

How Can Organisations Train Employees to be more Proactive?



Organisations are increasingly looking for their employees to be proactive – to show initiative in their work and contribute to positive change. But how can organizations increase proactivity in their workforce? Professor of Management at ESSEC Business School, Prof. Karoline Strauss and fellow researcher Sharon K. Parker of the University of Western Australia share their research.

From the paper *Intervening to Enhance Proactivity in Organizations: Improving the Present or Changing the Future*



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THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD

 **PERCEIVE**
with a set of key takeaways

 **PROJECT**
with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context

 **PERFORM**
by putting it all into practice using action tips





● PERCEIVE with a set of key takeaways

- Employees who take a proactive approach at work – who speak up with suggestions, try to bring about improvements, and take initiative – generally perform better, are more satisfied with their job, and progress more quickly in their career.
- For organizations, a proactive workforce which anticipates changes and is willing to contribute to innovation is seen as a competitive advantage.
- Two potential avenues for organizations wishing to increase the proactivity of their workforce have been traditionally used: hiring new human resources with particular personalities and skills sets, or changing the work context, for example by enriching existing employees' work.
- These strategies often encounter two issues that may block their implementation: the lack of opportunity to hire due to difficult economic or budgetary contexts, and the lack in means and resources to enrich job roles.
- Training and development are therefore essential for organisations: in the United States alone, organizations spend over \$165 billion in training their workforces.
- The training approach an organization should take depends on the type of proactivity it is looking for in its employees: different training approach would be needed to encourage employees to become proactive in solving problems they encountered in their day-to-day work, or to encourage them to involve themselves in strategic change and become proactive in shaping the future of the organization.
- Employees faced with a high workload were most likely to respond positively to training aimed at encouraging them to be proactive problem solvers. Training these employees to identify problems in their job and to develop ways to address these problems helps them to find more efficient ways of completing their day-to-day tasks.
- A training approach aimed at encouraging employees to become more proactive in shaping the future of the organization was most effective for those who are generally more focused on long-term rather than short-term benefits.
- Employees who are more interested in the short-term do not respond to the training approach in the same way – they did not become more proactive.
- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to proactivity training: For organizations who want to enhance proactivity in their workforce this has two important implications: First, to identify what kind of proactivity they expect.
- Second, organizations need to consider the situation the employee is in. What are the employee's needs and preferences?
- Pushing somebody who is generally not very interested in the long-term to contribute to bringing about a vision of the organization in the future is unlikely to be effective in making them more proactive, and our findings suggest that it can even backfire".



Read the full
feature article:
<https://councilcommunity.org/2016/10/04/how-can-organisations-train-employees-to-be-more-proactive/>



● **PROJECT**
with food for thought

- To what extent does your work and corporate culture encourage proactive employees? Do employees speak up and contribute?
- To what extent does your organisation provide employees with training in such areas as proactiveness?
- What about you? In what areas would you need training/ coaching – in dealing with day-to-day tasks, problem-solving and operations or long-term strategy and innovation?

Thoughts

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● **PERFORM**

by putting it all into practice

CHECKLIST

- 1. As an HR practitioner**, manager or external consultant brought in to deal with skilling up the workforce: Where is the company/organisation going? What does it want to achieve in the next 5 years?
- 2. Identify the challenges that will occur as a result** in the short, medium and long term on both a micro and macro level (this could form a team/department workshop using brainstorming or future scenario approaches).
- 3. Note down ways in which you would like the workforce to be proactive** in order to achieve these goals and overcome these challenges over the period(s) in question. You may want to think about expectations for different types of proactivity for different segments of the workforce.
- 4. Systematically evaluate barriers to these types of proactivity.** Do employees lack the incentive, skills, energy, or confidence to be proactive? Are there factors in their work environment that deter them (such as unsupportive managers or a climate of silence)?
- 5. Plan your training and development strategy** around addressing these factors as relevant (timeline, populations concerned, budget, providers, internal champions and trainers, etc.).
- 6. As an employee, reflect on which type of proactivity you can, and want to, engage in.** Identify why being proactive is important to you, and identify which skills gaps you might have. Formalise it in writing. Request training as appropriate.



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