Chapter 3
Principal Proactivity: School Principals' Proactive Behavior Forms and Their Levels of Display

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ABSTRACT

Increasing environmental complexity and ambiguity require organizations to rely on their members' proactive behaviors to deal with potential chaotic occurences surrounding the organizational functioning. Individuals respond these occurences by displaying various proactive behavior forms to build predictability islands in ocean of uncertainty. In this context, principal proactivity is one of key determinants of effectiveness of schools functioning in complex and anarchic environments. In this study, numerous forms of proactive behaviour were categorized under six general dimensions as innovativeness, issue selling, social networking, strategic scanning, strategic learning and feedback seeking. A causal comparative design was used to determine levels of general forms of proactive behavior performed by school principals. The data were collected from school principals working at different levels of public and private schools in İstanbul Province during 2014-2015 year. According to the results of study, the most frequent form of proactive behaviour displayed by school principals was strategic learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The uncertainties led by the complexity and dynamism of organizational environments and the increasingly decentralized structures of organizations require the organizations to empower their members and extend the decision-making responsibilities throughout their organizational structures. A high level of environmental uncertainty brings limitations to the predictability of the direction of the change. Due to this uncertainty, organizations have increasingly been obliged to rely on the initiatives of their members to overcome the problems they face and to take advantage of the forthcoming opportunities. Instead of remaining reactive, individuals' performing proactive behaviors to deal with the opportunities and problems in internal and external environments of the organization has become an important determinant of organizational effectiveness (Crant, 2000; Russell & Russell, 1992; Frese & Fay, 2001).

Proactivity

According to Bateman and Crant (1993), the roots of proactive approach lie in the perspective of "symbolic interactionism". The theory of symbolic interactionism approaches humans as proactive and goal oriented beings (DeLamater, Myers, & Collett, 2015, 9). Humans do not only react to the actions of others, they also have the tendency to interpret or define the actions of others. The reactions they give are not targeted at others's actions directly, however, rather at the meanings they attribute to those actions (Blumer, 1986, 79). Meaning arises from interactions between individuals and individuals shape their perceptions towards events as a reaction to the interactions that they form with other individuals in a common context. According to this view, individuals contribute to the meaning arising from the situation in which they take part, and the individuals and the situation determine each other mutually (Reichers, 1987). In other words, individuals are the social products who are affected by the behaviors of others, but still keep the distance with others and have the ability to start an individual action (Blase, 1990). This interaction process enables individuals to make proactive behavioral choices based upon the shared meanings and to make action plans to implement their choices (Sass, 1994; DeLamater, Myers & Collett, 2015).

Thus, from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, employees can be considered as not passive recipients, but active individuals who attempt to shape their environments according to their expectations within organizational life. On this point, Crant (2000) defines proactive behavior as challenging the status quo to improve the current situation or to create a new one. In other words, proactive behavior is a

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