



PROACTIVE PERSONALITY AND AGE AT MARRIAGE AS PREDICTORS OF CAREER SUCCESS

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of proactive personality and age of marriage on career success as experienced by public servants. A sample of 249 participants with a mean age of 35.15 years participated. Using proactive personality scale and career success scale were validated and used for the study. The study found that proactive personality was a significant predictor of career success ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), and marriage at an earlier age also predicted career success ($\beta = -.14, p < .01$). The paper offers new approach in reconciling cultural expectations and workplace growth. Proactive personality among employees, organisational psychologist can develop career assessment tools and organise career planning workshops to serve as the platform for encouraging employees to actively engage in self-development, goals setting, strategy implementation, and skills development to expand their core competencies and resourcefulness. This study also showed that marrying earlier can be considered an advantage. Further research may however focus on which proactive approach best predicts success and happy employees also considering the role family-work balance can be harnessed to boost career success.

Keywords: *Career success; proactive personality; marriage; family-work balance*

Introduction

The present economic crisis and greater competitiveness among most businesses did not spare business organisations in Nigeria. As a result, most organisations are constantly engaged in major work force reduction in an attempt to cut down the human capital cost and become more competitive in the business world.

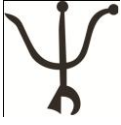
Recently, the Nigerian labour market continued to go downward as organisations kept on laying off staff in hundreds (Obasi, 2018; Ujah, 2013). This trend signified



that the possibility of employees to have secured and stable career path has been decreased consequently influencing employees' career success.

As a result of insecurity of jobs, the problem of career success is imminent and this led some employee to experience negative emotions dissatisfaction and be depressed with their work (Lee & Allen, 2002). This is probably because they are faced with stressful career transition, which might totally spoil their career life. These negative emotions not only will bring serious impact on their psychological well-being, but also affect their desire to gain success. Therefore, positive thinking is imperative to promote employees motivation who are moved involuntarily to achieve career success. This assertion is consistent with the suggestion that employees should possess positive traits (i.e. proactive personality) that would instigate them to act with optimism and find ways to lift their motivation for gaining positive career outcomes. (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001, 1999).

Pan and Zhou (2015) posit that career success is critical in influencing how individuals perceive and respond to their career development within organisations. The importance of career success to individuals as well as organisations has been well documented, and accordingly, it has long been of interest to both career researchers and managerial practitioners (Ituma, Simpson, Ovadje, Cornelius & Mordi, 2011; Gunz & Heslin, 2005; Hughes, 1937; Pan & Zhou, 2013; Super, 1990; Verbruggen, 2012; Zacher, 2014). Hughes (1937) proposed that career success comprises of subjective career success (SCS) and



objective career success (OCS). OCS is reflected by observable, measurable, and verifiable indicators such as salary, promotion, managerial level, and so on. SCS, in contrast, refers to an individual's reaction to unfolding career experiences. Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz (1995) further supported that career success is the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes that are derived from one's job or work experiences.

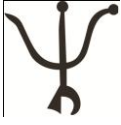
While it is widely acknowledged that both OCS and SCS are crucial to individuals, increasingly more scholars directed their attention to SCS because of its far reaching influence on individuals as well as its complexity compared with objective success. So far, a substantial number of researchers focus on this theme and seek to identify the determinants or antecedents of SCS, as well as the boundary conditions of these effects (e.g., Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008; Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Harris, Moritzen, Robitschek, Imhoff, & Lynch, 2001; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

Recent studies indicate that the level of income, status and promotion that are used to determine an individual's career achievement appear to be less relevant once employees achieved a certain level of compensation (Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Hofman, Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Tan & Khulida, 2011). To them, the personal satisfaction derived from their career is what matters most. This means that the fundamental qualities of career success deal with an individual's



measurable satisfaction in meeting their planned career goal. A progression of positive outcomes in a career may include such events as obtaining work in the profession, achieving job promotions and receiving recognition. Therefore, success is defined as achieving or gaining a desired goal and measured with the level of satisfaction with the extent of achievement. But when compared to the African population Ituma, Simpson, Ovadje, Cornelius and Mordi (2011) found that Nigerian middle and high managers are interested in the OCS than the SCS. This is common in the civil service where employees are promoted every three years with or without any additional skills.

The most common theory specifically addressing career success in the literature is the human capital theory (Becker, 1993). This theory posits that people are different in the amount and quality of human asset or capital in terms of education, experience, skill, and personal characteristics that they bring to the job. The amount and effectiveness of the human capital one has and expends on the job is the main determinant of career success. The human capital theory proposes that employees make rational choices regarding investments in their own human capital. This theory argues that individuals make rational choices regarding whether or not they want to invest more time, effort, and money in education, training, and experience (Becker, 1993). Their investment in these human capitals influences their work performance and, subsequently, influences the organization rewards. Melamed (1995) classified human capital into three types: (a) relevant to the job (e.g. education, experience, mental ability); (b)



partially relevant depending on the nature of the job (e.g. personality); and (c) not relevant to the job at all (e.g. race, marital status, physical appearance).

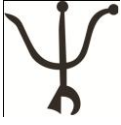
Further, Silva (2006) and Lounsbury, Moffitt, Gibson, Drost and Stevens (2007) strongly stressed that employee's career success is largely dependent on their intellect and character. Implying that employees should not only possess knowledge and skills required, but importantly have certain qualities and attitudes that drives towards career success. To achieve this, it important to ask if those who are proactive have high tendency of experiencing significant career success.

Attaining career success with the right personality trait like proactive personality could also be influenced by the timing an individual decides to establish a stable family. This timing here is viewed as the age of marriage. In a collectivist society like Nigeria, establishing a family is considered highly valuable and stand as estimates of achievement and fulfilment. Goldin and Lawrence (2000) argued that both career-making and the search for a marriage match takes time and cannot be accomplished simultaneously. While some researchers (Vella & Collins, 1990; Siow, 1998; Giolito, 2003; Goldin, 2004) pointed that the opportunity cost of delaying marriage is higher for women than for men because of women's biological clock. It could be argued that women base their marriage-timing and career decisions on the belief that their marriage prospects, if they choose to



delay participation in the marriage business, depend on the marriage success of previous cohorts of high-powered women. Consequently, as more women delay marriage, the risk of remaining single increases for career women, hence the expected payoff from delaying increases (Goldin, 2004). Consequently, the reverse is the case as the desire for early marriage increases at the expense of career development. A more recent study by Solomon and Jackson (2014) opposed the findings of Goldin, Collins and Siow that being married promotes satisfying home life and enable spouses to focus more than work.

The dilemma of responsibilities still stands as extended families relations is not easy to escape from. Responsibilities to dependents (extended family relations and friends) are one important factor influencing the amount of time, finances and energy that individuals are able and willing to devote to work (Mayrhofer, Meyer, Schiffinger & Schmidt, 2008). The demands of family have been shown to reduce worker's personal resources of time, energy, finances and commitment available for work (Kirchmeyer, 2006). Heidi and Ellen (Paa & McWhirter, 2000) noted that the effects of gender on career expectation were often mediated by personal and environmental variables such as perceived support for combining work and family. Relatively low work effort will, in turn, limit opportunities for positive performance outcomes, such as merit increases and promotions (Lobel & St. Clair, 1992). The need inquire whether age of marriage would increase higher career success.

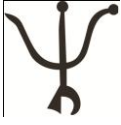


The current study

Exploring the influence of individual's proactive behaviour, age of marriage on career success could result in a clear understanding of these relationships and also help employees understand how their career achievement can be influenced and thereby gain ideas to design an effective career plan. However, minimal research has explored the effects of personality on career success (Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Bozionelos, 2004; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). There is a void in the literature because personality is found to be important in many other related domains of organizational behaviour, including leadership, job performance, and job satisfaction. Very few studies have attempted a comprehensive examination of the effects of proactive personality on career success among Africans or Nigerian samples (Ituma, Simpson, Ovadje, Cornelius & Mordi, 2011). Also, age of marriage has only gained discourse in informal settings than in dedicated research study. The present study in filling this gap, intends to examine how proactive personality and, age of marriage influence employees' career success among a Nigerian population and non-management staff and find out the societal implication of these influences.

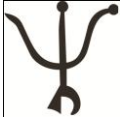
Proactive Personality and career success

Proactive behaviour refers to anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Existing research provides extensive evidence of the different ways in which employees



express proactive behaviour, including seeking feedback (Ashford, Blatt, & Vandewalle, 2003; Ashford & Cummings, 1983, 1985), taking initiative in pursuing personal and organisational goals (Frese & Fay, 2001; Roberson, 1990), actively adapting to new environments (Ashford & Black, 1996; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Saks & Ashforth, 1996; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), expressing voice (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001), selling issues (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), acting in advance to influence individuals and groups (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Williams, Gray, & von Broembsen, 1976), expanding roles (Nicholson, 1984; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997), revising tasks (Staw & Boettger, 1990), creating jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), implementing ideas and solving problems (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006), and building social networks (Morrison, 2002; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). These various literatures portray proactive behaviours as prevalent at work, and as affecting outcomes for both the individuals who carry them out and their organisations.

The range of behaviour and activities highlighted above demonstrate that proactive individuals actively seek changes and opportunities as a means to improvise present work conditions for furthering career success. This means that the proactive individual will not feel depressed and not lose focus if faced with career obstacles (e.g. sudden termination or retrenchment). They will continuously look for various approaches to be continuously sustained in their career, have some sense of job security and advance in their careers.



Individuals with highly proactive personality are likely to perform better than others because they know how to control, create and enact opportunities as well as make contributions to their career achievement. People with proactive personality may alter their own work methods, procedures and decisions to influence the situations in which they work (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 1999; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2000; Barnett and Bradley, 2007; Crant, 2000). Therefore, they are likely to seek for career information, sponsorship and opportunities for self-improvement, such as developing expertise in areas that are critical for the enhancement of career performance. According to Yang, Gong and Huo (2011) proactive personality is one of the important natural characteristics for individuals to sustain their career achievement in the trend of job insecurity. The reason being that a proactive individual is relatively not limiting themselves in certain circumstances, but is aggressively searching new resources and chances, and act on them to be continually advanced in their career life. This justification led to the formulation of the hypothesis below

H₁: Proactive personality is positively related to career success of employees

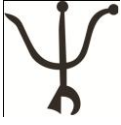
Age of marriage and career success

The trade-off that exist between achieving a high-powered career goals and securing a marriage present three facts: (1) when a high-powered career is desirable, men's and women's life sequence imply that they start by investing in



their careers and then look for a marriage partner; (2) both men and women fear singlehood; (3) because of differential fertility, women may want to marry earlier than men. First, the achievement of a high-powered career involves time-intensive investments in education and early career development. Because of time strains, men and women who attempt to become high-powered professionals may not believe the search for a marriage partner to be compatible with their ambition. Oppenheimer (1988) suggests that starting a family may threaten career goals, as an early commitment to marriage may result in dropping out from university. For this same reason, Goldin and Lawrence (2000) show that the availability of contraceptives allowed women to delay marriage and make career investments.

Second, delaying marriage may result in remaining single. The evidence that even in the developed countries, the fear of singlehood remains high among young people (Thornton & Freedman, 1982). In a study by Brown and Lewis (2004) find that powerful women are at a disadvantage in the marriage market. Using a laboratory experiment in which men and women are asked to assess an opposite sex person described as a supervisor, a co-worker or an assistant, Brown and Lewis (2004) show that men are more likely to choose the subordinate compared to the high-powered woman for investing in a long-term relationship, while women are indifferent between the three categories of men. Another study shows that higher IQ men are associated with higher chances to be ever-married for men but lower chances for women (Taylor, Carole, George, Lawrence, David,



Valerie & Ian, 2004). The study suggests that higher IQ women are more likely to delay marriage in order to invest in a high-powered career, with some never marrying. This evidence suggests that career women face the risk of staying single because they have delayed marriage. The point where men are fertile for a longer period than women. This is the sole gender difference between men and women. As a result, we expect women who delay marriage to incur a higher cost than men because men will find them less attractive as marriage partners than younger and more fertile women. Women may thus want to marry earlier than men (Vella & Collins, 1990; Giolito, 2003). According to the United Nations Social Indicators for the period between 1991 and 1997, men do marry at an older age than women in all countries. In the developed regions, men and women are respectively 29 and 26 years old in average at the time of their marriage. This justification led to the formulation of the hypothesis below

H₂: age of marriage is related to career success of employees

Method

Participants

Participants in this study comprised of 249 (Male =139 and Females =110) non-managerial married public servants drawn from Enugu state Nigeria. Participants were incidentally selected on the basis of their willingness to participate in the study. They were of between 21 to 60 years with mean age of 35.15 (S.D= 8.69) years



Instrument

A questionnaire form comprising two instruments was used for data collection.

Career success scale

Career success scale is a measure for career success developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990). The 5-items career success scale measure employee's perception of their satisfaction with reference to personal financial/non-financial goals achievement. Sample items include, 'I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career', 'I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for income'. It is on a 5-point scale 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. For the present study the researcher conducted a pilot study using 69 participants from the Ministry of Water Resources Enugu and obtained a Cronbach Alpha of .87.

Proactive personality scale

Proactive personality is measured by proactive personality scale developed by Bateman and Crant (2000). The 10-items proactive personality scale assessed the degree of individual efforts in manipulating the difficult work environment by creating and taking opportunities to gain positive outcomes. Sample of items includes, 'I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life', 'No matter what the odds, I believe in something I will make it happen'. In this study, each of the adapted questions asked how strongly the respondents agreed or



disagreed with proactive personality statements on a five-point scale that ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. However, for the present study the researcher conducted a pilot study using 69 participants from the Ministry of Water Resources Enugu and obtained a Cronbach Alpha of .76.

Procedure

Three hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed. The participants were asked to respond in a five-point Likert-format response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly agree, indicating the level of their agreement regarding the applicability of the listed statements in describing their current level of career success and desire to move forward. Out of the 300 participants surveyed, 249 copies of the questionnaire were properly completed and returned, representing a return rate of 83%. The questionnaire was administered to the participants in their offices during their work hours. The questionnaire took about five minutes to complete. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and their anonymity was protected and the data would be used strictly for academic purpose.

Design/Statistical Analyses

The study adopted a predictive correlation design. Hierarchical multiple regression with enter method were the statistical tools for analyzing the data using SPSS version 16.



Results

Table 1: Correlations of gender, age, age at marriage and proactive personality and career success

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1 Career success	15.24	5.25	-				
2 Gender	-	-	.06	-			
3 Age	35.15	8.69	-.04	-.20**	-		
4 Age at marriage	20.52	11.74	-.14**	.03	.20**	-	
5 Proactive personality	41.03	6.32	.19**	.28**	.29**	.06	-

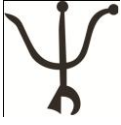
** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Correlations in Table 1 showed that amongst the studied variables only age at marriage ($r = -.14$, $p < .001$), and proactive personality ($r = .19$, $p < .05$) were significantly associated with career success. While gender, and age were not significantly association with people's career success.

Table 2: Hierarchical multiple regression predicting career success from gender, age, age of marriage and proactive personality.

Predictor s	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	B	T
Gender	.59	.082	1.01	.70	.07	1.20	-.19	.03	.42
Age	-.02	-.031	-.57	.00	-.002	-.03	-.05	.07	.99
Age of marriage				-1.49	-.14**	2.55	-1.43	-.14*	2.55
Proactive Personalit y							.72	.23**	3.97
AR ²	.00			.02			.06		
ΔR^2	.01			.02			.04		
ΔF	.82			6.49			15.79		

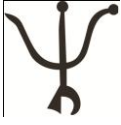
p= ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$



Hierarchical multiple regression results in Table 2 showed that gender and age were added in step 1 of the equation. Result of the regression analysis indicated that none of them was a significant predictor of career success. In step 2 of the equation, age at marriage was added. Regression result indicated that age of marriage was a negatively significant predictor of career success ($\beta = -.14, p < .01$). This imply that when people marry at a younger age, they tend to go extra mile in improving themselves to attain success in their career. Age at marriage accounted for 2% of the variance in career success ($\Delta R^2 = .02$). In step 3, proactive personality was built into the model. Proactive personality positively and significantly predicted career success of individuals ($\beta = .23, p < .01$). It added an additional 2% to the explanation of the variance in career success ($\Delta R^2 = .02$). Individuals who are proactive in nature are able to pursue their dreams and goals in life. They are equally able to struggle hard to achieve their life aspiration.

Discussion

The present study investigated the role of proactive personality and age at marriage on career success among employees. The present findings showed that there was an association between proactive personality and career success. The finding confirmed the first hypothesis and also provides support for past studies conducted by Barnett and Bradley (2007), Hofman, Dries and Pepermans (2008) and Tan and Khulida (2011). The finding implies that employees who possesses proactive personality are more successful in their career. One possible explanation for this result is that individuals with proactive personality normally



do not accept their roles passively. Rather, they challenge the obstacles, seek for approaches, initiate changes and transform such difficulties into useful chances that can promote their sense of success. This means proactive individuals are those who will always take chances and opportunities they find, grasp and act on it to benefit their career progression. Another reason why individuals with proactive personality are more successful in their career is because they tend to be self-starters (i.e. initiative), future-oriented, and persistent in doing activities until their objectives are achieved. These characteristics are important for individuals' career success, because more often than not, such individuals with proactive characteristics will seek for advancement in their fields, acquire additional training/education or qualification.

The second hypothesis which states that age at marriage would significantly predict career success was also significant. The negative association indicates that marriage at a much younger age could predict career success. This finding contradicts the studies by Oppenheimer (1988) and Goldin and Katz (2000) who argued that career women cannot combine a stable family (marriage life) and their career. This could only go far in developed countries where most career women prefer their career advancement to making a home. Culturally, it is observed that women getting married earlier is preferable. For men, it is viewed that as soon as he is gainfully employed, he is expected to start considering marriage. The association found in the study could be seen as the ability to marry



early help the individuals gain some level of stability in their lives and plan on future advancement together early enough than later.

Implication of the study

The current research results demonstrated that success in career can be better achieved if employees demonstrate proactive personality. Thus, to build proactive personality among employees, organisational psychologist can develop career assessment tools and organise career planning workshops to serve as the platform for encouraging employees to actively engage in self-development, goals setting, strategy implementation, and skills development to expand their core competencies and resourcefulness. This study also showed that marrying earlier can be considered an advantage. Further research may however focus on which proactive approach best predicts success and happy employees also considering the role family-work balance can be harnessed to boost career success.

Limitation of the study

There are limitations in the design of this study that might influence the interpretations and generalisations of these findings. This study only concentrated on employees in active government agencies. Different results could be obtained if the study is conducted in non-governmental organisations such as privately owned organisations. Also, some of the staff were previously working in an agency that experienced retrenchment of workers and now



working in new agencies, this could affect the study. Based on the regression model, proactive personality only explains 4% of the variance in career success. This indicates that there are other potential factors that might influence employees' career success like some demographic variables e.g. age of marriage, educational level at marriage, and number of dependents, job characteristics, supervisory support and career enhancing strategies. Hence, it is suggested that future research should replicate the framework of this study by incorporating the mentioned factors to elicit a comprehensive understanding on how personal, organisational, and environmental factors affect individuals' career success.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of proactive personality and age of marriage on career success. The results indicated that proactive personality did relate to career success. Also, marrying early predicts career success. Since the study was conducted at government owned organisations, the findings must be interpreted with cautious and cannot be generalized to represent other organisation. It is hoped that through the examination of how proactive personality relate to career success, a more complete understanding of the kind of effort needed to enhance career success will be achieved.



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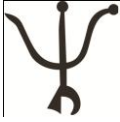
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