

## **THE ROLE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT TOOLS IN ENHANCING PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR**

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### *Abstract*

*This study aims at measuring the relationship between career development tools and proactive behaviour using self-report questionnaires collected from workers at an oil and gas service company in Peninsular Malaysia. The results of linear regression analysis displayed two major findings: first, job autonomy was positively and significantly related to proactive behaviour. Second, transformational leadership was positively and significantly related to proactive behaviour. In overall, this result demonstrates that the career development tools act as an important predictor of employees' proactive behavior in the organizational sample. Further, this study provides discussion, implications and conclusion.*

*Keywords: Career Development Tools, Proactive Behavior, Malaysia, SPSS*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Career program is often seen as an important function of human resource development and management (Azman, et al., 2015; Wong, et al., 2017). It refers to the role of human resource managers in designing and administering the entire stage, process, attitude, behavior and situation which related to employees' work well-being in organizations (Antoniou, 2010; Gomez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 2016). In carrying out the role, human resource managers will often collaborate and liaise with other department heads to set up a master career plan in order to achieve the following aims: retain top talent, enhance engagement and productivity, reinforce succession planning, generate knowledge transfer and retention, fill internal skill and role gaps, as well as build positive employer branding (Insala, 2017). Implementation of the career plan at organizational and departmental levels may strongly motivate employees to maintaining and supporting their organizational strategy and goals in an era of global economy (Crawford, Monson & Searle, 2016; Clarke, 2017).

A review of the recent literature pertaining to human resource development shows that the design of career programs will not achieve its aim if management does not have capabilities to appropriately implement career development tools in organizations (Hadjisolomou, 2015; Bocciardi, et al., 2017). In an organizational development perspective, career development tools are generally viewed as an organization takes initiatives to assist its employees in achieving their career goals (Wong, et al., 2017; Guerrero, Jeanblanc & Veilleux, 2016). According to many scholars like Sia and Appu (2015), Rono and Kiptum (2017), Anitha and Aruna (2016), specifically state that career development consists of two influential tools: job autonomy and transformational leadership.

In an organizational career, job autonomy (JOTY) is often viewed as employees' freedom to determine work methods, work schedules, and decision making in executing daily job operations (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Anitha & Aruna, 2016; Montgomery, 2017). While, transformational leadership (TRLP) is usually seen as the ability of leaders to use charisma (inspire and motivate followers), intellectual stimulation (challenge followers to higher levels of performance), individualized consideration (personal attention to every followers) and idealized influence (role model for followers) in executing their organizational goals (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Suifan & Al-Janini, 2017).

Extant studies in competitive organization reveal that the ability of management to properly implement job autonomy and transformational leadership in evolving employee careers may have a significant impact on employee outcomes, especially proactive behavior (De Jong, et al., 2015; Marinova, et al., 2015; Zee, 2016; Wu & Parker, 2017). In a human attitude and behaviour perspective, proactive behaviour (PROB) is broadly defined as individuals who have capabilities to use proactive personalities, maintain social networking and

manage career behaviour in achieving their career objectives in organizations (Crant, 2000; King, 2004; Huang, 2016; Yang & Chau, 2016).

Within a career management model, many scholars think that JOTY, TRLP and PROB have different meanings, but highly interconnected concepts. Even though the nature of this relationship is interesting, the role of career development tools as an important predicting variable has been ignored in the context of oil and gas industry (Edwin, 2015). Many scholars debate that this condition may be caused by several factors: first, a number of earlier studies have much described the conceptual definitions and different types of career prospect in oil and gas companies (Idris & Manganaro, 2017; OilJobFinder, 2017; Harhara, Singh, & Hussain, 2015; ShaleNET, 2013). Second, many past studies have much discussed the characteristics of career development program, such as conceptual definitions, purposes, types and benefits of career development tools in oil and gas companies. On the contrary, the effect of specific career development tools (i.e., job autonomy and transformational leadership) on employees' proactive behaviour has not been adequately discussed in the oil and gas companies (Bloomfield, 2015; Insala, 2017; Yu, 2010).

Third, many previous researches have been conducted by oil and gas company officers and consultants using an applied research methodology to develop career programs and link their effect on specific job structure issues, especially upstream, midstream and downstream activities, as well as pay levels and structures for workers (Bloomfield, 2015; Insala, 2017; ShaleNET, 2013). In an applied research methodology, a simple descriptive and correlation as well as secondary data are often utilized to predict outcomes and solve practical problems (Harhara, Singh & Hussain, 2015; ShaleNET, 2013; Yu, 2010). As a result, the above studies have only offered general findings and this may not sufficient to be used as guiding principles by practitioners in understanding the complexity of career development tool concept and establishing innovation plans to support ultimate career development objectives in oil and gas industry.

Therefore, these reasons inspire the researchers to fill in the gap of literature by assessing the effect of career development tools on proactive behaviour. Specifically, the present study intends to answer two important objectives: first, to assess the relationship between job autonomy and proactive behaviour. Second, to assess the relationship between transformational leadership and proactive behaviour.

## 2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER DEVELOPMENT TOOLS AND PROACTIVE BEHAVIOR

The importance of career development tools as a predicting variable has gained strong support from the notion of career management theory. For example, Herzberg's (1966) motivator-hygiene theory states the importance of internal job factors such as recognition, achievement, possibility of growth, advancement, responsibility and work itself in enhancing positive individuals' actions. Application of this theory in career management shows that the notion of internal job motivation factors is often driven by job autonomy (De Jong, et al., 2015; Marinova, et al., 2015). On the contrary, Fiedler's (1964, 1967) leader-match theory posits that leaders who are able to select leadership styles that suite with the particular conditions may motivate followers to support their goals. Application of this theory in career management shows that that the notion of leader-match and is often viewed as transformational leadership (Rank, 2006; Northouse, 2013). Further, transformational leadership theory explains that idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration are important leadership practices in affecting followers to achieve their goals in organizations (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Fogelqvist & Lestander, 2017). The notion of these theories has gained strong support from the career management research literature.

Previous empirical researches showed that effect of career development tools on proactive behavior had produced mixed results. For example, studies by several researchers, such as Parker, Williams & Turner (2006) used a sample of 282 wire makers in U.K. and Paramitha & Indarti (2014) used sample of 132 employees working in mass media industry in Indonesia. Results from these studies showed that leader's support did not act as an important determinant of employees' proactive behaviour in the organizations. This finding is due to diverse employees have different values and assessments about the importance of support types provided by management in the organizations (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Further, latest researches have provided strong evidences that career development tools are important determinants of proactive behaviour in dynamic organizations. For example, results from surveys of 179 employees in a Dutch research and consultancy organization (De Jong, et al., 2015), 28,402 meta-analytic tests (Marinova, et al., 2015), 146 trainees from the financial sector (Zee, 2016), 138 employees from United State and 212 employees from a large gas and oil company in China (Wu & Parker, 2017) displayed two important findings: first, the ability of leaders to appropriately implement autonomy in doing daily job operations had enhanced employees' proactive behavior (De Jong, et al., 2015; Marinova, et al., 2015). Second, the ability of leaders to appropriately implement transformational styles in performing daily work had enhanced employees' proactive behavior (Zee, 2016; Wu & Parker, 2017). Thus, it was hypothesized that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between JOTY and PROB

H2: There is a positive relationship between TRLP and PROB

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

A cross-sectional research design was utilized because it allowed the researchers to combine the workplace career literature, and the actual survey as a main procedure to collect data for this study. The use of this procedure may collect accurate data, less biased data and high quality data (Creswell, 1998; Sekaran, 2000). This study was conducted at an oil and gas company in West Malaysia. At the initial stage of this study, a survey questionnaire was developed based on the workplace career management literature. Then, a back translation technique was employed to translate the survey questionnaires into Malay and English versions in order to enhance the validity and reliability of research results (Creswell, 1998; Wright, 1996).

The survey questionnaire has 3 parts: first, JOTY was assessed using 17 items adapted from career program literature (Breugh, 1985; Parrish, 2001; Saragih, 2011; Goussinsky, 2015). The dimensions used to measure this construct were work method, work scheduling and decision making. Second, TRLP was had 15 items that were adapted from career management related transformational leadership (Callow, et. al, 2009; Rank, 2006; Zee, 2016). The dimensions used to measure this construct were charismatic, inspirational motivation, idealized influence and intellectual stimulation. Third, PROB had 9 items that were adapted from career management related proactive behaviour (Owens, 2009; Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Huang, 2016). The dimensions used to measure this construct were proactive personality, networking and career management behaviour. The above items were assessed using a 7-item scale ranging from “strongly disagree/dissatisfied” (1) to “strongly agree/satisfied” (7). Respondent characteristics were used as controlling variables because this study concerned on employee attitudes.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to distribute 200 survey questionnaires to employees work in the organization. This sampling technique was employed in this study because the list of registered employees was not given to the researchers for confidential reasons and this condition did not allow to choose participants randomly from the population. Of the total number, 132 (66 percent) usable questionnaires were returned to the researchers. The survey questions were answered by participants based on their consent and on a voluntary basis. Further, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to assess the validity and reliability of instrument and test the research hypotheses.

#### 4. FINDINGS

The majority respondents were male (56.8 percent), Malaysian (97.7 percent), aged between 25 to 34 years old (64.4 percent), degree holders (47.7 percent), employees who in management and professional level (59.1 percent), employees who served from 5 to 14 years (52.3 percent), permanent employees (76.5 percent), employees who had monthly salaries starting from RM4000 and above (50.0 percent), and married (68.9 percent).

Table 1 shows the results of validity and reliability analyses for the instrument. The questionnaires had 41 items, which related to three variables: JOTY (17 items), TRLP (15 items), and PROB (9 items). The factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test (KMO) were conducted for each variable. The results showed that: first, all research variables exceeded the acceptable standard of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's value of 0.6 and all research variables were significant in Bartlett's test of sphericity, indicating the sample used in this study was adequate (Hair, et al., 1998). Second, all research variables had eigenvalues larger than 1, and the items for each research variable exceeded factor loadings of 0.40, indicating that the variables met the criteria of validity analysis (Hair, et al., 1998). Finally, all research variables had the values of Cronbach alpha greater than 0.70, indicating that the variables met the requirements of reliability analysis (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These statistical results confirm that the instrument has met the acceptable standards of validity and reliability analyses.

Table 2 shows the results of descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. The mean values for the variables are between 4.37 and 5.77, signifying the levels of JOTY, TRLP, and PROB ranging from high (4) to highest level (7). The correlation coefficients for the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., JOTY and TRLP) and the dependent variable (i.e., PROB) were less than 0.90, indicating that the data were not affected by serious collinearity problem (Hair, et al., 1998). These statistical results further confirm that the variables have satisfactorily met the criteria of validity and reliability analyses.

Table 3 shows that the inclusion of job autonomy in the analysis had explained 29 percent in the variance of proactive behavior, showing that it provided a moderate support for the overall model (Chin, 2001). Specifically, the outcomes of testing hypothesis displayed two major findings: first, JOTY was positively and significantly correlated with proactive behaviour ( $\beta=0.224$ ;  $p=0.029$ ), therefore H1 was supported. Second, TRLP was positively and significantly correlated with PROB ( $\beta=0.249$ ;  $p=0.013$ ), therefore H2 was supported. This result demonstrates that JOTY and TRLP is an important predictor of proactive behaviour in the studied organization.

**Table 1.** Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Measure	Items	Factor Loadings	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained	Cronbach Alpha
JOTY	17	0.510 to 0.828	0.912	1622.21	8.821	51.890	0.940
TRLP	15	0.504 to 0.740	0.888	1056.46	7.271	48.470	0.921
PROB	9	0.543 to 0.866	0.900	1216.63	6.371	70.785	0.948

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Pearson Correlation (r)		
			1	2	3
1. JOTY	5.64	.646	1		
2. TRLP	5.77	.531	.614**	1	
3. PROB	4.37	1.043	.390**	.379**	1

Note: Correlation Value is significant at \*\*p<0.01 Reliability estimation are shown diagonally (value 1)

**Table 3.** The Outcomes of Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Relationship between Career Management and Proactive Behavior

Variable	Dependent Variable (PROB)	
	Step 1	Step 2
<u>Controlling Variable</u>		
Gender	-.178	-.132
Race	.039	.059
Age	-.051	.015
Education	-.113	-.114
Position	.167	.145
Length of Service	.114	.056
Type of Service	.210*	.138
Monthly Income	-.048	-.114
Marital Status	-.241**	-.199*
<u>Independent Variable</u>		
<b>JOTY</b>		<b>.224*</b>
<b>TRLP</b>		<b>.249**</b>
R Square	0.121	0.288
Adjust R Square	0.057	0.223
R Square change	0.121	0.167
F	1.872	4.415***
F Δ R Square	1.872***	14.054***

Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001 Beta = Standardized Beta

As an extension of the hypothesis testing, the variance inflation factor was further conducted to test the relationship between the variables of interest. The results of this test showed that the relationship between JOTY and PROB was 1.717; and relationship between TRLP and PROB was 1.651. These values were less than 0.10, indicating that they were not affected by a serious collinearity problem (Hair, et al., 1998).



## **5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The result of this study shows that career development tools act as an important predictor of proactive behavior. In the context of this study, leaders (management employees) have designed and administered the various kinds of career programs to meet different workers' needs and expectations based on broad policies and procedures as established by their stakeholders. Majority respondents view that the levels of JOTY, TRLP and PROB are high. This condition describes that the readiness of management to appropriately implement job autonomy and transformational leadership to achieve their targets may lead to greater workers' proactive behaviour in the organizations.

This study provides three major implications: theoretical contribution, robustness of research methodology, and contribution to practitioners. In terms of theoretical contribution, the finding of this study is consistent with the notion of Herzberg's (1966) motivator-hygiene theory, Fiedler's (1964, 1967) leader-match theory, and Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational leadership theory reveals that the ability of management to appropriately implement career development tools may strongly invoke employees' proactive behaviour in the organization. This result also has supported and broadened studies by De Jong, et al., (2015), Marinova, et al., (2015), Zee (2016), Wu & Parker (2017). With respect to the robustness of research methodology, the survey questionnaires used in this study had met the requirements of validity and reliability analyses. This situation may lead to produced accurate and reliable research results.

Regarding with practical contribution, the outcomes of this study may be used as useful recommendations by leaders to improve employee careers in organizations. In order to perform this objective, top management needs to focus on the following issues: firstly, performance management should be encouraged to assist leaders in using formal and/or informal performance appraisal systems to develop employee performance in achieving organizational objectives. Secondly, communication openness should be promoted to reduce interaction gap, increase understanding about career prospects and cooperation between employees in achieving career goals. Thirdly, interactive training methods (e.g., mentoring, coaching, counselling and case studies) should be updated to ease employees in understanding theoretical knowledge and enhancing practical skills in planning, managing and monitoring the progression of their career paths in organizations. Finally, the type, level and/or amount of reward should be upgraded according to job structure and merit. This change will help employees to receive adequate rewards and may strongly attract, retain and motivate employees to support their organization strategy and goals. If top management concerns on the above suggestions this may strongly motivate employees to perform the organizational career objectives.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that JOTY and TRLP are important predictors of PROB in the organization. Therefore, current research and practice within the human capital development model needs to view JOTY and TRLP as a crucial dimension of the workplace career management domain. This study further suggests that the capability of leaders to appropriately implement job autonomy and transformational leadership in achieving their targets will strongly induce subsequent positive employee outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, commitment and performance). Thus, this positive behaviour may lead to greater organizational competitiveness and productivity in an era of knowledge based economy.

This study has several limitations: firstly, the data was only taken one time during the length of this study and it did not describe detail differences in the sample. Secondly, this study only assesses the relationship between latent variables and the conclusion drawn from this study does not show the relationship between specific elements for the independent variable and the dependent variable. Thirdly, this study only focused on particular career development tools and neglected other important elements (e.g., job structure and work culture). Finally, the sample for this study was collected using a purposive sampling plan in a single private company. These limitations may decrease the ability of generalizing the results of this study to other organizational situations.

This study provides several suggestions to reinforce future research. Firstly, certain important organizational and personal characteristics (e.g., job type, working condition, gender, age, education and marital status) should be included in the analysis and this may clarify different effect of career development tools in organizations. Secondly, longitudinal research design may be used to collect less bias and accurate data because it describes detail sub-sample perceptions toward causal relationships between variables of interest. Thirdly, the findings of this study would produce better findings if it is done in more than one organizations. Fourthly, other theoretical constructs of career development tools such as counselling, mentoring, coaching and support should be considered because they have been widely acknowledged as an important link between career management and work outcomes. Finally, other outcome constructs such as satisfaction, commitment, performance, ethics and prosocial behaviour need to be assessed because they are found important in the workplace career program research literature. The importance of these matters needs to be further discovered in future research.

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