

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY AND SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS: EVIDENCE FROM PRIVATE SECTOR ACADEMICS OF PAKISTAN

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## ABSTRACT

*The “new career” concepts found in the industrialized economies were studied since the implementation of career models in institutional environments, which have different social, cultural and political norms and thus result in diverse patterns of career development. For carrying out the research, academics were chosen from Pakistan’s private sector universities. The private sector is commercialized and innovative and fits well with the career concepts discussed in the study. To support to the conceptual framework, the researcher has taken the Protean Career Theory as the underpinning theory. For sampling purposes, proportionate stratified sampling has been adopted. Simple random sampling has been utilized to select the academics within each stratum. The sample was chosen out of a total population of 4,994 academics present within the 35 private sector universities located across the country. The questionnaire was distributed among individuals after obtaining permission from the universities. The researcher managed to collect data from 192 respondents with a response rate of 55%. The hypothesis was measured with Structural Equation Modeling and Confirmatory Factor Analysis in AMOS software. The researcher found a statistically insignificant relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success.*

**Keywords:** *Perceived Employability, Protean Career Theory, Subjective Career Success, Private Institutional Sector.*

## INTRODUCTION

The nature of work, workplaces, and organizations, in the last few decades, have witnessed a considerable change. The workplaces are in transition, and new changes and challenges are evolving. For individuals, success has been the primary

motive in the career of one's work life. The success, however, is divided by researchers as subjective and objective in nature. Especially the subjective career success has gained much popularity and significance in recent times. Researchers have investigated multiple psychological factors, responsible for nurturing subjective thinking of an individual and its relationship with other personality traits. The present research intends to better understand the "contemporary career concepts" like protean career orientation, affective commitment, and perceived employability in relation to the subjective career success among academics in Pakistan. These concepts are explained in light of the Protean Career Theory that is the underpinning theory for the present research. The theory has an emphasis on dispositions, attitudes, identities, and beliefs leading to psychological success (Briscoe, Hall & De Muth, 2006). The researcher has included academics as the population of interest as they are at the forefront of developing human resources (Iqbal, Arif & Abbas, 2011). Moreover, academics in the private sector of Pakistan are taken as the study sample, as the private sector is commercialized and more innovative (Halai, 2013), and thus fits well with the career concepts as discussed. These "contemporary career concepts" are known by the "new deal" which does not guarantee permanent employment, but rather the onus of career development is on the individual (De Vos & Soens, 2008), and the fact is also mirrored by Briscoe and Hall in their study in 2006. Briscoe *et al.* (2006), mention an increase in self-employment, independent contractors, private consultancy firms, and entrepreneurship as models of functioning in the modern career landscape.

De Vos and Soens (2008), stress that skill development, meanwhile, leads to perceived employability and subjective career success. A discouraging figure has been put forth by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE, 2015). According to the BEOE report (2015), a large number of Pakistanis have migrated to other countries especially from 2010 to 2015. Among those who migrated, the Bureau claims that 975 were university academics that left in 2014 alone. This brain drain meanwhile is common among all professions and not just academics. Therefore, it is essential to know from a researcher's perspective the level of job dissatisfaction among academics living in their motherland, and whether they feel employable enough to continue working. It is imperative to study, in light of the modern-day concepts like perceived employability and subjective career success especially after the global financial crisis and from the view of developing country like Pakistan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The economic conditions during the recession of 2007-2012 have called for workplaces to be more flexible so as to meet marketplace challenges.

Likewise, Hall (2002), called for internalizing career success in times of economic uncertainties. There is also an emphasis on employees learning and adapting according to the changing workplace by shifting the motivations from employer-orientated to being career-orientated. Therefore, continuous learning has become crucial for the workers in the contemporary era. Moreover, Hall (2004), emphasize that such changes lead the employees to shift their attention towards a career path with a heavy heart rather than moving up the organization's hierarchy. Hall (2004), proclaims about the protean career as:

“The central issue is a life fully worth living.... The secret is to find your unique genius, your talents that you love to develop and use” (Hall, 2004, p. 9)

There have been thus changes in the employees' psychological contract where, as a result of the transactional psychological contract, the individuals' responsibility for career development has increased (O'Neil, Bilimoria, & Saatcioglu, 2004). Employees can, therefore, enhance their perceptions of employability through the ever-increasing possession of skills.

There is empirical evidence to support that perceived employability, and career outcomes are positively related to each other (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, & De Witte, 2011). Similarly, in the competency-based definition given by De Vos, De Hauw and Van der Heijden (2011), perceived employability is taken as a human capital variable. According to human capital theory, employees invest in skills which lead them to greater employability in the marketplace (Forrier, Verbruggen, & De Cuyper, 2015; Ackah & Heaton, 2004).

Furthermore, the contest mobility perspective of career success has similar premises. It states that individuals build upon their human capital competencies, so as to lead themselves to subjective career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). In numerous studies, employability has been positively related to the job and career satisfaction (Greer & Waight, 2017; Xie, Xia, Xin, & Zhou, 2016; Berntson & Marklund, 2007). Employability is thus considered as an important trait for those who perceive that there are a few job opportunities in the labor market. Uncertainty associated with unemployment may lead to a feeling of reduced well-being, but employability being a positive personality characteristic and psychological attitude may reduce these uncertainties (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg & Kinicki, 2005). According to McKee-Ryan et al. (2005), outcomes associated with reemployment should be assessed in terms of quality of one's reemployment. They define the quality of reemployment as

a “new employment” that is of equal if not less than the job that was lost before in terms of satisfaction. Consequently, coping with a job loss takes one form or another until the professional achieve a state of equilibrium with multiple life areas such as work-life balance. Therefore, it may be held that individuals who adjust to less than acceptable jobs are sacrificing their self-worth.

On a negative note, there has been little research done on the relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success. Empirical evidence is provided by De Vos *et al.* (2011), establishing the proposition that perceived employability is positively associated with subjective career success. In their research, the authors found that individuals with employment options are more satisfied with the job. Also, Cash and Gardner (2011), depict a positive relationship between hardiness and career satisfaction. According to them hardiness is related to employability and is a multidimensional concept known for the individual’s inclination to act rather than be passive about the outcomes. Eby Butts and Lockwood (2003), found a positive relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success when employees’ skill building was shown to lead to career satisfaction and success. Also, Gowan (2012), identified four dimensions of perceived employability: career identity, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital. According to Gowan (2012), social capital particularly is related to career satisfaction since networking opens the doors to career opportunities.

Rothwell and Arnold (2007), further describe a positive relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success in their study on 200 human resource professionals. According to their findings:

“We suggest that subjective career success relates to an individual’s perceptions of their past and present, such as how they feel they are doing up to now in relation to their “subjective timetable”, while employability relates to their perceptions of the present and future, in that it concerns their self-perceptions of how well they expect to be able to deal with a number of circumstances that may present themselves in the future, whether positive (e.g., promotion, selection processes) or negative (e.g., redundancy, downsizing) (Pp.35-36)

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that employability drive leads to proactivity and opportunities for career development (Chiaburu, Baker & Pitariu, 2006). In their study on a Global Fortune 500 company, Joo and Ready (2012), depicted a positive relationship between highly career satisfied individuals and proactive personalities. According to their research findings, proactivity is independent of the efforts as displayed by the organizations and creates a culture of employability. It is thus assumed that:

**H: There is a positive relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success**

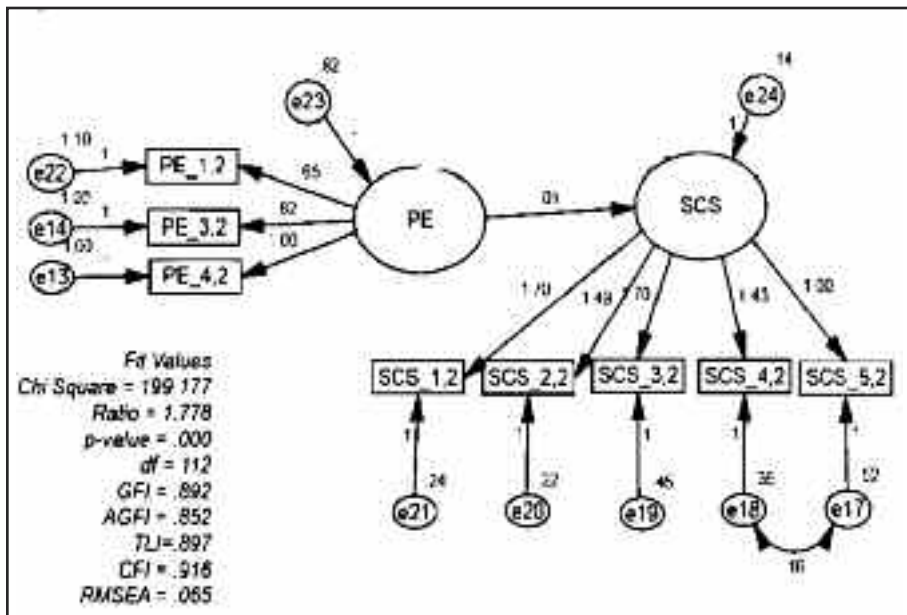
**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Hypothesis testing is done by the researchers after the questionnaires were received. The researcher has employed SPSS and AMOS for data analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is especially important to find out the missing values, outliers, non-responder bias, and normality. Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) is particularly used for hypothesis testing since it's easy to use Graphical User Interface (GUI) shows an accurate view of confirmatory factor analysis.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Hair Jr, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2010), define a structural model in which there is a correlation between latent constructs. This model is built up after subsequent stages and includes first defining the constructs that are being used in the research, developing the measurement model, and last of all checking for the validity of the measurement model. After these stages, the structural model builds up, and shows the relationships among the different constructs and is based on the hypotheses of the research.

**Figure 1. Results from AMOS: Relationship between PE and SCS**



After the structural model was developed using the graphical user interface of AMOS software, the researcher has looked into the “fitness of the model” as proposed by Garver and Mentzer (1999). The fitness has been found out using specific indices like Tucker Lewis, Comparative Fit, Root Mean Square, Degrees of Freedom, Goodness of Fit and Adjusted Goodness. These are presented in the Table below:

Table 1. Model Fit

Index	Ideal Fit	Observed Fit
Non-normed fit index (NNFI) or Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	>.90	.89
Root Mean Square Approximation of Error (RMSEA)	<.08	.86
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	>.90	.92
X <sup>2</sup> / D.F. ratio	Equal to or Less than 3	1.7
Goodness-of-fit Index (GFI)	>.90	.89
Adjusted Goodness-of-fit Index (AGFI)	>.80	.86

Direct effects were observed through the structural model. These direct effects move from one variable to another as depicted in the hypotheses developed earlier in the conceptual framework. The Table is shown below:

Table 2. Directs Effect

			Est.	S.E.	C.R.	P	Status
SCS	β	PE	.007	.05	.16	.88	Not Sig

		Est.	S.E.	C.R.	P	Status
SCS	β PE	.007	.05	.16	.88	Not Sig

*P < 0.05 \*\*\* Not Sig = Not Significant*

*SCS (subjective career success), PE (perceived employability)*

### CONCLUSION

As theoretically argued previously, there have been changes in the psychological contract, with more emphasis laid on “Internal Success” (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). At the same time, employees can enhance the perceptions of employability through an increase in skills (Berntson & Marklund, 2007). The result from the hypothesis testing shows a statistically insignificant relationship as β = .007, z-value = .155 and p>.05.

The insignificant relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success does not support the argument as posited by De

Vos *et al.* (2011). According to De Vos *et al.*, perceived employability is taken as human capital. Professionals thus invest in their skills which leads them to greater employability in the marketplace. With a positive and yet statistically insignificant relationship, the academics are not skill- driven, with greater emphasis on developing their employability. The findings are also not supporting Cash and Gardner (2011), who found a positive relationship between hardiness and career satisfaction. Hardiness according to Cash and Gardner (2011), is related to employability and is a concept known for the individuals to become positive about job outcomes. Thus, due to competition, fewer jobs, less upward mobility, and centralization are hampering academics' subjective career success. The insignificant relationship is not supporting according to Rothwell and Arnold (2007), who found a positive relationship between skills-building and career satisfaction. The findings of the present study are also not supporting Seibert Grant, and Kraimer (2001), who describe employability-driven employees as adaptive and willing to change personal factors such as knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's), so as to meet the needs and demands of the external and internal environmental situations. Results of the present research are contrary to those of Berntson and Markland (2007) who mention perceived employability as a reflection of the employees' ability to attain better jobs in the workplace. The academics, due to weak employability perceptions, are not satisfied with employment prospects and are feeling less secure.

In this regard, the previous theoretical contribution is related to the insignificant relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success. The employing organizations provide skills that are needed to increase their employability perceptions. However, the skill development has been short of providing career satisfaction to the academics. The findings of the present study are thus contrary to the research that employees learn and adapt according to the changing workplace by shifting the motivations from being employer-orientated to being career-orientated (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). These findings confirm the fact that employment opportunities among the academics in Pakistan are not undergoing major shifts as those of their counterparts in the industrialized world depicted within the Anglo-American researches. In other words, careers are still being seen in terms of security of job within a single organization, and employees are less employable across relevant labor markets. Respectively, the academics have not transformed themselves and are still organization-centered.

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