

Are You Proactive Enough? If Not, Apply the 8Ps!

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Abstract

The paper supplies vital answers to the issue of pro-activeness, its important steps, that is, the 8Ps steps involved and it pursues to illustrate the key importance and benefits of being proactive. It is an adaptation and expansion of Low's (2017) Conference paper, 'Being Proactive, the Steps: the 7 Ps Involved and the Importance and Benefits of Being Proactive', first presented on 29 June 2017 at New Construction Trends in the 21st Century, Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering, KazGASA and on 1 July 2017 at the International Scientific & Practical Conference, GylmOrdasy (Academy of Science) (in honour of the 80th Anniversary of academician Askar Kulibayev), Almaty, Kazakhstan. Here, in this article, the 8P is added, thus enhancing the key steps involved in being proactive among individuals and organizations.

Keywords: Being proactive, leaders, managers, predict, prevent, positive, prepare and plan, participate, perform, practice; persist.

Introduction

To start with, one, as a leader and/or a manager or even an employee of an organization, needs to ask oneself these questions, and reflect on them:

1. "Does one react to the events happening around one; or does one take initiative to prepare for, participate in and/or control the events?"
2. "Does one take an active or passive role? Does one think in terms of the present or does one look to the future, anticipating outcomes and preparing for the consequences?"
3. "Does one decide when one has to? Or does one make conscious decisions as part of a larger plan or scheme of things?"

Paper's Aim and Objectives

This secondary literature paper's aim and objectives are to define pro-activeness and the steps, the 8Ps involved in being pro-active as well as to illustrate the key importance and benefits of being proactive among individuals and organizations. Interestingly, although pro-activeness is a recent buzzword or catchword (Such examples include Eat your career.com, 2017; Empirelifemag.com, 2017; Crainer, 2007; Maxwell, 1999; Covey, 1989), it has been widely acclaimed to be a good trait and quality to pursue since time immemorial (such as, for example, Aesop's Fables). Aesop's Fables (1995, p. 17) has this eloquent story about 'The Boasting Traveller', and to cite:

The Boasting Traveller

A Man once went abroad on his travels, and when he came home he had wonderful tales to tell of the things he had done in foreign countries. Among other things, he said he had taken part in a jumping-match at Rhodes and he done a wonderful jump which no one could beat.

“Just go to Rhodes and ask them” he said; “everyone will tell you it’s true.” But one of those who were listening said, “If you can jump as well as all that we needn’t go to Rhodes to prove it. Let’s just imagine this is Rhodes for a minute: and now – jump!”

The moral and message of the story is that deeds and not words are important. This indeed coincides with Jack Welch’s notion of leaders, leading and learning, should “never sit still” as well as they energize (**motivate**) their people (Crainer, 2007, **bold author’s**). Interestingly, this is similar to Matsushita’s “keep(ing) on our toes at all times” (Matsushita Konosuke cited by Goto Seiichi in Matsushita, 1999, p. 90-93) and “doing my best... ..and a little more” (Matsushita Konosuke cited by Matsushita Masaharu in Matsushita, 1999, p. 78).

What more, Teo and Low (2018, p. 79; **bold, authors’ words**) highlighted that “as Warren Bennis urges, twenty-first century leaders need to make sure that they are (**proactive**) constantly reinventing the organisations. Leaders must cleverly deploy their people’s creativity to recreate the company” and move the organization”. With the need to avoid ‘groupthink and if leaders and managers are to better their strategic thinking and planning, they must indeed act, forge or recreate their organizations.

Interestingly, it is truly said [and this is attributed to George Bernard Shaw] that the world has three kinds of people those who (act,) make things happen, those who watch what happens, and those who wonder what happened.

What is Pro-activeness?

One understands and better appreciates pro-activeness when one recognizes that the opposite and contrasting meaning of pro-activeness is that of being passive.

And undeniably being passive is being inert, inactive, reactive, unreceptive and/ or even lifeless. The passive person can also be indifferent or callous to changes, service betterment and/or overall improvements.

Next, “of all the things a leader should fear, complacency should head the list” (Maxwell, 1999, p. 66). To this author’s mind, similar to passiveness is another force that can lead to no action(s); and that is complacency. And one does little or nothing to improve.

Contrary to passiveness and complacency with their little or no action, the Dictionary.com (2017) defines proactive as an adjective, that is,

“serving to prepare for, intervene in, or control an expected occurrence or situation, especially a negative or difficult one; anticipatory”

And to act, as a verb, means one tackles, prepares and does something. One is said to “do something; exert energy or force; be employed or operative” (Dictionary.com, 2017a).

Two persons in the same position may attempt or tackle the job in very different ways. One takes control, starts new initiatives or enterprises, generates constructive change, and leads proactively. The other tries to maintain, get along, conform, keep his head above water, and be a good guardian of the status quo. The first tackles issues head-on and works for constructive reform. The second “goes with the flow” and passively conducts business as usual.

Walt Disney once said, “The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.” (<https://www.pinterest.com/explore/proactive-quotes/>). In being proactive, until and unless one acts, then something is done; there’s change. Note that pro-activeness, taking the lead, is really powerful and helpful in terms of affecting one’s personal change as well as influencing others and changing the world around oneself.

One is in control (Ricotti, 2012) or takes control (Owen, 2015). And in Asia or in Japan in particular, the late Matsushita Konosuke (1994, p. 69) spoke of each manager or employee is “your own boss” to proactively grow (your own) talents to new heights; they can contribute and derive pleasure in the prosperity of your ‘business’”.

Proactive leaders and people, taking the initiative (Maxwell, 1999, Chapter 10), are not reactive; instead they are hands-on, practical and “responsive” (“Be proactive”; Covey 1989, Habit 1).

Being proactive includes identifying new problems, uncovering new solutions or finding new keys and answers, and providing active leadership through an uncertain future. In its vitalform, pro-activeness involves grand ambitions, breakthrough thinking, and the means to make even the impossible happen. It overhauls or overtakes the past and creates the future. Pro-activeness can be a game-changer; it builds new industries, changes the rules of competition, or transforms the world.

The 1st P: Predict

To be proactive or hands-on, you must be pre-emptive and in fact, one must first develop foresight or farsightedness (Eat your career.com; 2017). [Or in short, a leader must have the vision. The late Matsushita Konosuke (1999, p. 48) once said that “leaders in any field... should always have a clear vision of what they want to do, and only then approach others for support or opinions. ‘Simply acting on the advice of others without any ideas of your own is not leadership’”]

Proactive people – often taking the initiative – are seldom caught by surprise. They learn to expect or anticipate problems and events. Understanding how things work, a proactive person looks for trends or key patterns; recognizes the regular routines, daily practices and natural cycles that exist in one’s business. At the same time, one does not allow oneself to become self-satisfied or smug.

The 2nd P: Prevent

Of significance is how the proactive person sees a difficulty or an obstacle; and this is best stated by Orison Swett Marden: “Obstacles are like wild animals. They are cowards but they will bluff you if they can. If they see you are afraid of them... they are liable to spring upon you; but if you look them squarely in the eye, they will slink out of sight.”

Indeed successful leaders or people look at problems or obstacles directly in the eye; they prevent problems or difficulties from occurring. They reduce or minimize, if not, obliterate them.

Proactive people predict possible or potential barriers, and apply their power to find ways and means to overcome them before those obstacles turn into concrete roadblocks and dead-ends (Eat your career.com; 2017).

When one is pro-active, (s)he is thinking about what could happen today to avoid chaos tomorrow; it is a sort of like an insurance plan. On the personal side or personally, one has a succession or back up plan in place just in case one loses one’s job or didn’t get the promotion one was expecting (Empirelifemag.com, 2017).

Proactive leaders and managers (employees) prevent problems that others would just look back on in hindsight and claim unavoidable. One may not want to allow oneself to get overwhelmed or be swept up in a feeling of powerlessness and defenselessness. When challenges come, take charge and face them head on before they grow into overpowering problems or difficulties.

The 3rd P: Positive

One needs to ask oneself: “Are you positive enough?”
“Are you thinking positively?”

Sad though, negative people (tend to or) blame other people for their situation. They don’t take responsibility for themselves and their actions (Gitomer, 2007). In *Unsinkable*, Ricotti (2012) highlighted the need to master one’s mind, looking at the silver lining of each situation and every situation has a silver lining (that is thinking positively). [One then stays away from the closed doors of negative thinking and shed one’s limiting beliefs.]

To this author, leadership is about being positive in a negative situation; it is about successful or effective leadership having to deal with hostilities, adverse and/ or unhelpful situations. When one is positive, it’s about believes in better, creates opportunities and makes bigger opportunities as well as attracts support from followers and performs better (Owen, 2015, Chapter 4). In short, proactive leaders find the positive meaning in seemingly negative situations and they create or make bigger things happen.

Optimists or positive-minded proactive people keep their confidence and self-esteem at a healthy level. And self-esteem is one of the most empowering qualities one can possess. With a high level of self-esteem, one will be able to meet life’s challenges and worthy of success (MacDonald, 2004).

And here, it is noteworthy to say that our mind can be a potent and powerful tool, aid and resource when it is in a positive mode. If one thinks “I CAN do it”, then “It CAN be done.” Orison Swett Marden (cited in Gitomer, 2007, p. 3) once said, “To think you can, creates the force that can.” And Henry Ford (cited in Gitomer, 2007, p. 70) also said, “If you think you can... or if you think you can’t... you’re right.” Or as Earl Nightingale (cited in Gitomer, 2007, book-cover underside) declared, “You become what you think about all day long.”

This author thus also holds the view that proactive people are positive. It is thinking BIG (Action-oriented people think BIG; and they turn anxiety into actions; Foster, 2003, p. 115-117). And they have an overall positive mind growth, and they take positive steps to prevent (avert) problems or difficulties from happening.

Positive thinking supplies and stocks the green light for proactive leaders (people) to act and move things. It also serves as the rocket fuel that boosts a proactive leader(person)'s ways of doing things, finding solutions and resolving issues. When one is positive, one is also solution-oriented. Instead of griping and wallowing in one's own sorrows and problems, one spends time working on solutions. Every problem presents an opportunity and if one spends much time or is too busy concentrating on the problem, the opportunity will pass one by (Gitomer, 2007, p. 50-51).

To enlarge our lives, we need to enlarge our minds. And this calls for a positive mind growth. Here, it is noted that mind-set is or can be, in some ways, rigidly fixed or is at least not supple while (positive) mind growth has a flexibility, adaptability and growth nuance. And here, (positive) mind growth carries the notion of the organization being biological or organic and growing (Morgan, 2006, 1997). Thus mind growth is associated more with proactive people and positively they look at possibilities and various options available (Low, 2012). They don't limit their options and thinking as well as actions. Interestingly, indeed being proactive gives one more options because one is considering things before they happen (Empirelifemag.com, 2017).

The 4thP: Prepare and Plan

Acting or taking action without thoughtful preparation is similar to setting sail without a compass or a map.

To be proactive also thus involves preparation and planning. One prepares, and takes time to think hard before acting. One also does much research to see if what one wants to do have been tried before. Of importance too, one also reflects on other options (Lindenfield, 1999).

One "must cultivate and always upkeep a readiness to cope should the winds of adversity blow again" (Matsushita, 1999, p. 69). "Preparedness", Matsushita (1999, p. 69) believed, "was one of the secrets of a successful life".

One thus also gets ready to do planning. "Proactive people plan for the future." (Eat your career.com; 2017).

When one plans, one is indulging in long-term thinking, and this is indeed worthy step to pursue. After all, it is long-term thinking, calculated and is strategic.

The 5th P: Participate

Talk is cheap. And participation and action is valued.

Proactive people – leaders or employees – are not just talkers; they are not idle, lazy or indolent observers. They take part and/ or participate (Eat your career.com; 2017). They are indeed active participants.

To be proactive, one must get involved. For the late Matsushita Konosuke (1999), he encouraged employees to participate, and to him, they, as experts and consultants, should give their views or suggestions, expressing their ideas.

One has to take initiative and be a part of the solution. Recognize that one is only a piece of the whole and that one influences — and is influenced by — the actions of others. As a leader/ manager, one doesn't simply react to the people, but one engages with them. One exerts one's influence and contributes. One also voices one's views or opinions; give one's perspective(s).

The 6th P: Perform

When one is positive and when one does things, one does it well (Gitomer, 2007). Quality performance follows.

To be a leader and as a manager, one has to act and take actions to fulfil one's role and responsibilities. One should be proactive. Therefore to be proactive, one must also perform (Eat your career.com; 2017).

It's from good management to great leadership; one dares to dream and dares to act. One, who has the courage, dares to act (Owen, 2015). One thus performs – in spite of setbacks or difficulties.

From this author's personal experience and observations, the most valuable employees, if not leaders and managers, are the ones who are proactive. By definition, this means they control situations by *causing* things to occur or happen rather than waiting to react *after* things happen.

People who are proactive leap; they don't wait or sit around waiting for answers to appear; they stand up, put one foot in front of the other, and find the answers or responses. They don't wait for someone to hand them instructions, tell them what to do and/ or give them a box of tools; they are their own resource(s) or in short, they are resourceful.

Proactive people are constantly moving forward, looking to the future, and making things happen. They're actively engaged, not passively observing. Being proactive is a way of thinking and acting.

The 7th P: PrACTice

To practice is to ACT. So PrACTice! PrACTice! PrACTice!

Here, one respondent who knew that the authors were writing this current paper rendered these voluntarily; he spoke of, "leaders must act and practice; practice refines and perfects one's acts and these lend credibility... Leaders coach and also practice helping others to act too." These coincide with what Morgan, Harkins and Goldsmith (2005)'s *The Art and Practice of Leadership Coaching: 50 Top Executive Coaches Reveal their Secrets* talk about. Of significance, the coach must link the coachee to the bigger picture and larger vision; and "by deliberately and frequently linking the coachee's efforts to the overall objective, the coach creates the sense of forward momentum and purpose valued by action and goal-oriented organizations." (Morgan, Harkins and Goldsmith, 2005, p. 42).

To prACTice is to attempt, rehearse and apply; and "Practice makes perfect" – as the saying goes. They also coach to duly enable others to act and practice. This is true when it comes to the pro-active leaders, coaching and leading their people well.

On one hand, "people who are cocky and arrogant say, 'I know that' and move along. And on the other hand, (**proactive**) people who are confident and positive ask themselves, 'How good am I at that? And seek to improve.'" (Gitomer, 2007, p. 57; **bold author's**).

Continuation or more so, improvement is the motivation of the proactive person. Seeing mistakes as learning opportunities, the proactive leader (person) learns from mistakes, corrects him(her)self and improves. The proactive leader learns and leads (Crainer, 2007, Chapter 6).

Stephen Covey once said, "If we keep doing what we're doing, we're going to keep getting what we're getting." (<https://www.pinterest.com/explore/proactive-quotes/>). The proactive person keeps on doing; (s)he keeps on practicing. There is renewal and one grows; one "sharpen(s) the saw" (Covey, 1989: p. 287)

The 8th P: Persist

Proactive leader/ people keep on keeping on. With persistence, an element of resilience is added to the qualities of the proactive leader/ manager or employee, (s)he becomes tough(er).

Staying positive and being resilient, proactive leaders (people) have the will to prevail (Owen, 2015). When one keeps on practicing, one persists; and this is beneficial as one not only achieves one's goals, but also, excels. Indeed when one is steadfast and persistent, one is also relentless in pursuing one's goals. One's actions thus become sustainable, workable and/ or viable.

Positive, hardy and tough, the action-oriented leader/ manager (person) bounces back quickly when life knocks one down (Ricotti, 2012), and (s)he is basically a "climber" (Stoltz, 1997). S(he) persistently climbs; they turn crawling into climbing while turning their adversities to their advantages (Foster, 2003).

The Critical Importance and Benefits of Pro-activeness

One (**the organization**) does not become dated and obsolete and/ or is not left behind. One (**the organization**) needs to be adaptable (Matsushita, 1999, p. 62, **bold author's**).

Change is renewal; it is fundamental; and one needs to change and make progress. When one is proactive, one recognizes the need for change. And actively embrace, adopt and adapt changes to cope and manage for the better. Although *Star Trek* is simply a television fictional show, Low and Low (2015, p. 274) spoke of *Star Trek* leadership and its beneficial pro-activeness, planning ahead and planning to change; and here, it is good to quote:

It can be taken that the brave men and women of Star Trek are proactive, and that is their forte. Captain Jean Luc Picard, for example, said these wise words, "We must anticipate, and not make the same mistake twice." (Eaton, 2009, cited in Low and Low, 2015). Star Trek's brave men and women always plan ahead, plan to change, knowing fully well that, as in all businesses or entrepreneurial ventures, failing to plan is planning to fail. In this connection, Maxwell (1993: 73, cited in Low and Low 2015) pointed out, "(true) not all change is improvement, but without change there can be no improvement."

As they carry out their duties – mapping countless solar systems, greetings new species, and establishing ties with civilizations big and small – they live, work, and face the possibility that they could die in space.

They boldly go anywhere – where no one has gone before but they plan and in fact, have good systems and are well organized. Interestingly, they also have The Starfleet Survival Guide (Mack, 2002 cited in Low and Low 2015).

Incorporated in the Starfleet Survival Guide too includes the standard equipment's non-standard uses and unconventional medicine; these are good as they deter, prevent and/or avoid problems from arising as well as to capitalize on any opportunity arising and applying them accordingly. Organized, they plan; they thus plan to change and improve. It is also indeed about moving ahead and creating positive change.

Pro-activeness triggers innovation. And ordinarily so, there's an unending need to innovate or evaporate [get wiped out by the competition] (Glaser, 2014)! Individuals innovate to be different, and organizations innovate to improve their businesses; and innovation boosts their competitive edge. Indeed when one or the organization takes the initiative, one (the organization) is likely to differentiate/ update, invent and innovate. And being creative and innovating, in most ways, is good and useful for future of the individual and the organization; it also helps to expand the individual's skills repertoire and the organization's product range and development as well as its sales, business and market.

“Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit.” said Conrad Hilton, Hotel Executive (cited in Maxwell, 1999, p. 66). Definitely so, when one is proactive, one will learn and grow, even turning mistakes or failure into fertilizer (Foster, 2003, Chapter 12) and pain to gain (Foster, 2003, Chapter 11). As one is thinking ahead, one may realize there are things that one could change, adopt or adapt for the better. One sees, for example, oneself as a business owner in the future so one is making moves today to increase one's skill set and networking with people already running businesses (Empirelifemag.com, 2017).

If one is passive, one would be like a jelly flowing with the tide, simply going with the flow. One should not just go on, but one should, in fact, grow in one's life. One should learn and better the Self-Incorporated. One should grow oneself. Hence, being proactive is good for one's career; one can develop or grow one's career and oneself.

Being proactive helps the organization in many ways.

Today's business customers await sellers not only to respond effectively to their expressed needs but also to understand or appreciate their business sufficiently well to proactively address their latent and future needs. Proactive customer orientation can certainly benefit the business organization (Blocker, Flint; Myers and Slater, 2011). Proactive customer orientation and service can also lead to upping the Company's brands and image, increasing its number of customers as well as bettering its business and having a bigger market share. When pro-activeness is applied to service such as high-touch strategies, nicer or more polite greetings to customers, better counter services and/ or improved queue management, the service quality and service levels will improve. Besides, with various customer service options, such as using technological betterments to satisfy customers; the customer service is likely to shine and excel. Increased or greater customer satisfaction is thus attained.

When one (the organization) is proactive, not only one (the organization) is prepared (Lindenfield, 1999) but avails to oneself (the organization) opportunities; one (it) can then grab whatever opportunity such as customer service or chance occasion that is presented. After all, it is said that, “opportunity dances with those on the dance floor” (<https://www.pinterest.com/explore/proactive-quotes/>).

If one is proactive, others will see through one's examples, and they will also see our actions. And one thus gets to be more influential, being able to influence others. One thus also leads through role modelling and by example. Then again, our children and descendants as well as all of us inherit the earth, and have a common future (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1989). Further, if the Company is proactively socially responsible, it may up its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and overall image and also set the example for other companies to follow its CSR steps.

When one (the organization) is proactive, one has the benefits of clearer directions for one's future (as a leader's the organization's) (Empirelifemag.com, 2017). Sitting back and waiting for things to happen is not an option or preference, there's a path that one has drawn out and one is sticking to it. One is not in the position at work that one wants today but one knows where one is planning to go, and how one plans to get there.

And yet another big benefit can be as such: One is happy with where one is and where one is going because one has an idea of what is coming. It is easier to sleep at night when one has a plan (for oneself and one’s organization) for the morning (Empirelifemag.com, 2017).

As a prelude to the conclusion, it is certainly good to note that the study was based on secondary data and since it is seemingly theoretical, it should be both helpful and useful, that, in the future, for researchers to carry out interviews, surveys and test out these Ps in context of leaders and managers being proactive.

Conclusion

One of the authors once came across (and in which he cannot locate the source but still remembers) the wisdom of this witty Buddhist saying, and it goes as such: ‘It’s better to be out helping others than staying in a locked room, praying’. Clearly then, action is louder than even praying, chanting and/ or meditating.

Indeed one excels when one does the planning, is prepared and is in action. And all in all, one needs to ask oneself “What would your life be or look like if you directed it instead of drifted through it?”

Indeed all in all, pro-activeness is NOT about words or theories. It is very much about action(s), moving things and making things happened. Action begets action.

And to accomplish one’s goals and get results, one has to flesh them out. One has to act.

To be proactive is also to be professional; one walks one’s talk, and in this regard, a proactive leader (manager or employee) needs to take these vital 8Ps steps (please see Figure 1 below); and they are:

- Predict
- Prevent
- Positive
- Prepare and Plan
- Participate
- Perform
- PrACTice
- Persist

Figure 1 below illustrates the 8Ps Steps involved in being proactive.

Being Proactive and the 8Ps Steps Involved:



And the whole organization, overall, benefits from employing and having proactive leaders, managers and people. They become the organization’s pluses as well as bundles of energies, moving the organization.

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