

Proactivity, Sociability, and Career Resilience as Predictors of Career Exploration

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of proactivity, sociability, and career resilience on career exploration. Using a correlational research design, 516 MBA final-year graduates studying in private colleges and universities in Hyderabad were selected through simple random sampling. Pearson's correlation, independent samples t-test, and multiple regression analysis have been employed using SPSS version 21 to analyze the data. The findings of the study indicate that all the variables have shown a significant positive relationship with each other and proactivity, sociability, and career resilience significantly impact career exploration. Significant gender differences were found in proactivity, sociability, and career resilience, where males scored higher than females in all three measures. This study also entails an analysis of the results, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Proactivity, Sociability, Career Resilience, Career Exploration

In the post-modern landscape, careers have undergone a significant evolution, necessitating individuals to proactively craft their career paths right from an early age. Post-graduation is a specialized study that is pursued by students to advance in their respective careers. Predominantly, during this phase, young adults are highly career-driven and constantly look out for ways to adopt a systematic, directed career process to kick-start their careers. They set career-related goals and investigate potential career paths. However, selecting a career path and forming a career-related identity can be challenging. The multitude of career options can make it difficult to commit to one. Additionally, some students may feel unprepared to make career decisions due to a lack of necessary information about various professions and employers (e.g., Gati et al., 1996). To ease this decision-making process, students often engage in career exploration by actively seeking and accessing career-related information (Stumpf et al., 1983). Career exploration is a self-regulatory behavior that can assist students in choosing a career path and achieving their career goals (Lent & Brown, 2013). However, career goals can be met successfully only when the career exploration process is undertaken prudently. In this context, proactivity, sociability, and career resilience that impact the career exploration process among MBA graduates are explored in this study.

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Proactivity

A proactive individual takes charge of their career choices, aims high, and are first ones to capture possibilities right in time. Proactive personality, as described by Bateman and Crant (1993), is the consistent inclination to initiate actions to impact one's environment. It involves a broad tendency to take personal initiative across various activities and settings (Seibert et al., 2001), and it includes improving or creating new circumstances (Crant, 2000). Those with proactive personalities often engage in career development due to their desire for achievement (Thompson, 2005) and a strong motivation to learn (Major et al., 2006). Consequently, highly proactive individuals are expected to exhibit more taking-charge behaviors and greater career initiative compared to less proactive individuals. They are more likely to advance their careers, achieve favorable outcomes (Jiang, 2017), continually enhance their skills and knowledge for career growth, adapt to new situations, and persist through challenges (Bezuidenhout, 2011).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that proactive personality significantly influences positive career outcomes such as career progression and job performance (Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert et al., 2001; Crant, 1995; Thompson, 2005). Proactive individuals are also associated with higher creativity, as they seek innovative ways to improve themselves (Kim et al., 2009; Zhou & George, 2001). Studies also suggest that proactive individuals are driven learners (Major et al., 2006). Proactivity involves being an active agent in career planning and management (Bezuidenhout & Coetsee, 2010). Studies show that proactive personality correlates with both subjective career success, like job satisfaction, and objective success outcomes (Erdogan & Bauer, 2005; Seibert et al., 1999; Byrne, Dik, & Chiaburu, 2008; Ng et al., 2005).

Sociability

As it is understood that an individual with a proactive personality can seek career progression, it is important to understand other factors that can facilitate the same. Cheek and Buss (1981) characterize sociability as an inclination to associate with others and favoring companionship over solitude. In a professional setting, it entails creating networks of acquaintances with individuals who can assist in one's career progression and leveraging these networks to discover new job opportunities. Sociability encompasses the inclination to build and maintain social networks, effectively using both formal and informal contacts for career advancement. This includes actively seeking feedback from others to advance in one's career and being willing to take risks (Bezuidenhout, 2011). A person with sociability has self-assurance and adjusts to various social situations by altering their non-verbal behavior according to different socio-cultural contexts.

Careers are shaped within a social framework (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), and individuals must be adept at interacting with people from diverse backgrounds to seek, create, and sustain employment in multicultural workplaces (Bezuidenhout, 2011). Effective networking influences career outcomes, including increased job opportunities, promotions, supportive behaviors, and career satisfaction (Forret & Sullivan, 2004). According to Wahat (2009), sociability is significantly associated with proactive career behavior and career adaptability or resilience.

Career Resilience

Cascio (2007) asserted that "career resilience is a vital survival skill in the 21st century". London (1983) first proposed the term career resilience, identifying it as part of career motivation along with career identity and career insight. He defined it as the capacity to

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withstand career disruptions in turbulent environments, contrasting it with career vulnerability, which he described as psychological fragility under unfavorable conditions. Collard et al. (1996) defines career resilience as the ability to adapt to changing, often disruptive, circumstances and being career self-reliant. It involves continuous learning, personal excellence, focused yet flexible attitudes, and solid performance aligned with organizational goals (Bezuidenhout, 2010). Career resilience fosters a sense of control over one's career and optimism about future success (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Resilient individuals are generally positive about their future, confident in their employability, and capable of handling challenges (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). High self-efficacy, risk-taking, and independence contribute to career resilience.

Career resilience is influenced by several factors, including personal attributes such as self-efficacy, emotional stability, optimism, adaptability, and flexibility (Rahimi et al., 2018; Yalcin et al., 2022). Social support from mentors, professional networks, and family factors influence the development of career resilience in individuals (Lee et al., 2022; Arora & Ragnekar, 2014). Organizational factors like positive work environment and opportunities for continuous learning also play a significant role. The outcomes of career resilience include higher career satisfaction, improved job performance, reduced burnout, enhanced employability, career success, and career self-management (Rahimi et al., 2018; Rossier et al., 2017; Chiaburu et al., 2006; Braunstein-Bercovitz et al., 2012).

Career exploration

Career exploration can be explained as a process of acquiring knowledge about one's own personality and professional landscape, along with understanding how personal characteristics and external factors can combine to achieve favorable results (Jordaan, 1963; Porfeli & Skorikov, 2010). Blustein (1992) defines it as “encompassing those activities, directed toward enhancing knowledge of the self and external environment, that an individual engages in to foster progress in career development.” Jordaan (1963) initially introduced the concept as a process individuals undergo during transitions, which can occur at any point in one's life.

Prior research on career exploration identified self-efficacy, career interest, and personality traits as antecedent factors (Nauta, 2007). Betz and Vuyten (2012) found that individuals who are undecided about careers engage more in career exploration. Blustein and Phillips (1988) suggested that individuals who use thinking-oriented approaches for decision-making and experience stress related to specific exploration tasks are likely to engage in environmental exploration more than self-exploration. The outcomes of career exploration are effective career choices (Yusran et al., 2021), satisfaction with vocational decisions (Greenhaus & Sklarew, 1981), competent job search, and increased perception of employability.

This study aims to understand the role of proactivity, sociability, and career resilience in impacting the process of career exploration. Career exploration is a crucial process, especially pertinent for MBA graduates entering the job market. This study addresses a research gap by enhancing the literature on career exploration and assisting students in preparing for their prospective careers.

Objectives

- To understand the relationship between proactivity, sociability, career resilience, and career exploration among MBA graduates.

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- To determine gender differences in proactivity, sociability, career resilience, and career exploration among MBA graduates.
- To ascertain the influence of proactivity, sociability, and career resilience on career exploration among MBA graduates.

Hypotheses

- H1 Proactivity will be related to career exploration among MBA students
- H2 Sociability will be related to career exploration among MBA students
- H3 Career resilience will be related to career exploration among MBA students
- H4 There will be no significant gender difference in
 - a) Proactivity among MBA students
 - b) Sociability among MBA students
 - c) Career resilience among MBA students
 - d) Career exploration among MBA students
- H5 Proactivity, sociability, and career resilience predict career exploration among MBA students

METHODOLOGY

Sample

516 final-year MBA graduates, aged 21-26, studying in private colleges in the Hyderabad district, selected using simple random sampling, constituted the sample group for the present study. Out of the total sample, 263 were male students and 253 were female students.

Instruments

Two measures were used in this study,

1. **Employ ABILITY scale:** The employ ABILITY scale was devised by Bennett & Ananthram (2021). It comprises 134 items divided into 14 sub-scales. Career exploration is one of the subscales, consisting of 8 items, is a 9-point Likert scale (0= no confidence and 9= complete confidence), was adopted in this study. Scoring of the scale includes the summation of scores of all items representing the level of career exploration. A higher score reflects a greater level of career exploration for the individual. Adequate reliability above 0.7 was established for all the subscales.
2. **The Employability Attributes Scale (EAS):** EAS was formulated by Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2010) to measure the employability attributes of individuals based on self-perception. It is a six-point Likert scale (1= never true for me; 5=always true for me) with 56 items grouped into 8 sub-scales: career self-management (10 items), cultural competence (5 items), self-efficacy (5 items), career resilience (6 items), sociability (7 items), entrepreneurial orientation (7 items), proactivity (7 items) and emotional literacy (7 items). Three subscales namely, proactivity, career resilience, and sociability have been employed in this research. Total scores are determined by summing all items within each subscale. Higher scores reflect a higher aspect of that attribute. The reliability value of the proactivity subscale is 0.87, the career resilience subscale is 0.75, and the sociability subscale is 0.79.

Procedure

Research participants (i.e. 516 MBA graduates) were briefed about the study. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants after obtaining verbal consent. The questionnaire consisted of informed consent, a demographic profile, and self-report measures chosen for

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the study. Participants took about 20 minutes to complete the whole set. Then, the data was scored as per the manual and was analysed to obtain significant inferences.

Data Analysis

Data was scored as per the research measures' manuals. Inappropriate responses were discarded. Data was entered into statistical package for social sciences (IBM SPSS) version 21 software to perform statistical analysis. Descriptives, Pearson's product-moment correlation, independent samples t-test, and multiple regression analysis were computed to test the research hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the Study Variables

Measure	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Career Resilience	516	27.32	4.57	1			
2. Sociability	516	31.92	5.74	0.71**	1		
3. Proactivity	516	32.21	5.49	0.74**	0.71**	1	
4. Career Exploration	516	57.35	11.20	0.11**	0.22**	0.21**	1

** $p < 0.01$

Table 1 reveals the mean and standard deviation values of career resilience, sociability, proactivity, and career exploration. Table 1 also depicts the correlation between the study variables. It can be inferred that there is a significant positive correlation between career resilience and career exploration ($r=0.11$), sociability and career exploration ($r=0.22$), proactivity and career exploration ($r=0.21$), however, the strength of the relationship is weak. It can be interpreted that when individuals maintain a resilient attitude toward careers, build social networks, and engage in proactive career behaviors, they tend to explore their careers more effectively. Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are accepted in this study.

Table 2 t-test showing gender differences in study variables

	Males (263)		Females (253)		t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Career resilience	27.74	4.83	26.87	4.24	2.17	0.031*	0.191
Sociability	32.67	5.54	31.15	5.76	3.03	0.003**	0.267
Proactivity	32.99	5.53	31.38	5.34	3.37	0.001**	0.296
Career Exploration	57.45	12.81	57.24	9.26	0.214	0.831	0.001

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 2 indicates the gender differences obtained in the study variables using t-test among the MBA graduates. It can be deduced that career resilience is significantly different between male and female students ($p < 0.01$), where male students seem to possess higher career resilience than female students. It is also evident that sociability significantly differs between males and females ($p < 0.01$), where males have scored better than females. Further, a significant gender difference is observed in proactivity ($p < 0.01$), where male students have higher proactivity than female students. Regarding career exploration, no significant gender difference was found among the MBA graduates ($p > 0.05$). Based on Cohen's d values, it can be concluded that there is a marginal (small) difference between males and females in sociability, proactivity, and career resilience. Therefore, hypothesis H4 (a, b, and c) are rejected and hypothesis H4 (d) is accepted.

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Table 3 Regression analysis showing model summary and ANOVA result

	R	R²	Adjusted R²	df	F	P
Model 1	.249	.062	.057	515	11.329	0.000**

** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 represents the model summary and ANOVA results based on the regression analysis. It can be observed that 6% of the variance in career exploration ($R^2 = 0.062$) is explained by career resilience, sociability, and proactivity. Moreover, the regression model is significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that it has an acceptable fit to the data.

Table 4 Regression analysis showing coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta(β)		
(Constant)	43.81	3.13		14.00	0.000**
Career resilience	-.403	0.169	-.164	-2.39	0.017**
Sociability	0.388	0.129	0.199	3.01	0.003**
Proactivity	0.378	0.142	0.185	2.67	0.008**

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 shows the regression coefficients and significance values indicating the predictive relationship between the constructs. It can be inferred from Table 4 that career resilience ($B = -.403$), sociability ($B = 0.388$), and proactivity ($B = 0.378$) have a significant (at 0.05 level) impact on career exploration. The negative Beta coefficient of career resilience is a result of the suppression effect (Krus & Wilkinson, 1986) and this phenomenon can occur when the relationship between the two constructs is negligible. Thus, hypothesis 5 is accepted.

DISCUSSION

This research aims to examine the relationship between all study variables and understand the influence proactivity, sociability, and career resilience have on career exploration among MBA graduates. This study is significant in discovering novel antecedents to career exploration.

Hypothesis H1 assumes a significant relationship between proactivity and career exploration. A positive significant association was found between the two constructs in this study. This result explicates that if an individual actively shows curiosity and takes responsibility to act towards his career without being nudged or hit by external conditions also tends to explore various career options to make informed decisions about one's professional path. A similar result was obtained in the study by Zhu et al. (2021), where career exploration was positively related to proactive personality. Bateman and Crant (1993) demonstrated that proactive personality is strongly connected to proactive career behaviors, including career exploration and planning. According to Shen and Hu (2015), people with a highly proactive nature are more inclined to investigate both their personal traits and external resources actively, leading to more defined job search intentions and career advancement plans. Cai et al. (2015) also found that individuals who possess proactive personalities tend to be driven and are more adept at planning and managing their careers.

Hypothesis 2 signifies a positive relationship between sociability and career exploration. It was proved in this study that sociability is significantly related to career exploration.

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Further, it can be added that individuals who socialize, are outspoken, and capable of building career networks tend to discover various career-related opportunities that can boost their career progress. Nauta (2007) and Kleine et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between extraversion and career exploration. Extraverted individuals possess greater confidence in conducting career searches and seeking career-related information (Reed et al., 2004).

Hypothesis 3 states that there will be a significant association between career resilience and career exploration, which was verified in this study. It can be elucidated that individuals who are adaptive to career challenges are constantly driven to engage in career exploration. A few past studies (Pang et al., 2021; Seibert et al., 2016; Bimrose & Hearne, 2012) signify a similarity between career adaptability (which consists of the dimension of career curiosity which is similar to career exploration) and resilience. Moreover, individuals with greater resilience tend to experience reduced levels of difficulty in making career decisions (Pang et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 4 assumes there are no gender differences in career resilience, sociability, proactivity, and career exploration. In this study, significant gender differences were found in career resilience, sociability, and proactivity, where male students showed higher career resilience, proactivity, and sociability compared to female students. Prior studies revealed (eg. Greenglass et al., 1999) that proactive coping is significantly different among males and females. Sylva et al. (2019) found that males reported higher levels of career initiative compared to females. This result also aligns with other studies on proactive behavior, which have consistently shown that males, compared to females, are more likely to exhibit proactive behavior (Kidder & Parks, 2001). Crocetti et al. (2019) confirmed in their study that gender differences exist in sociability among adolescents. Though several studies found that females possess better social skills than males, with respect to building professional contacts and networks, men exhibit higher competency than women. Moreover, Forret and Dougherty (2001) found that men participated in socializing activities more frequently than women. With respect to career resilience, Sarwar et al. (2010) found that males have higher resilience than females. It could also be because female university students perceived more significant career obstacles than male students (Luzzo, 1995). Also, males tend to bounce back effectively through career difficulties. Concerning career exploration, insignificant gender differences reveal that MBA male and female students are able to explore career opportunities equally as the contemporary career demands both genders to be career-ready.

Hypothesis 5 proposes that career resilience, proactivity, and sociability have a significant impact on career exploration. Career exploration is a lifelong process that requires individuals to remain perseverant and robust through career disturbances, and developing a resilient attitude toward careers indeed influences the effectiveness of exploratory behaviors. Koen et al. (2010) found that individuals with higher career resilience are more proactive in exploring career opportunities, as they are better equipped to handle uncertainty and changes in the job market. Resilience fosters a sense of confidence and motivation to seek out new career paths and opportunities, even in the face of adversity. King (2004) demonstrated that career-resilient individuals are more likely to engage in continuous learning and self-improvement, which are key components of effective career exploration. Similarly, proactivity allows individuals to make sound career decisions preemptively, even before encountering adversity. This proactive approach is essential in exploring various careers that align with one's personality. Crant (2000) found that proactive individuals are more likely to take initiative in their career development, seeking out information and opportunities that

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align with their interests and goals. Proactive individuals tend to anticipate future career opportunities and challenges, allowing them to navigate their career paths more effectively (Seibert et al., 2001). Sociability helps individuals build valuable connections and social networks, seek and utilize social resources, such as mentors and professional contacts, which can provide pertinent information. This social engagement enhances their ability to identify and pursue suitable career opportunities. Sociability facilitates the exchange of career-related information within social networks, helping individuals make informed career decisions. Sociable individuals are better at gathering diverse perspectives which in turn enriches their career exploration process.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of this study that pave a path for future research are as follows: Firstly, the study participants only belonged to private MBA colleges in Hyderabad, which could affect the generalizability of the findings to a larger student population. Secondly, since this study employed self-report measures, it is subject to certain limitations. Lastly, the effect of confounding variables that are not accounted for in the research design can obscure the relationship between the study variables.

Implications

This research is significant in identifying antecedent factors of career exploration. This study illuminates a direction for MBA graduates to manage their careers independently. It offers valuable insights to career advisors and counselors to assist students in crafting career interventions.

Directions for future research

Future research may be conducted on employees and other student populations from various geographical locations to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Further, confounding variables may be identified and controlled to improve the theoretical model. Additionally, a qualitative study can be conducted to validate the predictive role of proactivity, sociability, and career resilience.

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Conflict of Interest

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