

## Exploring Factors Towards Career Success in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is to explore the factors affecting employees' career success and develop a theoretical framework and testable propositions concerning how individual protean career attitude and organizational learning practices related to employees' career success. Further insight was proposed in determining the mediating impact of perceived employability toward these construct. Review of past literatures is used to addresses the conceptual boundaries for this study and justify the proposed research framework with the hypothesis of the relationship between the constructs. This research study adopting quantitative method of data analysis through self-administered questionnaire on the academic staffs from the Malaysia private institute of higher learning. In total, 352 completed questionnaires were returned out of the 750 distributed, yielding a response rate of 47%. Supporting the hypotheses, the results showed that both individual protean career attitude and organizational learning practices are positively correlated with perceived employability and career success. Perceived employability mediated the relationship between individual protean career attitude, organizational learning practices and career success. In addition, perceived employability proved as the strongest predictor among all the variables. This study may help employers understand how today's employee will perceived career success from the perspective of the employability connection framework. In addition, the finding of this study may add knowledge to local and international human resource managers to develop an effective learning and development strategies that highly impact employees' employability in order to facilitate their employees in pursuing their career success.

**Key words:** Career success, organizational learning, protean career, employability, adopting quantitative

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### INTRODUCTION

Organizations nowadays are facing rapid change in internal and external environmental forces which have a significant impact on organizational performance and structure. These changes have forced the organization to adopt a work structure that supports organization's flexibility and adaptability. Many contemporary scholars (Baruch, 2004; Baruch *et al.*, 2015; Watkins and Marsick, 2003) stated that the change in organizational structure has forced a significant shift in career management paradigm from careers that offer secure employment to careers that provide opportunities for development (Baruch, 2004). The traditional perspective of career success which measures by hierarchical progression has become uncertain and unsecure due to the flattening of the organization structure and elimination of managerial layers. In other word, individual career perspective that focused on hierarchical progression was shifted to the ability of individuals to hold onto that position and stay employed to achieve a higher level position to be employable. Employability was considered an alternative

for job security (Cuyper *et al.*, 2014). Evolution in career paradigm also demonstrated a major change in the responsibility of managing a career from company to employees. Employees are tended to be more aggressively in acquiring the skills and knowledge to increase the value of their employment by current and prospective employers. Hall (2004)'s protean career perspective stated that individuals who possessed protean career attitudes are tend to use their own values to manage their career instead of referring to organizational values. In the same time, there are numerous researches studied the implication of individual career management from the perspective of protean career and boundaryless career with regard to the career effectiveness (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006; Hall, 2004; Zafar and Mat, 2012). Although, career management responsibility has been shifted from organization to employee, in fact, organizations are still playing an important role in managing employee's careers in forming a supporting environment for employee to pursue their self-managed careers. Organization need to provide supporting climate for employee learning and development which was found to have a significant

relationship with organizational and individual outcomes such as employees' job satisfaction, performance and profitability (Watkins and Marsick, 2003). This research will focus on studying the relationship between employee protean career attitude, organizational learning practices, employee perceived employability and career success of academic staffs in the context of Malaysia private higher learning institutions.

Currently, Malaysia has 20 public universities, 509 private universities and colleges inclusive of 27 foreign branch campuses of foreign universities. Undoubtedly, private higher institutions are playing an important role in complement the government's efforts in meeting the growing demand of skilled and qualified manpower to facilitate Malaysia to become a fully developed nation in the year 2020. Likewise, the industry of higher education, specifically among the private higher education institutions, is competing aggressively to capture the local as well as international students' market. Since education service is highly intangible and inseparability, 'people' or human capital of the institutions can be one of the best sources of competitive advantages (Loh, 2011). On the other hand, recruitment market in the education industry is highly mobile and good academic staffs are highly sought after by all institutions. In order to reduce academic staff's turn over, ensuring knowledge sharing and skill development through the efforts of organization learning practices is critical for employee employability and career success (Ismail and Rasdi, 2006). In fact, Malaysia government is heavily relied on private higher institutions to support the government's efforts in realizing the mission of Malaysia as an education and training hub in Asia as well as worldwide which in turns as a main contributor of foreign exchange earner. However, there is lack of studies in Malaysia focusing on academic staffs' career success, employability and its antecedents specifically in the areas of private higher education institutions (Arokiasamy *et al.*, 2009; Loh, 2011; Ng *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, it is important to study and analyse the academic staffs' perceived career success, career satisfaction and employability which expected as the main sources of Malaysia private universities' competitive advantages.

Reviews from pass literatures found that quite a number of researchers have examined the impact of employee's career success from the perspective of organizational factor (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990; Judge *et al.*, 1995; Dam, 2004) or individual factors (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006; Hall, 2004; Hall and Moss, 1999; Zafar and Mat, 2012), respectively. In fact, there has been relative lack of attention on exploring how both individual career attitude and organizational learning practices may connected and influenced employee's employability and career

success. In order to fill the research gap, this study will investigate the contribution of both organization practices and individual attitude toward employee's employability and career success in the context of higher learning institutions. In addition, the emerge of new career perspective due to the erosion of job security in career management has led to an increasing emphasis on employability as an important factor affecting employment relationships. Both organization and individual employee are responsible in stimulating employees' employability orientation which expected will bring positive effect for both organizational and employee outcomes. Hence, organizational learning, protean career attitude and employability orientation are expected correlate positively with career success, whereas employability will mediate the relationship between the constructs. By relating all these variables, this study are expected to further enhance the career management models by empirically research on the predictive validity of the organizational learning practices, protean career attitude and perceived employability toward employee's career success.

**Research objectives:** This research is aim to justify the impact of individual protean career attitudes and organizational learning practices on the career success of academic staffs in Malaysia private higher learning institutions. Furthermore, this research also examines the mediating impact of perceived employability throughout the construct of career success. The following specific objectives were raised:

- Explain the implication of protean career attitude and organizational learning practices toward employability which in turn influence employee's career success
- Investigate the influence of both individual protean career attitude and organizational learning practices on career success in consideration of the contribution of both factors in order to justify the main contributor for academic staffs' career success
- Investigate whether perceived employability as a mediator on the impact of individual protean career attitude and organizational learning practices on career success

**Literature review:** Career was defined in earlier studies as "the moving perspective of a person with references to the social order and of the typical sequences and concatenation of office" (Hughes, 1937). A modern definition by Baruch and Rosenstein (1992) stated that career is "a process of development of the employee along a path of experience and jobs in one or more organization." Arthu *et al.* (1989) regard career as an

unfolding sequence of a person's work experience over time. Most of the earlier studies of career (Arthur *et al.*, 1989; Super, 1957) focused career success in terms of extrinsic outcomes such as salary and promotion but more recent scholars definition of career success typically include both objective (extrinsic) measures as well as subjective (intrinsic) assessments (Nabi, 2003; Ng *et al.*, 2005). On one hand, careers as the "property" of individuals but on the other hand, career will be planned and managed by their organizations for their employees (Baruch, 2004). There is widespread agreement among researchers and practitioners that career success is no longer solely determined by either one party (Ballout, 2007). Both employees and employers have to achieve a substantial fit in managing the process of career advancement. Individual and organization are supposed to share the obligation in career management (Burack, 1977).

Review of recent career studies reported that individual, instead of organization is responsible for their own career planning (Hall, 2004, Hall and Moss, 1999). This changing attitude of employees toward their career management and development has led to the new career concept called protean career (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006; Hall, 2004) which stated that the person instead of the organization, responsible for their own career. This concept indicated that most employees presumed that self-directed career attitude is one of the important factors for realizing career success. Although, most of the studies in career management indicated that individual self-management in career development is critical in the modern career context (Hall, 2004), organizations are still playing important role in providing continuous learning opportunities and learning resources that needed for employees to advance in their own career. Wiersma and Hall (2007) argued that organization should play active role in sharing the responsibility of career management with their employees. Furthermore, Ballout (2007) indicated the notion of joint responsibility for career management between individual and organization to be expected from the fact that both individual and organization career management were positively related to each other and to employee career success specifically on subjective career success than salary growth and promotions. Hence, in this study, it is assumed that both individual and organization career management practices will positively influence employee's career success.

- H<sub>1</sub>: there exists a positive relationship between protean career attitude and career success
- H<sub>2</sub>: there exists a positive relationship between organizational learning practices and career success

Emerging of new career perspective due to the elimination of job security has led to an increasing emphasis on employability as an important factor affecting employment relationships. Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden defined employability as "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating work through the optimal use of competencies". Forrier and Sels (2003) conceptualized employability as "the chance for employment on the internal or external labour market". Similarly, Fugate *et al.* (2004) defined employability as "a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities". All previously mentioned conceptualizations share that employability implies a permanent process of acquisition and fulfilment of employment, within or outside the current organization, today and in the future.

Organizations are responsible in stimulating employees' job competencies and employability orientation in order to enhance both organizational and employee performance outcomes. A study done by Van der Heijden, among 215 Dutch non-academic university staff members found that learning opportunities from organisation are significantly related to employees' employability. Similarly, Dam (2004)'s suggested that organization's career development support was found positively related to employability orientation. Moreover, review from literatures (Kidd and Smewing, 2001; Maurer and Tarulli, 1994) also shown that the perceived presence of organizational learning practices will affect employees' perception on their employability. Hence, this study assumed that organisation learning practices will positively influence employee's perceived employability:

- H<sub>3</sub>: there exists a positive relationship between organization learning practices and perceived employability

On the other hand, Seibert *et al.* (2001) indicated that individual with a proactive personality will try to seek for continuous learning opportunities to enhance their human capital, thereby becoming employable. This was consistent with the study done by Nauta *et al.* (2009) suggested that individual employee nowadays is more responsible in managing and developing their employability orientation. Vos and Soens (2008) indicated that individual with a proactive career attitude would take initiatives to manage own career. Employees with high proactive personality are shown to have a more protean attitude and are thus perceived highly in employability orientation (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, this research assume that individual protean career attitude with positively influence employee's perceived employability.

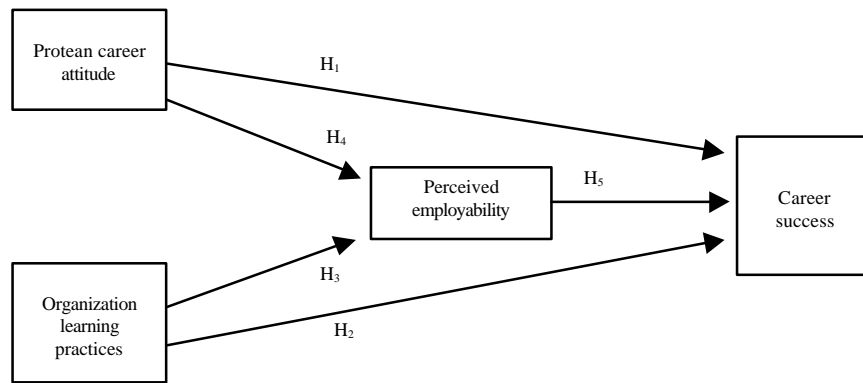


Fig. 1: Research framework

- H<sub>4</sub>: there exists a positive relationship between individual protean career attitude and perceived employability

Research indicates that individuals who engages in protean career attitude tend to look for career opportunities to determine their career success (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). They are highly adaptable to the changes in their workplace environment and likely to take more responsibility for their career development (Yet *et al.*, 2013). In other word, individual with proactive personality is motivated to embrace “self-knowledge, self-awareness and personal responsibility” which in turn lead to career success. Vos and Soens (2008) studied on the impacts of protean career attitude on career success with self-management (employability) as the mediator found that protean career attitude is an important factor affecting employee’s career success, meanwhile employability was assumed as the construct of self-management since it involves personal skill and competency development that make the person being aware of the change in the environment. On the other hand, there is also empirical evidence (Vos *et al.*, 2011) suggests that organizational learning practices are correlated to employability and employability in turn contributes to the career success of individual. Survey done by Vos *et al.* (2011) on 561 employees in a prominent financial institution in Belgium was found supported the fact that organizational learning activities have a positive impact on enhancing employability which in turn positively influences the career success. In addition, employability showed a full mediation effect of the relationship between participation in competency development and career success and a partial mediating effect of the relationship between perceived support for competency development and career success (Vos *et al.*, 2011). Therefore in this study, employability will expected mediates the impact of protean career attitude and organizational learning practices on career success.

- H<sub>5</sub>: there exists a relationship between organisation learning practice and protean career attitude toward career success which was mediated by perceived employability

Based on the review of literatures and previous theoretical frameworks, a conceptual framework is proposed to explain the relationships between protean career attitude, organizational learning practices, perceived employability and career success. To further enhance the existing model of career success, perceived employability is included as mediator in the structural relationship between protean career attitude, organizational learning practices and career success (Fig. 1).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Research design and sampling methodology:** This research study is a field study adopting quantitative method of data analysis through self-administered questionnaire on the academic staffs from the private higher learnig institutions which categorized as university college and university status throughout Malaysia. The researcher uses the descriptive-correlation study in order to study the proposed hypotheses. The populations for this research are academic staffs of the private higher learning institutions in Malaysia which categorized as university college and university status according to the ranking from Ministry of Higher Education. According to Ministry of Higher Education, total number of academic staffs in higher education institutions was 56,992 which inclusive of 32,516 persons from public higher education institute and 24,476 persons from private higher education institute. The academic staffs from the private higher institutions located around Klang valley area will be selected as the sample for this research. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010) in general, sample size >30 and >500 are appropriate for most research. The

researcher will pick the sample units from five private universities located in Klang valley with SETARA'13 Tier-5 status. The 2013 Rating for Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia (SETARA'13) is a standard of measurement on quality of teaching and learning for universities and university colleges in Malaysia. Therefore, it is reasonable to choose the institutions with SETARA recognition to represent the higher institutions which embedded certain levels of learning and development practices for their staffs. Snowball sampling approach was used to collect the data from the respondents in variety institutions. Total 150 questionnaires will be distributed to the administrator in each of the selected institutions (SEGi University, Asia Pacific University, Inti University, Sunway University and Taylor University) and the administrator will then identify the academic staffs who they have access to and request those respondents to respond anonymously to the survey. Hence, in total 750 questionnaires were distributed for this survey purpose. Total 352 completed questionnaires were returned out of the 750 distributed, yielding a response rate of 47%. From the output presented, there are 159 males (45.2%) and 193 females (54.8%) in total of 352 respondents. The 160 respondents are from the age group of 30-39 years old (45.5%), 155 respondents (44%) are from the age group of 40-49 years old, 22 respondents (6.3%) are from the age of 50 and above and only 15 respondents (4.3%) are <30 years old. In term of education level of the respondents, majority of the respondents, 305 respondents (86.6%) are holding Master degree, 35 respondents (9.9%) are holding a Doctoral degree and 12 respondents (3.5%) are holding a Bachelor degree. This is justifiable with the current requirement for academic staff that must hold at least of Master degree. Likewise, majority of the respondents, 301 respondents (85.5%) are holding a position of lecturer or senior lecturer, 30 respondents (8.5%) are holding a position as Associate Professor, 9 respondents (2.6%) are holding position as Professor and 12 respondents (3.5%) are working as a tutor in higher learning institutions. Finally 167 respondents (47.4%) with working experience of 6-9 years, 137 respondents (38.9%) with working experience of 2-5 years, 30 respondents (8.5%) are working with the institution for >10 years and 18 respondents (5.1%) only worked for <2 years in higher learning institutions.

**Measurement:** In this study, previous tested scales and measurement were modified and adapted for the four variables. The major constructs for this research are career success, perceived employability, organisational learning practices and protean career attitude. Unless stated otherwise, participants responded to all questionnaire items for measures using Likert five-point scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

This study adopted the short version of Dimensions of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) to measure the organization learning practices (Yang, 2003). The original DLOQ was developed by Watkins and Marsick (2003) consists of seven dimensions measures with a total of 43 items. Yang (2003) modified and reduced the items of measurements from the original DLOQ into 21 items with three questions for each dimension. This instrument has been tested and validated by several empirical studies (Yang *et al.*, 2004; Zhang *et al.*, 2004). Protean career attitude was measured by the Protean Career Attitude Scale developed by Briscoe and Hall. The scale was constructed to measure individual protean career inclusive of both a value-driven attitude and a self-directed attitude toward individual self-managed career attitude. Originally, the protean career attitude scale consists of 14, 8 items used to assess self-directed career management and six items pertained in evaluating the protean value-driven predisposition (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006). For the measurement of perceived employability, this study adapted 16 items of self-perceived employability constructed by Rothwell and Arnold (2007). Six items were used to measure internal employability and ten items used to measure external employability. Lastly, employee's perceived career success was measured by an eight-item scale adapted from Greenhaus *et al.* (1990). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used as an indicator for internal consistency of the constructs. Ideally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be >0.7 (DeVellis, 2003). In this study, all the variables used have good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported 0.873 for the protean career attitude scale, 0.926 for organization learning practice scale, 0.923 for perceived employability scale and 0.925 for career success scale (Table 1).

Table 1: Instrument or questionnaire layout

Section	Variables	No. of questions	Sources of questions	Cronbach alpha
A	Demographic information	5	-	-
B	Career success	8	Greenhaus <i>et al.</i> (1990)	0.925
C	Protean career attitude	14	Protean career attitude scale by Briscoe <i>et al.</i> (2006)	0.873
D	Organizational learning practices	21	Modify DLOQ developed by Yang (2003)	0.926
	Perceived employability	16	Self-perceived employability scale by Rothwell and Arnold (2007)	0.923

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Researcher is using descriptive and inferential statistics in this research. To test hypothesis 1 and 2 in other words, to justify the influence of individual protean career attitude and organizational learning practices on career success, the result of multiple regression indicates that both the independent variables correlate substantially with the dependent variable. Protean career attitude is positively and significantly correlated with career success ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = 0.706$ ), whereas organization learning practices also found positively and significantly correlated with career success ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = 0.804$ ). In addition, multiple variable collinearity was tested by computing the tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF). Multicollinearity is present when tolerance values are below 0.10 or when VIFs are greater than 10.0 (Hair *et al.*, 2003). In this data set, the tolerance values for both variables are 0.414 ( $< 0.10$ ) and VIFs values are 2.418 (below 10.0), indicated that no support for the existence of multicollinearity found in the data set. In addition, the multiple regression models with the two predictors produced  $R^2 = 0.667$  indicates that the model (protean career and organization learning practices) explains 66.7% of the variance in career success. Finally, the largest beta coefficient of 0.638 for organisation learning practices comparing with beta coefficient of 0.22 for protean career, indicates that organization learning practices makes the strongest unique contribution in explaining the career success of employees.

To test hypothesis 3 and 4, in other words, to justify the relationship between organization learning practices, protean career attitude and perceived employability, standard multiple regression was used. The result indicates that both protean career attitude and organization learning practices correlate substantially with the perceived employability. Organization learning practice is positively and significantly correlated with

perceived employability ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $r = 0.736$ ). On the other hand, protean career attitude also found positively correlated with perceived employability ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = 0.582$ ). In this data set, the tolerance values for both variables are 0.414 ( $> 0.10$ ) and VIFs values are 2.418 (below 10.0), indicated that no support for the existence of multicollinearity found in the dataset.

To test the mediating effect of perceived employability in hypothesis 5, the three-equation regression analysis was performed (Baron and Kenny, 1986). First, the mediators were regressed on the independent variables. Secondly, the dependent variable was regressed on the independent variables and thirdly, the dependent variable was regressed on the independent variables and the mediators. Referring to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediating effect exist when the independent variable showed influence on the mediator; the independent variable showed impact on dependent variable; the mediator affects the dependent variable and finally, the effects of independent variable on the dependent variable diminishes (or reduce) when the mediator is entered into the regression equation. Applying the above criteria in testing hypothesis 5, organization learning practices and protean career attitude were entered at step 1 (model 1), explaining 66.6% of the variance in career success. After entry of perceived employability at step 2 (model 2), the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 76%,  $F(3, 341) = 356.14$ ,  $p < .005$ . The mediator (perceived employability) explained an additional 9.2% of the variance in career success, after controlling for the two predictor (organization learning practices and protean career attitude),  $R^2$  change = 0.092,  $F$  change (1, 341) = 128.38,  $p < 0.05$ . In the final model, all the variables are statistically significant with perceived employability recording a higher beta value ( $\beta = 0.448$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), follow by organization learning practices ( $\beta = 0.322$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and protean career attitude ( $\beta = 0.200$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2-4).

Table 2: Model summary

Models	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	0.816 <sup>a</sup>	0.666	0.664	0.24413	0.666	341.379	2	342	0.000
2	0.871 <sup>b</sup>	0.758	0.756	0.20817	0.092	129.380	1	341	0.000

Table 3: ANOVA

Models (1 and 2)	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-values	Sig.
Regression	40.692	2	20.346	341.379	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
Residual	20.383	342	0.060	--	--
Total	61.075	344	--	--	--
Regression	46.299	3	15.433	356.143	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	14.777	341	0.043	--	--
Total	61.075	344	--	--	--

<sup>a</sup>Predictors: (Constant), MEAN\_OLP, MEAN\_PCA; <sup>b</sup>Predictors: (Constant), MEAN\_OLP, MEAN\_PCA, MEAN\_EMP; Dependent variable: MEAN\_CS

Table 4: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Models (1 and 2)	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		Sig.	Correlations		
	B	SE	Beta	t-values		Zero-order	Partial	Part
Constan	-0.657	0.179	--	-3.667	0.000	--	--	--
MEAN_PCA	0.302	0.068	0.217	4.474	0.000	0.706	0.235	0.140
MEAN_OLP	0.856	0.065	0.638	13.130	0.000	0.804	0.579	0.410
Constant	-1.195	0.160	--	-7.471	0.000	--	--	--
MEAN_PCA	0.278	0.058	0.200	4.825	0.000	0.706	0.253	0.129
MEAN_OLP	0.432	0.067	0.322	6.453	0.000	0.804	0.330	0.172
MEAN_EMP	0.568	0.050	0.448	11.375	0.000	0.800	0.524	0.303

<sup>a</sup>Dependent variable: MEAN\_CS

### CONCLUSION

Evolution in career paradigm demonstrated a major shift in responsibility for career management from employers to employees. Employees are seen as more responsible for acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by current and prospective employers. However, organisation is still playing an important role in managing employee’s careers in providing supporting climate for employee learning and development (Watkins and Marsick, 2003). The results of the study indicate that both employee’s protean career attitude and organization learning practices correlate significantly to career success and organization learning practices makes the strongest unique contribution in explaining employee’s career success ( $\beta = 0.638$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) in comparing to protean career attitude ( $\beta = 0.22$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, the relationship between organisational learning practices and protean career attitude as predictor and career success as dependent variable and the mediating role of perceived employability was supported. In the final model, all the variables are statistically significant with perceive employability recording a higher beta value ( $\beta = 0.448$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), follow by organization learning practices ( $\beta = 0.322$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and protean career attitude ( $\beta = 0.200$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). All the proposed hypothesizes were tested and justified and the proposed model is well fit and able to explain the variance of dependent variable caused by the independent variables and mediator.

Since, organization learning practices significantly correlated to career success, creating a supporting climate for employee’s learning and development should be an important consideration in human resources planning. On the other hand, the shift of career management from organization of employee self-managed careers, employees’ perception of employability orientation would take a significant role in career management context. Employees under protean career would actively pursue self-managed careers that offered personal accomplishment and employability. As such, an organisation may be advised to convince their employees that the organisation is ready to incorporate a certain level of learning and development opportunities as well as

career development and growth opportunities in their human resources policies and objectives (Ballout, 2009). In addition, this study may help employers understand how today’s employee will perceived career success from the perspective of the employability connection framework. The finding of this study may add knowledge to local and international human resource managers to develop an effective learning and development strategies that highly impact employees’ employability in order to facilitate their employees in pursuing their career success.

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