

What are the contrasting types of proactivity that manifest at work? A systematic literature review, content analysis, and future directions

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Abstract

Purpose – This study summarizes widely dispersed literature on proactivity at work in its many different forms and highlights contrasts between the various themes in detail.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is based on systematic literature review of proactivity at work using 1708 peer reviewed articles published between 1969 and 2021 using R and Vos viewer software; a content analysis of the 100 most cited articles in proactivity research; and synthesis and integrative literature review to develop future research directions.

Findings – This study uncovers many interesting facets of knowledge, including proactivity-related themes that have emerged over 50 years of research, time-related publication trends, top journals, top authors, and the most commonly used keywords. The content analysis of the 100 most-cited articles revealed findings such as the role of each proactivity theme impacting academic discussions to date. For example, quantitative research appears to be more prevalent among the most cited articles compared to different types of qualitative research. Finally, future research directions building on our findings are provided.

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Originality/value – To our knowledge, this work is the first attempt to contrast different types of proactivity at work as opposed to extant literature, which is either driven by the proactivity phenomenon or focuses on similarities rather than on contrasting aspects of the various forms of proactivity at work. Hence, the significance of this research extends beyond theoretical considerations and incorporates valuable practical elements.

Keywords Citation-based systematic review, Job crafting, Proactivity, Proactive behaviors, SLR, Voice

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

The last 50 years, and particularly recent ones, have witnessed an upsurge in scholarly interest in different types of proactivity (e.g. job crafting, feedback seeking, proactive personality, voice) in work settings as showcased by the growing number of publications on this topic (Crant *et al.*, 2016; Davidson and van Dyne, 2016; Parker and Bindl, 2016; Parker and Collins, 2010). Given the fast-changing environments in which organizations currently operate and need to respond to (Slatten *et al.*, 2013), proactive behaviors by employees are instrumental to the success of organizations. Such employees challenge the status quo and initiate needed changes in turbulent circumstances.

Despite the increase in scholarly work on proactivity at work (Grant and Ashford, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2010; Tornau and Frese, 2013; Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), further scholarly work may be impeded if interested organizational psychology and management scholars fail to make effective use of prior evidence regarding this phenomenon (Rousseau *et al.*, 2008). We concur with Rousseau *et al.* (2008, p. 477) that “a systematic review of the full body of evidence is the key first step in formulating a science-based conclusion” that will benefit organizational behavior scholars and practitioners alike. In response, in this review of 1,708 peer-reviewed articles drawn from 408 journal articles published between 1969 and 2021, we contribute to the proactivity literature by implementing a citation-based systematic literature review (SLR) as an objective tool to map the scientific structure of the different forms of proactivity at work (Acedo and Casillas, 2005) while avoiding potential biases that naturally arise along with traditional narrative reviews (Hodgkinson and Ford, 2014; Zupic and Čater, 2015). In doing so, we point out many insightful findings regarding intellectual work on proactivity while contrasting different forms of proactivity, a dual endeavor that to our knowledge has been the object of no prior attempts.

Second, we use content analysis as a research tool to critically analyze the 100 most influential articles on proactivity in work settings. We then synthesize the findings of the SLR and content analysis of the sample articles together with discussions in Parker and Bindl (2016) as a theoretical framework in an integrative manner (Torraco, 2016) to present provocative future research directions for research and practice while avoiding the pitfalls detailed by Hodgkinson and Ford (2015).

Using the three tools, we seek to answer the following research questions: (1) What scientific structures and dynamics of different forms of proactivity at work have been identified thus far? (2) What major organizational content domains have been tapped by proactivity research scholars over the last 50 years, and what are their dynamics? and (3) What provocative future directions should guide academic and practitioner-oriented interests as well as policy makers for proactivity to effect aspired changes in academia and in organizations?

Theoretically, we respond to current calls by researchers (see, for example, Vogt *et al.*, 2021; Jiang *et al.*, 2023) by synthesizing the dispersed literature on different themes within proactivity at work and presenting our findings in a novel manner by contrasting these themes. Second, by contrasting themes within proactivity at work, we suggest innovative and thought-provoking future research directions to support ongoing scholarly discussions on this significant phenomenon in its different forms.

Practically, this work provides managers with a summary of the many forms of proactive employee behaviors and traits they can capitalize on at work in order to effect changes in their organization. This summary will be invaluable to managers given the competing demands on their time (Bruch and Ghoshal, 2002). Moreover, the study pinpoints several research-informed organizational factors that may help (or impede) employees' proactive behaviors in the workplace.

The article is structured as follows: We first present the research methodology adopted to gather our data for the systematic analysis. We then present the findings of the SLR analysis followed by those of the content analysis of the 100 most-cited articles. Lastly, we present synthesized future research directions we infer from the above results.

2. Literature review

Proactivity, generally defined as “self-initiated and future-focused action to change oneself or the situation” (Parker *et al.*, 2019, p. 221) can manifest as a behavior in many forms in organizations (Parker and Bindl, 2016; Parker and Collins, 2010). In addition, some organizational actors show a tendency to initiate change in their work environment, thus providing evidence of a proactive personality (Crant *et al.*, 2016). Parker and Collins (2010) classify proactive behaviors into three major categories: (1) person-environment fit behaviors (or behaviors targeting a better fit between a person and their work environment); (2) proactive work behaviors (or behaviors aimed at improving the internal work environment); and (3) proactive strategic behaviors (or behaviors aimed at making the organization better fit the external environment).

Our study focuses on the first two categories, including the following prominent proactive work behaviors: (1) feedback seeking (making efforts “toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behavior for attaining valued end states,” Ashford, 1986, p. 466); (2) job crafting (the inauguration of change in one's job) (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001); (3) taking charge (making efforts to enact change at work; Morrison and Phelps, 1999); (4) voice (a tendency to “express future-focused change oriented ideas to create envisioned future outcomes,” Davidson and van Dyne, 2016, p. 472); and (5) personal initiative (demonstrating a “self-starting approach to work and going beyond what is formally required,” Frese *et al.*, 1996, p. 38). However, we exclude strategic behaviors as our study targets organizational actors and their fit to their environment rather than the organization's fit to the external environment exemplified in the strategic behaviors category. Our study also extends conversations about the proactive behaviors enumerated by Parker and Bindl (2016) as we build on our findings to suggest future directions. Finally, we extend the scope of our study to encompass the proactive personality of organizational actors, defined as individuals' inclination to effect change in their surroundings (Bateman and Crant, 1993) given its relevance and importance in shaping organizational outcomes.

It is important to point out that proactivity is linked to myriad positive individual and organizational outcomes readily traceable to it. Examples include superior job performance (Wu and Parker, 2011), innovation (Parker and Bindl, 2016), creativity (Binnewies *et al.*, 2007), career success (Seibert *et al.*, 1999), job and career satisfaction (Wu and Parker, 2011), and individuals' health (Wolsink *et al.*, 2019).

3. Methodology

A systematic literature review begins with a well-defined article search criterion and proceeds through several stages of quality and relevance testing in order to identify all relevant articles. Based on the chosen sample, a citation analysis is performed to provide a bird's eye view of the subject area. The main goal of the systematic literature review is to

conduct a thorough content analysis in order to provide a detailed snapshot of the literature. This section describes our selection process, citation analysis, and content analysis.

3.1 Selection process

Choosing the database for document search is the initial step. Many options were available, including Web of Science (WoS), Scopus (SC), ScienceDirect (SD), Business Source Complete (BSC), and ProQuest (PQ), among others. Each of these data sources has its pros and cons. For instance, WoS and SC have strict requirements for a journal to be listed, with WoS having the strictest of the two. However, full texts cannot be searched in either of these databases. In contrast, journals appearing in SD, BSC, and ProQuest are listed based on each journal's subscriptions. Thus, they allow the researcher to search the full text of the subscribed articles. However, the main difficulty with these databases is that they do not provide the citation information needed for the purpose of conducting our study. For example, journals listed in SC have a broader coverage compared to WoS, while Scopus is recognized as the most suitable database for conducting a citation analysis (see, for example, [Geetha and Kothainayaki, 2019](#); [Sainaghi et al., 2020](#); [Celik et al., 2023](#); [Arici et al., 2023](#)). In response, we selected the SC database, which includes approximately 24,000 journals.

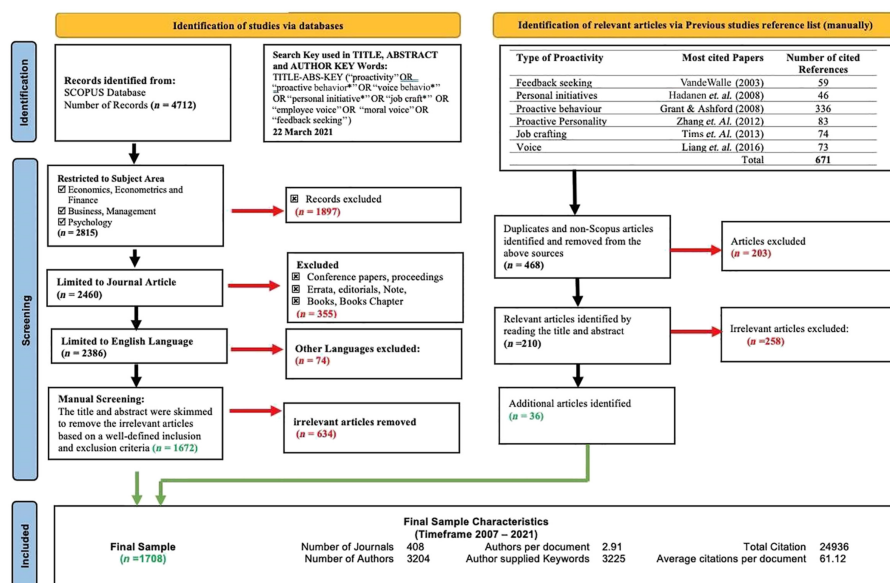
A systematic literature review (SLR) starts with a comprehensive search of articles containing relevant keywords. We started the process by searching each article's title, abstract, and author-supplied keywords for one of the following: *proactivity*, *proactive behavior*, *proactive personality*, *voice*, *personal initiative*, *taking charge*, *job craft(ing)*, *employee voice*, *moral voice*, and *feedback seeking*. The search key used in our SCOPUS search was as follows:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("proactivity" OR "proactive behavior*" OR "taking charge" OR "voice behavior*" OR "personal initiative*" OR "job craft*" OR "employee voice" OR "moral voice" OR "feedback seeking")

The search was carried out in November 2020. These keywords were selected following an extensive discussion among the co-authors, all of whom are active in the field. This search resulted in 4,712 documents. (The flow chart of the selection process is shown in [Figure 1](#).) Following the Scopus subject classification, the subject area was then restricted to *Business*, *Management and Accounting*, and *Psychology*. This cut the number of documents to 2,815. Next, the search was restricted to journal articles after we removed books, book chapters, conference proceedings, notes, conference papers, and errata in order to focus on peer-reviewed papers. As a result, 355 articles were removed, leaving us with 2,460 articles. Finally, 74 non-English-language articles were also removed, leaving us with 2,386 articles.

Our 2,386 articles were then manually skimmed by two co-authors focusing on titles and abstracts to ensure that the sample only contained relevant articles. Topics falling outside of the scope of the study (i.e. relating to macro- as opposed to micro-level proactivity) were excluded, as were studies that used non-organizational actors (i.e. students). Similarly, articles related to topics outside the management and organizational psychology realms (e.g. marketing, education) were also excluded. This critical step resulted in removing 634 articles that survived our search but were deemed irrelevant.

To ensure that no important articles were left out, the list of articles was compared with reference lists of six prominent articles published at different times and focusing on different types of proactivity (see [Figure 1](#)). In total, we compared 671 articles from this reference list with our sample. This important step identified 36 missing articles, which were then added to the sample. The final sample thus consisted of 1,708 articles published in 408 journals published from 1969 to 2021. This yielded 3,225 author-supplied keywords and 3,204 different authors and included 171 single-authored documents. The average number of authors per article was 2.91.



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 1.
Article selection
flowchart (PRISMA)

3.2 Citation analysis

Citation (or bibliometric) analysis has become an extremely useful tool for systematically examining a large body of literature, inferring trends over time, and comparing the relative impact of the most prolific authors, top journals, and most frequently cited papers. Furthermore, it provides an overall picture of the literature, which is highly beneficial to researchers planning to embark on their own studies in that area (Ahmad et al., 2020; Fiaz et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2023a, b). Our own analysis was carried out using Bibliometrix, a comprehensive statistical tool based on the R language (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). In addition, numerous additional software programs have been developed in order to perform bibliometric analysis (Asatullaeva et al., 2021; Anwar et al., 2021).

3.3 Content analysis

Content analysis is a quantitative method designed to obtain crucial information from selected literature. Content analysis relates to extracting primary findings from published articles, the methodology employed, the date range, and the data sources, to name some examples. The technique is useful for studying goals as even open-ended data in each paper can be thoroughly examined, sorted, and assessed using this process. Content analysis is used to better analyze and interpret phenomena or events as it allows these phenomena to be reduced to well-defined categories (Harwood and Garry, 2003). Traditionally used in media science, content analysis is currently gaining traction in the physical and social sciences as well. Further, through systematic analysis using measurable metrics and visually representative data, salient features of problems raised in the literature can be elucidated and research gaps identified. Taking advantage of this potential, we performed a content analysis of the most impactful 100 articles based on their average annual citation count. We coded our 100 articles in terms of: (1) type and role of proactive behavior in the study in question (i.e. antecedent,

mediator, outcome); (2) antecedents and outcomes of proactive behaviors, if any; (3) theory and methodology used (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods); (4) sample type and size; (5) country in which the study was conducted; and (6) major findings. Our analysis of the most impactful 100 articles thus helped us identify gaps in the literature and offer implications for future research and practice.

4. Results of systematic literature review

4.1 Types of proactivity

To analyze the 1,708 articles, we categorized them into themes known in the proactivity literature. Figure 2 shows 598 studies of Voice, 336 of Proactive Behavior, 302 of Job Crafting, 164 of Feedback Seeking, 84 of Personal Initiative, 67 of Proactive Personality, and 157 of some of these themes in combination across various themes (see Chiaburu *et al.*, 2006 on proactive personality and feedback seeking) (Figure 3). Notably, Voice was examined in approximately 35% of included studies, indicating a substantial emphasis on this particular phenomenon. Other themes such as Proactive Behavior, Job Crafting, Feedback Seeking, Personal Initiative, Proactive Personality, and Others were assessed in 20%, 18%, 9%, 5%, 4%, and 9% of included studies, respectively.

The examination of the 100 most-cited articles within the field of proactivity studies (Figure 3b) further supports the prevailing pattern observed in Figure 3, wherein Voice emerges as the most extensively investigated construct, with themes such as Proactive Behavior, Job Crafting, Feedback Seeking, Personal Initiative, Proactive Personality, and the combination of the different proactivity types being explored to a lesser extent.

4.2 Time-related publication trends

To examine publication trends, we partitioned 53 years of published research into 16 distinct time periods. Although the selection of these periods may be considered somewhat arbitrary, using three-year intervals enabled us to derive insights regarding overarching patterns pertaining to each category of proactivity research. Figure 4 shows the total number of publications and their trends from 1967 to 2020. Initially, the number of publications was lower due to the fact that proactivity was yet not established as a distinct field. From 1967 to

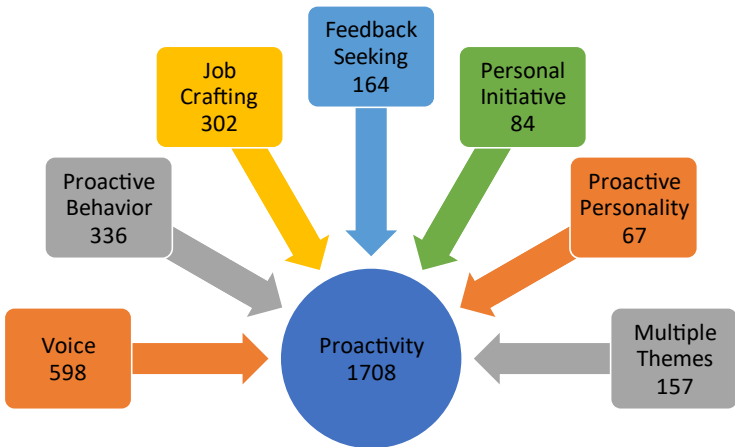
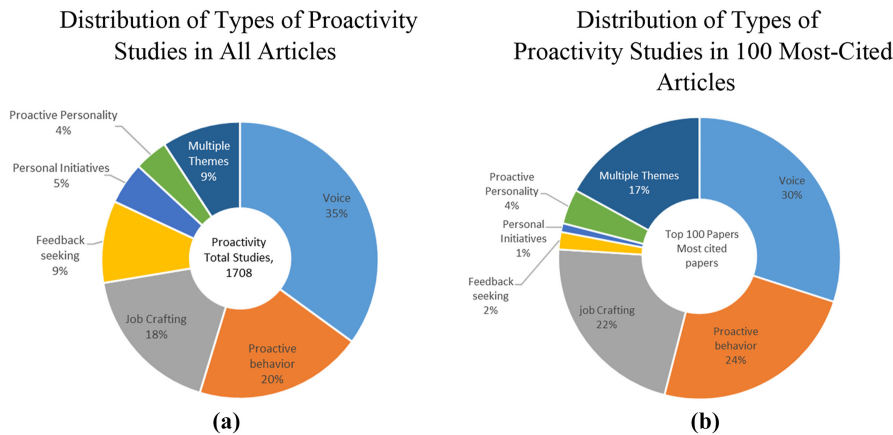


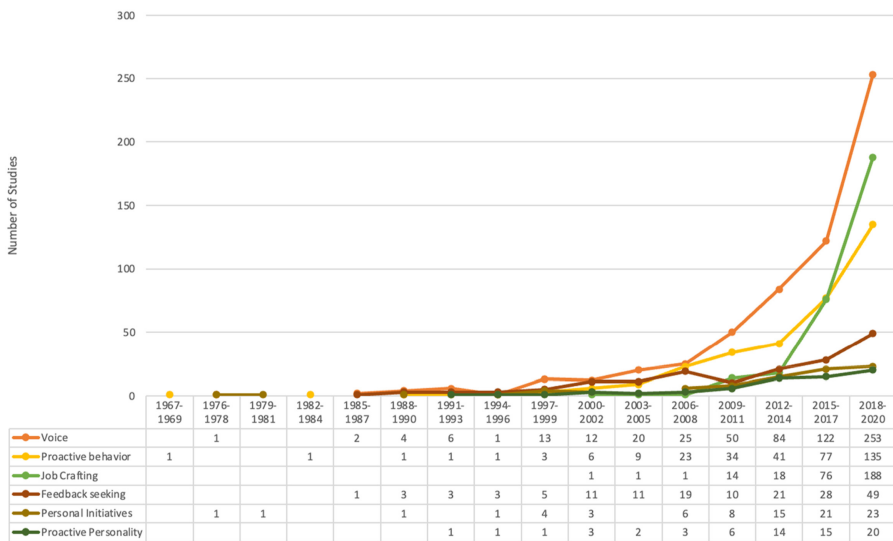
Figure 2.
Key themes in
proactivity studies

Source(s): Figure by authors



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 3.
Distribution of types of
proactivity studies



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 4.
Publications trends of
proactivity studies

1996, only 35 articles were published, which shows basal growth in publications. This time period of research on proactivity can be seen as the *infancy period*, reflecting the fact that the significance of the proactivity topic was just beginning to draw scholars' attention. From 1997 to 2008, a *steady development period* saw the publication curve increase gradually, thus capturing growing awareness of the importance of the topic across diverse academic fields. After 2008, a sharp growth curve in publications can be seen. From 2009 to 2020, the *take off period* saw the fastest growth. Among proactivity types, Voice has been the top trend since the start of publication, showing steady growth leading to a doubling in publications after 2008, followed by Proactive Behavior and Job Crafting. Around 2000, publications showed an

increasing trend for all other proactivity types that paralleled Voice. In this respect, the most interesting finding relates to Job Crafting, a label first introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). In comparison to other proactivity types, Job Crafting lagged behind at first, with only one article published in 2001 but 188 articles in the period 2018–2020. This surge in interest in Job Crafting by number of publications is followed closely by Voice, which also saw a high number of publications during that period. In brief, Job Crafting was the most researched topic in recent years and is expected to keep growing in the future. Other topics, including Feedback Seeking, Personal Initiative, and Proactive Personality also showed increasing trends but at a more gradual pace compared to Voice, Proactive Behavior, and Job Crafting, as shown in Figure 4.

4.3 Top journals

Upon comprehensive examination, the 1,708 publications included in this study revealed a total of 408 distinct journals. Table 1 presents the top three journals with the highest productivity for each type of proactivity. It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of these journals hold esteemed rankings, such as the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) ranking of A*, A, and the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) rating. These rankings are indicative of the journals' high standing within the domains of business and management and psychology research and of their substantial contributions to the realm of proactivity. It is also noteworthy that the *Journal of Applied Psychology* has an interest in all types of proactivity.

4.4 Top authors

Based on our dataset, 3,204 authors across our 1,708 publications were selected for this study, with an average of 2.91 authors per article affiliated with 1,473 organizations and spread across 71 countries. Table 2 presents the top three authors based on citations for each type of proactivity research. These prolific authors have made major contributions to the field of proactivity by publishing and propagating their research in leading international journals (See Table 2). Overall, Arnold B. Bakker is the most prolific author with the most citations (4,198) and an h-index of 196 and topping the Job Crafting category.

4.5 Most frequent authors' keywords

Figure 5 presents a word cloud that graphically depicts the most frequently occurring authors' keywords found in articles focusing on Voice, Proactive Behavior, Feedback Seeking, Job Crafting, Personal Initiative, and Proactive Personality. A word cloud was used here to determine the conceptual structure of a field using word co-occurrences in a bibliographic collection and highlighting the nexus of the main theme with the emerging subfields of the study (Köseoglu and Parnell, 2020). This analysis helps us identify relationships between different concepts or areas of research, thus providing a deeper understanding of interrelationships between identified keywords. In terms of visibility, the word cloud displays words in various sizes according to the number of times they appear. Though the placement of words is somewhat random, predominating words are placed in the middle so that they are more visible given their larger size. For example, Voice is connected with Prohibitive and Promotive Voice, Job Satisfaction, Ethical Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Leader Member Exchange (LMX), and Psychological Safety, while Proactive Behavior showed a strong connection with Self-efficacy, Work engagement, Psychological Empowerment, Transformational Leadership, and Innovation (among prominent examples). This concurs with the findings of Bakker et al. (2012), which also showed a strong connection between Job Crafting and Work Engagement.

Source title	NP	TC	PSY	Article	Most-cited publication in each journal Title
<i>Voice</i>					
International Journal of Human Resource Management	37	1,689	2004	Wood and Wall (2007)	Work enrichment and employee voice in human resource management and performance studies
Journal of Applied Psychology	25	4,696	1998	Burris <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Quitting before leaving: The mediating effects of psychological attachment and detachment on voice
Social Behavior and Personality	21	149	2013	Wang <i>et al.</i> (2018)	How transformational leadership influences employee voice behavior: The roles of psychological capital and organizational identification
<i>Proactive behavior</i>					
Journal of Vocational Behavior	1,037	16	1998	Ashforth <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Socialization tactics, proactive behavior, and newcomer learning: Integrating socialization models
Journal of Applied Psychology	3,599	15	1996	Parker <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Modeling the antecedents of proactive behavior at work
Journal of Organizational Behavior	3,015	15	1993	Ohly and Fritz (2010)	Work characteristics, challenge appraisal, creativity, and proactive behavior: A multi-level study
<i>Job crafting</i>					
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	1,807	20	2011	Parker and Griffin (2011)	Understanding active psychological states: Embedding engagement in a wider nomological net and closer attention to performance
Journal of Vocational Behavior	2,319	14	2012	Tims <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Job crafting and its relationships with person-job fit and meaningfulness: A three-wave study
Frontiers in Psychology	242	18	2017	Wong and Tetrick (2017)	Job crafting: Older workers' mechanisms for maintaining person-job fit
<i>Feedback seeking</i>					
Journal of Management	1,146	9	1990	Whitaker <i>et al.</i> (2007)	The development of a feedback environment and role clarity model of job performance
Journal of Applied Psychology	1,830	8	1997	Chen <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Leader-member exchange and member performance: A new look at individual-level negative feedback-seeking behavior and team-level empowerment climate
Social Behavior and Personality	57	8	2007	Lee <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Relationships between LMX and subordinates' feedback-seeking behaviors
<i>Personal initiative</i>					
Personality and Individual Differences	5	102	1988	Xia <i>et al.</i> (2012)	The relation of self-supporting personality, enacted social support, and perceived social support
Journal of Applied Psychology	5	793	2007	Frese <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Business owners' action planning and its relationship to business success in three African countries

(continued)

Table 1.
Most cited journal

Table 1.

Source title	NP	TC	PSY	Article	Most-cited publication in each journal Title
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	3	150	2007	Binnewies et al. (2007)	Taking personal initiative and communicating about ideas: What is important for the creative process and for idea creativity?
<i>Proactive personality</i> Journal of Vocational Behavior	5	416	2006	Wanberg et al. (2006)	Mentor and protégé predictors and outcomes of mentoring in a formal mentoring program
Career Development International	4	190	2010	Dikkers et al. (2010)	Proactivity, job characteristics, and engagement: A longitudinal study
Journal of Managerial Psychology	3	116	2011	Zacher and Bock (2014)	Mature age job seekers: The role of proactivity
Note(s): TC = total citations; NP = number of publications; PSY = publication start year					
Source(s): Authors' own production					

Table 3 presents the frequency distribution of authors' keywords, categorizing them according to the type of proactivity they represent. The most frequently occurring keyword was Job Crafting, with a count of 233, followed by Employee Voice, with a count of 177. Notably, all six types of proactivity identified in the study exhibit a common underlying theme, encompassing Leadership, Work Engagement, Self-efficacy, Job Performance, Innovation, and Creativity. This observation highlights the interconnectedness between these concepts and the overarching notion of proactivity. Of particular significance are the keywords Work Engagement and Self-efficacy, which demonstrate a robust association with all types of proactivity.

4.6 Authors' country or region of affiliation

A synoptic overview of the most prolific authors shows that a majority of them are affiliated to the US, China, the UK, Australia, and Hong Kong, respectively. Total numbers of authors from each country and their collaborating authors' countries are shown in Table 4. This shows that top research countries are developed countries, including collaborations, which indicates that research funding agencies may need to collaborate more with developing countries, especially in South Asia and Africa. In terms of regional affiliations of authors, Table 5 shows that the East Asia and Pacific region ranks high in publications followed by North America.

5. Results of content analysis of 100 most-cited articles

This section presents a quantitative approach to generating a valuable source of knowledge from the extensive and diverse data extracted from the 100 most-cited articles based on average citations per year. The full list of top 100 most-cited articles is reported in appendix A1. In this approach, the data are meticulously explored, categorized, and evaluated using the pivot fields function in Excel to show various aspects of the different types of proactivity, including mediators, moderators, theories, data type, sample size, etc. Content analysis serves as a method for examining various forms of data, including visual and verbal data, allowing for the systematic categorization of phenomena or events. This categorization facilitates enhanced analysis and interpretation of the data. Content analysis is a research technique used in making replicable and valid inferences from data in their context (Krippendorff, 2018) in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. This study used content analysis to classify and summarize the 100 most-cited articles.

Author	TC	NP	PSY	Article	Most-cited publication, by author Title
<i>Voice</i>					
Wilkinson	1,486	23	2004	Wilkinson <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Changing patterns of employee voice: case studies from the UK and the Republic of Ireland
Tangirala	1,062	11	2008	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008)	Exploring nonlinearity in employee voice: the effects of personal control and organizational identification
Dundon	821	12	2004	Wilkinson <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Changing patterns of employee voice: case studies from the UK and the Republic of Ireland
<i>Proactive behavior</i>					
Parker	3,982	21	2000	Parker <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Modeling the antecedents of proactive behavior at work
Griffin	2,093	7	2007	Griffin <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Leader vision and the development of adaptive and proactive performance: a longitudinal study
Sonnentag	786	7	2006	Sonnentag and Starzyk (2015)	Perceived prosocial impact, perceived situational constraints, and proactive work behavior: looking at two distinct affective pathways
<i>Job crafting</i>					
Bakker	4,918	30	2011	Bakker (2011)	An evidence-based model of work engagement
Demerouti	2,185	27	2012	van den Heuvel <i>et al.</i> (2015)	The job crafting intervention: effects on job resources, self-efficacy, and affective well-being
Tims	2,400	15	2012	Tims <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Job crafting and its relationships with person-job fit and meaningfulness: a three-wave study
<i>Feedback seeking</i>					
Qian	144	13	2012	Qian <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Authentic leadership and feedback-seeking behavior: an examination of the cultural context of mediating processes in China
Levy	360	7	1995	Whitaker <i>et al.</i> (2007)	The development of a feedback environment and role clarity model of job performance
Morrison	386	6	1990	Morrison (2002)	Information seeking within organizations
<i>Personal initiative</i>					
Frese	3,181	15	1996	Frese <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Business owners' action planning and its relationship to business success in three African countries
Fay	2,183	6	1997	Fay and Sonnentag (2002)	Rethinking the effects of stressors: a longitudinal study on personal initiative
Friedrich	219	5	2006	Frese <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Business owners' action planning and its relationship to business success in three African countries
<i>Proactive personality</i>					
Crant	778	3	1996	Crant (1996)	The proactive personality scale as a predictor of entrepreneurial intentions
Capozza	40	2	2009	Trifiletti <i>et al.</i> (2009)	A validation of the proactive personality scale
De Lange	77	2	2010	Dijkers <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Proactivity, job characteristics, and engagement: a longitudinal study

Note(s): TC = total citations; NP = number of publications; PSY = publication start year

Source(s): Authors' own production

Table 2.
Top authors of each
proactivity types



Figure 5.
Word cloud

Source(s): Figure by authors

5.1 Research design

Following a comprehensive examination of the 100 most-cited articles in the field, we determined that a majority of research designs employed in these publications rely on quantitative methods, as illustrated in Figure 6. Surveys and experiments are the most commonly used quantitative methods in proactivity research. In a few studies, researchers employed a mixed-methods approach depending on their research questions, data availability, and the nature of their study. Specifically, 61% of papers used a quantitative approach, while only 4% relied on qualitative methods. Furthermore, 12% of the papers were conceptual studies, 9% consisted of meta-analyses, 7% constituted literature review papers, 5% were methodological in nature, and 2% presented a mixed design incorporating multiple research approaches. This comprehensive analysis highlights the prevalence of quantitative research methods and provides insights into the diverse research designs employed within this domain.

5.2 Types of proactivity

Figure 7 depicts the distribution of various proactivity types in the 100 most-cited papers. This yields similar results to the findings extracted from the analysis of 1,708 studies in the field of proactivity. The majority of articles focused on the concept of Voice (30%) while Proactive Behavior accounted for 24%, Job Crafting for 22%, Proactive Personality for 4%, Feedback Seeking for 2%, Personal Initiative for 1%, and other themes.

Voice	Frequency	Proactive Behavior	Frequency
Employee Voice	177	Proactive Behavior	77
Voice	83	Proactivity	58
Voice Behavior	86	Self-Efficacy	15
Prohibitive Voice	23	Creativity	12
Promotive Voice	22	Socialization	10
Job Satisfaction	21	Work Engagement	10
Ethical Leadership	20	Leadership	9
Transformational Leadership	17	Transformational Leadership	9
Leader-Member Exchange	15	Well-Being	9
Psychological Safety	15	Motivation	8
Job Crafting		Feedback Seeking	
Job Crafting	233	Feedback Seeking	50
Work Engagement	72	Feedback	17
Job Performance	18	Feedback-Seeking Behavior	25
Job Design	13	Feedback Environment	6
Burnout	12	Leader-Member Exchange	5
Vietnam	12	Performance Appraisal	5
Well-Being	12	Self-Regulation	5
Performance	10	Goal Orientation	4
Job Demands-Resources Model	9	Self-Efficacy	4
Job Satisfaction	9	Job Performance	4
Personal Initiative		Proactive Personality	
Personal Initiative	36	Proactivity	22
Innovation	5	Proactive Personality	17
Self-Efficacy	5	Personality	8
Entrepreneurship	4	Career Adaptability	4
Work Engagement	4	Innovation	4
Employee Engagement	3	Self-Efficacy	4
Performance	3	Age	3
Affective Trust	2	Career Development	3
Developing Countries	2	Creativity	3
Employee Behavior	2	Leadership	3

Note(s): Same colored themes are recurrent underneath different types of proactivity. Green colored themes represent proactivity type
Source(s): Authors' own production

Table 3.
Frequency of authors
keywords

Country or Region	Voice		Proactive Behavior		Job Crafting		Feedback Seeking		Personal Initiative		Proactive Personality	
	All	CC	All	CC	All	CC	All	CC	All	CC	All	CC
USA	324	112	173	51	85	27	156	51	18	6	40	12
China	271	109	97	32	78	30	98	34	12	5	13	3
United Kingdom	137	48	47	15	22	7	8	4	12	3	5	2
Australia	106	35	65	23	28	8	5	1	5	2	5	5
Hong Kong	31	14	17	8	10	2	5	4	3	1	3	2
Germany	30	13	46	24	18	8	4	2	34	15	10	3
India	33	13	11	4	16	7	5	2	2	1	4	2
South Korea	25	12	14	7	24	9	17	8	3	1	3	2
Canada	29	11	37	10	10	3	18	10	2	1	1	
Netherlands	34	11	36	15	147	56	14	6	26	12	19	6
Ireland	29	10	2		2	1	2	2				
Pakistan	29	10	5	2	7	3	2				5	1
New Zealand	16	7	7	3								
Turkey	9	5	5	4	4	2						
Singapore	9	4	3	2			2	1	11	4	5	1
Switzerland	11	4	12	7	9	5					2	1
Belgium	15	3	4	2	18	5	27	7	2		3	1
Denmark	13	3	1								1	
France	12	3	10	7	6	2	1		1		4	
Italy	10	3	3	1	29	9			2		5	3
Nigeria	5	3			2				1	1		
Finland	4	2	7	4	25	6	1	1	3	2		
Georgia		2	1	2				1				
Ghana	6	2					1	1	1	1		
Malaysia	4	2	11	4	4	2	3	3	3	1	1	
Norway	3	2	4	3	13	5			1	1	1	
Chile	3	1	5	3	2	1						
Dominica		1										
Egypt	4	1	1									
Greece	3	1	4	1	4	1					5	1
Hungary	1	1										
Iran	4	1	1	1	2				1	1		
Israel	5	1	3	1			2	1				
Japan	4	1	4	3	17	5	3	1	1	1		

Table 4.
Country collaboration

(continued)

Saudi Arabia	3	1	1	1					1			
Spain	9	1	35	16	11	2	1		10	7	3	2
Sri Lanka	1	1	1	1								
Sweden	6	1	5	4	1				4	1		
Thailand	4	1			4	1	1	1			1	
South Africa			11	6	17	6			6	1	1	1
Indonesia	1		5	3	6	3			2			
Austria	5		3	1	2	2	1		3	1		
Brazil	3		1	1	14	4			4	1		
Haiti			3	1								
Poland			4	1	7	4						
Portugal			3	1	6	3	1	1	1		2	1
Romania			6	1	9	6						
Serbia			2	1	2	1					1	
Ukraine				1								
Jordan					2	2						
Slovakia					1	1						
Slovenia			2		2	1						
Peru					1		1	1				
Uganda									5	1		
Costa Rica											2	1
United Kingdom												
South Korea												
Ecuador	2											
Kazakhstan	2											
Kenya	1											
Kuwait	1											
Lebanon	1											

(continued)

Table 4.

Mexico	1		1									
Uzbekistan	1											
Iraq			2									
Bangladesh			1									
Czech Republic			1									
Liechtenstein			1									
Morocco			1									
Philippines			1									
Croatia					1							
Lithuania					1							
Ethiopia								1				
Montenegro											1	

Note(s): CC = country collaborations
Source(s): Authors' own production

Table 4.

5.3 Role of proactive behaviors: antecedents, outcomes, mediators, and moderators

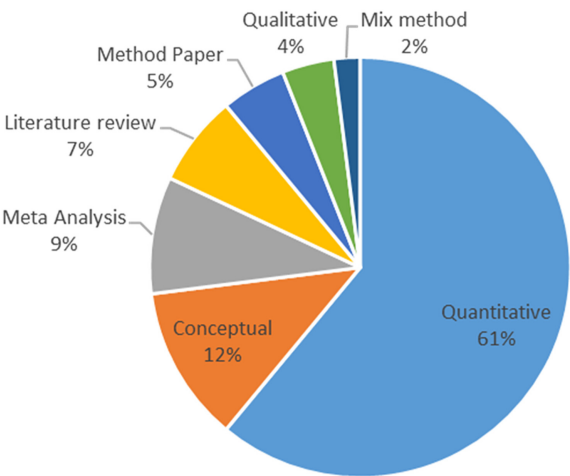
This section analyzes the role of each type of proactivity as antecedent, outcome, mediator, or moderator in the 100 most-cited publications (see Table 6). The analysis revealed intriguing patterns in the role of each theme within the proactivity domain. Voice, a prominent proactive behavior, was predominantly researched as an outcome. On the other hand, Job Crafting exhibited a multifaceted nature, being studied as an outcome, antecedent, and mediator. However, the absence of its use as a moderator suggests that its impact may be context-dependent, requiring exploration in future research.

Notably, the overarching finding of our analysis, which is shown in Table 6, reveals limited investigation of proactive behaviors as antecedents, mediators, or moderators. Proactive behaviors were primarily examined as outcomes in the highly cited 100 papers, suggesting a research focus on understanding them as consequences rather than their roles as underlying mechanisms or contextual factors driving behaviors. However, out of the other themes, Personal Initiative emerged as a notable exception, with studies highlighting its direct relationship as an antecedent leading to desired outcomes.

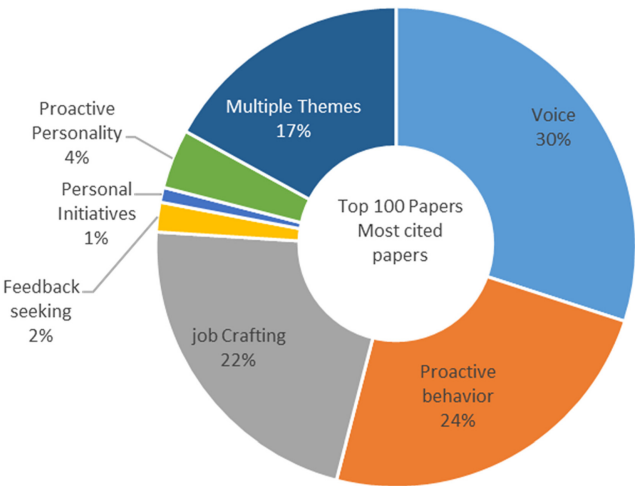
The findings above indicate the need for more balanced investigations of proactive behaviors across these different roles, thus expanding our understanding of their dynamics and implications. By delving deeper into the antecedents, mediators, and moderators of proactive behaviors, researchers can provide valuable insights for organizations aiming to foster a proactive work environment and enhance employee well-being and performance. Future research should aim to elucidate proactivity as underlying mechanisms or contextual factors, thus enabling a deeper understanding of their impact on individuals and organizations. Additionally, our results emphasize the importance of recognizing and promoting personal initiative as a catalyst for fostering proactive behaviors and driving positive outcomes.

Region	Voice		Proactive behavior		Job crafting		Feedback seeking		Personal initiative		Proactive personality	
	All	CC	All	CC	All	CC	All	CC	All	CC	All	C
East Asia and Pacific	471	185	224	85	171	60	134	53	40	15	31	13
North America	353	123	210	61	95	30	174	61	20	7	41	12
Europe and Central Asia	334	113	244	111	340	127	60	24	99	42	62	20
South Asia	63	24	18	7	23	10	7	2	2	1	9	3
Middle East and North Africa	18	4	9	3	4	2	2	1	2	1	0	0
Sub-Saharan Africa	12	5	11	6	19	6	1	1	14	4	1	1
Latin America and Caribbean	9	2	10	5	17	5	1	1	4	1	2	1
Grand total	1260	456	726	278	669	240	379	143	181	71	146	50
Note(s): CC = country collaborations												
Source(s): Authors' own production												

Table 5.
Publication by region



Source(s): Figure by authors



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 6.
Research design of 100
most cited papers

Figure 7.
Breakdown of types of
proactivity in 100
most-cited papers

6. Discussion, limitations, and future research directions

In this study, we aimed to answer three research questions in connection with different types of proactivity at work. This work was motivated by the proliferation of academic work on the phenomenon of proactivity, leading to a focused approach to contrasting the different types of proactivity prevailing in organizations in order to highlight current knowledge as well as gaps in that knowledge of each type of proactivity. Given that this issue has not yet been addressed in the management literature, our study contributes to bridging this intriguing gap.

In responding to the first question, we used the SLR to identify the various structures of proactivity types of interest to this study. We adopted this objective method to offer an

Type	Outcome	Antecedent and outcome	Antecedent	Mediator	Moderator	Total
Voice	17	4	2	1	1	25
Job crafting	11	3	6	4		24
Proactive behavior	14	2	1		1	18
Personal initiative	4		2			6
Proactive personality	1	1				2
Feedback seeking	1	1				2
Mixed themes	9	9	4	1	0	23
Total	57	20	15	6	2	100

Source(s): Authors' own production

Table 6.
Role by proactive
themes

unbiased view of current knowledge of proactivity to interested scholars and practitioners. To address our second research question, we used content analysis of the most impactful work in the domain of proactivity to complement the results of the SLR analysis. We detailed all relevant results and highlighted the contrast between the various proactivity types. To respond to our third question, we followed the recommendations of [Wickert et al. \(2020\)](#) in building up this section while also following [Tsang and Ellsaesser \(2011\)](#) in posing questions for future research that contrast the various forms of proactive behaviors. [Table 7](#) suggests future directions and sample questions inferred from the results of both the SLR and the content analysis in this study. To further relate these future directions to current discussions in the literature, the structure of the table was inspired by and extends that in [Parker and Bindl \(2016\)](#).

Researchers interested in this domain as well as those with an interdisciplinary focus will find our study especially valuable as it updates our understanding of this important domain. Our work should also inspire future discussions of gaps in that understanding, especially as the objectivity of the methods applied in this work excludes the possibility of bias. Meanwhile, novice researchers will be able to use this work as a starting point for their understanding of the literature in this domain, especially if they are interested in one subdomain or type of proactivity relative to other types. Finally, managers who use evidence-based approaches will find the results of this work helpful, particularly to the domains mostly affected by proactivity at work. For example, managers can review the main leadership styles associated with different types of employee proactivity at work. Further, our work draws attention to organizational cultural values typically associated with specific types of proactive behaviors at work.

The primary limitation of our study lies in the number of studies and themes we reviewed. Although, as specified earlier, the large amount of literature summarized here comes with many strengths and contributions, the large number of published studies does not allow us to create a conceptual framework inclusive of antecedents, moderators, and outcomes of the entire set of papers (see, for example, [Bilro et al., 2023](#); [Kim et al., 2023](#)). We therefore encourage scholars interested in proactivity research to address this limitation in their future studies and to present reviews specific to each theme within proactivity.

To conclude, our work acts as a starting point in encouraging further scholarly discussions that can enlighten academics and practitioners alike by comparing and contrasting different types of proactive behavior and personality at work.

Directions for future research	Relevance and explanation	Sample questions
General	This domain is the outcome of the SLR and content analysis findings of the study	• What proactive behaviors are triggered similarly at work, and which ones are triggered differently? • Do some proactive behaviors interact with or even contradict each other to affect individual and organizational outcomes? • What role do proactive behaviors play as mechanisms in relation to individual and organizational outcomes? • Can proactive behaviors act as contextual variables to explain organizational phenomena? • Can proactive personality or behaviors act as a positive reinforcement feedback loop (i.e. recursively), and when does this happen? • Can we learn about new types of proactive behaviors not yet unraveled in research? • Can proactivity as a research domain be tapped from an interdisciplinary approach?
Organizational complexity	As opposed to organizational modernity (Parker and Bindl, 2016), organizational complexity symbolized by paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011) can inform research on proactive behaviors	• What types of paradoxes (organizing, belonging, performing, learning) can prompt different types of proactive behaviors in organizations? • Can proactive behaviors act as mitigators to encountering paradoxes in organizations? • Do positive organizational outcomes such as innovation (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018) be sparked by proactive behaviors when employees experience tensions at work? • What proactive behaviors lend themselves to affecting positive organizational and individual level outcomes when paradoxes are encountered at work, and which proactive behaviors do not have the same effect and why?
Place (national level or values; organizational level)	Like Parker and Bindl (2016), who emphasize <i>time</i> as germane characteristics in exploring proactivity research, we emphasize <i>place</i> in the form of national cultural differences (Taras et al., 2012) or values (Dorfman and Howell, 1988) to open up future avenues for research. Further, we account for potential impacts of organizational cultures (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984)	• In what national or organizational cultures are proactive behaviors or proactive personality encouraged or frowned upon in work settings? • Do national or organizational cultures interact with different types of proactive behaviors in meaningful ways? • Do proactive behaviors promote dissimilar work outcomes, behaviors, or attitudes contingent on national or organizational cultural contexts or values?
Place (industry level)	The role specific industries play in relation to proactive behaviors	• Do organizational actors exhibit different forms of proactive behaviors in male-dominated versus female-dominated industries? • Can some aggregated industry level differences be linked to the prevalence of certain types of proactive behaviors?

(continued)

Table 7.
Future research
directions and sample
questions

Directions for future research	Relevance and explanation	Sample questions
Persons	The relationship between the diversity concept and proactivity (minorities in the workplace, expats, refugees, etc.)	• How and when do diverse employees engage in proactive behaviors? • Is proactive personality encouraged or suppressed by status in an organization (e.g. member of demographic minority)? • What organizational factors or leader or employee characteristics promote or discourage proactive behaviors at work? • Do diverse employees engage in certain proactive behaviors but not others?
Societal issues	Extending discussions in Parker and Bindl (2016) on societal problems that can be addressed by proactive behaviors	• Can some or all types of proactive behaviors be linked to the UN sustainable goals (e.g. gender equality)?

Source(s): Authors' own production

Table 7.

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Appendix

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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