

Journal of Law & Social Studies (JLSS)

Volume 3, Issue 2, pp 143-152

[www.advancelrf.org](http://www.advancelrf.org)

## Influence of Proactive Career Behaviors on Career Choice Decisions of Students

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### Abstract

Due to increased trend in job transitions, prospects of occupation these days are difficult to predict. Therefore, workers need to develop differentiated set of skills and competences to be able to adapt to a variety of available occupations. The volatility in employability due to ever changing technologies, business environments and models need to focus on becoming lifelong learners not only to maintain their employability but to create more opportunities for themselves. This situation has affected work like of people in a way that the careers no more belong to the organizations but to individual. According to the literature on boundaryless careers, there are three types of variables that can be used to predict career success. Combinations of these three variables are generally referred to as career competencies. Theoretical research reveals that 'understanding why, 'whom,' and 'how' are the three most important indicators of career success. The findings demonstrate that proactive career behaviors are predicted by future work self and identity resolution. Future work self has a significant positive impact on employment status and, as a result, can lead to future employment success. The findings also revealed that future work self predicts career planning the most. Career consultation is the second most reliable indicator of future employment. Future work self can also forecast proactive skill improvement and proactive career consulting.

The study showed results that identity resolution predicts career planning the most. Identity resolution also predicts proactive skill development, career consultation and proactive career networking.

**Key words:** Future self-work salience, proactive career behaviors, career consultation, identity resolution, career planning

### Introduction

Due to increased trend in job transitions, prospects of occupation these days are difficult to predict. Therefore, workers need to develop differentiated set of skills and competences to be able to adapt to a variety of available occupations. The volatility in employability due to ever changing technologies, business environments and models need to focus on becoming lifelong learners not only to maintain their employability but to create more opportunities for themselves (Savickas et al., 2009). This situation has effected work like of people in a way that the careers no more belong to the organizations but to individuals (Duarte, 2004; Savickas et al., 2009). Recently, it has been observed that knowledge of perceived future employability in respect of its antecedents and consequences makes it better to well discern its impact among young adults; hence, making it easier for practitioners to guide young adults regarding their future employment (Gunawan, 2020).

Literature on boundaryless career explains that there are three classes of variables to predict career success. Combinations of these three variables are generally referred to as career competencies. In a recently conducted research, empirical evidence has been found in favor of career competencies as an important tool for graduates to mobilize during and after their period of school to work transition (Presti, 2021). Theoretical research confirms that career competencies such as 'knowing why,' 'knowing whom,' and 'knowing who' are the three most important indicators of career success (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003).

Here, 'know why' is linked to career planning, 'know whom' is linked to networking and 'know how' is linked to skill development and which are all the necessary competencies for succeeding in this era of boundaryless careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby et al., 2003; Vos, Clippeleer, & Dewilde, 2009).

Career insight, proactive personality, and openness to experience are three variables of 'knowing why' (career planning) competency. Similarly, 'knowing whom' (networking) includes contacts and networks related to career (M. Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). And, 'knowing how' (skill development) involves skills and knowledge related to career and job (Bird, 1996).

Furthermore, studies show that proactive behaviors such as proactive skill development, personal growth, a desire to explore professional options, and career planning are essential for students' employment status and other job-related outcomes (Brown et al., 2006). Strauss et al. (2012) established the concept of future work self to identify the reason behind such proactive career behaviors. According to Strauss et al. (2012), proactive career behaviors include career planning, network building, career consulting, and skill development.

Experimenting with future job self-salience and associated career success elements, such as proactive career behaviors, is necessary (Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). As a result, this study focuses on the aforementioned proactive career behaviors since they are associated with the theoretical concept of future work self salience (Strauss et al., 2012).

The cumulative effects of self awareness that create identity resolution were specifically investigated in the prediction of networking, career counselling, career planning, and skill development. In this study, the future work self was thought to operate as incentive to boost proactive career activities, while identity resolution was seen to be a supplemental source that fosters such proactive career actions.

### **Success predictors in the boundaryless career**

A boundary less career is a notion in which variables are used to predict professional success. There are three types of variables that predict professional success in individuals, which are sometimes referred to as career skills (Eby et al., 2003). Writing about boundary less careers and career competences centers around three main types of variables: 'knowing why,' 'knowing whom,' and 'knowing how' (M. B. Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Mittendorff, et al., 2008).

The first variable of 'knowing why' i.e. career insight involves a state when an individual has established specific career goals, have realistic career expectations and is aware of his/her weaknesses and strengths (London, 1993). This 'knowing why' aspect in fact is the individual's identity or awareness about self (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Hall (1976) refers to this self awareness about one's own interests, abilities and values as identity resolution. A second variable of 'knowing why' i.e. proactive personality (Eby et al., 2003) involves individuals having proactive behavior who demonstrate initiative, take action on opportunities after identifying them and have greater perseverance during setback situations (Batemen & Grant, 1993). The third variable of 'knowing why' i.e. openness to experience involves individuals who are considerably broad minded, imaginative, active and curious (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

### **Future work self**

Future work self is someone's mental picture of his or her self regarding professional career in coming future. It is in fact the work related future aspect of the self-concept (Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). It is therefore considered a notion stemming from the concept of possible selves which inculcates identity based motivation to direct one's existing behaviors in a certain direction to achieve desired future (Oyserman & James, 2011).

Future work self involves cognitive representations of individual's hope for his or her work related future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Here, future work self is more precise concept in contrast to 'hoped for possible self' because it is an explicit concept which focuses on an individual's future specific to work (Strauss et al., 2012). People with an orientation towards their future work selves have ambitious goals, are focused in a specific direction and are inclined to take risks. Also, these people can creatively think about their future possibilities and proactively make efforts to define their careers (Strauss et al., 2012).

Self-regulation behaviour is influenced by one's future employment (Carver & Scheier, 2012). According to studies, future work selves serve as a motivating resource for an individual's proactive conduct toward his or her profession (Strauss et al., 2012), although not all future work self-serve as a motivating resource (Strauss et al., 2012). People are more likely to create their future work selves when asked to do so, even if they had not previously considered their future work selves (King & Raspin, 2004). People who already have a sense of their future work self-differ from those who do not, and hence have distinct motives (Strauss et al., 2012).

Future work self which is salient indicates he or she may readily envisage his or her future self (Ashforth, 2000; Strauss et al., 2012).

Strauss et al. (2012) explain that the motivation and proactive behavior towards career primarily depends on an individual's salience. That means, through salience i.e. standing out from the rest in terms of future work selves leads to proactive career behavior.

People having a clear work future in their minds which is easy for them to imagine have salient future work self. This salience develops over time as they examine their role models, consider their objectives and hopes, and consider who they would like to achieve in the future (Strauss et al., 2012).

It is crucial to distinguish future work self from career identity since future work self is not limited towards the individual's current profession or employment (Blau, 1988).

According to Guan et al. (2014), future work self has a beneficial influence on job status and can thus contribute to successful future employment.

On the contrary, negative future self leads to feelings of anxiety, worry and threat due to the low perception of progress in future goals (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997).

Strauss et al. (2012) found that future work self predicts proactive career activities in participants in their study. Career planning, network building, career counselling, and skill improvement are examples of proactive career practices.

Individuals have the liberty to redefine their future selves over their course of life (Cross & Markus, 1991)

The three essential explanatory processes serve as the foundation of future work self (Strauss et al., 2012; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015). The first step is discrepancy between one's current self and one's desired future work self. This disparity fosters self-directed conduct in order to establish objectives in order to reach the desired future (Bandura, 2001). Identity creation is the second procedure. This process entails rethinking and researching oneself in order to obtain the desired outcome (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001). The third process involves awareness about situational constraints which is developed due to the stimulation caused by the mental imagery of one's future career (Taylor et al., 1998).

The necessary talents required to reach the anticipated future goals are among the situational restrictions. This awareness about situational constraints causes incongruence between present skill level and the required skill set to achieve future role in return creates motivation to develop those skills (Strauss et al., 2012).

Strauss et al. (2012) discovered that future work salience predicts proactive career actions in general, as well as when other aspects like as age, career aspirations, job tenure, career identity salience and commitment and future time perspective are controlled.

Hence, this study, considering the existing literature and empirical evidences from research on future work salience in relation to predicting proactive career behaviors develops following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Future work self salience is positively associated with proactive career behaviors such as networking, career consultation, career planning, and skill development

#### Identity resolution

The above definition of a boundaryless profession illustrates the three classes of variables (which are the three career competences to predict career success) involving 'knowing why,' 'knowing whom,' and 'knowing how' (M. B. Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Mittendorff et al., 2008). Identity resolution is a component of the first variable of 'knowing why,' which "answers the issue of 'why' as it pertains to professional drive, personal significance, and identity" (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby et al., 2003). The identity component of 'knowing why' is the individual's self awareness about one's own interests, abilities and values (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Gould, 1979) which is referred to as identity resolution by Hall (1976).

An approach similar to boundaryless career is protean career theory (J. Briscoe & Hall, 2002). This theory revolves around two primary components i.e. personal values and self direction. According to this theory, protean career is a career in which individual's internal values guides them to make career decision and to measure their career success. Secondly, individuals have self directed careers in which they manage their careers through continuous adaptation in terms of demands for learning and performance (J. P. Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

J. P. Briscoe and Hall (2006) also suggest that an individual's values and one's sense of identity can possibly guide one's career. Values are core of one's identity (Hitlin, 2003) and therefore identity should independently influence one's career.

Hall (2002) mentions that identity is one of the two broad metacompetencies (the other is adaptability).

In the present study, the identity resolution component of 'knowing why' and personal identity component of protean career theory (considering personal values as being the core of personal identity) are examined in relation to proactive career behaviors. Following is the hypothesis formed based on the existing literature on identity resolution and proactive career behaviors.

*Hypothesis 2: Identity resolution(Hall, 1976) is positively associated with proactive career behaviors such as networking, career consultation, career planning, and skill development.*

### Methodology

Data were collected from baccalaureate students ( $n = 194$ ) at a university in Pakistan i.e. Forman Christian College. All the students were sent an online survey through email. Among the 194 participants, 123 were males, and 71 were females. 45% were from bachelors in science, 26% were from bachelors in computing and 20% were from bachelors in business and 9 % of participants were from bachelors in arts.

### Measures

Future work self ( $\alpha = 0.881$ )

Future work self salience of the participants was measured by five items developed by (Strauss et al., 2012). Five point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree was used. To complete this section of the questionnaire, participants were instructed to imagine themselves in terms of the type of work they hope for their expected job. The five items were "This future is very easy for me to imagine", "The mental picture of this future is very clear", "I can easily imagine my Future Work Self", "I am very clear about who and what I want to become in my future work", "What type of future I want in relation to my work is very clear in my mind".

Identity resolution ( $\alpha = 0.657$ )

Identity resolution was measured using four items from (Gould, 1979) using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree. The four items were "I clearly understand my capabilities", "I often feel confused about who I am as a person (R)", "I have a strong sense of personal identity", "I know what I want out of life".

Proactive skill development ( $\alpha = 0.726$ )

Proactive skill development was measured by three item scale developed by Penley and Gould (1981). They were asked to rate their responses on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree. The three items were "I develop skills which may not be needed so much now, but in future positions", "I gain experience in a variety of areas to increase my knowledge and skills", "I develop knowledge and skill in tasks critical to my future work life".

Proactive career networking ( $\alpha = 0.875$ )

Proactive networking was measured by three items. Two out of the three items were from the scale developed by Penley and Gould (1981) and the third additional item was a new item added by Strauss et al. (2012) in their model to assess networking with at least three items. The participants were asked to rate their responses on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree. The three items were "I am building a network of contacts or friendships with colleagues to obtain information about how to do my work or to determine what is expected of me", "I am building a network of contacts or friendships to provide me with help or advice that will further my work chances", "I am building a network of colleagues I can call on for support".

Career Consultation ( $\alpha = 0.875$ )

Proactive skill development was measured by the three item scale developed by Backman, O'Maley, and Johnston (1978). They were asked to rate their responses on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree. The three items were "I seek advice from my supervisor(s) or colleagues about additional training or experience I need in order to improve my future work prospects", "I initiate talks with my supervisor about training or work assignments I need to develop skills that will help my future work chances", "I make my supervisor aware of my work aspirations and goals".

Career planning ( $\alpha = 0.875$ )

Career planning was also measured by the four item scale developed by Backman et al. (1978). They were asked to rate their responses on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree. The four items were "I have not really decided what my career objectives should be yet", "I have a plan for my career", "I have a strategy for achieving my career goals", "I know what I need to do to reach my career goals", "My career objectives are not clear (R)", "I change my career objectives frequently (R)".

## Results

The following table 1 shows means, standard deviations and correlations between all variables. The results show that all correlations were significant.

Table 1:

Means, standard deviations and correlations (n = 194)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Future Work Self	3.53	0.86	1					
2. Career Planning	3.49	0.78	.607**	1				
3. Identity resolution	3.76	0.63	.577**	.577**	1			
4. Proactive skill development	3.86	0.71	.395**	.325**	.543**	1		
5. Proactive career networking	3.56	0.94	.431**	.269**	.345**	.469**	1	
6. Career Consultation	3.55	0.95	.481**	.367**	.378**	.464**	.578**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 1 mentioned that future work self salience is positively associated with proactive career behaviors such as networking, career consultation, career planning, and skill development. Similarly hypothesis 2 stated that identity resolution is positively associated with proactive career behaviors such as networking, career consultation, career planning, and skill development. As hypothesized, future work self and identity resolution both predicted proactive career behaviors.

Correlation between future work self and career planning is 0.607 which is the highest in the group. The second highest correlation of future work self is with career consultation i.e. 0.481. The third highest correlation of future work self is with proactive career networking which is 0.431.

Correlation between identity resolution and career planning is 0.577 which is the highest in the group. The correlation between identity resolution and proactive skill development is 0.543 which is the second highest in the group. The correlation between identity resolution and career consultation is 0.378 and it is the third highest in the group.

## Regression

Future work self in predicting proactive career behaviors:

In regression analysis we have taken future work self as independent variable, and each of the career behaviors as dependent variable. In this regression analysis we have checked which of the career behavior variable is better

predicted by future work self. We found out that future work self predicts career planning more as compared to other behaviors as shown below in figure. Future work also predicts career consultation. Proactive skill development and proactive career consultation can also be predicted though future work self. Following are regression results:

Career Planning = 1.601 + 0.607 Future Work Self

Variable		Beta	t	Sig.
Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	1.601	8.704	.000
Future Work Self	$\beta_1$	.607	10.578	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.368$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.365$				

Career Consultation = 1.943 + 0.431 Future Work Self

Variable		Beta	t	Sig.
Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	1.727	7.002	.000
Future Work Self	$\beta_1$	.481	7.598	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.231$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.227$				

Proactive Career Networking = 1.943 + 0.431 Future Work Self

Variable		Beta	t	Sig.
Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	1.943	7.701	.000
Future Work Self	$\beta_1$	.431	6.615	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.186$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.181$				

Proactive Skill Development = 2.749 + 0.395 Future Work Self

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.

Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	2.749	14.295	.000
Future Work Self	$\beta_1$	.395	5.953	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.156$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.151$				

Identity resolution in predicting proactive career behaviors:

In second scenario we have taken identity resolution as independent variable, and each of the proactive career behaviors as dependent variable. In this regression analysis we have checked which of the career behavior variable is better predicted by identity resolution. We found out that identity resolution predicts career planning the most as compared to other behaviors as shown below in figure. Identity resolution also predicts proactive skill development. Career consultation and proactive career networking can also be predicted by identity resolution. Following are regression results:

Career Planning =  $0.821 + 0.577$  Identity Resolution

Variable		Beta	t	Sig.
Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	.821	2.975	.003
Identity Resolution	$\beta_1$	.577	9.798	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.333$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.330$				

Proactive Skill Development =  $1.592 + 0.543$  Identity Resolution

Variable		Beta	t	Sig.
Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	1.592	6.198	.000
Identity Resolution	$\beta_1$	.543	8.953	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.295$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.291$				

Career Consultation =  $1.421 + 0.378$  Identity Resolution

Variable		Beta	t	Sig.
Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	1.421	3.735	.000
Identity Resolution	$\beta_1$	.378	5.661	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.143$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.139$				

Proactive Career Networking = 1.592 + 0.543 Identity Resolution

Variable		Beta	t	Sig.
Name	Symbol			
Constant	$\beta_0$	1.637	4.269	.000
Identity Resolution	$\beta_1$	.345	5.091	.000
$\beta$ : Standardized Beta value				
$R^2 = 0.119$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.114$				

## Discussion

This study explores motivational resource of future work self in prediction of proactive career behaviors.

Taber and Blankemeyer (2015) conducted a similar research found that future work self predicts proactive career behaviors which includes career planning, proactive skill development and proactive career networking. The study conducted by Taber and Blankemeyer (2015) focused on three measures of proactive career behaviors whereas this research involved the fourth additional dimension of proactive career behavior i.e. career consultation. These findings are also consistent with the results of previous studies, which showed positive significant association between proactive personality and process of personal career development (Hu et al., 2018; Zhu, 2021). In this study, career consultation had the second highest correlation with future work self (0.481) after career planning (0.607).

Taber and Blankemeyer (2015), Strauss et al. (2012) and many other studies found that future work self plays an influential role in engaging in proactive career behaviors and the results of this study are in congruence with these past studies.

The results found out that future work self predicts career planning the most. Second most predictable measure of future work is career consultation. Proactive skill development and proactive career consultation can also be predicted though future work self.

Also, J. P. Briscoe and Hall (2006) explains that identity resolution accompanied by flexibility and ability to adapt can considerably shape the success of career. Results of this study also indicate that identity resolution predicts proactive career behaviors which influence career success. Also, literature suggests that people who are higher in identity resolution are inclined to do extensive career planning (Gould, 1979) and this study confirms this relationship.

The results show that identity resolution predicts career planning the most. Identity resolution also predicts proactive skill development, career consultation and proactive career networking.



## Implications

Practical implications of this research are significant for career counselors. Teachers and counselors can work with students to clarify their future work self and assist them in understanding their identities. Taber (2015) provides comprehensive aid for assisting people in clarifying their future work self which could be used to help students in this regard. Since, securing job for university students is considered as an emerging issue worldwide and thus gaining attention in education research (Zhu, 2021); therefore, this study proposes counseling sessions as a solution to assist students in exploring their personal identities and what they want out of their lives can help them in securing employment in future.

Theoretical contribution of this research is that it found career coaching as a significantly impacting measure of proactive career behaviors along with three already established and studied measures i.e. career planning, proactive skill development and proactive career networking. In addition, identity resolution is a significant factor in predicting proactive career behaviors.

## Limitations

There are a few limitations in this study. Sample of this study consisted of participants from a single university which may bind the generalizability of the findings. Thus, future researchers can focus on future work self-salience and identity resolution in a relatively broad population which may include sample from different groups belonging from different ages, culture, professions etc.

## Future research

Future researchers should perform experimental study on future work self-salience and identity resolution. Further research on additional variables influencing future work self and identity resolution can be useful to understand their linkages from other aspects as well. This can contribute to both career development practices and theory of career success. Longitudinal research on how identity and future work self alters over life time and their impact on career related behaviors can also be explored.

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