

Proactive Personality and Job Engagement: The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety among Indonesian Employees

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Abstract

Prior literature has not sufficiently clarified the psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between proactive personality and job engagement. To address this gap, the present study proposes that psychological safety may serve as a mediating variable in this relationship. Data were collected from 349 Indonesian employees working across various organizations and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results provide strong support for the proposed hypotheses and model. Proactive personality was found to be positively associated with psychological safety, which in turn was positively related to job engagement. Furthermore, psychological safety was confirmed as a significant mediator in this relationship. These findings suggest that fostering proactive employees and enhancing psychological safety may help organizations increase employee job engagement.

Keywords: *proactive personality, psychological safety, and job engagement.*

1. Introduction

Job engagement is critical for enhancing both individual and organizational performance. (Riatmaja et al., 2021). As suggested by Kahn (1990) Employees vary in the extent to which they invest their cognitive, emotional, and physical selves in their work roles. Accordingly, higher levels of job engagement are essential for improving organizational effectiveness. In human existence, work is not merely an economic activity. (see Correia & Carvalho, 2026) but also a meaningful arena for self-expression, purpose, inner growth, and the realization of values associated with personal spirituality. Prior research has extensively examined the antecedents of job engagement, including personal attributes. (Hakanen et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2009; Rich et al., 2010) job and personal resources (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), relationship quality (May et al., 2004), and leadership (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Tims et al., 2011).

Building on this literature, the present study focuses on the role of proactive personality in shaping job engagement. Proactive personality refers to a dispositional tendency that captures the extent to which individuals take initiative to influence their environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Vallabh et al., 2024). Although prior research has linked proactive personality to job engagement (Bakker et al., 2012), the underlying psychological mechanisms explaining this relationship remain insufficiently explored. While psychological safety has been recognized as an important factor in fostering positive employee attitudes and performance (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Pinho & Colston, 2024; Vallabh et al., 2024), its role as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between proactive personality and job engagement has not been clearly established. This gap is important because understanding how proactive personality

translates into higher engagement can provide deeper theoretical insights and more actionable implications for organizations. Thus, this gap is particularly consequential because proactive individuals are more likely to initiate change, voice ideas, and take interpersonal risk behaviors that inherently depend on a perception of psychological safety. Without such a mechanism, the link between proactive personality and engagement may be theoretically incomplete.

Taken together, this study treats psychological safety as a key explanatory mechanism through which proactive personality enhances job engagement. It therefore responds to the limited understanding of how and why proactive personality influences job engagement, offering a more comprehensive and process-based perspective. Therefore, this study strengthens the theoretical foundation of the relationship between these variables by identifying a proximal psychological condition that facilitates this link.

2. Literature Review

Job Engagement

Job engagement, as the outcome variable of the current study, is a multidimensional construct that reflects the extent to which individuals invest themselves in their work roles. (Kahn, 1990; Liao et al., 2013). It encompasses cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions. (Kahn, 1990), representing how employees think about, feel toward, and energetically act in their jobs. Drawing on Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of engagement, the cognitive dimension reflects the extent to which individuals are attentive to and absorbed in their work tasks, the emotional dimension captures positive feelings such as enthusiasm and pride, and the physical dimension reflects the degree of effort and energy exerted in role performance (see also May et al., 2004 for a review). Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive understanding of how employees fully engage in their work.

Proactive Personality, Psychological Safety, and Job Engagement

Proactive individuals tend to show initiative, take action, and persist until they bring about meaningful change in various work situations (Vallabh et al., 2024; Wijaya, 2019). In contrast, less proactive individuals often fail to recognize or seize opportunities for change. (Kirby et al., 2002). Prior research has demonstrated that a proactive personality contributes to a range of desirable work outcomes. (Nielsen et al., 2023; Wijaya, 2019). Crant (2000) Further argued that proactive behavior is better understood by examining the underlying process, including its antecedents and outcomes, as well as the roles of mediators and moderators. Building on this perspective, the present study proposes a model linking proactive personality to job engagement through psychological safety.

Research on proactive personality suggests that proactive employees tend to feel a strong sense of control over their work environment (Converse et al., 2012; Wijaya, 2019). They are more likely to choose jobs that fit their values and interests (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010) and to adapt to job demands through active learning (Bakker et al., 2012). Compared to less proactive individuals, highly proactive employees tend to possess greater personal resources, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-determination, which enable them to take initiative and assume broader roles at work (Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009). These personal resources not only enhance their capacity to cope effectively with workplace stressors but also shape how they interpret and respond to their work environment. From this perspective, proactive individuals are more likely to appraise their surroundings in a positive and enabling manner,

including perceiving higher levels of psychological safety. This is because their confidence and resilience reduce the perceived interpersonal risks associated with speaking up, experimenting, or initiating change. Consistent with emerging evidence (Vallabh et al., 2024), proactive personality can therefore be understood as a dispositional foundation that fosters the perception of psychological safety in the workplace. Their positive self-views and adaptive behaviors help them respond to workplace situations more constructively, which in turn strengthens their sense of psychological safety. Therefore, it is expected that higher levels of proactive personality are associated with higher psychological safety. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Proactive personality is positively related to psychological safety.

Kahn (1990) suggested that employees are more likely to be engaged when they feel psychologically safe. Psychological safety encourages engagement because it allows employees to express themselves without fear of negative consequences. (May et al., 2004; Pinho & Colston, 2024). From a psychological perspective, environments perceived as threatening tend to elicit withdrawal-oriented responses, thereby reducing individuals' cognitive focus, emotional connection, and physical involvement at work. However, some scholars argue that disengagement is not solely a function of contextual safety but may also depend on individual differences and coping strategies, suggesting that not all employees respond uniformly to low-safety environments. Despite this nuance, empirical evidence consistently indicates that psychological safety plays a facilitative role in engagement, as employees who feel safe are more likely to express themselves without fear of negative consequences. Supporting this view, May et al. (2004) Found that psychological safety positively influences job engagement. Based on this reasoning, this study predicts that employees with higher psychological safety will demonstrate higher levels of job engagement. Thus, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Psychological safety is positively related to job engagement.

Drawing on proactive personality theory, this study seeks to elucidate the mechanism through which proactive individuals translate their dispositions into higher job engagement by leveraging psychological safety. (Crant, 2000). Rather than operating solely through a direct pathway, the effect of proactive personality is expected to flow through psychological safety, such that individuals with a proactive disposition are more likely to perceive a safe environment for interpersonal risk-taking, which in turn fosters deeper engagement at work. This reasoning is consistent with Kahn's (1990) Engagement theory, which posits psychological safety as a critical condition for individuals to fully express themselves in their roles. Moreover, research on psychological safety suggests that employees are more willing to invest in cognitive, emotional, and physical energies when they feel free from fear of negative consequences. (Edmondson, 1999; Elsaied, 2019). From a dispositional perspective, proactive individuals are particularly inclined to shape and interpret their environments in ways that enable such safety, thereby reinforcing their engagement. In this sense, psychological safety functions as a key explanatory mediator, clarifying how and why proactive personality enhances job engagement. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 3: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between proactive personality and job engagement.

3. Methodology

Respondents and Procedure

Respondents were alumni from two Indonesian higher education institutions (an academy and a college) who were selected based on being currently employed as employees. The sample of employed alumni is appropriate because it captures individuals who are actively embedded in real workplace contexts, ensuring that proactive personality, psychological safety, and job engagement are examined as they naturally occur in organizational settings. By focusing on respondents who are currently working, the study aligns its sample with its theoretical focus on workplace behavior, thereby enhancing the relevance and validity of the findings.

Before data collection, respondents were provided with informed consent outlining the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Ethical procedures were strictly followed to ensure that the research adhered to accepted standards of integrity and respect for participants. In addition, all responses were treated with full confidentiality and anonymity, with no personally identifiable information collected or disclosed, thereby minimizing potential risks and encouraging honest reporting. As the alumni were geographically dispersed across Indonesia, an online survey was employed.

The questionnaire was administered in Indonesian and distributed to 636 alumni. Following data collection, data screening procedures were conducted to ensure the quality and suitability of the dataset for analysis. Responses were examined for completeness, and cases with substantial missing data would be removed. A total of 349 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 55%, and all responses were usable. Female respondents accounted for 46% of the sample. The respondents' ages were categorized into four groups (21–30, 31–40, 41–50, and over 50 years), with the majority falling within the 21–30 (56%) and 31–40 (35%) age groups. All respondents held an undergraduate diploma, and 22% had also completed a master's degree.

Study Measurements

Proactive Personality. Proactive personality was assessed with the 10-item scale version used in Seibert et al. (1999). This scale was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.87.

Psychological Safety. Psychological safety was assessed with the 7-item scale of Edmondson. (1999). However, one item was found to have low loading (see Table 2). The item was dropped. This scale was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale with 6 items was 0.72.

Job Engagement. May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) developed the 13-item scale of job engagement based on Kahn's (1990) Concept of engagement. Of the items, 4 items for assessing cognitive, another 4 items for assessing emotional, and the last 5 items for assessing physical engagement. This scale was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Cronbach's alphas for cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement were 0.70, 0.72, and 0.74, respectively. The overall Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.78.

Control Variables. In addition, this study included gender (male = 1; female = 0), age (21 – 30, coded as 1; 31 – 40, coded as 2; 41 – 50, coded as 3; and more than 50, coded as 4), and education (bachelor degree, coded as 1; master's degree, coded as 2; and doctoral degree, coded 3) as control variables.

4. Results and Discussion

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among the research variables are shown in Table 1. As shown, positive correlations among the study variables were found and were significant at $p < 0.01$.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender (0 = female)	0.54	0.50					
2. Age	1.53	0.68	0.18**				
3. Education	1.22	0.43	0.01	0.00			
4. Proactive personality	4.05	0.47	0.13*	0.07	0.04		
5. Psychological safety	3.71	0.55	0.00	-0.08	0.04	0.24**	.
6. Job engagement	3.74	0.42	0.05	0.02	0.10	0.49**	0.29**

Note. N = 349, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed.

Validity and Reliability for Study Variables

Before testing the proposed model and hypotheses, all measurement items were assessed for validity and reliability. A total of 30 items were included in the analysis. Validity and reliability tests were conducted using SPSS. The results of the validity and reliability analyses are presented in Table 2. An item with a loading score of approximately 0.60 or higher was considered valid. Most items were found to be valid, except for one item of psychological safety, which was removed. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, and all constructs met or exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70.

Table 2: Validity and Reliability Test Results

Item Code	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
PP1	0.66	0.87
PP2	0.72	
PP3	0.64	
PP4	0.59	
PP5	0.71	
PP6	0.75	
PP7	0.69	
PP8	0.71	
PP9	0.64	
PP10	0.68	
PS1	0.72 (0.73)	0.72 (with 6 items)
PS2	0.63 (0.63)	

Item Code	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
PS3	0.60 (0.63)	
PS4	0.37 (-)	
PS5	0.65 (0.66)	
PS6	0.67 (0.67)	
PS7	0.59 (0.56)	
CE1	0.75	0.70
CE2	0.75	
CE3	0.76	
CE4	0.65	
EE1	0.82	0.71
EE2	0.82	
EE3	0.68	
EE4	0.62	
PE1	0.66	0.74
PE2	0.71	
PE3	0.74	
PE4	0.68	
PE5	0.75	
Overall job engagement		0.78

Note. N = 349, PP = proactive personality, PS = psychological safety, CE = cognitive engagement, EE = emotional engagement, PE = physical engagement. In the initial test, one item of psychological safety exhibited a low loading and was therefore dropped. In the second test, all remaining items achieved the expected loading values, as reported in parentheses.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 3 presents the results for the standardized path coefficients, standard errors, critical ratios, and significance levels of the hypothesized paths. This study hypothesized that proactive personality would be positively related to psychological safety (H1). As shown, proactive personality was positively related to psychological safety ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that proactive individuals tend to shape and select environments that foster openness, trust, and interpersonal risk-taking. (e.g., Crant, 2000). The study also hypothesized that psychological safety would be positively related to job engagement (H2). As predicted, psychological safety was positively related to job engagement ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Consistent with prior works, empirical studies have also shown that psychologically safe environments foster higher levels of involvement, enthusiasm, and absorption in work activities. (e.g., May et al., 2004).

Table 3: Direct and Indirect Effects Results

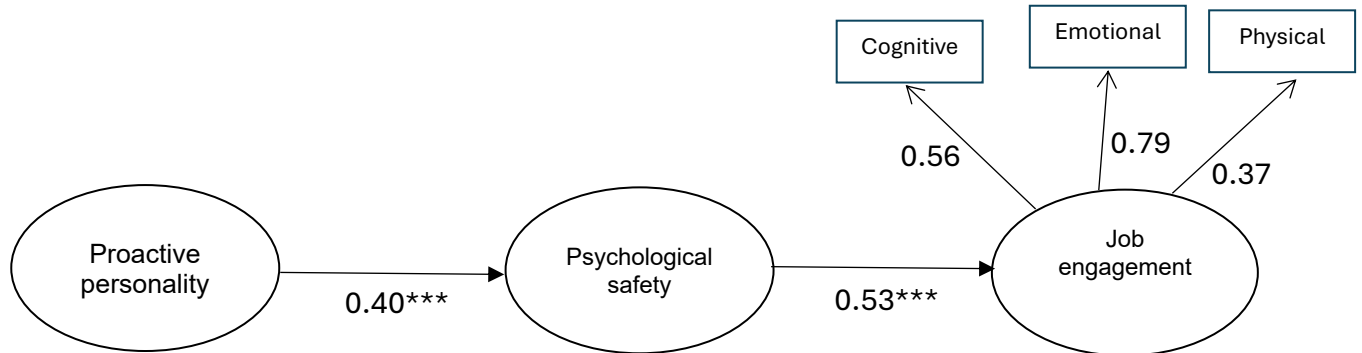
Path	Direct Effect	S.E.	C.R.	Sig.
Gender → JE	0.12	0.04	1.93	0.054
Age → JE	0.10	0.03	1.56	0.118
Education → JE	0.04	0.05	0.69	0.495
PP → PS (H1)	0.40	0.06	4.65	***
PS → JE (H2)	0.53	0.13	4.62	***
Path	Indirect Effect	LLCI	ULCI	Sig.
PP → PS → JE (H3)	0.21	0.06	0.46	***

Note. N = 349, *** $p < 0.001$, JE = job engagement, PP = proactive personality, PS = psychological safety, LLCI = lower-limit confidence interval, ULCI = upper-limit confidence interval.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that psychological safety would mediate the relationship between proactive personality and job engagement. A 95% bootstrapped confidence interval (based on 2,000 resamples) was used to assess the mediating effect of psychological safety. As shown in Table 3, the indirect effect of proactive personality on job engagement was 0.21 ($p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Finally, this finding is also consistent with prior research suggesting that the influence of proactive personality on work outcomes is often transmitted through contextual and psychological mechanisms rather than occurring solely through direct effects. (Parker et al., 2010).

Research Findings

The purpose of this study is to integrate proactive personality, psychological safety, and job engagement. The findings provide evidence that (1) proactive personality is positively related to psychological safety, (2) psychological safety is positively related to job engagement, and (3) psychological safety mediates the relationship between proactive personality and job engagement (see Figure 1). The model fit indices indicate an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 394.10$, $df = 196$, $p < 0.001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.01$; GFI = 0.90; AGFI = 0.88; CFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.05).

**Figure 1:** Proposed Model with Standardized Path Estimates

Note. N = 349. *** $p < 0.001$. For the ease of presentation, not all control variables are presented.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers an integrative model linking proactive personality, psychological safety, and job engagement. It contributes to literature in several important ways. First, by examining the mediating role of psychological safety, this study responds to calls for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the relationship between proactive personality and job engagement. (Bakker et al., 2012). In the context of competitive work environments, psychological safety has emerged as a critical factor. (Edmondson, 1999). Incorporating psychological safety into the proposed model offers a more nuanced and comprehensive account of the underlying psychological mechanisms through which proactive personality fosters job engagement, thereby constituting a central theoretical contribution of this study.

Second, this study establishes a positive relationship between proactive personality and psychological safety. A plausible explanation is that proactive employees are better able to respond to and shape their team environments, which in turn fosters a stronger sense of psychological safety. Furthermore, the study confirms the positive effect of proactive personality on job engagement, consistent with prior research showing that proactive individuals tend to achieve better performance outcomes. (Asghar et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2010; Vallabh et al., 2024; Wijaya, 2019). The findings reinforce Kahn's (1990) proposition that psychological safety is a crucial psychological condition that promotes employee engagement. In a wider view, these findings suggest that fostering proactive individuals and cultivating psychological safety are not only beneficial for organizational outcomes but also for enriching human life. Moreover, when individuals feel safe and empowered, work becomes a forum for fulfillment, alignment with personal values, and even spiritual growth—transforming engagement from mere involvement into a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life. (see Correia & Carvalho, 2026, for a review). Moreover, the findings suggest that psychological safety functions as a culturally relevant mechanism through which proactive tendencies are translated into higher job engagement in Indonesian workplaces, particularly within high power distance contexts where hierarchical structures may otherwise inhibit open communication and employee initiative related to engagement.

Managerial Implications

Organizations, managers, and management consultants can benefit from the findings of this study. Although practitioners have long recognized the importance of proactive personality in promoting positive behaviors, attitudes, and performance outcomes (Fuller Jr & Marler, 2009), this study offers additional insight into how employee engagement can be enhanced through psychological mechanisms. Specifically, the findings highlight the importance of fostering psychological safety as a key pathway through which proactive personality translates into greater job engagement. Prior research suggests that a supportive organizational climate, such as a positive diversity climate, strong supervisor relationships, and effective leadership, can overall further strengthen employees' sense of psychological safety. (Carmeli et al., 2010; Vallabh et al., 2024). Therefore, practitioners should actively cultivate these conditions to enhance psychological safety in the workplace. Finally, organizations can leverage proactive employees as valuable assets, as they are more likely to contribute to stronger team relationships and higher levels of psychological safety, which in turn foster job engagement. To enhance organizational performance through engagement, organizations should recognize and develop proactive tendencies

among employees. Accordingly, proactive personality indicators may be usefully incorporated into human resource practices, such as selection, promotion, job rotation, and team-building initiatives.

Limitations and Future Directions

At least two limitations should be noted. First, although this study provides new insights into the relationship between proactive personality and job engagement (Bakker et al., 2012) It employs a cross-sectional design, with data collected at a single point in time. This may raise concerns about common method variance, which can lead to spurious correlations among the study variables. (Chang et al., 2010). Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Future research is encouraged to use longitudinal designs or collect data from multiple sources to reduce this potential bias. Second, the use of alumni from two institutions who are employed in various companies may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should examine these relationships across a wider range of sample contexts to enhance external validity. Third, this study relied on an online questionnaire survey. Although this method is efficient for reaching geographically dispersed respondents and may enhance respondents' independence in answering the questions, it limits the researcher's ability to control data quality. Future studies may consider alternative data collection methods, such as direct interviews or mixed-method approaches, to improve data accuracy and depth.

Future research may further enrich the proposed model by examining potential moderating variables that shape the relationships among proactive personality, psychological safety, and job engagement. Individual factors such as self-efficacy may strengthen the effect of proactive personality on psychological safety, as employees with higher confidence in their abilities are more likely to interpret their work environment positively and engage in interpersonal risk-taking. Similarly, contextual factors—including organizational culture (Prajogo et al., 2021) and organizational cynicism (Prajogo et al., 2020)—may amplify or weaken the extent to which proactive individuals feel psychologically safe and, consequently, become more engaged in their work.

In addition, job characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback may play important boundary roles in this model. Enriched job designs may provide proactive employees with greater opportunities to express initiative, thereby enhancing their sense of psychological safety and facilitating higher job engagement. Conversely, in rigid or low-autonomy jobs, the positive effects of proactive personality may be constrained. By incorporating these moderating variables, future studies can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which proactive personality most effectively translates into psychological safety and job engagement.

5. Conclusion

This paper proposes a model that sequentially links proactive personality, psychological safety, and job engagement. By positioning psychological safety as a key explanatory mechanism, the study offers a more nuanced account of how individual dispositions translate into meaningful work outcomes. Specifically, it highlights that proactive individuals are more likely to cultivate environments in which they feel safe to express themselves, take interpersonal risks, and fully invest in their roles. This mechanism enriches existing perspectives by moving beyond direct trait–outcome relationships toward a process-based understanding. The findings also underscore the importance of contextual and relational

factors in activating the benefits of proactive personality in organizational settings. Overall, the model contributes to the literature by integrating personality and social context into a coherent framework that explains how engagement is fostered at work.

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