Proactiveness can be defined by the degree of manufacturing executive involvement in the development of the strategic processes of the business unit, together with the degree of long-term commitment to investments in manufacturing structure and infrastructure aimed at building capabilities in anticipation of their need. This research divides survey data from 60 Ohio manufacturers into low and high performers (based on market share and sales growth) and examines the characteristics of each group based on the aforementioned proactiveness aspects.

Manufacturing structure relates to technology, and the corresponding survey questions measured intended use of tools such as CAD, CAM, flexible manufacturing systems (FMS), and the like. Infrastructure relates to people, and so the corresponding survey questions measured areas such as improved training, motivation, and span of work.

Firms that were high performers had high levels of investment in structural programs and either a high level of manufacturing involvement or a high degree of investments in infrastructural programs. Firms that only excelled on one aspect or that did not excel in structural programs were less likely to be successful.

Thus, a key insight is that manufacturing involvement without commitment to a plan for investing in manufacturing is not any more likely to lead to success. Another key insight is that investments in technology are not enough to achieve superior performance; other dimensions of proactiveness, such as investments in people, must also be pursued.