

PROACTIVE PERSONALITY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS OF GEN Z INDIVIDUALS

Małgorzata OKRĘGLICKA^{1*}, Anna LEMAŃSKA-MAJDZIK²

¹ Czestochowa University of Technology, malgorzata.okreglicka@pcz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-5806-2322

² Czestochowa University of Technology; anna.lemanska-majdzik@pcz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-3484-3498

* Correspondence author

Purpose: Generation Z is specific in many areas of life, including entrepreneurship. Since entrepreneurial intentions are indicated as an antecedent of actual entrepreneurship and since it is indicated that Gen Z individuals are characterized by greater entrepreneurial intentions (EI) compared to other generations, it is worth examining the traits that may additionally strengthen the entrepreneurial intentions of young people. One such personality trait is proactivity. Hence, the main goal of the study is to determine how proactive personality (PP) affects the entrepreneurial intentions of Gen Z individuals in Poland.

Design/methodology/approach: To address the research goal, a survey using the CAWI method was conducted in 2024 among 370 Gen Z individuals in Poland. The respondents expressed their opinions on a 5-point Likert scale. The participants in the study were selected through purposeful random selection. Following acceptance of the reliability indicator values, a statistical analysis was conducted using a multiple regression model, descriptive statistics, and correlation indicators.

Findings: The research confirmed the relatively high level of EI of Gen Z individuals. Regression analysis confirmed the strong dependency between PP, as an independent variable, and EI, as a dependent variable, in the study group. A 76.4% increase in the EI variable level in the Gen Z group follows a 100% increase in the PP predictor.

Research limitations: The main limitation of the study was that the research group was not entirely representative, which made it impossible to extrapolate the findings and make specific predictions about the likely use of PP in the workplace.

Practical implications: For management practitioners, the development or adjustment of HR management tools is recommended to select candidates for job positions requiring an entrepreneurial orientation who are characterized by proactivity.

Originality/value: The paper's contribution is visible by highlighting the significance of enhancing the proactivity of individuals to create entrepreneurial intentions as an antecedent of entrepreneurial actions.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial intentions, Generation Z, proactive personality, proactivity

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Young individuals born between 1997 and 2012, known as Generation Z, hereinafter “Gen Z”, are beginning a new phase in the corporate world with distinctive traits, fresh perspectives, and digital abilities. More than 25% of the world's population is already members of Generation Z as of 2023, and it is predicted that they will account for 27% of the workforce by 2025. Previous research in this area is limited, in part due to a lack of data availability, as Gen Z members are still very young and have been in the workplace for a relatively short time, whereas older generations are well-studied (Lopes, Gomes, Trancoso, 2024).

Entrepreneurship is a means of job creation, economic development, and lifestyle improvement, and it is also a way to generate income, independence, livelihood, and self-confidence. However, it takes time for entrepreneurial activity to emerge. It concerns how people's behavioral attitudes and cognitive processes interact with social, economic, and cultural issues (Hossain et al., 2023). Previous studies confirm that strong entrepreneurial intention (EI) is associated with a high potential for entrepreneurship (Amofah, Saladríguez, 2022). Moreover, in recent years, some studies have been conducted to examine the entrepreneurship of Gen Z, which have shown greater entrepreneurial intentions compared to other generations such as Generation Y (Dreyer, Stojanová, 2023).

The proactivity of an individual in the context of Generation Z may prove to be a factor that stimulates their entrepreneurial intentions. Thanks to this feature, the younger generation has a greater chance of using available tools, developing skills, creating valuable networks of contacts, responding to changing market conditions, and, finally, taking business initiatives, which are key to fulfilling dreams of having their own business. Proactivity not only promotes the development of entrepreneurship but also allows for better coping with challenges and quick response to changes in the dynamic world of business. Thus, the main goal of the study is to determine how proactive personality (PP) affects the entrepreneurial intentions of Gen Z individuals in Poland.

This article makes multiple contributions to the body of knowledge regarding Gen Z's business aspirations. First, it adds to the body of research by addressing the topic of how personality factors, such as proactivity, affect the creation of entrepreneurial activities. This topic hasn't been examined much in the past. Second, by taking a theoretical approach, this study can contribute to the development and expansion of ideas on young people's proactivity, particularly that of Gen Z. Third, the study can offer insightful information to enhance entrepreneurial education programs, such as those that enhance and expand Gen Z members' proactive competencies, making them more competitive in the dynamic business world. For management practitioners, the development or adjustment of HR management tools is recommended to select candidates for job positions requiring an entrepreneurial orientation who are characterized by proactivity.

2. Literature review

2.1. Entrepreneurial intentions

Among various stages of entrepreneurship, the most crucial stage is the formation of EI (Selvan et al., 2024). Intentions are mental states that direct individuals toward behavior and describe a person's readiness to conduct this behavior in the future (Ajzen, 2011). Thus, the literature identified EI as an effective means for subsequent entrepreneurial action (Kautonen, Van Gelderen, Fink, 2015).

EI is considered a conscious awareness or process that results in the decision to establish and manage a business in the future (Otache, Edopkolor, Kadiri, 2022). It is identified with the goal of establishing a new business or exploring new opportunities within an existing business (Silesky-Gonzalez, Lezcano-Calderon, Mora-Cruz, 2025). Vamvaka et al. (2020) defined EI as a planned, controlled, voluntary, and innate behavior where people continuously think about entrepreneurial ideas and tasks before establishing new ventures. Bae et al. (2014) defined EI as the antecedent of entrepreneurial action or behavior that demonstrates an individual's willingness to own and run new ventures. Individuals can start their own business ventures only when they have sufficient EI toward an entrepreneurial career (Wu, 2010).

Entrepreneurial intentions are the foundation for subsequent entrepreneurial ventures, emphasizing the important role of shaping a solid educational framework that activates individuals' intentions. However, the stimulation of entrepreneurial intentions is not solely dependent on participation in entrepreneurship programs, and as Kariv, Giglio and Corvello (2025) point out, it also depends on endogenous factors, such as individual characteristics of a person.

Thompson (2009) stated that EI is not a binary "yes or no" decision; rather, it extends along a nomological continuum, ranging from mere preference for self-employment over paid employment to commitment to an entrepreneurial career and finally to nascent entrepreneurship.

EI can be characterized as a stage when an individual develops an initial idea or concept to create a new business, product, or service, or implement a specific initiative (Liñán, Chen, 2009). In other words, EI is part of the phase of reflection, concept development, and planning, involving market research, the business plan, the search for initial financing, and the validation of the idea (Ruiz-Alba et al., 2021). The EI role is decisive in the early stages of conception and planning, even before the company or project is officially launched or incorporated into a legal structure (Grande, Camprubi, Séraphin, 2025).

In the entrepreneurial context, a general definition is that EI is the state of mind that directs and guides a person's attention, experience, actions, goal setting, communications, commitment, organization, and other kinds of work toward the enactment of entrepreneurial behavior (Vamvaka et al., 2020).

Thompson (2009) defined entrepreneurial intention as a self-acknowledged conviction of the individual's mind regarding the possibility of starting a new business with a sincere and

committed plan to do so at a specific moment. As such, the intention may result from necessity or opportunity-based entrepreneurial activity (Szabó, Aranyossy, 2024). However, usually, EI comes from the internal desires of the individuals rather than compulsion (Pribadi et al., 2023).

The wide variety of EI terms may be related to the view that entrepreneurial activity is perceived and studied as a process (Held et al. 2018). At the same time, it is indicated that the process is developed over time, and the entrepreneurial mental activity of individuals can be developed, especially in the early stages of life (Bergmann, Stephan 2013).

2.2. Proactivity as a dimension of entrepreneurial orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) refers to top-level managerial propensities or beliefs about dimensions of risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactivity that can influence firms' strategic decisions at the individual, group, or organization level (Lumpkin, Dess, 1996). EO has gained considerable attention as a key concept in the strategy process and as an antecedent of outcomes such as firm performance, innovativeness, and relationships with other firms and the changing environment (Choi, Kim, Roh, 2024).

EO is a completely strategic propensity toward entrepreneurship development as a dominant idea, according to Gupta & Gupta (2015). Additionally, EO describes a company's propensity to operate independently, creatively, risk-takingly, and proactively in response to potential market situations. EO is an individual's overall perception of individuals directly involved in venture creation, whether in a new startup or an existing company. The idea of EO is commonly used by academics to analyze or understand an organization's entrepreneurial behavior. Therefore, EO can also be described as the various approaches to strategic initiative development that key decision-makers employ to carry out their company's overarching objective, maintain its viewpoint, and establish a competitive edge (Al-Mamary, Alshallaqi, 2022).

Proactiveness, according to Lumpkin and Dess (1996), is the promptness with which businesses respond to both current market demands and emerging market prospects. A company that keeps a very proactive attitude will be able to predict new markets' needs and combine resources to better satisfy them than rivals. According to Lumpkin and Dess (2001), companies that are highly proactive are able to predict potential changes in the business environment or even influence it to their advantage. Being proactive enables companies to profit from first-mover advantages and advantages that latecomers never acquire, such as expanding their customer base and improving their reputation in the eyes of their clients (Khan et al., 2021). Businesses that have a proactive mindset are able to predict the wants of their clients and the responses of their rivals in the marketplace. Additionally, proactive businesses concentrate on building their capacity to sway legislators and mold markets to their benefit in terms of market share or position. Additionally, proactive initiatives enable companies to stay up to date with technological developments and consistently work to develop and incorporate resources that correspond with them (Loan et al., 2023).

A proactive organization, as opposed to a reactive one, is characterized by an exceptional opportunity mindset. The ability of a business to react to business opportunities by exerting effort in the competitive marketplace is referred to as proactiveness. The ability to anticipate and adjust to new goods and services rather than merely reacting to future events as they happen is known as proactivity. Being proactive keeps businesses ahead of the competition and puts pressure on the market (Al-Mamary, Alshallaqi, 2022).

2.3. Proactive personality

PP can be defined as a relatively stable personality or behavioral tendency of individuals to act in order to actively influence their environment (Chen et al. 2021). Even with excellent workplace management, an individual's personality remains a strong factor in determining motivational attitudes in the workplace, and one of the personality characteristics, especially often considered in terms of work performance, is PP. PP is considered to be an antecedent of proactive behavior in an organization, also supporting organizational creativity and innovation. This is due to the fact that a proactive employee has greater skills in recognizing and solving problems, as well as initiating changes (Suseno et al., 2020). PP translates into active behaviors and efforts of organizational members, which, on the one hand, allow them to influence its external environment and on the other hand, effectively shape the intraorganizational environment, allowing them to perceive opportunities and overcome limitations on the way to set goals (Shi et al., 2023). Comparing people with more and less PP, it can be indicated that those with a strong proactive character are more emotionally stable, which allows them to cope better with stress in a changing and hostile environment and more often seize opportunities to improve performance (Bateman, Crant, 1993). In addition, strong PP allows individuals to strive to carry out tasks in accordance with their interests and makes them more willing to take the initiative and take action to solve problems. Meanwhile, when people who are not very proactive internally accept the external environment in its current state, passively react to changes, and allow this external environment to shape them (Crant, 2000).

Proactive individuals are more likely to adapt to the requirements and specifics of the organization, presenting positive styles of coping with challenges (Wang et al., 2024). In addition, people with PP show an increased willingness to help colleagues and are particularly engaged in effective knowledge acquisition (Chai, Hu, Niu, 2022).

An individual's PP should be shaped from the earliest years. It has been confirmed that PP significantly affects the career course of students, as they have higher self-efficacy, are more confident in making career decisions and conducting job searches, and are less afraid of changes in the work environment (Park, 2015). Thus, PP is a factor of personal success, as highly proactive individuals have higher levels of affective commitment, intrinsic motivation, pursuit of autonomy, career self-efficacy, and creativity (Shi et al., 2023). Such individuals also show higher levels of job and career satisfaction (Wang, Lei, 2023). Presbitero (2015) also demonstrated the importance of shaping PP already at the stage of education, proving the moderating

role of PP in the relationship between proactive career planning and proactive career implementation.

2.4. Hypothesis development

In the literature to date, there have been studies on both the general impact of proactivity on EI and the specific impact of PP on young people's EI. Among the studies on the relationship between proactivity as an element of entrepreneurial orientation and EI of Generation Z representatives, we can indicate the research on the entrepreneurial behavioral intentions of 341 Saudi Arabian students, which confirmed the actual influence of proactivity on EI among college students who are interested in venturing into new businesses (Al-Mamary, Alshallaqi, 2022). Another cross-sectional survey among 381 students at Indonesian universities revealed that EO, as a three-factor instrument consisting of the three dimensions of risk-taking, innovativeness, and proactiveness is positively correlated with EI (So et al., 2017). Moreover, the research on 300 male and 300 female senior students in Saudi Arabia's eastern province. Confirmed the positive influence of proactiveness, as one of the EO dimensions, on students' entrepreneurial intention. Moreover, there is no difference between male and female groups when examining the proactiveness-EI relationship (Sobaih, Elshaer, 2022).

Among the studies on Gen Z individuals' PP and its impact on EI, one can mention the study of Travis and Freeman (2017), who investigated PP and EI on a group of 471 students of a private college and a public university in the southeastern United States and confirmed the positive correlation between these variables. In turn, Naz et al. (2020), based on research on 700 university students in universities in Pakistan, didn't confirm the direct influence of PP on EI; however, they found the positive serial mediation effect of different self-efficacy dimensions on PP-EI relations. In the study of Hu et al. (2023) on 647 students from 24 universities in China, the structural equation model confirmed the positive effect of PP on their entrepreneurial intention. Moreover, findings indicated that entrepreneurial passion mediates the relationship between PP and EI under controlled entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Similarly, Chen (2024) presented the results of the study on a total of 764 university students from two Chinese universities, which confirmed a positive effect of PP on EI when entrepreneurial attitude exerted a partial mediating effect in this relation.

The above allows for the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a dependency between the proactive personality and entrepreneurial intentions of Gen Z individuals.

3. Methods

To address the research goal, a survey using the CAWI method was conducted in 2024 among 370 Gen Z individuals in Poland. The participants in the study were selected through purposeful random selection. The respondents expressed their opinions on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey questions were prepared based on a literature review. The variable of PP consists of 9 items developed based on Crant and Kraimer (1999):

- PP1. I am constantly looking for new ways to improve my life.
- PP2. I am usually the one who initiates constructive change.
- PP3. I like to watch my ideas turn into reality.
- PP4. If I don't like something, I try to fix it.
- PP5. I assume that if I believe in something, I will make it happen.
- PP6. I like to convince others of my ideas, even if I encounter opposition.
- PP7. I excel at identifying opportunities.
- PP8. I am always looking for ways to improve.
- PP9. I can see a good opportunity long before anyone else.

In turn, the variable of entrepreneurial intentions consists of 5 items developed by Liñán and Chen (2006):

- EI1. My career goal is to become an entrepreneur.
- EI2. I am willing to do whatever it takes to become an entrepreneur.
- EI3. I will do my best to start and run my own business.
- EI4. I am determined to start my own business in the future.
- EI5. I intend to start my own business one day.

The internal consistency of variables was investigated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which level seems to be satisfactory (Table 1).

Table 1.
Cronbach's alpha reliability test

EI	PP
0.921	0.896

Source: own research.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of a set of items. Since a value of 0.7 is generally considered the acceptable threshold, it is worth noting that the Cronbach's alpha levels for all variables are high (above 0.8).

Following acceptance of the reliability indicator values, a statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, correlations (Kendall Tau correlation coefficient), and multiple regression. The calculations were carried out using the Statistica 13.3 statistical software.

4. Results

The first step of the statistical analysis of the data from the conducted study was the analysis and evaluation of descriptive statistics for the independent variable PP and the dependent variable EI.

It should be noticed that the respondents, who are the Gen Z members, assessed the 9 sub-variables of PP relatively high. As a 5-point Likert scale was used for assessment, each variable achieved a mean above 3.00 (Figure 1). The lowest score was given to the element concerning initiating constructive changes (PP2) and being a leader in finding opportunities (PP7). In turn, the highest score (4.10) was given to the factor indicating one's own satisfaction with implementing ideas turn that into reality (PP3).

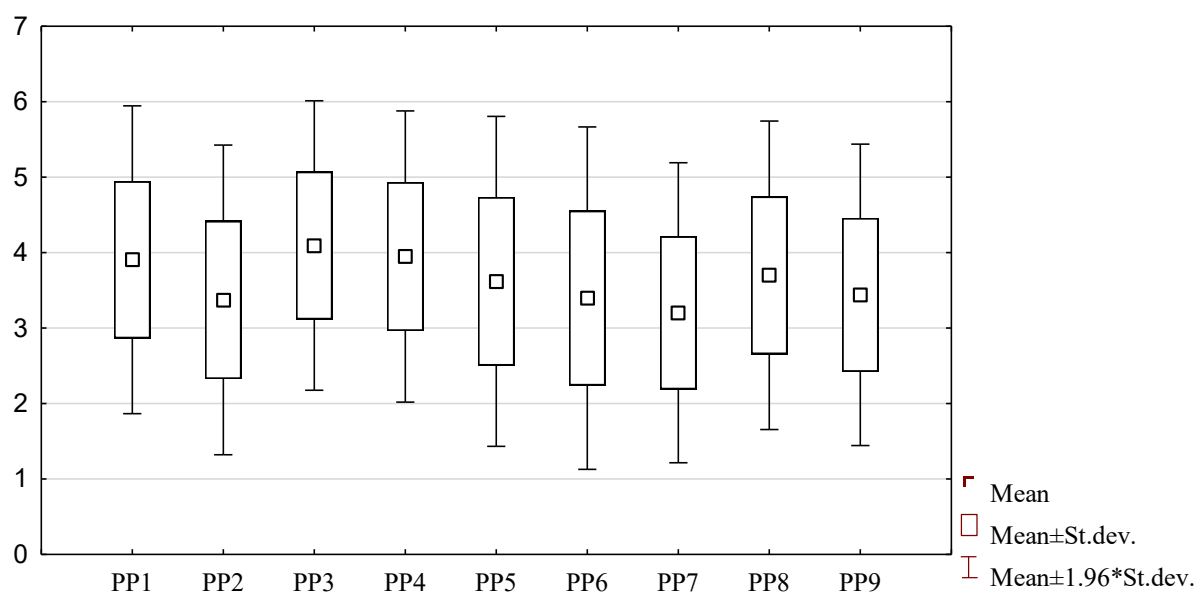


Figure 1. Descriptive statistics for development potential (DP).

Source: own research.

In the area of the EI variable, the study results revealed quite similar opinions of reviewers belonging to Gen Z. The mean responses ranged from 3.22 for EI2 to 3.80 for EI5, using a 5-point Likert scale (Figure 2). Considering that the highest rating directly concerned the respondents' plans to start a business in the future, it can be concluded that young people have a high level of intentions towards entrepreneurship.

The next stage of data analysis was to examine the correlation between the items of both variables (Table 2). The use of the Likert scale to express the respondents' opinions resulted in treating the variables as nonparametric, which prompted the use of the Kendall Tau correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between the predictors. All correlations were statistically significant for $p < 0.05$. The strength of correlation between the variables ranged from weak to moderate, which allows for conducting a multiple regression analysis.

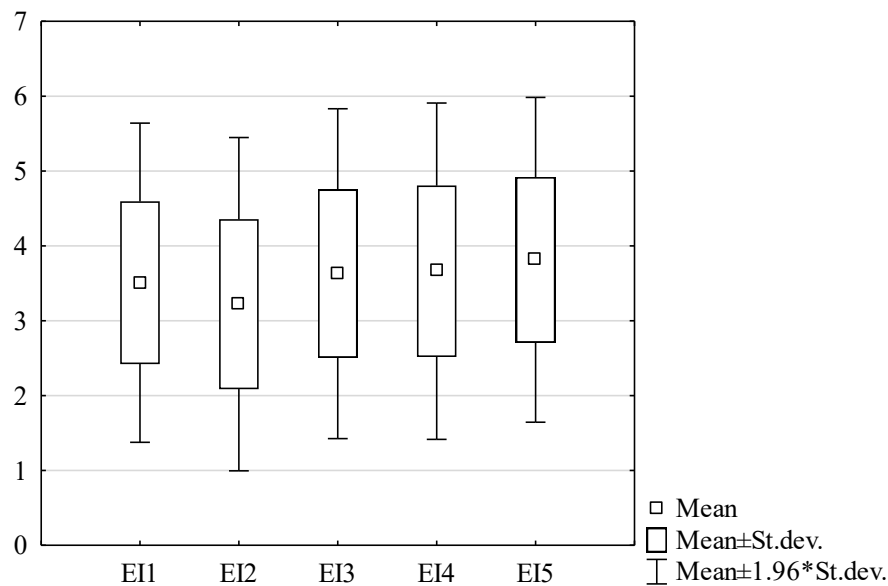


Figure 2. Descriptive statistics for entrepreneurial intentions items.

Source: own research.

Table 2.

Correlation analysis (n=370; p<0.05)

	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	PP6	PP7	PP8	PP9
EI1	0.286	0.340	0.320	0.279	0.369	0.354	0.411	0.407	0.381
EI2	0.288	0.332	0.307	0.270	0.301	0.319	0.338	0.370	0.458
EI3	0.214	0.300	0.304	0.312	0.341	0.300	0.321	0.327	0.403
EI4	0.219	0.306	0.316	0.311	0.350	0.334	0.367	0.323	0.382
EI5	0.270	0.333	0.348	0.310	0.367	0.257	0.317	0.319	0.353

Source: own research.

Multiple regression analyses were used to evaluate dependency between PP as an independent factor in the group of Gen Z individuals. The EI level was included as dependent variable in the regression model (Table 3).

Table 3.

Multiple regression results

n=370	R=0.605; R ² =0.365; Adjusted R ² =0.364; F(1,368)=211,88; p<0,000; Standard error of estimate=0.77960					
	b*	std err*	b	std err	t	p
Intercept			0.794	0.195	4.075	0.000
PP	0.604	0.042	0.764	0.052	14.556	0.000

Source: own research.

It was verified by Table 3's summary of the multiple regression model that the entire model was statistically significant ($p < 0.00$). Additionally, the complete model was able to account for 36.4% of the response variability, which is a promising outcome. The PP predictor within the model seems to have a statistically significant and positive impact on EI. A 76.4% increase in the EI variable level in Gen Z group follows a 100% increase in the PP predictor.

Our findings are consistent with many previous researches, as PP has long been recognized as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial outcomes (Luo, Huang, Gao, 2022; He, Lu, Qian, 2019; Claes, Beheydt, Lemmens, 2005). It should be noted that in many studies the PP-EI relationship is mediated or moderated by additional variables, which poses a challenge to the authors' past research. As an example, we can cite the research of Huang and Kee (2024), derived from a sample of 250 final-year students from public universities in China, demonstrating that PP partially influences EI through its effects on attitude towards entrepreneurship and perceived behavioral control. Similarly, Kumar and Shukla (2023), in a survey study of a total of 531 college students of 18–28 years of age in India, confirmed both the direct effect of PP on EI and the indirect effect via entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

5. Conclusion

Entrepreneurial intentions are a key basis for undertaking entrepreneurial activities (Kautonen, Van Gelderen, Fink, 2015), both in the form of establishing one's own company and entrepreneurial activities in existing organizations. Hence, the intensification of EI seems to be an important task not only for the interested parties but also for the state, for which entrepreneurship is a factor of economic development and improving competitiveness.

When considering whether proactivity as a manifestation of entrepreneurial orientation and PP as an individual feature constitute a significant determinant of EI, it should be pointed out that previous studies have confirmed the possibility of such a relationship (Chen, 2024; Hu et al., 2023; Naz et al., 2020; Travis, Freeman, 2017).

The current study focused on the diagnosis and assessment of the impact of PP on EI in a group of Gen Z individuals in particular. The designed and conducted quantitative research allowed us to achieve the main goal of the study, which was to determine how PP affects EI of Gen Z individuals in Poland. Regression analysis confirmed the strong dependency between PP, as an independent variable, and EI, as a dependent variable, in the study group. It was therefore possible to confirm hypothesis H1. The research results suggest the need to build proactivity in young individuals, starting from the early stages of education, which may translate into success in later professional life.

There are several research limitations that can be identified in this study. The main limitations of the study was that the research group was not entirely representative, which made it impossible to extrapolate the findings and make specific predictions about the likely use of a PP in the workplace.

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