

# Effects of Proactive Coping on Workplace Adaptation After Transition from College to Workplace

YiHui Cai, and Takaya Kohyama

**Abstract**—Proactive coping directed at an upcoming as opposed to an ongoing stressor, is a new focus in positive psychology. The present study explored the proactive coping's effect on the workplace adaptation after transition from college to workplace. In order to demonstrate the influence process between them, we constructed the model of proactive coping style effecting the actual positive coping efforts and outcomes by mediating proactive competence during one year after the transition. Participants ( $n = 100$ ) started to work right after graduating from college completed all the four time's surveys --one month before (Time 0), one month after (Time 1), three months after (Time 2), and one year after (Time 3) the transition. Time 0 survey included the measurement of proactive coping style and competence. Time 1, 2, 3 surveys included the measurement of the challenge cognitive appraisal, problem solving coping strategy, and subjective workplace adaptation. The result indicated that proactive coping style effected newcomers' actual coping efforts and outcomes by mediating proactive coping competence. The result also showed that proactive coping competence directly promoted Time1's actual positive coping efforts and outcomes, and indirectly promoted Time 2's and Time 3's.

**Keywords**—Proactive coping style, proactive coping competence, transition from college to workplace, workplace adaptation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IN the past, the coping was viewed as an adaptive reaction to stressful experiences and was regarded as reactive [1]. Recently, the coping has been conceptualized as something one can do before stress occurs. Proactive coping has emerged as one style of this future-oriented coping, which directed at an upcoming as opposed to an ongoing stressor [2]. Reference [3] posit that proactive coping is a method of assessing future goals and setting stage to achieve them successfully. Besides coping ahead the stressful situation, proactive coping also appraisals a future stressor as challenge [4]. This distinguishing feature also highlights the positive nature of proactive coping, and also marks it from the other coping that negatively defines stressors as threaten, loss, or harm.

Based on the positive feature, proactive coping is especially important among individuals facing transition situation [4]. Previous studies have focused on proactive coping in the

context of preparing for aging-related tasks and situation [5], [6]. However, Reference [4] suggested that it is reasonable to speculate that proactive coping plays an important role in younger people's life change experience, such as students' transition-to-university experience. There were two studies addressed to this topic, and both of them confirmed proactive coping's positive influence on the transition-to-university [4] [7]. However, transition from college to workplace is also a stressful life change to young people. In a more recent study, Reference [8] examined the relationship between proactive coping and job hunting -- the early stage of transition from school to work. The results indicated the proactive coping positively influenced the job hunting outcome.

Although the literatures started to focus on the proactive coping's effect on the transition of young people, there have not been any studies investigate proactive coping's effects on newcomers' workplace adaptation after the transition from college to workplace. In this paper, we will address about this issues.

There has been two approaches to study stress coping, one is to take the coping as a personality disposition, which is relatively constant during different situations, and the other one is to considerate the coping as a changeable variable depends on the stressor. The coping from the former approach is named coping style, and the coping from the latter approach is called coping strategy. Most of the empirical researched about proactive coping were carried out following the former approach, in other words, proactive coping style has been mainly focused.

However, proactive coping has started to be described as a multi-aspect concept [6],[2]. Besides the proactive coping style, proactive coping competence has started to draw attention from researchers recently. Reference [6] defines proactive coping competence is the ability to take a future-oriented viewpoint, set realistic goals and make plans. Possessing proactive coping competence may indicate that an individual is able to facilitate the proactive coping style [6]. It is likely that proactive coping competence translates the proactive coping style into the actual coping efforts in a certain stressful situation such as transition from college to workplace. In this view, we will investigate both dispositional and ability accepts of proactive coping, and hypothesize that proactive coping style effects newcomers' the actual coping efforts and

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outcomes of workplace adaptation by mediating proactive coping competence.

To examine actual coping efforts and outcomes in the workplace adaptation situation, we will employ Reference [9]'s transactional theory. According to their theory, coping efforts between the stressor and coping outcomes comprises cognitive appraisal and coping strategy. Additionally, the subjective workplace adaptation is taken as the coping outcome in the current study.

Considering workplace adaptation is a relative long-term process, it is necessary to demonstrate both proactive coping's short-term and long-term effects on the transition from college to workplace. Therefore we will employ the follow-up research approach. For details, proactive coping style and competence will be assessed one month before the transition (Time 0), and the actual coping effort to the workplace stressor and the outcome will be assessed one month (Time 1), three months (Time 2), and one year (Time 3) after the transition.

Taken all together, the aim of current study was to examine the process that proactive coping style effects newcomers' coping efforts and outcomes of workplace adaptation by mediating proactive coping competence.

## II. METHOD

### A. Participants

The participants were Japanese newcomers who graduated from college and started to work in April 2011, and still worked in the same place in April 2012. The data were collected at four time points as following: one month before the transition from college to workplace (Time 0), and one month after (Time 1), three months after (Time 2), one year after (Time 3) the transition. The participants at Time 0 were 424 newcomers, at Time 1 were 293 newcomers, at Time 2 were 190 newcomers, and at Time 3 were 100 newcomers. Therefore, the analyzed sample in the present study consisted of the 100 newcomers that completed all four time's survey. Participants included 36 males and 64 females. The average age of the males were 22.53 years ( $SD = .88$ ), while the average age of the females were 22.25 years ( $SD = .64$ ).

### B. Measures and Procedure

At Time 0, the pre survey was distributed in March 2011. Three scales were utilized to measure proactive coping style (the J-PCI), proactive competence (the PCS), and demographics. The data was collected by an Internet research company, and the participants got a net credit as a token of appreciation.

#### 1. Demographics

The demographic variables assessed were age, sex, birthplace, and category of future job.

#### 2. Measure of proactive coping style

The proactive coping subscale of the Proactive Coping Inventory-J (PCI-J; [10]) was used to assess proactive coping style. The proactive coping subscale consists of 14 items and

ratings are made on a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (completely true). The final internal consistency in the current sample was acceptable for the proactive coping subscale ( $\alpha = .66$ ).

3. Measure of proactive coping competence proactive coping competence. The PCS consists of 21 items and ratings are made on a 4-point from 1 (not at all able) to 4 (very able). The final internal consistency in the current sample was high ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

At Time 1, Time 2, Time 3, the post surveys were administered in May 2011, June 2011, and April 2012, by the same Internet research company as Time 0. The participants got a net credit as a token of appreciation. At all of the three points, the same questionnaires were utilized to measure the challenge cognitive appraisal of work stressor (the CARS), the problem solve coping strategy toward work stress (JSS-R), and the subjective adaptation of workplace.

#### 4. Measure of challenge cognitive appraisal of work stressor

The challenge subscale of the Cognitive Appraisal Rating: (CARS; [11]) was used to assess the challenge cognitive appraisal about job stressor. It consists of 2 items and ratings are made on a 4-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The internal consistency for this scale in the current sample was acceptable ( $\alpha = .64, .58, .71$ ).

#### 5. Measure of problem solving coping strategy to work stressor

The problem solving coping strategy was assessed by the items selected from the coping subscale of Job Stress Scale-Revised version (JSS-R; [12]). It consists of 4 items rated from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The internal consistency for this scale in the current sample was high ( $\alpha = .83, .87, .85$ ).

#### 6. Measure of subjective workplace adaptation

The subjective workplace adaptation was assessed by the 7 items from Reference [13]'s measurement of adaptation to the workplace. These 7 item are designed to rate the adaptation from the highest score 10 to the lowest score 1. The internal consistency for this scale in the current sample was high ( $\alpha = .91, .93, .93$ ).

## III. RESULT

The effects of gender on proactive coping style and competence, challenge cognitive appraisal, problem solving coping strategy and subjective workplace adaptation in three time points were tested. T- test showed that gender had no effects on the self-reported variables.

SEM (Structural equation modeling) was performed to test the hypothesized mediating models. The model was constructed in the order of that proactive coping style effect proactive coping competence, and then effects the challenge cognitive appraisal, problem solving coping strategy, and subjective workplace adaptation, which were in the time order. In the process of model fitting, its insignificant pathways were dropped, and some pathways were added suggested by the modification indices. This resulted in an improved model fit,  $\chi^2$

(33) = 30.39,  $p = .60$ ; RMSEA = .00; GFI = .95; AGFI = .90 (Fig. 1). In the overall model, proactive coping style effected proactive coping competence, and then proactive coping

TABLE I  
CORRELATIONS, MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ALL STUDY VARIABLES

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
proactive coping style	2.71	0.33	1										
proactive coping competence	2.86	0.41	.66**	1									
challenge cognitive appraisal (T1)	3.15	0.86	.34**	.43**	1								
problem solving coping strategy (T1)	2.64	0.67	.33**	.40**	.47**	1							
subjective adaptation of workplace (T1)	5.09	1.20	.35**	.51**	.51**	.34**	1						
challenge cognitive appraisal (T2)	3.01	0.86	.19**	.33**	.46**	.23**	.34**	1					
problem solving coping strategy (T2)	2.54	0.72	.31**	.45**	.43**	.54**	.45**	.60**	1				
subjective adaptation of workplace (T2)	4.25	1.13	.26**	.37**	.42**	.32**	.60**	.65**	.61**	1			
challenge cognitive appraisal (T3)	2.78	0.91	.30**	.37**	.52**	.26**	.35**	.56**	.48**	.57**	1		
problem solving coping strategy (T3)	2.55	0.69	.28**	.27**	.41**	.33**	.27**	.53**	.58**	.51**	.57**	1	
subjective adaptation of workplace (T3)	4.77	1.30	.25*	.33**	.41**	.15	.40**	.58**	.45**	.63**	.64**	.65**	1

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

competence directly predicted the challenge cognitive appraisal, problem solving coping strategy and subjective workplace adaptation of Time 1. Through the Time 1's positive coping effort and outcome, proactive coping competence indirectly predicted the Time 2's and Time 3's positive coping effort and outcomes. In view of this, it was clear that 1) proactive coping style effects the positive coping efforts and outcomes by mediating proactive coping competence, 2) proactive coping competence directly promoted Time 1's actual positive coping effort and outcomes, and 3) it indirectly promoted Time 2 and Time 3's.

competence and the coping efforts, rather than only proactive coping style and positive outcomes. As the ability aspect of proactive coping, proactive coping competence refers to a set of ability to take a future-oriented viewpoint, set realistic goals and make plans [6]. Based on this definition, we hypothesized the proactive coping competence mediates the process of proactive coping style effecting the coping efforts and outcomes. The result of the current study supported our assumption, and also it is the first empirical evidence to support the conceptualization of proactive coping competence.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

In this study, the purpose was to investigate proactive coping's effects on the workplace adaptation after transition from college to workplace. In order to elucidate the influence process, we purposed the hypothesized model that proactive coping style affects newcomers' coping efforts and outcomes of workplace adaptation by mediating proactive coping competence. And the result showed that, proactive coping style mediating proactive coping competence to effect newcomers' the actual positive coping effort and outcomes during one year after transition from college.

Based on this result, there were two notable findings. First, as we hypothesized, proactive coping competence's mediating function between proactive coping style and the actual coping effort and outcomes was supported.

Many earlier studies about proactive coping have been focusing on the dispositional aspect—proactive coping style. Even though, proactive coping style has shown to relate to many positive outcomes, such as functional ability and positive affect [14], the question of functioning process between proactive coping style and the positive outcomes is still not clear. In the current study, we included proactive coping

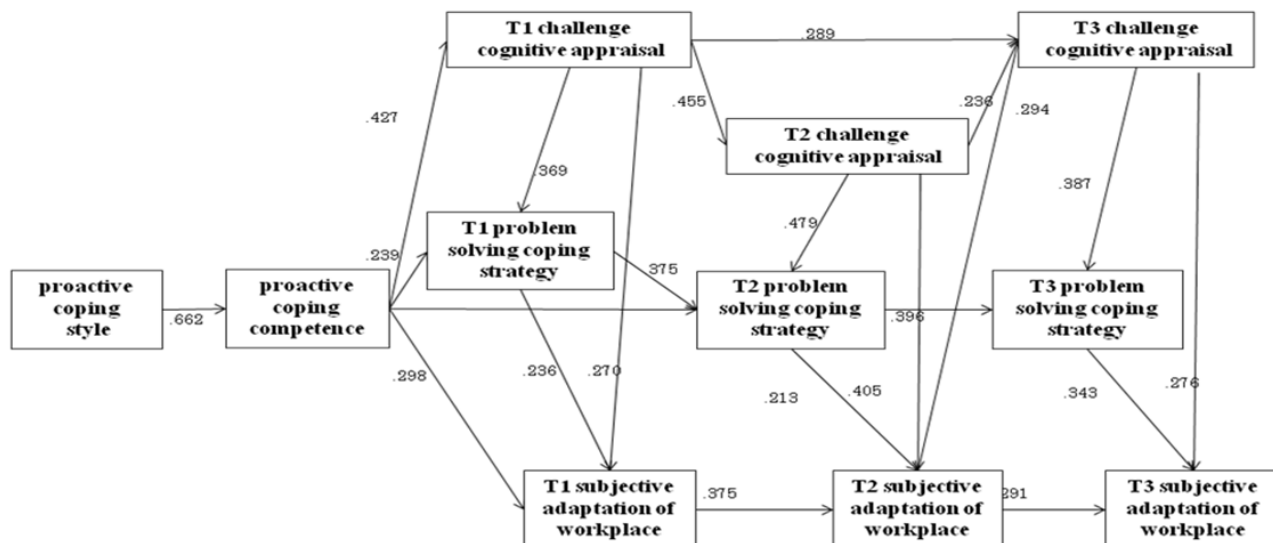


Fig. 1 Model of proactive coping style predicting the actual positive coping effort and subjective workplace adaptation after one month (Time 1), three months (Time 2), one year (Time 3) after the transition from the college to workplace

Second, proactive coping competence directly fostered the actual positive coping efforts and outcomes one month after the transition, and indirectly promoted the positive coping efforts and outcomes three months and one year after the transition. This finding coincides to the positive feature of the proactive coping [3], and also indicated that not only right after entering the workplace, but also in a long-term view, proactive coping competence is a helpful skill for newcomers to think, and behave actively, for the purpose of gaining the adaptation to the new environment.

There were two studies addressed proactive coping style positively relates the adaptation to university after transition from high school [4], [7]. The finding of the current study is corresponded to them. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that, not only elderly people, the younger people also benefit from proactive coping to adapt to the new environment after the transition efficiently.

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