Proactive Personality and Positive Mental Health among Civil Service Aspirants

Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Civil services are viewed as one of the most prestigious careers in India and students aspiring for this should face the toughest competitive examination. Preparation for this requires a lot of motivation, enthusiasm, zeal, persistence and ability to regulate one's own learning. Proactive personality refers to a stable disposition towards proactive behavior which leads to self-development through self-regulation. This study explores the relationship between proactive personality and positive mental health among civil service aspirants. A sample of 156 aspirants from various civil service coaching centers in Chennai was selected through simple random sampling and data was collected with the help of Proactive Personality Scale and Positive Mental Health Inventory. Results revealed that proactive personality had a significant negative relationship with interpersonal skills. Aspirants with higher proactive tendencies possessed higher level of general coping, personal growth and autonomy. Aspirants with technical education background had higher level of proactive tendencies. The implications are discussed in the article.

KEYWORDS:

Proactive personality, Positive mental health, Civil service aspirants

1. Background

Organizations in 21st century are technology-driven marked by rapid dynamism. It necessitates individuals to adopt agile behaviours to anticipate problems and provide solutions to the customers. So, organizations look for individuals seeking out opportunities, initiating change, taking responsibilities and being innovative for success. Public sector embedded in this environment cannot be immune from the uncertainty of market. Unlike private organizations, change in public organizations depends upon various factors such as political will, social interest, constitutional rights of the citizens and so on. Therefore, apart from structural and procedural reform in public organizations, change in employee's perspective to suit to organizational goals in achieving democratic values is paramount importance for social transformation.

a) Civil Service Aspirants

Civil service aspirants are the candidates interested in competing for various positions under All India Civil Service Examinations through open competition. In order to achieve higher ranks, civil service aspirants spend many years for this preparation. These people are the future administrators who could engineer social change. Due to demands of globalization and technological revolution, a new breed of public service providers is expected to steer development process. Hence, civil service aspirants are expected to possess competence to meet the requirement of social change. A proclivity for such change and act depends upon the proactive personality of individuals. At the same time, it is important to ensure the mental health of these individuals while initiating change in the society.

b) Proactive Personality

Bateman and Crant (1993) defined proactive personality as "stable disposition toward proactive behavior. Individuals with proactive personality could anticipate problems, identify opportunities, and act on them, initiate to bring meaningful change". Grant and Ashford (2005) ascertained that "proactivity is potentially a way to actively shape interpersonal relationships and social interactions thus raising people's sense of relatedness at work". Parker et al (2006) insisted that "anticipating thinking and taking control of situation are key features of proactivity". Prieto (2010) suggested that "proactive personality may be more specifically tailored to predicting entrepreneurial leadership in firms than the more general Big Five factors and facets". Cangiano and Parker (2016) indicated that "proactive personality acts as driving force for individual's creativity, innovation, adaptability, flexibility". Hence, we can understand that

building proactive personality characteristics will bring many positive consequences.

c) Positive Mental Health

Vaillant (2012) viewed positive mental health as "the presence of multiple human strengths rather than absence of weakness". WHO (2003) defined mental health as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his/her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified 'enablers' as one of the four components of positive mental health. Enablers reflect benign social conditions, strong family, a good school system, living in a democratic meritocracy. Civil service aspirants from high socioeconomic background move to coaching centres after completing graduation at the age of 21 years. Proper utilization of various psychological resources such as self-esteem, resilience, autonomy and so on are crucial for their performance in examination as well as smooth transition into the next phase of their life.

2. Review of Related Literature

Major, Turner and Fletcher (2006) found that "proactive personality had significant incremental validity in the prediction of motivation to learn over all relevant Big Five facets".

Harvey, Blouin and Stout (2006) found that young workers high on the proactive personality trait seemed to fare worse on strain associated with work, job satisfaction.

Fuller and Marler (2009) found that "proactive personality was positively related to objective and subjective career success and proactive personality's relationship with supervisor-rated overall performance was stronger than that reported for any of Big Five factors or the Big Five collectively, but was unrelated to social desirability".

Jawahar and Liu (2016) in their study on proactive personality and citizenship for performance found that "proactive individuals who were also politically skills were more likely to demonstrate greater citizenship toward superior and job/task conscientiousness via increased career satisfaction".

Cangiano and Parker (2016) highlighted that no empirical evidence is available to indicate the effect of proactive personality was beneficial

for health and well-being. They indicated that mental health and wellbeing were the most important positive outcomes of proactivity.

Loi, Liu, Lam and Xu (2016) highlighted that emotional job demands at work were positively related to employees' intention to quit their organization when employees possessed low proactive personality. The interaction between emotional job demands and proactive personality was stronger when team potency was low.

Strauss, Parker and O'Shea (2017) theorized that when an individuals' motivation at work is characterized by pressure and coercion (high controlled motivation), with no compensatory intrinsic interest in or identification with the work (low autonomous motivation), proactive behavior is likely to deplete employees' resources, resulting in job strain.

3. Need for the Study

The pattern of civil service examination in India has undergone a drastic change due to administrative reforms. It is witnessed that aspirants across India organized protest against change in the examination pattern. Seibert, Kraimer and Crant (2001) indicated that "proactive personality was positively related to innovation, political knowledge, and career initiative, all of which, in turn, had positive relationships with career progression and career satisfaction." Therefore, it is expected that proactive personality would be a virtue among civil service aspirants. In a prismatic society (Riggs, 1973) like India, where high degree of heterogeneity and formalism still exist, 'enablers' components of positive mental health (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) can't be integrated in the society. Hence, there is a possibility that proactive tendencies among civil service aspirants could have differential effect on their positive mental health. In this context, it is imperative to explore the relationship between proactive personality and positive mental health among civil service aspirants.

4. Hypotheses

1. Proactive personality and positive mental health of civil service aspirants are significantly related to each other.
2. Civil service aspirants differ in their positive mental health based on the level of proactive tendency.
3. Civil service aspirants differ in proactive personality based on selected demographic variables.

5. Research Method

The present study adopted survey method. The following tools were used to collect the data.

1. Proactive Personality Scale by Bateman and Crant (1993):

This tool consisted of 17 statements answered on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale's reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was found to be 0.87 to 0.89 across different samples and the test-retest reliability coefficient was 0.72. This scale had convergent, discriminant, and criterion validities.

2. Positive Mental Health by Vaingankar et al (2011):

This tool consisted of 47 statements to be answered on a 6-point Likert scale exploring six different dimensions of mental health viz. general coping, emotional support, spirituality, interpersonal skills, personal growth and autonomy, and global affect. The scale had good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha of 0.96).

The population of the study consisted of civil service aspirants from various coaching centres in Chennai city. 200 civil service aspirants from three major coaching centres were selected through simple random sampling. The tools were distributed to the aspirants. Out of the 200 data collected, only 156 were considered for final analysis.

6. Results and Discussion

From table 1, it is observed that proactive personality had significant negative correlation with interpersonal skills dimension of positive mental health, where as the other dimensions were not significantly correlated. Therefore, hypothesis-1 is partly accepted.

Table 1: Relationship between Proactive Personality and Positive Mental Health among Civil Service Aspirants

Dimensions of Positive Mental Health	Correlation Coefficient
General Coping	0.11 NS
Emotional Support	-0.08 NS
Spirituality	-0.17 NS
Interpersonal Skills	-0.22*
Personal Growth & Autonomy	0.07 NS
Global Affect	0.14 NS
PMH Total	-0.09 NS

*Significant at 0.05 level; NS-Not Significant

The environment prevailing among civil service aspirants poses a cut-throat competition working towards achieving a place in bureaucratic ladder. Proactive tendency focuses on change that challenges the status quo. From the literature, it is expected that proactive tendency should contribute to a healthy interpersonal relationship. But here, there is a significant negative association between interpersonal skills and proactive personality. Generally in a government set up, people developed with a sort of belief that any new initiative would be criticized by others; also they tend to ensure their survival irrespective of others which in turn made them to be selfish and restricting themselves from forming close relationship with others. The environment in which civil service aspirants live already would have provided knowledge about this and they restrict themselves from sharing resources and moving closely with others. Probably, this could be a reason for the significant negative correlation between interpersonal skills and proactive personality among civil service aspirants.

From table 2, it is noticed that civil service aspirants differ significantly in their general coping, interpersonal skills, personal growth & autonomy based on the level of proactive tendencies. Hence, the hypothesis-2 is partly accepted.

Aspirants with high proactive tendencies had significantly higher score in general coping and personal growth & autonomy, while aspirants with low proactive tendencies had significantly higher score in interpersonal skills. This could be witnessed from the negative correlation of interpersonal skills with proactive personality in Table 1. However, there is no significant difference in the overall mental health of civil service aspirants due to their level of proactive tendencies.

Table 2: Difference in Positive Mental Health of Civil Service Aspirants with respect to their Level of Proactive Personality

Dimensions of Positive Mental Health	Proactive Personality				't' value
	High (N=115)		Low (N=41)		
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
General Coping	39.48	6.75	36.12	7.02	2.65*
Emotional Support	33.79	7.85	32.54	7.12	0.94NS
Spirituality	28.24	9.59	29.59	9.53	0.77NS
Interpersonal Skills	43.33	7.05	45.66	5.59	2.12*
Personal Growth & Autonomy	50.31	7.92	46.71	8.46	2.38*
Global Affect	05.84	0.36	05.78	0.57	0.66NS
Positive Mental Health Total	201.00	26.63	196.39	19.76	1.16NS

*Significant at 0.05 level, NS-Not significant

From table 3, it is found that civil service aspirants differ significantly in their proactive personality based on their gender and educational

background. Hence, the hypothesis-3 is partly accepted.

Table 3: Difference in Proactive Personality among Civil Service Aspirants based on the selected Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	N	M	SD	't'-value
Gender	Male	66	98.09	10.37	3.88*
	Female	90	90.43	14.26	
Source of Motivation	Self	93	95.19	14.35	1.83 NS
	Others	63	91.43	11.24	
Education	Technical	108	95.44	13.67	2.71*
	Non-Technical	48	89.69	11.51	

*Significant at 0.05 level; NS-Not significant

Male aspirants have displayed higher proactive tendencies than females. Though we discuss about equal opportunities, the social norms in collective culture still expect female aspirants to play traditional role which in-turn could have affected their proactive tendencies. Aspirants with qualification like B.E./B. Tech. had significantly higher proactive tendencies than their counterpart. Aspirants with technical qualifications have already been exposed to professional ethics and corporate work culture at their college level which in turn contributed for their higher proactive tendencies.

It is found here that the self-motivated civil service aspirants have displayed higher proactive tendency. Logically self-motivated aspirants should possess significantly higher proactive tendencies since proactive behavior is a function of self-initiation and intrinsically motivated.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicated the relationship between proactive personality and positive mental health among civil service aspirants is multifarious. It is necessary to sensitize civil service aspirants and coaching institutions about proactive personality and how external factors influence one's behaviour despite motivation. Periodic training programmes have to be organized to promote interpersonal skills, trust and effective utilization of psychological resources among aspirants and develop proactive personality. Further exploration on how feedback mechanism as a self-regulatory process influences proactive personality of civil service aspirants has to be conducted. This could help in changing the work culture of government organization to initiate and bring changes in the society.

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