

# Using data from 20,400 people, revealing a causal model of how proactive behavior leads to organizational performance

Individuals' proactive behavior is strongly influenced by factors that can be changed by managers, rather than by individual personality, cognition, or compatibility with superiors.

In 2022, the Japan Research Institute, Inc. (President: Katsunori Tanizaki, Head Office: Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo, "JRI") announced that proactive behavior, one of the key factors in corporate human capital management practices, affects the performance of individuals, teams, and organizations, as well as the factors that promote employee proactivation. Following on from the previous survey (Note 1) of the fiscal year, we conducted a large-scale survey of 20,400 people working for companies (the "Survey"). In conjunction, we reviewed previous research and constructed a hypothesis-testing model based on the advice of Professor Akito Shimazu of Keio University.

## Summary of survey results

-A causal model from proactive behavior to organizational performance has been clarified. While proactive personnel are those who are convinced of their personal growth and their contribution to the organization through their duties, not only do such personnel need to be increased, but also proactive teams to enhance the organizational performance outlook.

-The proactive score is the lowest for people in their 40s and 50s, who can be considered

the core human resources in business.

- In order of importance, the factors that strongly influence individual proactive behavior are 'self-efficacy,' 'job characteristics,' and 'group cohesiveness.' Notably, the highest impact comes from factors that can be modified through managerial intervention rather than from individual personality traits.

- Only two areas have the highest impact on team proactivity: the work environment, followed by the leadership behavior of the boss. With the right work environment and leadership behavior from superiors, a group that is individually proactive will also be proactive as a team.

### **Definition of “Proactive Behavior” and “Proactive Score”**

To make “proactive behavior,” which is generally regarded as visionary, future-oriented, and transformation-oriented behavior, usable in business, the JRI has redefined it as a construct consisting of four behaviors: “innovation behavior,” “external networking behavior,” “internal networking behavior,” and “career development behavior” (Note 2).

At JRI, the degree of practice of these behaviors is measured on a five-point scale using 12 questions developed by the company, and a simple average is scored, called the “Proactive Score.” Forward-thinking companies use this score as a KPI to develop autonomous human resources that support restructuring their business portfolios.

### **Outline of the Survey**

Survey Title: Survey on Proactive Behavior in 2023

Behavior Survey Period: Monday, January 22, 2024 – Friday, January 26, 2024

Methodology: Web Surveys

Survey target: Employees of the company

Number of persons surveyed: 20,400

## Key findings

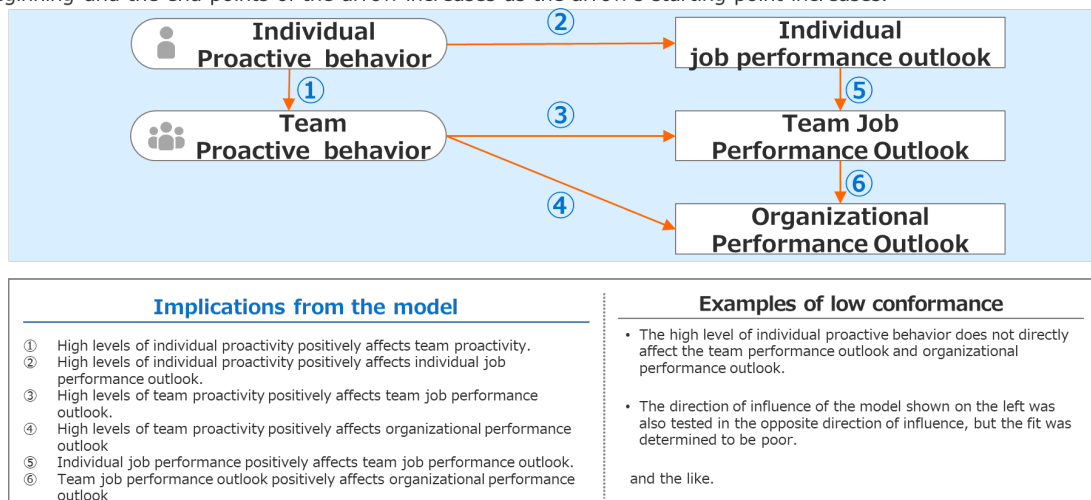
### 1. Unravel the causal model from proactive behavior to organizational performance

In the previous survey, a high proactivity score was found to be related to outcome indicators (impact on both society and organizational performance), such as “job performance,” which indicates one’s evaluation within the organization, “self-fulfillment,” which means the degree of fulfilment of one’s career, and “work engagement,” which indicates motivation and enthusiasm for work.

Based on the suggestions obtained in the previous survey, we increased the resolution and constructed a unique hypothesis model that focuses on the causal relationship between proactive behavior and outcomes. We verified our model based on data from 20,400 people and obtained significant results for the following model (Fig. 1).

〈Figure 1: Proactive Behavior and Performance Outlook〉

In the model, “→” indicates the direction of positive influence. In other words, the relationship between the beginning and the end points of the arrow increases as the arrow's starting point increases.



Source: Japan Research Institute, Limited.

This leads us to the following points:

(1) Proactive human resources are those who are convinced they can contribute to the organization through their personal growth and duties.

The model revealed that the proactive behavior of individuals leads to a prospect of individual job performance, that is, a positive impact on personal growth, a positive effect

on the workplace, and a confidence in the contribution of the organization through work. This can also be seen as proof that people who can take proactive action, that is, proactive people, drive corporate change involving personal growth and the workplace. In human capital management, which is expected to transform the human resource portfolio, proactive human resources were once again considered critical.

(2) The key is to increase not only proactive human resources but also proactive teams

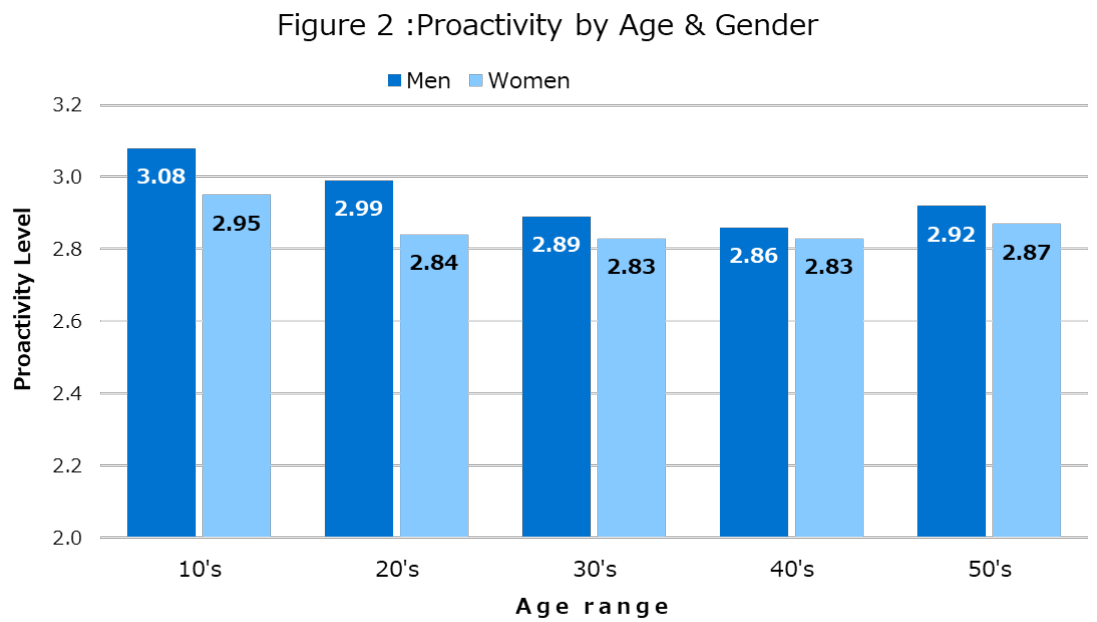
The model also revealed that individual proactive behavior does not have a direct positive impact on team or organizational performance. From the perspective of increasing corporate value, this finding suggests the importance of not only increasing the number of individuals who can take proactive actions, that is, proactive human resources, but also increasing the number of proactive teams composed of such human resources. At the same time, the evidence indicates that increasing individual proactive behavior and enhancing personal performance prospects leads to higher performance prospects for teams and organizations. From this model, the path and sequence for improving organizational performance starting from proactive behavior can be said to have been clarified. For example, when trying to improve organizational performance beginning from a new challenge, the management point has become clear: to increase the individual proactivity score and develop specific measures to improve team proactivity without damaging the score while at the same time coordinating the performance outlook so that it is linked.

## 2. Management is essential for maintaining and improving proactive scores

We also analyzed the “Differences in Proactive Scores by age and gender,” which we mentioned in the previous survey. As in the last survey, the results indicated that people in their 40s and 50s, considered the core human resources for work, had the lowest value by age group. Another feature is that the difference by age is more significant for men. While the survey is not a year-to-year comparison, the average value by age group suggests that proactive scores can decline if left unchecked.

This also means that no scientific management approach that focuses on proactive scores currently exists and that proactive behavior is not covered by management, and we

believe this trend is a consequence of this process. Therefore, intentional and systematic efforts are necessary to maintain and improve the Proactive Score; in short, management is needed.

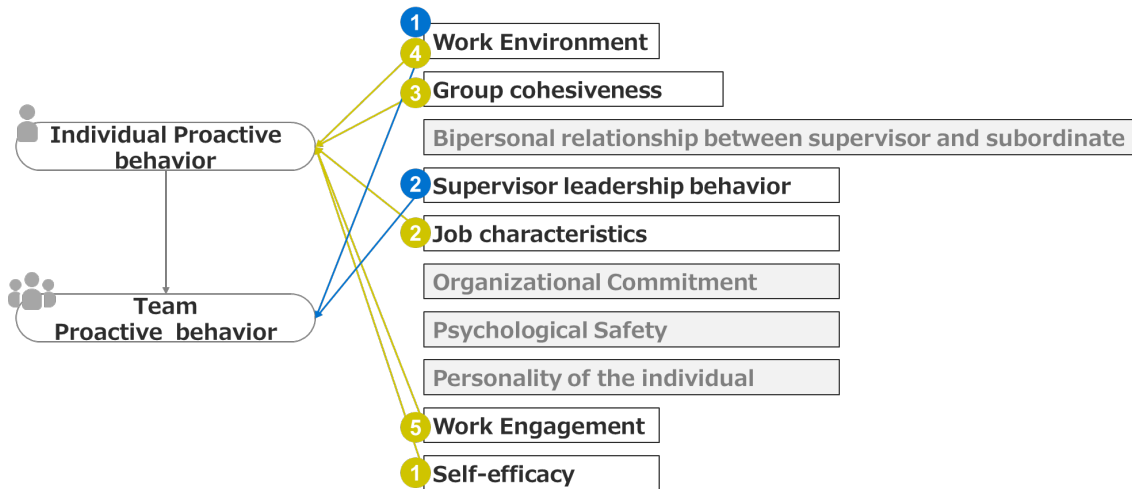


Source: Japan Research Institute, Limited.

3. Proactive scores are strongly influenced by factors that are changed by management styles

To clarify the points that should be considered to increase the number of proactive human resources and teams, which are key to improving corporate value, this survey examined a model based on previous research on the factors that increase the proactive score of individuals and teams and obtained significant results in the following points (Fig. 3).

〈Figure 3: Selection Factors Influencing Proactive Behavior〉



First, self-efficacy, which indicates “a state of perceiving that one can accomplish one’s mission, etc.,” has the highest impact on individual proactive behavior, followed by job characteristics indicating engaging jobs “with high levels of diversity, completeness, importance, and autonomy,” and group cohesion indicating “a high sense of belonging as a member of a group.” What is characteristic is not a so-called hard-to-change point that is greatly influenced by personality, cognition, and compatibility, such as the person’s personality and the bilateral relationship between a boss and a subordinate; however, items can be changed by the efforts of managers and management. In particular, the fact that self-efficacy has the most significant impact on individual proactive behavior suggests that managers play an essential role, as do hard measures such as job changes due to job transfers. Specifically, managers need to make steady efforts in the field, such as assigning missions to subordinates according to their abilities and circumstances through 1-on-1 meetings and other dialogue opportunities and having subordinates accumulate successful experiences.

Next, the work environment strongly influences team proactivity, followed by the supervisors’ leadership behavior. Compared to individual proactivity, the number of factors is smaller, which suggests that a group of proactive individuals will also be proactive as a team if an appropriate work environment and supervisor leadership behavior exist. The fact that the leadership behavior of the supervisor was significant, rather than the personal relationship between the boss and the subordinate, should be

noted. Furthermore, the methodology of how the supervisor manages the proactive behavior of the individual and the team may be more important than considering the human relationship with the subordinate.

**Japan Research Institute, Research & Consulting Division, Senior Manager, Yusuke Shimono's Comments**

Data analysis from 20,400 respondents revealed that the path of proactive behavior affecting organizational performance has been clarified. Furthermore, proactive human resources are those who can achieve their own growth and promote the transformation desired by the company through autonomous challenges.

In particular, a very compatible image of human resources in companies' human resource management arises at a significant turning point where we are trying to restructure our business portfolio.

The survey results also suggest that focusing on and managing individuals may lead to a different outcome than corporate transformation. Specifically, the team needs to be managed by adopting a bird's eye view of proactive actions and leading them. This means looking at the balance of the whole team from such a viewpoint while approaching the individual, and management skills beyond personal management are needed for middle management.

Through this survey analysis, we also identify the leading factors for improving the proactive score. The identification of the factors will need to be further refined by restricting the cases further. However, an important implication is that the proactive score is manageable and does not depend on “hard-to-change” factors such as personality since no items were selected as factors such as the Big 5 or “human relations” with supervisors, which depend precisely on these factors.

From this, the important thing in practicing human capital management based on proactive human resources and teams is to proactively activate these and strengthen and develop management personnel who can manage such human resources and teams.

The JRI supports corporate transformation through middle-level management intervention, from introducing a proactive corporate human resource evaluation system

to continuing to strive to realize advanced human capital management based on knowledge gained through practice in the field.

Note 1: Japan Research Institute, Inc., ABeam Consulting Co., Ltd., “Comprehensive Survey on the Actual Situation of Proactive Human Resources” (June 6, 2023) <https://www.jri.co.jp/page.jsp?id=105380>

Note 2: Definition of each concept in proactive behavior

**“Innovation Behavior”**: Behavior that seeks to change the environment surrounding one’s own work by rethinking such work and that of the workplace as a whole or by changing methods and procedures. This is an action that positively changes the work itself by oneself.

**“Internal Networking Behavior”**: Actions to build high-quality relationships with various entities in the organization, including superiors and colleagues in the workplace, and to carry out challenging work while involving related parties.

**“External Networking Behavior”**: The behavior of actively building a network with people other than the company to which the person belongs to improve one’s own knowledge.

**“Career Development Behavior”**: Envision your own career and learn the skills and knowledge necessary to realize it, both inside and outside the company, which are actions that try to acquire or expand the scope of work on their own.

In this survey, individual responses to the above concepts, such as “the subject of the question begins with ‘I am’,” are defined as individual proactive behavior, and responses to the team. “The subject of the question begins with ‘at my workplace’,” is defined as team proactive behavior.