

THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF PROACTIVE CAREER BEHAVIORS ON SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS: EVIDENCE FROM A CHINESE KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE FIRM

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Abstract

Rapid digital transformation and intensifying market competition have made career development increasingly critical for employees in technology-driven organizations. Career success depends not only on promotion opportunities but also on how employees plan their careers, develop their skills and talents, build professional networks, and seek guidance when making career-related decisions. This study aimed to examine the levels of proactive career behaviors and career success among employees at Glodon Company Limited and to investigate the relationship between proactive career behaviors and career success. A quantitative research design was employed. The population consisted of 8,569 domestic full-time employees, excluding overseas staff. Questionnaires were distributed to 400 employees, yielding 386 valid responses included in the analysis. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis.

The findings revealed that both proactive career behaviors and career success were at moderate levels. Proactive career behaviors were positively and significantly related to career success. Among the four dimensions, the career planning process demonstrated the clearest and most consistent relationship across all regression models. Skill and talent development activities were also significantly related to overall career success and subjective career success, whereas networking and consultation showed weaker relationships in this sample. These findings indicate that organizations should place greater emphasis on structured career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, and context-appropriate workplace career support.

Keywords: Proactive Career Behaviors, Subjective Career Success, Objective Career Success, Knowledge-Intensive Firm, Glodon Company Limited

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Introduction

Career development has become less predictable in contemporary work settings. Traditional career paths built around seniority, fixed promotion steps, and long organizational tenure no longer explain many employees' career experiences. Employees are now expected to take a more active role in managing their careers through learning, skill renewal, relationship building, and career planning (Akkermans et al., 2020; Chui et al., 2022). This shift has drawn attention to proactive career behaviors, which refer to self-initiated and future oriented actions that employees use to manage career opportunities and uncertainty. These behaviors commonly include career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation (Forbrig & Kuper, 2021). Prior studies have linked such behaviors with employability, adaptability, and career related outcomes (Peng et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2024; Chang et al., 2023).

Career success has also become a broader concept. It is no longer limited to visible outcomes such as salary, promotion, or job rank. It also includes employees' own evaluations of whether their careers feel satisfying, meaningful, and consistent with personal goals. Objective career success refers to externally observable achievements, while subjective career success refers to personal judgments of career satisfaction and fulfillment (Spurk et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2024). This distinction is important in knowledge intensive firms, where employees

may care about learning, autonomy, and professional growth as much as formal advancement (Akkermans et al., 2021). Therefore, a study of career success needs to consider both sides.

The Chinese organizational context gives career development a more situated meaning. In this context, employees' career outcomes are shaped not only by personal effort, but also by social ties, group expectations, and competition within technology-based firms. Guanxi refers to relationship based social connections. It may affect access to information, trust, supervisor support, and career related opportunities in Chinese workplaces (Ma et al., 2023). Recent evidence from Chinese employees also suggests that proactive career behaviors are linked with subjective career success and perceived employability, although these links may depend on workplace support and psychological resources (Jiang et al., 2024). This means that the four dimensions of proactive career behaviors may not operate in the same way. Career planning processes may help employees set clearer goals and make career decisions with greater direction. Skill and talent development activities may matter because technical knowledge changes quickly in digital work. Networking may provide information and visibility, but its value can depend on trust and informal relations. Idea consultation may help employees seek advice and feedback, yet employees may be cautious when discussing career choices with supervisors or peers. Prior

research also shows that proactive career orientation is related to subjective career success through career adaptability, which refers to the ability to adjust career plans when work conditions change (Chang et al., 2023). These conditions suggest that proactive career behavior dimensions may show different relationships with subjective and objective career success in Chinese knowledge intensive enterprises.

This context is salient in China's digital economy. Technology oriented and knowledge intensive firms now face frequent changes in tools, platforms, and work processes. Digital transformation in Chinese firms has increased the demand for skilled employees, especially those who can work with changing technologies and more complex tasks (Gao et al., 2025). Employees in this setting are expected to update their skills while responding to shifting market and organizational demands. Career self-management therefore becomes a practical need rather than a personal preference. Employees who plan their career paths, develop new skills, maintain useful work ties, and seek advice may be better placed to interpret opportunities and reduce career uncertainty. Prior research also suggests that proactive career behaviors help employees manage career uncertainty and maintain employability in changing work environments (Peng et al., 2021). Yet the value of these behaviors may vary across different forms of career success.

Glodon Company Limited provides a suitable setting for this study. As a major digital

construction enterprise in China, the company operates in a field that combines construction knowledge, software services, data platforms, and digital project management. Employees in this setting often work with changing technologies and project-based demands, which are common in construction software sectors facing rapid technological iteration and strong competition for skilled professionals (Hyun & Sachs, 2024). Their career success may depend on formal organizational systems, such as appraisal, promotion, and job level arrangements. It may also be related to how they manage their own development through career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation. For this reason, Glodon offers a meaningful case for examining proactive career behaviors in a Chinese knowledge intensive firm. This context is also relevant because employee retention and career development remain important issues in China's IT and digital service sectors (Xu & Loang, 2024).

Although prior studies generally report a positive relationship between proactive career behaviors and career success (De Vos et al., 2009; Rasdi et al., 2011), several gaps remain. Many studies treat proactive career behaviors as one combined construct. This approach may hide the different roles of career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation. Prior research has also focused more on subjective career success, while objective career success has received less

attention. In addition, much of the evidence comes from Western settings, where career norms, labor markets, and organizational relations may differ from those in China. These gaps make it necessary to examine proactive career behaviors at the dimensional level in a Chinese knowledge intensive context.

Therefore, this study examines the relationships between four dimensions of proactive career behaviors and career success among employees in a Chinese knowledge intensive organization. It focuses on career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation. It also compares their relationships with general career success, subjective career success, and objective career success. By doing so, the study seeks to show whether these proactive behaviors are related to career outcomes in the same way or whether their patterns differ across career success dimensions.

Objectives

1. To examine how different dimensions of proactive career behaviors are related to general career success.
2. To examine how career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation are related to subjective career success.
3. To examine how career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation are related to objective career success.

Literature Review

Career development in contemporary organizations is no longer well explained by stable organizational pathways alone. Rapid technological change, digital transformation, and shifting employment structures have made career paths less predictable. Employees are expected to manage their own career direction through planning, learning, relationship building, and adjustment to changing work demands (Akkermans et al., 2020; Chui et al., 2022). In this setting, proactive career behaviors have become important in career research. These behaviors refer to self-initiated and future oriented actions through which employees try to manage career opportunities and reduce career uncertainty. In this study, proactive career behaviors include career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation (Forbrig & Kuper, 2021; Peng et al., 2021).

Career Self-Management Theory

Career Self-Management Theory provides the main theoretical basis for understanding proactive career behaviors. The theory views employees as active agents who plan, monitor, and adjust their careers rather than relying only on organizational direction (Forbrig & Kuper, 2021; Smale et al., 2019). From this view, career development is not only a result of tenure, promotion rules, or managerial support. It also depends on how employees set goals, build skills, seek information, and use work relationships to make career

decisions. This theory is suitable for explaining career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation as separate but related forms of career self-management (Peng et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2024).

Career Self-Management Theory also suggests that individual agency works within a wider context. Employees may plan their careers and develop skills, but the results of these actions can still depend on organizational systems, labor market competition, and workplace support (Mavhungu et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2024). This point is relevant for Chinese technology-based firms, where employees face fast skill renewal, strong competition, and relational work norms. In such settings, proactive behavior may not lead to the same form of career success for every employee. Career planning may give clearer direction, while networking and consultation may depend more on trust, hierarchy, and access to useful relationships (Ma et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2025).

Protean Career Theory and Career Success

Protean Career Theory helps explain the outcome side of this study. It argues that modern careers are increasingly self-directed and guided by personal values, rather than only by formal organizational advancement (Akkermans et al., 2021; Chui et al., 2022). This view supports the distinction between subjective and objective career success. Objective career success refers to externally visible outcomes, such as income, promotion,

job level, and occupational status. Subjective career success refers to employees' own judgments of satisfaction, achievement, fulfillment, and value fit (Spurk et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2024).

This distinction is important in knowledge intensive organizations. Employees may value learning, autonomy, meaningful work, and professional growth, even when formal promotion is slow (Akkermans et al., 2021; Spurk et al., 2019). At the same time, objective outcomes still matter because they influence status, resources, and future opportunities. Protean Career Theory supports the need to examine both subjective and objective career success in the same study. It also helps explain why proactive career behaviors may have stronger links with subjective career success than with objective career success. Employees may feel progress and satisfaction through planning and learning, while salary, promotion, and job level may depend more on formal organizational systems (Seibert et al., 2024; De Vos et al., 2009).

Proactive Career Behaviors and Career Success

Prior research generally supports a positive relationship between proactive career behaviors and career success. De Vos et al. (2009) found that proactive behaviors, especially career planning and networking, were related to both objective and subjective career success over time. Rasdi et al. (2011) also found that proactive career management behaviors were associated with career success

in an emerging economy context. These studies suggest that proactive career behaviors may be useful beyond Western samples. Still, the strength and form of these relationships may differ across cultural and organizational settings (Smale et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2023).

Recent studies have added more detail to this relationship. Jiang et al. (2024) using data from Chinese employees, found that proactive career behaviors were linked with subjective career success and perceived employability through thriving at work. Chang et al. (2023) also found that proactive career orientation was related to subjective career success through career adaptability, which refers to the ability to adjust career plans when work conditions change. These studies suggest that proactive career behaviors are not only practical actions. They may also support employees' sense of learning, vitality, and career control, which can shape how they evaluate their career progress (Jiang et al., 2024; Chang et al., 2023).

The literature also cautions against treating proactive career behaviors too broadly. Li et al. (2025) noted that related proactive career constructs have often developed in parallel, which can create conceptual overlap if their dimensions are not clearly separated. Mavhungu et al. (2024) further showed that proactive career behaviors did not always predict career success when contextual constraints were present. These findings suggest that career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation should be examined

separately. Each behavior has a different function, and each may have a different relationship with subjective and objective career success (Li et al., 2025; Mavhungu et al., 2024).

Career Planning Processes and Career Success

Career planning processes refer to employees' efforts to set career goals, review progress, and identify steps for future development. This behavior gives direction to career self-management because employees can connect present work tasks with longer term career aims (Forbrig & Kuper, 2021; De Vos et al., 2009). Career planning may be closely related to subjective career success because employees with clearer goals may feel more satisfied with their progress and more confident about their future. It may also be related to objective career success, since planned employees may be better prepared for promotion or job level advancement. In knowledge intensive firms, where work tasks and skills change quickly, career planning may help employees make more careful career decisions (Akkermans et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2025).

H1a: Career planning processes are significantly related to general career success.

H2a: Career planning processes are significantly related to subjective career success.

H3a: Career planning processes are significantly related to objective career success.

Skill and Talent Development Activities and Career Success

Skill and talent development activities refer to employees' efforts to improve professional knowledge, technical ability, and work-related competence. These activities may include formal training, self-directed learning, participation in challenging projects, and efforts to strengthen weak areas (Peng et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2024). In technology oriented and knowledge intensive firms, skills can become outdated quickly. Employees who continue learning may be better able to meet new work requirements and maintain employability. Skill and talent development activities may also support subjective career success because learning often gives employees a sense of growth. They may also relate to objective career success when improved skills are recognized through promotion, job responsibility, or salary growth (Gao et al., 2025; Spurk et al., 2019).

H1b: Skill and talent development activities are significantly related to general career success.

H2b: Skill and talent development activities are significantly related to subjective career success.

H3b: Skill and talent development activities are significantly related to objective career success.

Networking and Career Success

Networking refers to building and maintaining professional relationships that may provide information, support, visibility, and career opportunities. Prior research has

treated networking as an important career behavior because it can help employees access resources that are not always available through formal systems (De Vos et al., 2009; Rasdi et al., 2011). In Chinese organizations, networking also needs to be understood through *guanxi*, which refers to relationship based social ties. *Guanxi* may affect trust, supervisor support, access to information, and career related opportunities (Ma et al., 2023; Smale et al., 2019). Even so, networking may not work in a direct or uniform way. Its value can depend on trust, hierarchy, informal norms, and whether the organization rewards relational visibility (Ma et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2024).

H1c: Networking is significantly related to general career success.

H2c: Networking is significantly related to subjective career success.

H3c: Networking is significantly related to objective career success.

Idea Consultation and Career Success

Idea consultation refers to seeking advice, feedback, guidance, or opinions from supervisors, peers, mentors, or experienced colleagues. It is a proactive behavior because employees do not wait passively for direction. Instead, they use other people's knowledge to improve career decisions and handle work problems (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Forbrig & Kuper, 2021). Idea consultation may support subjective career success by helping employees make more informed choices and feel less uncertain about career direction. It may also relate to objective career success

when advice leads to better work decisions, stronger performance, or more suitable development opportunities. In Chinese workplaces, however, employees may be careful when discussing career choices with supervisors or peers, especially if such discussions involve promotion or personal ambition (Ma et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2024).

H1d: Idea consultation is significantly related to general career success.

H2d: Idea consultation is significantly related to subjective career success.

H3d: Idea consultation is significantly related to objective career success.

Critical Evaluation of the Literature

The existing literature provides useful support for the relationship between proactive career behaviors and career success, but several limitations remain. First, many studies examine proactive career behaviors as one combined construct. This approach is convenient, but it can hide the different roles of career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation (Li et al., 2025; Forbrig & Kuper, 2021). Second, prior research has focused more on subjective career success than objective career success, although both remain important in organizational life. Subjective success captures satisfaction and fulfillment, while objective success captures salary, promotion, and job level (Spurk et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2024).

A further limitation concerns context. Much of the literature comes from Western settings, where career norms, labor markets,

and organizational relationships may differ from those in China (Smale et al., 2019; Rasdi et al., 2011). Recent Chinese evidence is useful, but more work is still needed in knowledge intensive firms shaped by digital transformation, *guanxi*, high competition, and fast skill renewal (Ma et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2024). These contextual factors may affect whether each proactive career behavior is linked more strongly with subjective success, objective success, or both. For this reason, a dimension-based review is needed before forming hypotheses for a Chinese digital construction enterprise.

Research Gap

Based on the reviewed literature, three research gaps can be identified. First, proactive career behaviors have often been studied as an overall construct, while the separate roles of career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation remain less clear (Li et al., 2025; Forbrig & Kuper, 2021). Second, subjective career success has received more attention than objective career success, even though both are necessary for understanding career outcomes in organizations (Spurk et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2024). Third, empirical evidence from Chinese knowledge intensive enterprises remains limited, especially in digital construction and software related sectors, where employees face changing tools, project based work, and strong competition for skilled labor.

This study addresses these gaps by examining proactive career behaviors as a multidimensional construct. It compares the

relationships of career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation with general career success, subjective career success, and objective career success. This approach is consistent with Career Self-Management Theory because it treats employees as active agents who use different behaviors to manage their careers. It is also consistent with Protean Career Theory because it recognizes that career success includes both personal evaluation and externally visible achievement.

Hypothesis Development

Drawing on Career Self-Management Theory and Protean Career Theory, the four proactive career behavior dimensions are expected to be related to career success, but not necessarily in the same way (Forbrig & Kuper, 2021; Akkermans et al., 2021). Career planning processes may give employees clearer goals and direction. Skill and talent development activities may improve employability and professional growth. Networking may provide information, visibility, and access to career resources. Idea consultation may help employees gain advice and feedback for career decisions. Subjective career success may be more closely linked with these self-directed behaviors because employees can directly feel progress, learning, and satisfaction. Objective career success may be more constrained by appraisal systems, job levels, and promotion opportunities (Spurk et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: The dimensions of proactive career behaviors are significantly related to general career success.

H1a: Career planning processes are significantly related to general career success.

H1b: Skill and talent development activities are significantly related to general career success.

H1c: Networking is significantly related to general career success.

H1d: Idea consultation is significantly related to general career success.

H2: The dimensions of proactive career behaviors are significantly related to subjective career success.

H2a: Career planning processes are significantly related to subjective career success.

H2b: Skill and talent development activities are significantly related to subjective career success.

H2c: Networking is significantly related to subjective career success.

H2d: Idea consultation is significantly related to subjective career success.

H3: The dimensions of proactive career behaviors are significantly related to objective career success.

H3a: Career planning processes are significantly related to objective career success.

H3b: Skill and talent development activities are significantly related to objective career success.

H3c: Networking is significantly related to objective career success.

H3d: Idea consultation is significantly related to objective career success.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative design with a cross-sectional survey. This design was suitable because the study examined the relationships between proactive career behavior dimensions and career success among employees of Glodon Company Limited at one point in time. It was not an experimental or longitudinal study, so the analysis was used to test statistical relationships rather than causal effects. The four proactive career behavior dimensions were career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation. Career success was examined through general career success, subjective career success, and self-reported objective career success.

The target population consisted of domestic full-time employees of Glodon Company Limited in China. Since the company workforce included both domestic and overseas employees, overseas employees were excluded from the sampling frame. After this adjustment, the population was 8,569 domestic full-time employees. These employees worked in major functional areas, including Research and Development, Project Management, Technical Support, Marketing, Administrative units, and other functional units. The sample size was calculated using Krejcie and Morgan's formula (Krejcie &

Morgan, 1970). Based on a population of 8,569, a 95 percent confidence level, and a 5 percent margin of error, the minimum required sample was 368. To reduce the risk of incomplete responses, 400 questionnaires were distributed. A total of 386 valid questionnaires were retained. Stratified random sampling was used to cover the main departments proportionally. This procedure improved coverage across the workforce, although it does not prove full representativeness of every employee subgroup.

A structured questionnaire was used as the main instrument. It had three parts. The first part collected demographic information, including gender, age, educational background, working years, job position, and department. The second part measured proactive career behaviors. It was adapted from Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1998) and later career behavior research by Forbrig and Kuper (2021). Career planning processes included four items on goal setting, progress review, future planning, and the link between current tasks and longer-term career direction. Skill and talent development activities included four items on training, learning, self-improvement, and professional growth. Networking included four items on professional relationships, career information, and useful contacts inside and outside the organization. Idea consultation included four items on advice seeking, feedback, and guidance from supervisors, peers, mentors, or experienced colleagues.

The third part measured career success. Subjective career success included five items

on satisfaction, achievement, recognition, personal standards, and career direction. Self-reported objective career success included five items on salary increase, promotion, job position, responsibility, and perceived advancement. These career success items were adapted from Seibert et al. (1999) and Spurk et al. (2019). The term self-reported objective career success was used because official salary and promotion records were not available.

All items used a five-point Likert scale from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. The questionnaire was reviewed for the Chinese workplace setting and the digital construction context of Glodon Company Limited. Content validity was assessed through the Index of Item Objective Congruence. Three experts reviewed the items, and the average IOC values for proactive career behaviors, career success, and the full questionnaire were above 0.80. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha. The coefficients were 0.87 for proactive career behaviors, 0.85 for career success, and 0.88 for the full questionnaire.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Before the regression results were interpreted, assumption checks were conducted. Multicollinearity was not a serious concern because VIF values ranged from 1.35 to 1.48 and tolerance values ranged from 0.68 to 0.74. Residual normality was acceptable, with the Shapiro Wilk test showing $p = 0.08$. Residual plots were also reviewed for linearity and homoscedasticity, and no clear pattern suggesting serious violation

was observed. Standardized residuals and Cook's distance were checked to identify influential cases. These diagnostic results supported the use of regression analysis, while findings were interpreted cautiously because the design was cross-sectional.

Results

Descriptive Results

After conducting the descriptive analysis of demographic data, the following results were obtained. The sample was almost balanced by gender, with 199 female employees, or 51.6 percent, and 187 male employees, or 48.4 percent. In terms of age, the largest group was 41 to 50 years old, accounting for 35.8 percent, followed by employees aged 30 to 40 years old, who accounted for 32.6 percent. For educational background, bachelor's degree holders formed the largest group, at 36.0 percent, followed by college diploma holders at 31.1 percent. Regarding working years, the largest group had worked for 4 to 6 years, accounting for 27.2 percent, followed by those with 1 to 3 years of experience, at 23.1 percent. These results show that the sample included employees from different demographic groups, with most respondents being mid-career employees with college level or higher education.

Descriptive statistics showed that proactive career behaviors among employees were at a neutral level ($\bar{X} = 3.19$, $SD = 0.72$). Among the four dimensions, idea consultation had the highest mean score, followed by career planning processes and skill and talent

development activities. Networking had the lowest mean score. The differences among the four dimensions were small, but the pattern suggests that employees reported slightly more engagement in seeking advice and reviewing career direction than in building wider professional connections.

Career success was also rated at a neutral level ($\bar{x} = 3.14$, $SD = 0.80$). Subjective career success was slightly higher than self-reported objective career success. This means that employees rated their own career satisfaction, achievement, and career direction a little higher than more external career outcomes such as salary growth, promotion, job position, and responsibility. However, the gap between the two dimensions was limited, so the result should be interpreted as a modest descriptive difference rather than a strong contrast between subjective and objective career success.

Regression Analysis

Before regression analysis, the main assumptions were examined. Multicollinearity was not a serious concern because VIF values ranged from 1.35 to 1.48 and tolerance values ranged from 0.68 to 0.74. Residual normality was assessed rather than raw score normality. The Shapiro Wilk test for residuals was not significant, $p = 0.08$. Residual plots were reviewed for linearity and homoscedasticity, and no clear curved pattern or funnel shaped spread was observed. Standardized residuals and Cook's distance were also checked, and

no influential case was found to seriously distort the regression results.

Skewness and kurtosis values were also reviewed to assess the basic distribution of the survey items before further analysis. For the proactive career behavior items, skewness values ranged from -0.175 to 0.006, while kurtosis values ranged from -1.047 to -0.835. For the career success items, skewness values ranged from -0.160 to 0.026, and kurtosis values ranged from -1.078 to -0.855. These values were within the commonly accepted range for survey data, as the skewness values were close to zero and the kurtosis values did not show extreme peakedness or flatness. This suggests that the item responses did not depart seriously from normal distribution. The results provided a reasonable basis for continuing with descriptive statistics and regression analysis.

The first regression model examined the relationships between the four proactive career behavior dimensions and overall career success. Career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation were entered as predictors. Overall career success was used as the dependent variable. This model was used to test H1a to H1d and to identify whether each dimension showed a significant relationship with career success when other dimensions were considered in the same model. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Regression Analysis Results of Proactive Career Behaviors Dimensions on Career Success

	B	Std. Error	β	t	p-value
(Constant)	1.845	.174		10.591	.000
Career planning processes	.157	.045	.193	3.497	.001
Skill and talent development activities	.141	.049	.163	2.873	.004
Networking	.031	.048	.036	.649	.516
Idea consultation	.075	.049	.088	1.532	.126

a. Dependent Variable: Career Success

b. $R^2 = .139$ Adjusted $R^2 = .130$

As shown in Table 1, the model explained a modest share of variance in career success, with $R^2 = 0.139$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.130$. Career planning processes were positively and significantly related to career success ($\beta = 0.193$, $p = 0.001$), so H1a was supported. Skill and talent development activities also showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.163$, $p = 0.004$), so H1b was supported. However, networking ($\beta = 0.036$, $p = 0.516$) and idea consultation ($\beta = 0.088$, $p = 0.126$) were not significant. Therefore, H1c and H1d were not supported. Overall, H1 was partially supported.

The second regression model examined the relationships between the four proactive career behavior dimensions and subjective career success. Career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation were included in the same model. Subjective career success was used as the dependent variable. This model was used to test H2a to H2d and to see which dimensions were related to subjective career success. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Regression Analysis Results of Proactive Career Behaviors Dimensions on Subjective Career Success

	B	Std. Error	β	t	p-value
(Constant)	1.672	.202		8.259	.000
Career planning processes	.169	.052	.180	3.243	.001
Skill and talent development activities	.166	.057	.165	2.905	.004
Networking	.052	.056	.052	.928	.354
Idea consultation	.082	.057	.084	1.450	.148

a. Dependent Variable: Subjective Career Success

b. $R^2 = .137$ Adjusted $R^2 = .128$

As shown in Table 2, the model explained a modest share of variance in subjective career success, with $R^2 = 0.137$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.128$. Career planning processes were positively and significantly related to subjective career success ($\beta = 0.180, p = 0.001$), so H2a was supported. Skill and talent development activities were also significant ($\beta = 0.165, p = 0.004$), so H2b was supported. Networking ($\beta = 0.052, p = 0.354$) and idea consultation ($\beta = 0.084, p = 0.148$) were not significant. Therefore, H2c and H2d were not supported. Overall, H2 was partially supported.

The third regression model examined the relationships between the four proactive career behavior dimensions and objective career success. Career planning processes, skill and talent development activities, networking, and idea consultation were entered as predictors. Objective career success was used as the dependent variable. This model was used to test H3a to H3d and to examine whether each dimension was related to more external career outcomes, such as salary growth, promotion, job position, and responsibility. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Regression Analysis Results of Proactive Career Behaviors Dimensions on Objective Career Success

	B	Std. Error	β	t	p-value
(Constant)	2.017	.214		9.432	.000
Career planning processes	.145	.055	.151	2.625	.009
Skill and talent development activities	.117	.060	.114	1.930	.054
Networking	.010	.059	.010	.179	.858
Idea consultation	.067	.060	.067	1.122	.262

a. Dependent Variable: Objective Career Success

b. $R^2 = .072$ Adjusted $R^2 = .063$

As shown in Table 3, the model explained a limited share of variance in objective career success, with $R^2 = 0.072$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.063$. Career planning processes were positively and significantly related to objective career success ($\beta = 0.151, p = 0.009$), so H3a was supported. Skill and talent development

activities were positive but not significant at the 0.05 level ($\beta = 0.114, p = 0.054$), so H3b was not supported. Networking ($\beta = 0.010, p = 0.858$) and idea consultation ($\beta = 0.067, p = 0.262$) were also not significant. Therefore, H3c and H3d were not supported. Overall, H3 was partially supported.

Discussion

This study examined how four dimensions of proactive career behavior were related to career success among employees in a Chinese knowledge intensive firm. The results showed a mixed pattern. Career planning processes and skill and talent development activities were significantly related to overall career success and subjective career success. For self-reported objective career success, only career planning processes remained significant. Networking and idea consultation were not significant in the three regression models. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 were partially supported. This pattern suggests that proactive career behaviors should not be treated as one uniform construct. Different behaviors appear to have different links with employees' career outcomes.

Career planning processes showed the most consistent relationship across the three models. Employees who reported clearer career goals, regular progress review, and better awareness of future direction also reported higher career success. This finding fits Career Self-Management Theory, which views employees as active agents who plan and adjust their careers rather than relying only on organizational arrangements (Forbrig & Kuper, 2021). In the setting of Glodon Company Limited, this result is also reasonable. Employees work in a digital construction firm where skills, projects, and work demand change quickly. Under such conditions, career planning may help employees make clearer choices about learning, work roles, and future development.

Skill and talent development activities were significantly related to overall career success and subjective career success, but not to self-reported objective career success at the 0.05 level. The coefficient for objective career success was positive, but the p value was slightly above the usual cutoff. This suggests that learning and skill improvement may be more closely linked with how employees evaluate their own career progress than with external outcomes such as salary growth, promotion, or job position. This is consistent with Protean Career Theory, which gives attention to personal standards, satisfaction, and perceived growth (Spurk et al., 2019). Employees may feel more capable and more satisfied after developing skills, even when formal rewards take longer to appear.

Networking and idea consultation were not significantly related to career success in this sample. This result should be interpreted with caution. It does not mean that relationships, advice, or feedback have no value. Rather, their direct statistical relationship with career success was weak in the present models. In Chinese organizations, networking may depend on trust, hierarchy, guanxi, and access to useful information. Idea consultation may also be shaped by whether employees feel comfortable discussing career concerns with supervisors or colleagues. These behaviors may work through slower or indirect paths that were not tested in this study.

The weak result for self-reported objective career success is important. The model explained only a limited share of variance,

which means that proactive career behaviors alone cannot account for salary growth, promotion, position level, or responsibility. These outcomes are likely shaped by appraisal systems, promotion rules, managerial decisions, department needs, and market conditions. For this reason, the findings should be read as evidence of statistical relationships rather than causal effects. The study adds value by showing that career planning has the clearest link with both subjective and self-reported objective career success, while other proactive behaviors show more limited relationships in this organizational context.

Conclusion

This study examined how four dimensions of proactive career behavior were related to career success among employees of Glodon Company Limited. The findings show that proactive career behaviors were not linked to career success in a single pattern. Career planning processes had the clearest relationship across the three models. They were significantly related to overall career success, subjective career success, and self-reported objective career success. Skill and talent development activities were related to overall career success and subjective career success, but their relationship with self-reported objective career success was not significant at the 0.05 level. Networking and idea consultation did not show significant direct relationships with any of the three career success outcomes.

These results suggest that career planning may be especially relevant in a Chinese knowledge intensive firm where employees face changing tasks, skill renewal, and uncertain career paths. Planning may help employees connect present work with future goals and make more deliberate career choices. Skill development also appears important, especially for how employees judge their own progress and satisfaction. However, the results for self-reported objective career success were weaker. This means that external career outcomes, such as salary growth, promotion, job position, and responsibility, cannot be explained well by proactive career behaviors alone. They are also likely to depend on appraisal systems, promotion rules, department opportunities, managerial decisions, and wider market conditions.

The study contributes to career self-management research by showing the value of examining proactive career behaviors at the dimensional level. If proactive career behavior is treated only as one overall construct, the different roles of career planning, skill development, networking, and idea consultation may be hidden. The findings also show why subjective and objective career success should be examined separately. Employees may feel career progress through planning and learning, even when formal rewards are slower or more constrained by the organization. For practice, the results suggest that firms should strengthen

career planning support and skill development opportunities, while also making advancement systems clearer and fairer. Future studies may include organizational support, leadership, job level, and labor market factors to explain career success more fully.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected through a cross-sectional survey, so the findings can only show statistical relationships among the variables. They cannot prove that proactive career behaviors cause career success. Employees who already feel more successful in their careers may also be more willing to plan, learn, and manage their career direction. Future studies could use longitudinal data to examine whether proactive career behaviors lead to later changes in subjective or objective career success.

Second, the study was conducted in one organization, Glodon Company Limited. This setting is useful because the company represents a Chinese knowledge intensive and digital construction firm. However, the results may not apply fully to other industries, smaller firms, state owned enterprises, or organizations with different promotion systems. Future research could compare several firms or industries to test whether the same pattern appears in other Chinese workplace settings.

Third, objective career success was measured through self-reported items because official salary, promotion, and personnel records were not available. Although this

approach allowed the study to collect career outcome data from employees, it may not fully capture externally verified career success. Future studies should try to combine survey data with more objective records, such as salary level, promotion history, job grade, or performance appraisal data, when access is possible.

The regression models explained only a modest share of variance, especially for self-reported objective career success. This suggests that career success is shaped by factors beyond proactive career behaviors alone. Organizational support, leadership, department opportunities, appraisal rules, labor market conditions, and personal resources may also matter. Future research may include these variables, as well as relevant controls such as age, tenure, education level, and job position, to provide a fuller explanation of career success.

Implications of the Study

The findings have implications for career development theory and human resource practice in knowledge intensive firms. The results do not suggest that all proactive career behaviors work in the same way. Instead, they show that different behaviors have different relationships with career success. This is important because many studies treat proactive career behavior as one broad construct. The present study suggests that a dimension-based view can give a clearer picture of how employees manage their careers.

Theoretically, the findings support a

more careful use of Career Self-Management Theory. Career planning processes showed the clearest relationship with overall career success, subjective career success, and self-reported objective career success. This suggests that goal setting, progress review, and future planning may be central parts of career self-management in a Chinese knowledge intensive firm. Skill and talent development activities were also related to overall and subjective career success. This pattern suggests that learning and skill renewal may be closely tied to employees' own sense of growth and progress.

The study also adds to Protean Career Theory by showing that proactive career behaviors were more clearly related to subjective career success than to self-reported objective career success. Employees may feel more satisfied and more confident about their careers when they plan and improve their skills. However, external outcomes such as salary growth, promotion, job position, and responsibility appear to depend on more than individual career behavior. They may also reflect organizational systems, appraisal rules, department opportunities, and managerial decisions.

For practice, organizations should give more structured support to career planning. This may include career goal discussions, individual development plans, clearer promotion criteria, and regular feedback on career progress. Such support may help employees connect their current tasks with longer term career goals. Firms should also continue to provide training and skill development opportunities, especially in digital and knowledge intensive work where technical requirements change quickly.

At the same time, the results should not be read as evidence that networking and idea consultation have no value. These behaviors did not show significant direct relationships with career success in this sample, but they may still support information access, advice, learning, and workplace adjustment. Organizations should therefore create a work climate where employees can seek guidance and build useful work relationships without fear of negative judgment. Career development systems should combine individual planning, skill development, fair advancement rules, and supportive communication. This balanced approach is more suitable than relying on one type of career behavior alone.

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