepreneurship is one of the classifications of entrepreneurship Ucbasaran et al (2001) consider to be in need of further in-depth study. Since that time a small but valuable literature is beginning to develop on this interesting but transient phase of the entrepreneurial journey. Not only is nascent entrepreneurship a suitable subject for study it also has the benefit of not being associated with many of the definitional problems that frequently impede entrepreneurial research. Delmar and Davidsson (2000) call nascent entrepreneurs 'people trying to start a business'. Korunka et al (2003) link the nascent entrepreneur with the beginning of the start-up process. Studies investigating nascent entrepreneurship have investigated the prevalence and characteristics of nascent entrepreneurship; career choice reasons for starting a business and human and social capital and nascent entrepreneurship Delmar and Davidsson looked at gender balances, age and experience influencers as well as occupational status. Like Levesque and Minniti (2006) they identified the relative youth of nascent entrepreneurs and like Arenius and Minniti (2005) the importance of role models in increasing confidence and reducing ambiguity. Carter et al (2002; 2003) looked at nascent entrepreneurship as a career choice and identified that nascent entrepreneurs were not qualitatively different from individuals who pursue other career options. The literature on proactive personality contends that there are individual (internal) factors and situational (external) variable interfacing in unique contexts. The environment in which this interchange takes place is therefore worthy of investigation.

In identifying the external situation Rotefoss and Kolvereid (2005) argue that individual and regional/environmental factors could be used to predict an individual's ability to achieve three entrepreneurial milestones. They contend that the business start-up process requires the achievement of aspiring entrepreneur, nascent entrepreneur and business founder milestones. Rotefoss and Kolvereid (2005) argue these cannot be wholly internally resourced and are therefore subject to the environment in which they are created. This is supported by Jack and Anderson (2002) who argue that firm creation is more than an economic process it is embedded in a specific environment. Delmar and Davidson (2000) argued that urbanisation creates opportunities of access to customers and resources. Thurik et al (2002) argue that technology; economic development, culture and institutions all encourage nascent entrepreneurship by creating demand for entrepreneurship by creating business start-up opportunities. Other variables within the environment will involve experience, Reuber & Fisher (1999), education, and the impact of networks as sources of knowledge and support. Arenius and Declerq (2005) argue that education provides access to 'knowledgeable others' Burt (1992) and that networks would supply a broader knowledge base in which to

relate current knowledge to opportunities. Bandura (1978) argued that this would provide increased confidence and positive new ideas for business creation. Nevertheless the nascent period is short, it is characterised by change and uncertainty. Middleton (2012) argues that nascent entrepreneurs seek legitimacy in creating an entrepreneurial identity by selecting strategies within their social interactions that involve conforming to expected roles, selecting pragmatic solutions and manipulating their image.

## **Proactive Personality**

Crant (2000 P436) defines proactive behaviour as “taking the initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions”. He argues that proactive personality is associated with leadership and that proactive people seek information and opportunities. Bindle and Parker (2010) write of bringing about change and taking charge of situations. Bateman and Crant (1993) argue that proactivity is personal and dispositional while other authors suggest that proactivity cues are triggered by situations (Morrison and Phelps, 1999) or contexts (Miller and Jablin, 1991). Bateman and Crant (1993 P105) state “Proactive people scan for opportunities, show initiative, take action and persevere until they reach closure by bringing about change. They are pathfinders who change their organisations mission or find and solve problems”.

Crant (1995) argues that proactive individuals will display discretionary behaviours that will lead them to exhibit higher job performance. This is supported by Thomas et al (2010). Seibert et al (1999) argued that individuals who exert control over their work situations are more likely to have a fuller understanding of the operation of their work environments and anticipate changes as well as be able to change the nature of their tasks, task order or methods of working. They were likely to engage in behaviours such as training, career planning and be persistent in pursuing career success.

Becherer and Maurer (1999) concluded that proactive personality disposition is related to entrepreneurship identifying that a more proactive approach in top management was related to the entrepreneurial posture of the firm. They argue that proactive entrepreneurs use their firms to actively shape the environment. Kickul and Gundry (2002) examined the interrelationships among small firm owner’s personality, strategic orientation and innovation. They identified that a small business owner’s proactive personality is linked to a strategic orientation of the firm that permits flexibility and change in response to surrounding business conditions. It can be argued therefore that the concept of proactive personality could be useful both in terms of its impact on entrepreneurial intentions, strategic orientation and as a determinant of venture launch success.

Crant (1995) studied behavioural intentions to own a business among students. In contrast to the cognitive approach the interactionist perspective (Bandura 1977) argues that individuals intentionally and directly change their current circumstances by choosing the career for which they are best suited. Crant (1995) argues that individuals with a proactive personality will be drawn to entrepreneurial careers. His study suggests that proactivity was positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions. This supports prior research (Shapero & Sokol, 1982; Kruegar and Brazeal, 1994) that ‘propensity to act’ is indicative of entrepreneurial actors. They argue that having a proactive personality may be positively related to propensity to act.

Previous research has identified that proactive personality is associated with intentionality to act. It is linked to entrepreneurship and to career intentions. Proactive people clearly make things happen. Proactive people initiate behaviours that they use to manipulate the external environment but this is a two-way process indicative of an open-minded flexible disposition. This proactivity is not related to creativity; proactivity need not be novel or creative while the initiation of new ideas mainly derives from cognitive rather than behavioural responses (Amabile et al, 2005). This research seeks to identify the relationship between proactive personality and nascent entrepreneurship. Furthermore it seeks to identify if intentions are translated into actions in the form of business start-ups.

According Crant (2000) proactive people identify opportunities, act on them, show initiative and persevere. While less proactive people are passive and reactive preferring to adapt rather than change. It could be argued therefore that nascent entrepreneurs with higher proactive personalities will be more active in their business preparations. This would seem to suggest that proactive personality is a disposition associated with continuing, on-going success rather than an episodic or context related phenomenon. Bindl et al (2012) argues that mood can affect proactive behaviour and that positive mood, enhanced by support and the ability to control a situation can enhance proactive personality. Seibert, Crant and Kraimer (1999) identified that proactive personality resulted in greater objective and subjective career success enjoying greater

remuneration and promotional prospects as well as a greater sense of satisfaction. Becherer and Maurer (1999) argue that proactive personality is related to entrepreneurship identifying that proactive personality was related to the entrepreneurial posture of firms. They argue that the proactive business owner reflects their own personality by creating a proactive firm that searches for new opportunities and makes bold assertive approaches in the market. This is supported by Kickul and Gundry (2002) who identified that proactive personality was linked to flexibility and change again indicative of the enduring impact of proactive personality. Bandura (1977) argues that individuals intentionally and directly change their current circumstances by choosing a career for which they are best suited. Crant (1995) argues that individuals with a proactive personality will be drawn to entrepreneurial careers. Becherer and Maurer (1999) identified that individuals who launched their own businesses had higher proactive personality than those who had purchased or inherited their businesses. This would suggest that the proactive disposition may be related to the intention to launch a new enterprise rather than the wish to manage an enterprise. But they also added a word of caution, suggesting that the big picture orientation of the proactive individual was related to sales volume but not profit. It could be argued that this may affect the long term survival of any businesses launched.

To test these assertions a number of hypotheses were developed.

**Hypothesis 1a** - : *Nascent entrepreneurs will display a greater tendency towards a proactive personality as measured by the PPS than a control group of non-entrepreneurs.*

**Hypothesis 1b** - : *Nascent entrepreneurs will display a greater tendency towards proactive personality as measured by the PPS than a sample of established entrepreneurs.*

**Hypothesis 2a:** *Nascent entrepreneurs who successfully launch their own business will have a higher proactive personality score than those who fail to launch.*

**Hypothesis 2b:** *Once a business is launched entrepreneurs with higher proactive personality scores will continue to trade for longer than those with less proactive personalities.*

## **Method**

The sample of nascent entrepreneurs was drawn from research sites across the UK. 122 questionnaires were completed 119 were usable. The established entrepreneurs were located within business incubator units again located across the UK, of the 154 questionnaires returned 138 were usable. The control group was made up of a convenience sample (n=49) of adults working in a range of careers.

## **Instruments**

One of the principal differentiators of the Proactive Personality Scale is that its questions solely deal with actions and manipulations there are none of the judgement or decision-making based questions typical of instruments within the cognitive domain. The original proactive personality scale (Bateman & Crant, 1993) is a 17 item scale. Initial reliability tests were conducted across three independent samples. Reliability was determined by a Cronbach alpha coefficient which ranged between 0.87 and 0.89 across the three samples. The alpha coefficient of the final scale was 0.89 and the inter-item correlation was 0.32. Bateman & Crant argue that this is within the range of average inter-item correlations 0.20 to 0.40 suggested by Briggs and Clark (1986). Stability reliability was determined by the test re-test method reliability was 0.72 over a 3 month period. Factor analysis of the 17 item scale using principle-axis factoring identified a single factor with an eigenvalue of 5.63. Cattells (1966) scree plot criterion also indicated a single factor. Seibert, Crant & Kraimer (1999) created a shortened 10 item version of the Proactive Personality Scale. The correlation between the original scale and the shortened version was .96 and deleting 7 items had very little effect on the reliability of the reliability of the scale (17 item alpha = .88, 10 item version alpha=.86). The shortened 10 item version of the PPS was used in this study. In this study a Cronbach alpha test derived from the entire sample (N=257), produced an Alpha coefficient of .91. In this study a test-retest was conducted among the nascent entrepreneur sample to determine temporal stability. In total 30 respondents completed the test-retest at an interval of 3 months as suggested by Kline (1993). The test-retest coefficient was .75( $p < .001$ ).

Validity was determined through the use of a battery of tests argued by Bateman & Crant to offer convergent and discriminant validity. The findings supported their predictions that proactive personality would correlate with four personality constructs, conscientiousness, extraversion, need for achievement and dominance. Discriminant validity was demonstrated between proactive personality and neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, intelligence, private self-consciousness, locus of control as well as age, gender and work

experience. Bateman & Crant report criterion validity which related proactive personality to extra-curricular activities, personal achievement and transformational leadership.

## Results

**Hypothesis 1a** - : *Nascent entrepreneurs will display a greater tendency towards a proactive personality as measured by the PPS than a control group of non-entrepreneurs.*

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to test this hypothesis. It revealed a significant difference ( $t(165) = 3.517, p \leq .01$ ) between the proactive personality scores of nascent entrepreneurs ( $m = 5.6025, SE = .09295$ ) and the general population ( $m = 4.9571, SE = .17622$ ). Proactive personality scores were significantly higher in nascent entrepreneurs and the hypothesis is therefore supported.

**Hypothesis 1b**: *Nascent entrepreneurs will display a greater tendency towards proactive personality as measured by the PPS than a sample of established entrepreneurs.*

This hypothesis was promulgated to investigate any differences in proactive personality that may be identified between the entrepreneurs at the nascent business start-up phase and more established entrepreneurs. While the mean of the nascent group was higher an independent samples *t*-test was conducted and revealed no significant difference ( $t(254) = 1.216, p > .05$ ) between the nascent entrepreneur group ( $m = 5.6025, SE = .09295$ ) and the established entrepreneur group ( $m = 5.4500, SE = .08453$ ). No significant difference exists between the proactive personality score of nascent and established entrepreneurs the hypothesis is therefore refuted.

**Hypothesis 2a**: *Nascent entrepreneurs who successfully launch their own business will have a higher proactive personality score than those who fail to launch.*

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted which compared the means of the two samples. The analysis revealed that there was no significant difference ( $t(101) = -.036, p > .05$ ) between those nascent entrepreneurs who successfully launched a business ( $m = 5.5339, SE = .13222$ ) and the group that failed to launch a business ( $m = 5.5415, SE = .16301$ ). Hypothesis 2a is refuted.

**Hypothesis 2b**: *Once a business is launched entrepreneurs with higher proactive personality scores will continue to trade for longer than those with less proactive personalities.*

In total 42 businesses were still successfully trading after six months. The mean proactive personality score for the successful group was ( $m = 5.6286, SE = .17408$ ). While the mean proactive personality score for the unsuccessful group was ( $m = 5.50, SE = .12244$ ). However the difference was not significant ( $t(103) = .622, p > .05$ ). Hypothesis 2b is therefore refuted.

## Findings

The study identified that nascent entrepreneurs displayed greater proactive personality scores than a control group of non-entrepreneurs. The findings support the hypothesis that proactivity is a behavioural attribute that distinguishes the nascent entrepreneur from non-entrepreneurs. This finding had been suggested by research from Bateman & Crant (1993), Becherer & Maurer (1999) and suggested by the work of Parker (1998). It was also identified that established entrepreneurs were more proactive than non-entrepreneurs. The analysis also identified that no statistical difference was identified between the proactive personality scores of the nascent entrepreneur group and the established entrepreneur group. Both groups displayed higher proactive personality scores than non-entrepreneurs. This supports the notion that entrepreneurs have a behavioural disposition towards proactivity. It also identified that that while this proactivity continued within the established phase of entrepreneurship there was no significant differences between proactive personality scores between these two groups. No significant difference was identified between the proactivity scores of those respondents who failed to trade successfully and those who continued to trade after six months. Seibert et al (1999) had

suggested that individuals who proactively exert control over their work structures are more likely to have a fuller understanding of the operations and environments in which they work using this to anticipate and react to changes.

It could be argued that the lack of significant difference between the nascent entrepreneur and established entrepreneur groups highlights the relative stability in proactive personality suggested by Bateman & Crant (1993). The findings suggest that proactive personality could be a factor in a nascent entrepreneur's decision to launch a new business. Proactive entrepreneurs continue to utilise this behaviour as established entrepreneurs, altering environments and reacting to change. Support for this suggestion comes from Becherer & Maurer (1999) they identified a difference between entrepreneurs who founded their own business and business owners who inherited or purchased their business. The latter group were less proactive than the entrepreneurial group. Indeed they identified a correlational link between the proactivity of an entrepreneur and the number of businesses founded.

So why did almost half the nascent entrepreneurs studied fail to start a business? Two contrasting possibilities suggest themselves. One is that nascent entrepreneurs with a proactive disposition were unable to manipulate their external environment. Not all external environments are the same some are more complex and controlled than others. Bindle (2012) argues that positive moods enhance proactive behaviours but also that negative moods inhibit proactivity. A lack of support and ability to control a situation may have resulted in a decision not to launch the business. An alternative idea is proposed by Yusuf (2012) who argues that positive disengagement from the entrepreneurial process may equally equate to success. Carter et al (1996) supports this reporting similarities, just as this research does, between those who launched a business and those that did not.

The research appears to support previous research that had been conducted within established entrepreneur groups that proactivity is an important variable in the entrepreneurial milieu. Proactive personality is a behavioural action that has been argued to be symptomatic of entrepreneurship. This research has strengthened this assertion by demonstrating that it is symptomatic of nascent and established entrepreneurs while it was not identified in a control group of non-entrepreneurs. The construct has demonstrated that it is stable overtime within the entrepreneurial sample. Proactive personality is a behavioural action. This distinguishes it from, and is independent of cognitive psychological constructs such as cognitive style. Proactive personality therefore has the capacity to influence the behaviours of all entrepreneurs. As a scale or as an approach is it better than the cognitive approach? Certainly it is less popular and less well explored by the academic literature. The findings seem to be suggesting that proactive personality as a measure and as a construct is neither better nor worse it is different. This may influence the actions of entrepreneurs causing them to act in a way that is contrary to their expected cognitive style.

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