

# Graduates Employability Skills and Placements - Mediating Role of Career Adaptability

Kalpna Venugopal, V Saravana Kumar



**Abstract:** This paper focused on examining the relationship exist between psychosocial variables, employability skills and career adaptability for procuring placements among management graduates; to ascertain the mediating effect of career adaptability skills in the relationship between employability skills and placements. The study opt, cross-sectional design. Data were gathered from management graduates (N=207), placed in varied job settings through academic placements. Hierarchical regression were performed to accomplish objectives of the study. The results showed positive and significant correlation among employability, career adaptability towards procuring placements. Further describes partial mediation effect of career adaptability in relationship between employability and placements obtained among graduates. The results proposes that management graduates need to possess more adaptability skills compared to employability skills in order to secure employment through placements. The career adaptability dimensions: control, curiosity, concern, confidence and major employability skills can be enhanced by providing academic workshops and training interventions to management graduates.

**Keywords:** Employability skills, Career adaptability, Placements, Management graduates

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the growing world, the word ‘competence’ is playing a major role in every individual’s professional lives. So, choosing the suitable career and having potential skills to compete with self will be ideal one to succeed in long run which automatically rules out the competition with others. As we all know how these MNC’s are on par heading towards growth of their corporates excelling by their excellent employee contributions, for which recruiting a right person for the right job can take the company to the unfold the next best level whereas if the wrong decision is made while choosing the candidate not suit for the job may also lead to company’s disaster at times. Subsequently, the potential of a fresher/ student to decide their specialization while schooling in masters or may be while placements should be rightly

assessed by themselves also with some experts opinions of their professors, friends and family to make up their mind and prepare in adapting certain skills and requirements of that particular career which they want to opt. The key component to success in the present world is by being more creative and innovative, good confidence, ability to learn and grow with right ethical and moral values. At present, in the career market the graduates must be equipped with an array of skills and traits (employability skills) to step in to the career (Goodman and Tredway, 2016) [13]. Since the employability skills are also a form of soft skills are the meant to be a building blocks of an individual’s career, the broadcasting often describe on how such abilities are lacking in school-students, graduates and even among working individuals. Supporting to this, organisations are also making efforts and spent quality time and money for training employees in order to enhance their general and specific skills required. Organizations’ and individuals’ define these skills in diverse ways, but in general these skill can be divided in to some general known eight categories includes communication, teamwork, problem solving, creativity and innovativeness, scheduling and organizing, self-management, learning, and expertise (Coetzee, 2012; Bezuidenhout, 2011) [4]. In contrast, few studies signifies the importance of other psychological traits that are indeed require for getting success. In line to this the career adaptability stresses its importance in academic literatures.

The word career adaptability means “the ability to successfully adapt to changes in the values of the job one has”. In a nutshell, career adaptability is the “ability for an individual to survive with present and future tasks, transitions, and challenges within their career”. Thus career adaptability and employability skills are found to be the critical factors to examine in the present scenario among students for academic success. These ideas characterize a students’ capacity to get a new line of work, keep up the activity, make appropriate changes, and lead to a fulfilled life with the skills they possess. In this paper, we originally talked about the need and significance of career adaptability in Asian culture. At first, the relationship among career adaptability, employability skills and placement procurement were reviewed. In the second part, based on online questionnaire forms from sample of final year management graduates who are mostly placed and are in ideal stage of getting their placements, and awaiting to start their professional career life. We presented a hierarchical regression model to examine the potential mediation role of career adaptability.

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This study examines a widespread consideration of associations among two variables, employability skills and career adaptability in students' placements. Since paper focuses on both career adaptability skills and skills of employability, it will help in the right development of an individual's career life even before starting of the career while still pursuing their masters.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

#### A. Employability Skills

Master of Business Administration is a program implied for those students who are setting themselves up with the right skills and competency in the functional area as business and business law, knowledge and applications of accounting and finance, marketing and management executives, management strategic decision making abilities over different issues pertaining to business and societal issues. The abilities learned by undergraduates during their scholarly profession can be set into the two expansive expertise classifications of specialized and non-specialized. Specialized abilities allude to subject-explicit or content-explicit learning and skill pertinent to, or inside, a specific order, for example, data innovation (IT) or brain research (psychology).

Specialized/Technical abilities at that point are those fundamental skills for capable working inside a specific order, while non-specialized abilities are those aptitudes or skills which can be considered pertinent crosswise over various jobs or professions (Sherer and Eadie, 1987; Ismail, 2015; Marock, 2008) [19]. Employability Skills are not work explicit, yet are aptitudes/skills which cut on a level plane over all businesses and vertically over all occupations from passage level to CEO. Due to their pertinence to expert working, non-specialized abilities are normally alluded to as employability aptitudes and incorporate fundamental abilities, for example, oral correspondence, perusing, composing and number-crunching, higher order skills, for example, learning aptitudes and systems, critical thinking, basic leadership, and full of feeling abilities and attributes, such as dependability and responsibility, optimistic attitude, relational abilities (co-operation, team work), self-discipline and self-management and ability to work without supervision (Cotton, 2001; McKinsey Global Institute, 2015; Creed, 2010) [6].

The writing encompassing employability shows that while managers might be fulfilled all in all with the degree of specialized aptitude/skills of new graduates, they are not persuaded by their competency in non-specialized capacities or employability abilities. That is, in the broad audit of key issues in employability, it is accounted for that businesses need workers to have employability abilities; that business' worth nonexclusive employability aptitudes over explicit word related (specialized) abilities; and that businesses consider numerous passage level requests for employment to come up short on the required employability aptitudes and express profound concerns with respect to this lack (Cotton, 2001). It is a reasonable end then that those abilities sectioned inside the expression "employability aptitudes/skills" are quick turning into a prerequisite for business as opposed to

alluring, and that businesses see the obligation regarding the advancement of such abilities lying with instructive organizations. Considering this, and given that an essential point of numerous undergrad – in the event that not all – programs is employability, at that point course improvement [11], conveyance and appraisal ought to incorporate the advancement of employability aptitudes as a noteworthy core interest (Ferreira and Coetzee, 2010) [5]. Similarly, a research conducted by UWA et al., (2005), reported major five capabilities which majorly discriminate the on development and significance index includes English communication skills, ICT skills to understand and disseminate information, writing skills in English, to cope with stress and risk taking, and critical thinking and innovativeness. Subsequently with the skills identified, the 'personal abilities' in terms of effective project management is found to be the significant factor for student's employability (Knight and Yoke, 2006). Notably, Dweck (1999) researched the skills plus project and concluded that it falls under two different divisions of self-confidence. First is a standard belief made on something like once intelligence that cannot be altered and second, changing or mutable belief that can be altered and developed in a feasible method. Thus the previous literatures emphasized that the employability skills are considered to be an important factor for students in procuring placements.

#### B. Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is defined as a "Socio-psychosocial factor that represents the possessions which individuals need to effectively cope up on current and anticipated career transitions" (Savickas, 1997, 2005). According to the career construction theory, for reflecting individual adaptive behaviours the adaptability resources are opted as a major strategy.

That is, such resources aid individuals as one among the self-regulation strategies that enable them to extend, enhance and eventually implement their self-concepts in work role, which in turn crafting their job and structuring their professions or livelihood. Also Fugate et al (2004) [12], stated career adaptability as a critical psychological construct of employability, susceptibility to learn, positivity, self-efficacy and locus of control. In this present work economy it is evident that employees in almost every sector are more likely to switch their jobs by necessity or by their choice, since there is no consecutive order on career demands to individuals (Nota et al., 2012). In this kind of prevailing situation individuals supposed to possess the skills which make them to compete and quickly adapt as well as manage the work transitions (Rossier et al., 2012). Thus in line with framework of career transition theory it is also supported that individuals should possess the skills that make them to aware and cope up of unexpected transitions. That is it can be done by visualizing the future and carries interventions built on the necessities (Rottinghaus et al., 2012). Also the, the career adaptability helps in deciding suitable jobs and eventually obtaining well-being and suitable jobs (Hartung and Taber, 2008; Hirschi, 2010) [10]. Career adaptability comprises four psychosocial abilities or transactional proficiencies [15].

First, “Concern reflects the skill to be conscious of and to plan for a job-related future; second, control denotes the individual sense of independent and inevitability concerning a professional career [16]; Third, curiosity is term defines the trend of discovering one's surroundings; and, finally, confidence shows the affinity to be self-motivated concerning the ability to solve concrete career problems” In a nutshell, this psychological construct, career adaptability acts as a psychosocial competencies strives to attain adaptive goals [17].

This adaptability along with its dimensions are perceived as resources or capabilities that allows individuals to succeed career transitions. Based on the theoretical perspective and previous literature, the conceptual model is framed (Figure 1) and hypothesized as follows H1 (a and b): Employability skills and career adaptability are positively related towards procurement of placements. H2: The relationship between the employability skills and procurement of placement will be partially mediated by career adaptability.

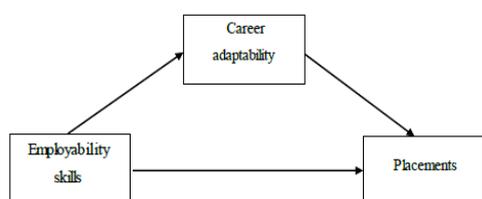


Figure 1: Conceptual model

### III. METHODS

#### A. Samples and Procedure

The study sample comprised of 162 graduate students of business administration recently placed in different organization. The data were collected by survey method using questionnaire The student samples were obtained by the method of purposive sampling on the bases of following two inclusion criteria, (1) placed with a job recently from college (2) undergone the placement trainings programme provided by the institution. In order to obtain more objective type of data, the management graduates from identical institution were chosen. The management graduates involved voluntarily in this study and their age ranges from 20 years to 28 years. Majority of them are male (N=111, 54%) than females (N=96, 47%).

#### B. Scales

Employability Skills was measured with 5 point likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) using Students Employability skills Scale (SEAS) which comprised of 30 items. The items were grouped according to the following eight skills namely “communication, problem solving, teamwork, planning and organizing, creativity or innovation, ICT skill, self-management and time management”. The sample items were “I can lead a team work at college”, “When doing a task, I often devise new ways to do it faster and better”, “I enjoy the “give and take” of working in a group”. Career adaptability was measured with 5-point likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) using Career

Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) with a total of 24-items. The scale comprised of four subscales/dimensions namely “concern, control, curiosity and confidence” of each with 6-items (Maree, 2012; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). All these dimensions’ act as a psychosocial resource to manage occupational transitions and work strains. The sample items were “Building skills for the future” (concern), “Taking decisions by self”(control), “Looking different ways of doing things”(curiosity), “Work up to my ability”(confidence).

Finally the perception about the job placement obtained by the institution were measured with 5 items with five point likert scale. The sample items “The opportunity I got from placements matches my career”, the employability and adaptability skills helped me for getting right placement”. Using SPSS, data analysis were carried out includes frequency distributions, reliability analyses, correlation and hierarchical regression

## IV. RESULTS

#### A. Descriptive Analysis

The association of demographic characteristics towards the dependent variable were examined initially. Based on the results of association the demographics such as gender and age were taken as control variables in further analyses. The Table 1 describes the mean, standard deviations and the coefficients of correlation under study.

The results of correlation depicts that the association among the study variables were modest. Further the overall fit were examined using AMOS. The result indicated better model fit for three factor model ( $\chi^2= 435.02$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $df =271$ ,  $CFI=0.92$ ,  $IFI =0.90$ ,  $TLI =.89$ ,  $RMSEA= 0.04$ ) than that of one-factor model ( $\chi^2= 1662.05$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $df =297$ ,  $CFI=0.25$ ,  $IFI =0.24$ ,  $TLI =.18$ ,  $RMSEA= 0.14$ ).

Table 1. Correlations, Mean, SD and reliability of the study variable

Variables	1	2	3	Mean	SD	Reliability
Employability Skills	-	-	-	4.01	0.54	0.816
Career adaptability	0.629**	-	-	4.5	0.59	0.824
Placement	0.390**	0.508**	-	4	0.49	0.853
Concern				4.12	0.54	0.794
Control				4.02	0.69	0.814
Curiosity				4.6	0.56	0.891
Confidence				4.52	0.74	0.862
Team work				4.62	0.49	0.832
Communication				4.21	0.47	0.861
Problem solving				3.81	0.55	0.799
Planning				3.54	0.61	0.874
Organizing				3.01	0.59	0.852
Creativity				3.12	0.45	0.881
ICT skills				3.89	0.54	0.891
Self-management				3.08	0.76	0.748
Time Management				3.41	0.56	0.814
Leadership				3.56	0.84	0.787

#### B. Hypotheses Testing

With the obtained model fit of measurement model the hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analyses.

To examine the effect of potential mediator, the steps proposed by Baron and Kenny (1996) were followed. Thus the analyses were carried with three consecutive steps to examine the mediation effect of career adaptability. As first, the demographics variables were entered as control variables, and second steps the relationship of predictor variable (employability skills) and mediator (career adaptability) with the criterion variable (placement) were examined separately. Similarly, the mediator with criterion (placement) were examined. Finally, the mediation effect were confirmed by examining the relationship of criterion variable, which showed lower beta coefficient than before.

The result from Table 2, depicted that the all the hypothesized correlation among the paths were significant. Thus hypotheses H1a and H1b are confirmed. Further the regression result showed, the career adaptability substantially reduces the strength of relationship between employability and placements. Thus the lower beta value of employability skills ( $\beta=0.418$  reduced to  $\beta=0.178$ ) after the inclusion of career adaptability ( $\beta=0.551$ ) confirm the partial y mediation effect on the relationship between employability skills and placements, which further supports hypothesis H2.

Variables	Model (R)	Model (R2)	t-value	Beta	p-value
Step 1: Placement					
Employability Skills	0.427	0.183	5.919	0.418	0.000**
Step 2: Placement					
Employability Skills			2.159	0.178	0.040*
Career adaptability	0.552	0.304	5.056	0.551	0.000**
$\Delta R^2$		0.121			

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ , N=207

Additional, sobel test were performed in order to determine the direction and strength of the mediation effect (career adaptability). As proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) [2], the result of sobel test supported the mediation effect by reflecting the significant drop in beta value of employability skills ( $t=3.78$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ) after the inclusion of mediator (career adaptability) [3]. Also the test were extended to for check whether the predictor variable employability skills by any way act as mediator. But the result showed insignificant mediation effect. Thus confirms the career adaptability as potential mediator.

## V. DISCUSSION

Both employability and career adaptability are considered as a critical variables in occupational and vocational literatures, and the present study examines the effect of these variables among management graduates in procuring placements. The positive and strong correlation between career adaptability, employability skills towards procuring of placements suggests that students who possess right proportion of employability skills and also consider themselves more adaptable in their work place secures more chances of getting jobs. Specifically the management students adaptability for securing jobs. Also the results described that, equivalent to prior studies (Hogan, et al., 2013; Corso, 2013; Autin, et al., 2017; Potgieter, 2012) [7], career adaptability contributes

more towards getting placements among other psychosocial resources [9]. With respect to the results of employability skills, communication and teamwork obtained highest mean score among the graduates [18]. This result are in line with the previous work Othman, Sulaiman, Masrom, and Buntat (2009), reported that the graduates with previous exposure to team works such as project assignments, interns and other academic group activities are able to manage, communicate and co-ordinate well with team environments. In turn this ability enable them to cope up well with the team based work culture and also make them to more presentable in the organization. Also this result emphasized the importance of academic curriculum over the performance of students in getting placements. Thus curriculum should also focus on communication and team building rather enhancing only on technical knowledge (Singh and Singh, 2008). As a same way, the mean results of the 4 sub dimensions of career adaptability describes equivalent results, which is for concern, control, curiosity and confidence. The overall dimensions of career adaptability contributes more towards procuring job. This results may be attributed to be the changed attitude of graduates through academic system exposed to modern technical training and education. In particular, with the help of platforms such as internships and organizational visits provided by the institution helps them to gain the real-time experience of work culture of varied settings. Thus the students may be aware of modern technologies through such trainings and also they became more confident towards their career prospects (Savickas, 2011). More importantly, the results indicated that abilities on employability and career adaptability are positively related. More specific, communication skills and team work followed by other skills were positively related to the four abilities of career adaptability viz., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. This findings support previous studies on the literature of career adaptability (Guzman and Choi, 2013; Del Corso and Rehfuß, 2011; Savickas, 2011; Othman et al., 2009) [8] The result of mediation effect of career adaptability supports the mediation hypotheses. And this results are found to be line up with the theoretical proposition by (Del Corso and Rehfuß, 2011; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Also supported by previous literatures (Minhas, 2010; Proctor et al., 2009). The results adds to the studies by (Autin, et al., 2017) [1], where it was suggested to examine the role of career adaptability in procuring jobs among students. More importantly the result of the study examines the critical linkages of personal traits and academic outcomes, which emphasized management graduates through their employability skills with increasing level of career adaptability could more positively influence towards getting placements. Thus exhibits pressing focus on employability skills and adaptability among management graduates to consider. The institutions/management should engage in interventions such as workshops and training programs for improving Career adaptability capabilities. For instance trainings time-perspective workshops that stimulate future orientation (concern), activities on information seeking (curiosity), self- esteem enhancement (confidence) and decision-making and stress management (control) trainings (Tolentino et al., 2013), which helps students to enhance adaptability skills and subsequently supports their employability.

### A. Implication, Limitation and Future Studies

Certain limitations of the study should be mentioned. First, the study focused on management graduates. It is important to consider that the type of program influences the skills acquired (Yildirim et al., 2016). In this view point, further studies can be reproduced by considering the type of education as a potential moderator for deeper insights. Second, the study is limited to specific period of time (i.e) cross-sectional. Future longitudinal studies may clarify how the association between employability and career adaptability evolve over varied time period as individuals experience transition phase. Finally the results denoted partial mediation effect of career adaptability between employability skills and procuring of placements. According to Hair et al., (2012) [14], the results of partial mediation signifies the possibility of certain other potential mediators between the examined relationships. Hence in order to test the entire model of career adaptability other personal and contextual factors can be explored.

### VI. CONCLUSION

The present study addressed the impact of employability and career adaptability towards securing placements among management graduates. By examining the role of these two psychosocial constructs among graduated students helps to provide deeper insights in getting jobs through placements. The management graduates along with the acquired skills of employability have to improve their adaptability resource to become employed. On the whole the graduates' adaptability resources by the way of their control, curiosity, concern and confidence attributes more variance towards procurement of jobs than that of employability skills. Thus indicates that the institutions and management should strive to improve adaptability resources thereby ensure employability among graduates.

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