

UNDERSTANDING PROACTIVE BEHAVIOURS AND CAREER SUCCESS: EVIDENCE FROM AN EMERGING ECONOMY

Roziah Mohd Rasdi*

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Thomas N. Garavan

University of Limerick, Republic of Ireland

Maimunah Ismail

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract. *This article explores the relationship between proactive career behaviours and both objective and subjective career success. The study was conducted on a sample of managers within the public sector of an emerging economy (Malaysia). A sample of 288 managers reported on their proactive career behaviours and career success. Results show that managers who engage in individual career management and networking behaviours report more subjective career success. Networking is positively related to both objective and subjective career success. We discuss the implications for managers' career in emerging economies.*

Key words: *proactive behaviors, individual career management, networking behavior, computer skills, career success*

Introduction

Like many emerging economies, Malaysia's work environment has increasingly become challenging and fast changing due to the forces of globalization and the changing nature of the workplace. Malaysia, like many emerging economies, has a strong dependency on human capital in order to achieve economic growth and development (Zheng, Soosay & Hyland, 2008). It also has a strong reliance on foreign direct investment. There is a strong market for talent in both private and public sectors. It is therefore not surprising that the pressures organisations are experiencing in emerging economies move the

* Corresponding author. Mailing address: Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA; Tel: +603-89467922, fax: +603-89450455; Email: roziah_m@putra.upm.edu.my.

management and development of the careers of managers up the agenda (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008). While there is a strong emphasis on top-down approaches by organisations to career development, there is an increasing adaptation of western notions of career development and management that emphasise self-management, self-direction, personal ownership of careers and less emphasis on internal labour markets. In countries such as Malaysia, this would be in stark contrast to the more traditional approach. Malaysia is fast 'catching up with more individualistic career approaches' (Zhu, Warner & Rowley, 2007). Some commentators have suggested that networking and inter-relationships will become increasingly important as part of career management for managers in emerging economies and particularly Asian countries (Richman & Wiggenshorn, 2005).

Malaysia as an emerging economy (ADB, 2005; Yusof & Bhattasali, 2008) is therefore an interesting context in which to study proactive career behaviours. It is generally characterized by strong traditional and religious institutions where interpersonal relationships are deeply embedded. Hofstede's (1980) cross-cultural study found that Malaysia was a collectivist culture; however, other commentators suggest that the cultural characteristics are more heterogeneous and fragmented (Andaya & Andaya, 2001). Malaysia in managerial terms operates on strong allegiances and loyalty to senior leaders. Managers rely on connections both within and outside the organisation to obtain responses to facilitate career success.

Research on emerging economies has highlighted that particular proactive behaviours such as networking have important direct and contingent effects on career outcomes. Some of these findings may not generalize to the public sector context (McCourt & Foon, 2007). Research on proactivity generally reveals that the proactivity – career outcomes relationship (De Vos, Dewettinck & Buyens, 2009) is contingent on gender (Forret & Dougherty, 2004), age (Ng, Eby, Sorrenson, & Feldman, 2005), tenure in organisation (Orphen, 1994), managerial level (Mohd Rasdi, Garavan & Ismail, 2012), employee type, organisation size and sector (Acquaah & Eshun, 2010). This study extends the proactive career behaviours literature in emerging economies by investigating the effects of three proactive career behaviours on career outcomes. There are but a few empirical studies that have investigated the relationship between proactive career behaviours and career success in emerging economies. The studies that *do* exist focused primarily on one proactive career behaviour, i.e.– networking. In this study, we present a broader conceptualization of proactive behaviours to include individual career management and the possession of computer skills in addition to networking to provide evidence of the value of proactive career behaviours in explaining career success in an emerging economy. This combination of cognitive and behavioural proactive career behaviours provides a good measure of the concept under investigation. Our findings potentially feed into theory development on proactivity by showing that such behaviours are of value in a different cultural and institutional context.

The paper is structured as follows: first, we describe the context of the study, including the economic, cultural and organizational dimensions. We review the literature on

proactive career behaviors and specify the study hypotheses. We describe the study methodology and present the findings. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the study findings for managers working in emerging economies.

The Study Context

The study reported in this paper was undertaken in Malaysia. In economic terms, Malaysia is considered an upper-middle income country. In the past ten years it has enjoyed significant prosperity and economic growth. It is a country highly dependent on foreign direct investment, which until 1997 had achieved rapid economic growth; however, the Asian economic crisis significantly impacted national economic development. It imposed major global pressures on foreign MNCs to look at human resource and talent issues and resulted in significant challenges within the public sector to become more efficient. The Asian crises had a fundamental impact on management practices including retrenchment, the introduction of new technology, major declines in loyalty and the introduction of reward systems linked to performance. There is evidence in the case of Malaysia that it adopted 'harder' HRM type policies and practices such as short-term contracts, performance-based promotion, the retention of the right of management to hire and fire (Smith & Abdullah, 2004; Bhopal & Rowley, 2002; Warner & Rowley, 2008). These represent more individualistic HR strategies. Some soft dimensions also continued to operate, such as a concern for employee welfare. It is arguable that the Asian financial crises brought a higher level of individualism to management practice including individual rather than collective employment practices and increased autonomy of managers (Warner, 2004). Such changes highlight the increasing need for managers to take more responsibility for their careers and utilize more proactive career behaviours.

In social terms, Malaysia is considered to be a pluralistic society; however, there are some significant divisions based on economic position, religion and language. These divisions are largely between the majority of Malays, Chinese (currently 20 percent of the population) and Indian (8 percent). Some of these divisions have been reduced as a result of economic growth and development.

There are, however, common cultural values prevailing regardless of ethnic identity. These cultural values emphasise the importance of hierarchy, harmony, group-oriented interests and respect for the elderly (Asma, 2001). Individual interests have traditionally given way to group-oriented interests. These cultural values have influenced the way in which careers are managed. Strong internal relationships are considered key factors in managing one's career. Seniority is particularly important and career approaches by organisations tend to be paternalistic in approach (Bhopal & Rowley, 2002; Smith & Abdullah, 2004).

The Malaysian public sector is experiencing a major reform. There is an increased focus on managerialisation, or new public management (NPM) (McCourt & Foon, 2007). These initiatives have focused on a number of strategies including the decentral-

ization of authority, downsizing, private sector style management and flexibility, a focus on outcomes and results rather than inputs and a management culture that emphasises the customer / citizen and accountability for results (Siddiquee, 2006). These changes have had major implications for how managers think about and manage their careers, including the need to take personal responsibility for managing the career, investment in development, the use of individual career management and skills enhancement strategies. Therefore, career management approaches in Malaysia are in the process of reform and development to one that incorporates elements of the US and European career management approaches, in addition to the influence of Asian approaches that focus on relationships and collectivist oriented activities. This perhaps represents one of the most significant dichotomies in the context of career management.

The study reported in this paper therefore explores the impact of Western type career management approaches in an emerging economy, one characterised by a collectivist oriented culture and a public sector that is transforming to a new paradigm of management.

Conceptualising Proactive Career Behaviours

The concept of proactive behaviour is generally conceptualized using a self-regulatory perspective (King, 2004; Abele & Wiese, 2008). Managers demonstrate proactive career behaviours through assuming responsibility for managing career goals and performance. Self-regulation involves meta-cognitive, motivational and behavioural components. Managers generate thoughts, feelings and actions that are systematically oriented towards achieving their goals. Self-regulated individuals are considered to be self-motivated, well planned, self-aware of performance outcomes, environmentally and socially sensitive and resourceful (Fay & Freese, 2001).

From a review of the career literature three components of proactive career behaviour have been selected: individual career management, computer skills development and networking behaviours. The first focuses on the insights that individuals develop about their career aspirations and the goals they set, the second deals with the development of specific skills to enhance career prospects within a given context and the third refers to networking behaviours initiated by individuals to manage their careers.

Individual career management represents an important cognitive component of proactive career behavior (Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003; Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006). Orpen (1994) proposed a model of individual career management that consists of two components: individual career planning and the selection of individual career tactics. Individual career planning focuses on the identification of career goals, strengths, weaknesses and the making of career decisions. Individual career tactics concentrate on the use of strategies to implement career plans. These include CV preparation, investment in training, networking and personal development activities. Those two activities represent intentions on the part of the individual to manage his/her career in a systematic way.

Developing proficiency in computer skills represents an important behavioral component of proactive career behaviour. Computer skills refer to an individual's skill to use computers to perform job-related tasks (Fenner & Renn, 2004). Cote (2005) highlighted that a manager's proficiency in computer skills represents a strategy to gain access to information to manage one's career successfully. Computer skills enhancement will also enhance the marketability of an individual and improve chances of career success. Computer proficiency is highlighted as a stand-alone competency that will contribute to personal and professional effectiveness (Randall & Zirkle, 2005).

Networking represents another behavioural component of proactive career behaviour (King, 2004; Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Networking behaviour is defined as the process of building up and maintaining informal, cooperative relationships with individuals other than an employee's immediate supervisor or subordinates in the expectation that this networking will assist job performance and career (Van Emmerik, Euwema, Geschiere & Schouten, 2006). Networking behaviours fulfil a variety of functions in the context of careers including the provision of emotional support, information seeking, career advice and sponsorship or advocacy for promotion (Wolff & Moser, 2009). Information seeking is highlighted as particularly important in facilitating career clarity, career planning and job and promotion opportunities (Eby et al., 2003).

Conceptualising Career Success

The concept of career success is conceptualised in a number of ways in the literature. Baruch (2004) described individual career success as a set of desired outcomes that are associated with personal, professional or organizational domains and how far those outcomes are accomplished. He conceptualizes five dimensions of career outcomes:

- (i) Advancement: hierarchy, power, professionalism, reputation (status), but also autonomy, entrepreneurship and self-control.
- (ii) Learning: gaining new skills, abilities and competencies.
- (iii) Physiological and survival: money making (buying power), security and employability.
- (iv) Psychological: satisfaction, recognition, self-esteem and self-actualization.
- (v) Quality of life and work-life balance.

Baruch's categorization of career success outcomes is consistent with the distinction made between objective and subjective career success that are utilized in the majority of career studies. Objective career success focuses on external criteria that are defined by one's profession, one's peers, culture or society. Career management may be horizontal (increased job security, longer vocations) or hierarchical (promotion, different job title). Subjective career success reflects on individual's perception of the career experience. It is based on more internal criteria and will be influenced by an individual's personal preferences for development, personal needs and values. Individuals' definitions of both objective and subjective career success will vary according to circumstances and

perceptions (Baruch, 2004). The meanings that individuals attach to career success will influence the proactive behaviours they use to manage their career progression. In this study, we predict that three proactive career behaviours (individual career management, networking and proficiency in computer skills) will influence objective and subjective career success.

Individual Career Management and Career Success

Individual career management is defined as the individuals' efforts in advancing career goals which lead to career effectiveness (Orpen, 1994). Orpen (1994) proposed a model of individual career management consisting of two components: individual career planning and individual career tactics. Individual career planning refers to the process of identifying one's career goals, strengths, weaknesses and career decisions, whereas individual career tactics focus on the utilization of career. Orpen (1994) found that individual career management was positively related to managers' career success. Specifically, he found that managers' career planning correlated with all components of career success (i.e., salary growth, $r = .19$; promotion, $r = .21$; career performance, $r = .30$; and career satisfaction, $r = .42$). Managers' individual career tactics correlated with salary growth ($r = .19$), career performance ($r = .27$) and career satisfaction ($r = .31$). He concluded that both career planning and career tactics contributed significantly to variance in all measures of career success. In addition, individual career management was found to have greater impact on subjective career success than objective career success. Hall, Waddell, Donner and Wheeler (2004) found that individuals involved in proactive career planning exhibited higher levels of work satisfaction. We therefore hypothesise that:

H1. Individual career management will have a positive and significant relationship with Malaysian managers' objective and subjective career success, and will have a greater positive impact on Malaysian managers' subjective rather than objective career success.

Networking Behavior and Career Success

Networking behavior is defined as the process of building up and maintaining informal, cooperative relationships with individuals other than the employee's immediate supervisor and subordinates in the expectation that such relationships will help or assist the employee to perform his or her job better (Van Emmerik et al., 2006). Studies on networking behavior suggest a direct relationship between networking behaviors and valuable career outcomes such as promotions and compensation (e.g., Knouse & Webb, 2001; Tymon & Stumpf, 2003; Van Emmerik et al., 2006), and subjective career success (e.g., Bozionelos, 2003; Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Ismail and Mohd Rasdi (2007) found that networking facilitated upward career mobility for academics. Respondents perceived that they gained more positive career outcomes, such as quicker promotion opportunities to take on leadership positions. We therefore hypothesise that:

H2. Involvement in networking behavior will have a positive and significant relationship with Malaysian managers' objective and subjective career success.

Proficiency in Computer Skills and Career Success

Proficiency in computer skills represents an important proactive behavioural career behaviour. Computer skills are defined as the ability to use computers as an instrumental aid of advanced information and telecommunications technology on job-related task (Fenner & Renn, 2004). Randall and Zirkle (2005), Pratt (2005) and Drucker (2006) have identified that computer skills are becoming more prevalent in today's managerial field; however, there is a paucity of research-based evidence on the link between possession of computer skills and career success. Computer skills are considered essential for individuals to increase their marketability and to have better chances for long-term career success (Mohd Rasdi, Garavan & Ismail, 2012). Cote (2005) stressed that managers' proficiency in computer skills is an essential management tool for information access and communication, and is highly needed for successful careers. Computer skills are also considered essential for individuals to increase their marketability and enhance long term career prospects. Basic computer literacy is a stand-alone core competency that will contribute to personal and professional outcomes (Randall & Zirkle, 2005).

Fenner and Renn (2004) indicated that 79.6 percent of American managers and professionals relied on computers or cellular phones in doing their extra-work activity at home. This recent phenomenon affecting work organizations is also known as technology-assisted supplemental work. In many instances, the use of laptop computers networked with other sources of data facilitated the ability of these workers to perform a complete job from start to finish. In addition, Borghans and Weel (2006) found that the importance of computers linked strongly and significantly to perceived work effectiveness. Fenner and Renn (2004) discovered that proficiency in computer skills was linked to work performance and career satisfaction. Therefore, it can be expected that managers who have high proficiency in computer skills will perform better in their work, and therefore, are more likely to achieve organizational rewards such as promotion, they will then experience stronger subjective career success. We therefore hypothesise that:

H3. Proficiency in computer skills will have a positive and significant relationship with Malaysian managers' objective and subjective career success.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The data were collected from the Malaysian public sector. Specifically, the study included organisations from the Malaysian government ministries. In total there are 27 ministries, of which 18 are centralized in Putrajaya (the federal administrative centre of Malaysia) with the remainder located outside Putrajaya. Two phases of data collection were implemented as part of the study. Of the 18 ministries, nine agreed to participate in the study. In order to achieve greater representativeness on the sample, a second phase of data collection was undertaken through the National Institute of Public Administration which provides training for the public sector in Malaysia. The samples

from the organisations were identified through the directory of each organisation and the trainees were recognized through training registration tests, prior to sampling.

The participants consisted of managers (Administrative and Diplomatic Officers – ADOs), an important group within the Malaysian public sector. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed. Three hundred and thirty three questionnaires were distributed randomly to the nine ministries utilizing each organisation's human resource division. One hundred and sixty seven questionnaires were distributed randomly to training participants. All study participants were guaranteed confidentiality. In total, 288 usable surveys were returned. A response rate of 50.5 percent was achieved from the nine ministries and a response rate of 71.9 percent was achieved from the training centre. We took a number of steps to enhance the response rate. We made contact with the HR specialist within each ministry and a replacement questionnaire was sent to respondents who had not responded to the initial survey.

A total of 50.3 percent were male and 49.7 percent were female. The respondents' average age was 41.80 years, with 26 as the youngest and 57 as the oldest. The majority of the respondents were married (85.1 percent), 55.2 percent had Bachelor's degree, 43.4 percent had Master's Degree and 1.4 percent had PhD degree. It should be noted that the Administrative and Diplomatic Officers' service scheme has set the minimum requirement of Bachelor's degree as the entrance qualification into the scheme. The average organizational tenure and work hours per day were 16.98 years and 9.99 hours, respectively.

Measures

All independent and dependent variables were measured with established and validated scales. We took several steps to ensure the accuracy and acceptability of the translation used in this study. The survey items were written originally in English and were translated to Malaysian via the conventional back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). The translators were bilingual management researchers.

Independent Variables

Individual Career Management: We measured individual career management using the individual career management scale designed by Orpen (1994). The subscales include: career planning {five items; sample item: "I have definite goals for my career over my lifetime"; $\alpha = .70$ (Orpen, 1994); $\alpha = .85$ (Mat Sani, 2007); $\alpha = .78$ (this study)}; and career tactics {six items; sample item: "I am always very careful to avoid dead-end career paths"; $\alpha = .68$ (Orpen, 1994); $\alpha = .71$ (Mat Sani, 2007); $\alpha = .81$ (this study), $\alpha = .84$ (overall scale for this study)}. All items in these subscales were responded on a scale ranging from 1 "very untrue of me" to 5 "very true of me".

Networking behaviors: We measured networking behaviours using the 28 items adapted from Forret and Dougherty's (2001) networking behaviors scale. The scale includes the following behaviours: maintaining contacts, socializing, engaging in professional activities, participating in community activities and increasing internal visibility. Forret and Dougherty (2004) found reliabilities of .79, .77, .73, .75 and .65, re-

spectively. The reliabilities for this study were .74, .82, .81, .83, .63, respectively and .91 (for overall scale). All items were randomly arranged and were rated on a scale ranging from 1 to 6 based on their frequencies. Sample item: “Given out business cards”.

Computer Skills: We measured computer skills using a shortened version of nine items of Flowers and Algozzine’s (2000) Basic Technology Competencies for Educators Inventory (BTCEI). A sample item is as follows: “Overall rating of basic computer operation skills”. All items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “not competent” to 4 “very competent”. A short description of the scales rating was provided to aid respondents. The shortened version of BTCEI was specially developed for this study because the original BTCEI contained 40 items. Therefore, we conducted a factor analysis to determine the validity of the instrument. A factor analysis using Varimax rotation extracted one factor accounting for 58 percent of the variance in computer skills. Bartlett Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO = 0.88) indicated that the factor analysis was valid and appropriate for the variables. The reliability of the scale in this study was 0.91.

Table 1 lists the constructs and various reliability measures for each of the instruments employed in this study. Some reliability measures were taken from various sources.

TABLE 1: Constructs and Sources of the Instruments

Sec	Scale	Total Items	Variable under Investigation	Source	Cronbach’s α (literature)	Cronbach’s α (this study) (n=288)
A	Individual Career Management Scale	11	Individual Career Management	Orpen (1994)		.84
	• Ind. Career Planning	5		Orpen (1994) Mat Sani (2007)	.70 .85	.78
	• Ind. Career Tactics	6		Orpen (1994) Mat Sani (2007)	.68 .71	.81
B	Networking Behaviors Scale	28	Networking Behaviors	Forret & Dougherty (2001)		.91
	• Maintaining contacts	5			.79	.74
	• Socializing	7			.77	.82
	• Engaging in prof. activities	8			.73	.81
	• Participating	4			.75	.83
	• Increasing Visibility	4			.65	.63
C	Computer Skills Scale (shortened version)	9	Computer Skills	Researcher (based on Flowers & Algozzine, 2000)	–	.91

Dependent Variables

Number of promotions: Number of promotions was calculated from the total of job hierarchical movements that the managers received along their managerial career. Monthly gross income was highly correlated with the number of promotions ($r = .94$), and therefore, it was excluded as a measure of objective career success. Furthermore, the Malaysian public sector managers' incomes are fixed to their positions. The number of promotions was then transformed to a natural logarithmic transformation as a means of equalizing the mean variance. Furthermore, the transformation was intended to normalize the distribution because it was positively skewed (number of promotions, $SK = .435$). Such transformation had been conducted in prior career success research (e.g. Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz, 1995; Poon, 2004).

Subjective Career Success: We measured subjective career success using a four-item seven-point Likert-like scale developed by Turban and Doherty (1994). Sample item: "I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career". This measure was utilized in studies by Kirchmeyer (2002) and Riordan (2007). They reported the reliability coefficient of .92 and .82, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha in the original study was .87 (Turban & Doherty, 1994), in this study it was .86.

Control Variables: We measured a number of variables that were potentially moderators. Respondents were asked to report their actual age. Gender was coded 1 for male and 0 for female. Management level was coded 1 for junior level and 2 for senior level managers.

Results

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were performed to determine the relationships between the study variables. Data analysis revealed appropriate reliabilities for all scales used in this study. The correlation analysis revealed the presence of collinearity between the 'age' and 'number of promotions' variables (0.85^{**}), the 'age' and 'tenure in current job' (0.93^{**}), the 'age' and 'tenure in organizations' (0.99^{**}), and the 'tenure in current job' and 'tenure in organizations' (0.94^{**}). We expected that such collinearity would exist between the overall scales and their various dimensions. The reason we decided to retain the overall scales in the correlation analysis was to determine the relationship between each proactive behavior construct and the three measures of career success. However, in conducting the regression analysis, we eliminated all variables that caused multicollinearity. The tolerance statistics which range from (.542–.963) and the VIF statistics which vary from (1.039 – 1.845) further confirmed that collinearity or multicollinearity was not a problem with this data set (Field, 2005). Similarly, we excluded the demographic and human capital variables in the regression analyses because we found that these variables would remove the effect of the selected proactive career behavior variables.

TABLE 2. Correlations, means and standard deviations of study variables

Variables	M	SD	Y ₁	Y ₂	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆	X ₇	X ₈	X ₉	X ₁₀	X ₁₁	X ₁₂	X ₁₃	X ₁₄	X ₁₅	X ₁₆	
Y ₁ Log ₁₀ Number of Promotions	.40	0.20																			
Y ₂ Subjective Career Success (0.86)	5.14	0.83	.21**																		
X ₁ Age	41.80	9.56	.85**	.09																	
X ₂ Gender	-	-	.06	.12*	.09																
X ₃ Marital Status	-	-	.21**	.17**	.19**	.19**															
X ₄ Number of children	2.46	1.99	.46**	.22	.50**	.25	.48**														
X ₅ Educational Level	-	-	.21**	-.04	.11*	-.11*	-.01	.02													
X ₆ Tenure in Current Job	167.03	106.56	.86**	.11*	.93**	.05	.17**	.47**	.07												
X ₇ Tenure in Organisation	203.81	108.65	.83**	.08	.99**	.07	.17**	.49**	.08	.94**											
X ₈ Ind Career Mgmt (0.84)	3.73	0.60	.05	.25**	.05	.20**	.21**	.23**	-.01	-.09	.06										
X ₉ • Career Planning	4.15	0.61	.02	.30**	.03	.25**	.24**	.23**	.01	-.13*	.03	.80**									
X ₁₀ • Career Tactics	3.37	0.76	.06	.17**	.05	.12*	.14*	.17**	-.01	-.05	.06	.91**	.48**								
X ₁₁ Networking Behaviour (0.91)	3.03	0.74	.15*	.20**	.13*	.16**	.11	.11	.11	.01	.16**	.50**	.31**	.51**							
X ₁₂ • Maintaining ext. contacts	3.32	0.98	.12*	.05	.10	.05	.01	.01	.12*	.01	.13*	.44**	.27**	.45**	.78**						
X ₁₃ • Socializing	3.11	0.97	-.05	.15*	-.07	.23**	.07	-.04	.04	-.05	-.04	.43**	.27**	.44**	.81**	.65**					
X ₁₄ • Engaging in prof. activities	2.70	0.83	.26**	.23**	.23**	.09	.13*	.17**	.14*	.03	.25**	.31**	.19**	.32**	.77**	.39**	.41**				
X ₁₅ • Participating in com. activities	2.91	1.08	.20**	.12*	.23**	.20**	.14*	.26**	.08	.07	.25**	.36**	.26**	.35**	.73**	.42**	.45**	.55**			
X ₁₆ • Increasing int. visibility	3.24	0.99	.07	.20**	-.01	.04	.04	.03	.05	-.06	.03	.39**	.22**	.41**	.78**	.58**	.53**	.53**	.47**		
X ₁₇ Computer Skills (0.91)	2.94	0.66	-.36**	-.04	-.48**	-.10*	-.06	-.32**	.16**	-.45**	-.47**	.02	.06	-.01	-.14*	.13*	.19**	.02	-.01	.18**	

Notes: Reliabilities in parentheses; n = 288.

Tenure in current job and tenure in organization were measured in months.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

To test the impact of the three career proactive behavior variables on managers' objective and subjective career success, we utilised Multiple Linear Regression analysis. In this analysis, the stepwise method was used given that the purpose of the analysis was to explore the variables that contributed significantly to the three measures of career success. All proactive behavior variables were entered into the model based on their significance to explaining career success. The results for the Multiple Linear Regression analysis are presented in Table 3 (for objective career success) and Table 4 (for subjective career success).

TABLE 3. Estimates of Coefficients for Log₁₀ Number of Promotions

Dimension	B (Unstandardized Coefficients)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized Coefficients)	t	<i>p-value</i>
Constant	.54	.06		8.93	.0001
Engaging in professional activities	.01	.01	.29	4.96	.0001
Socializing	-.01	.01	-.23	-3.29	.001
Maintaining external contacts	.01	.01	.20	2.89	.004
Computer skills	-.01	.01	-.35	-6.65	.0001

Notes: $R = 0.49$; $R^2 = 0.24$; *Adj. R*² = 0.23; $F = 44.22$, $p = 0.0001$, Durbin-Watson = 0.95

TABLE 4. Estimates of Coefficients for Subjective Career Success

Dimension	B (Unstandardized Coefficients)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized Coefficients)	t	<i>p-value</i>
Constant	3.19	.33		9.71	.0001
Career planning	.07	.02	.26	4.65	.0001
Engaging in professional activities	.02	.01	.18	3.08	.002

Notes: $R = 0.343$; $R^2 = 0.118$; *Adj. R*² = 0.112; $F = 9.48$, $p = 0.002$, Durbin-Watson = 1.92

Proactive Behavior and Managers' Objective Career Success

Table 3 reveals that three dimensions of networking and the possession of computer skills were significant in explaining variation in managers' number of promotions. The three significant types of networking behaviour are: engaging in professional activities ($t = 4.96$, $p = 0.0001$), socializing ($t = -3.29$, $p = 0.001$), maintaining external contacts ($t = 2.89$, $p = 0.004$); and also the proficiency in computer skills ($t = -6.65$, $p = 0.0001$). The *b*-values denote that computer skills ($\beta = -0.35$, $t = -6.65$) has made the strongest contribution in explaining number of promotions if the effects of all other variables were held constant. The negative β indicates that computer skills had a negative effect

on the number of promotions. A one unit increase in CS resulted in a 0.35 units decrease in the number of promotions. Next, the most significant variables focused on managers' monthly gross incomes: engaging in professional activities ($\beta = 0.29, t = 4.96$), socializing ($\beta = -0.23, t = -3.29$), and maintaining external contacts ($\beta = 0.20, t = 2.89$), respectively. The analyses revealed that maintaining external contacts made the least significant contribution to variance in monthly gross incomes.

The Adjusted R-Squared obtained was 0.23, indicating that 23.0 percent of the variance in number of promotions was explained by these variables ($F = 44.22; p = 0.0001; \alpha = 0.05$). The Durbin-Watson statistic (0.95) was slightly less than the threshold values of 1 to 3 indicating that the assumption of independent errors was not tenable. Field (2005) suggested that in this situation researchers should look up for precise values for the situation of interest. In other words, researchers should not base their conclusions on broad-based conventions but rather on the specific research situation in hand. Considering Field's advice (2005) and the fact that the value was slightly less than 1, we concluded that there was no serious violation of the assumption of independent errors.

Proactive Behaviors and Managers' Subjective Career Success

Table 4 reveals that career management and one dimension of networking behaviour significantly contributed to variance in managers' subjective career success. The relevant scales were: career management ($t = 4.65, p = 0.0001$) and engaging in professional activities ($t = 3.08, p = 0.002$). The b -values denote that career planning ($\beta = 0.26, t = 4.65$) was the most significant factor in explaining managers' subjective career success if the effects of all other variables were held constant. This suggested that a one unit increase in career management was followed by a 0.26 units increase in subjective career success. Our analyses also revealed that engaging in professional activities also contributed to subjective career success ($\beta = 0.18, t = 3.08$).

The Adjusted R-Squared obtained was 0.112, indicating that 11.2 percent of the variance in subjective career success was explained by career management and engaging in professional activities ($F = 9.48; p = 0.002; \alpha = 0.05$). The Durbin-Watson statistic (1.92) was between the threshold values of 1 to 3, and therefore, indicates that the assumption of independent residuals has been met (Field, 2005).

In this study we formulated three hypotheses (which may be divided into sets of sub-hypotheses) regarding the relationship between three types of proactive career behaviour and three measures of career success. In the first hypothesis, we hypothesized that: (a) individual career management activities would be positively related to objective career success (monthly salary). We did not find any support for this. We also hypothesized (b) that individual career management would be positively related to objective career success (number of promotions). Again, we did not find any support for this hypothesis. We hypothesized that individual career management (c) would be positively related to subjective career success. We found support for this part of the

first hypothesis. Thus, we conclude that individual career management activities are not related to either of the measurements of the objective career success (monthly salary and number of promotions), and correlate only with subjective career success.

In the second hypothesis, we hypothesized (a) that networking behaviours would be positively related to objective career success (monthly income). We found no support for this hypothesis. We hypothesized (b) that networking behaviours would be positively related to objective career success (number of promotions). We found support for this hypothesis. We hypothesized (c) that networking behaviour would be positively related to subjective career success. We found partial support for this hypothesis. The above findings lead to the conclusion that involvement in networking behaviour is not related to monthly income, but is positively related to the number of promotions and has a negative relation to subjective career success.

In the third hypothesis, we hypothesized (a) that proficiency in computer skills would be positively related to objective career success (monthly salary). However, we did not find any support for this hypothesis. We also hypothesized that (b) proficiency in computer skills would be positively related to objective career success (number of promotions). The analysis revealed that proficiency in computer skills was negatively related to number of promotions. We hypothesized (c) that proficiency in computer skills would be positively related to subjective career success. We did not find any support for this hypothesis. Based on the findings of this study, we conclude that proficiency in computer skills is not related to monthly income and subjective career success, but it is negatively related to managers' number of promotions.

Discussion

Drawing from a relational perspective of careers, we examined the relationships between three proactive career behaviours and career success for managers in an emerging economy. Our results showed that contrary to our hypotheses, the proactive career behavior, i.e., individual career management was not associated with objective career success (monthly income or number of promotions). However, individual career management was associated with subjective career success. This latter finding is consistent with that found by Orpen (1994). De Vos et al. (2009) also found a relationship between individual career planning and career satisfaction; however, this relationship was mediated by networking behaviours.

The findings on the lack of a statistically significant relationship between the proactive career behaviour, individual career management, and objective career success suggests that monthly income and number of promotions are not influenced by the way a manager plans his or her career. This finding must also be understood with reference to the study context. A merit-based system of pay operates within the Malaysian public sector where financial rewards are based on performance. It suggests that managers who engage in career management without sending signals to higher management (publicizing their performance through networking) will be less likely to get promoted.

This argument is consistent with the visibility mechanism proposed by signal theory (Spence, 1973). Promotion within the Malaysian public sector is also linked by issues of seniority. The findings on a statistically significant relationship between individual career management and subjective career success are not surprising given the support for this relationship in the literature. Managers who plan their careers reported that they were more satisfied with their careers.

The finding on the second proactive career behaviour, proficiency in computer skills, highlights a negative relationship between computer skills and objective career success. This negative relationship is perhaps explained by the fact that managers in the Malaysian public sector at senior levels are less likely to be involved in the technical aspects of work and are therefore less likely to have to utilize computer skills in their day to day work. The level of proficiency in computer skills was not related to subjective career success. Enhancement of computer skills requires an investment in time and results in less time for family and private life. This may lead to more negative feelings about career satisfaction.

The findings on the third proactive career behaviour – networking behaviour – highlight a positive relationship with both objective and subjective career success. The majority of networking behaviours measured in this study were positively and significantly correlated with both objective and subjective career success. This finding on the strong positive relationship between networking and career success is well established in the literature and holds for public sector managers in an Asian country.

It is noteworthy that we conducted this research in a non-western culture and a country categorized as an emerging economy. Given that the preponderance of career research is based on the US samples and established economies, the contribution of our research is to show that proactive career behaviours are associated with desirable career outcomes in a non-western culture. Specifically, we found that managers who demonstrated two proactive career behaviours – individual career planning and networking – also reported higher levels of subjective career success. Our findings suggest that the results on proactive career behaviours and career success can be generalized to Asian cultures and emerging economies. The study reported here was conducted in a cultural context where the prevailing social norms and expectations are significantly different from those found in Western organisations.

Study Limitations and Future Research

The research relied on self-report data and is cross-sectional in nature. Therefore, we are not able to draw conclusions concerning causality. Furthermore, the relationships we found could be inflated because of common-method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). The findings of this study could be strengthened through the use of a multi-trait – multi-method approach. In respect of the cross-sectoral design, our primary purpose was to clarify relationships between proactive career behaviours and career success, and we used relationships with strong theoretically derived antecedents.

Our sample consisted of managers, so this may represent a further limitation. It is arguable that the managers included in our study had more autonomy to engage in proactive career behaviours. It is possible that such proactive behaviours may not be observable with other employment groups.

Several areas for further inquiry remain open. There is a scope to understand why some managers are more successful as a result of the use of proactive career behaviour. It would also be useful to understand how managers execute particular methods of proactive career behaviour. Does the way in which they implement them result in different career outcomes? Grant and Ashford (2008), for example, have reported that proactive behaviours vary in terms of time, intended target of impact, frequency, timing and tactics. Therefore, when managers engage in proactive career behaviours, time might be relevant in explaining the types of outcomes derived from that behaviour. There is a scope to further explore the individual differences included in this study. We focused in this study on constructive, proactive career behaviours; however, what is the influence of proactive destructive behaviours where managers use their initiative or proactivity in a misguided fashion?

Finally, our findings highlight a number of practical implications. Our study suggests specific proactive career behaviours that are useful to employ to ensure objective and subjective career success. These include the setting of career goals, engaging in professional networking, socializing and maintaining internal and external contacts. There may also be value in managers undertaking training to enhance their career planning and networking skills. Examples of training interventions include role play and feedback, behaviour modelling and critique sessions and drama-based training.

We found, consistent with prior studies conducted in Western and advanced market contexts, that proactive career behaviours are a useful explanatory variable in explaining career outcomes in Malaysia. The Malaysian public sector should therefore consider the use of measures of proactivity when selecting and promoting managers. It is likely that managers who are high on proactivity will achieve higher performance and work effectiveness. Organisations should design career management systems that encourage managers to engage in proactive career behaviours. The possession of proactive behaviours and the opportunity to demonstrate them may enhance the overall success of a manager. Therefore, it makes sense to both attract managers with proactive behaviours and encourage their expression in organisations. However, it should be emphasized that while managers should be encouraged to be proactive, it may backfire where these proactive career behaviours do not result in career outcomes. Organisations should reward managers who demonstrate such behaviours.

Previous studies on emerging economies indicate that a variety of proactive career behaviours are of value in the context of career success. This study therefore extends the literature on emerging economies by investigating the effects of three proactive career behaviours of managers in a public service context. The overall findings endorse the view that proactive career behaviours are valuable in many different contexts. However, what is particularly interesting in the emerging economies context is the value of

internal networking. This finding may be context specific in that the study environment has strong collectivist cultural values.

Overall, this is one of the few empirical studies that have to date investigated proactive career behaviours in an emerging economies context. We utilized a broad conceptualization of proactive career behaviours and found some support for our hypotheses. Our findings help to deepen understanding of the relationship between proactive career behaviours and career success, but also suggest that proactive career behaviours may be context-specific in nature.

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