Investigating the Linkage Between Proactive Personality and Social Support on Career Adaptability Amidst Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper studies the linkage between proactive personality and social support with career adaptability amidst final year undergraduate students at a university in the northern region of Malaysia.

Design/Methodology/Approach: 257 questionnaires were distributed but only 188 were received and analysed. Regression analysis was used to determine the linkage relating proactive personality and social support with career adaptability.

Findings: Results indicates there is positive relationship and significance relating proactive personality and career adaptability. Likewise, positive relationship and significance exist relating social support and career adaptability.

Implications/Originality/Value: Proactive personality and social support are variables which essentially influence career adaptability among students. This result gives implication on how career advisors, lecturers and parents can channel efforts in making fresh graduates highly adaptable in their chosen careers.

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1. Introduction

Work structures and environments are experiencing dynamic changes. Subsequently, the continual introduction of new skills and knowledge demands have shed to light the necessity for new and dynamic career resources needed to cope with them effectively (Ebenehi, Rashid, & Bakar, 2016). This nature of the dynamic career structure is in response to the globalization of labour markets and economies, and the competition thereof. Hence, the demand for career adaptability abilities from the workforce. Subsequently, skills in career adaptability which is grounded on individual goal and fortitude in a knowledge-driven economy with incessant and spontaneous emergence of new skills, right attributes and technologies, global services and trade is of utmost value in the global labour market of this era (Ajake, Oba & Ekpo, 2014; Dickmann & Doherty, 2008).

In recent time of spontaneous economic change, millions of youths suffer from the recent economic crisis, which lead to unemployment, underemployment, job loss and job insecurity (Klehe et al., 2015). This

also causes transitions between jobs, organizations, and occupations more frequently than ever before (Rudolph, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2016). Rudolph et al., (2016) further explained that individuals differ in their willingness (i.e., adaptivity) and ability (i.e., adaptability) to engage in positive career-related behaviors (i.e., adapting). These adapting behaviors, inherently lead to the successful integration of the self into the work role which is an adaptation results from the prediction of career adaptability (Guan et al., 2017). This ultimately indicates the poor adaptive state of fresh graduates from the universities that lack the zeal to successfully integrate themselves into the work role which ultimately leads to increased joblessness. This is supported by researches indicating that the result of being adaptive include employment status, career satisfaction, promotability, entrepreneurial intentions, turnover, job Satisfaction (Chan, Mai, Kuok, & Kong, 2016; Coetzee, Ferreira, & Potgieter, 2015; Mckenna, Zacher, Ardabili, & Mohebbi, 2016; Zacher, 2015).

The poor state of adaptability of fresh graduates is reflected in the unemployment rate of Malaysian youths which rose by 1.2% in 2015 to become at about 10.7% (Dian, Mohd, & Mahyuddin, 2017). This is due to the increasing level of work demand in the labour, which is dynamic in nature and spiralling (Dian et al., 2017; Zulkifli, Omar, & Rajoo, 2016). This results in a highly competitive labour market rendering most fresh graduates totally unfit to adapt to their career.

Due to the above mentioned issues, young fresh graduate are striving to improve their professional skills that is significantly different from the skills and knowledge obligatory in previous centuries` occupation. This skills are trained into graduates and are expected to be up to date, volatile and spontaneous enough in order to continuously adapt to the usage of progressively complex technologies (Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013). This will enable graduates to be relevant in the generally unpredictable organizations settings of today (Savickas et al., 2009). Savickas & Porfeli, (2012), opines that career adaptability is a competence that can be acquired. The acquisition of this career adaptability competence can aid in the unemployment issue rising among Malaysian youths by increasing their concern about their prospective career part and how to achieve it. The enhanced curiosity from having career adaptability enable them to make proper exploration regarding their career, so that they can make proper decisions on relevant skills to be attained, boosting their confidence level in the process.

In as much as some youths desire to attain this skills, most of the youths do not actually achieve it, even after their undergraduate education. Prasad, (2017) discovered that numerous problems are still faced by employers in employing fresh graduates in Malaysia. According to a survey carried out on local fresh graduates by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education and JobStreet, the key reasons fresh graduates remain jobless are lack of English proficiency, poor communication skills and poor attitude (Balakrishnan, 2017). The reasons include the fresh graduates` attitude toward job search efforts, lack of proactive personality portrayed through absence of engagement in extra curriculum activities such as career fair organization participation, charity work etc.

To this end, Prasad, (2017) stated that despite interventions by efforts by Graduate Employability Management Scheme (GEMS), a Malaysian Government established to enhance professional qualifications, appearance, and personality of fresh graduates, much changes regarding this aspects is yet to be observed in the fresh graduates. It is inevitably up to the desires and attitude of the fresh graduates themselves to actually want to embrace these required skills. To such end, there is a need to cultivate a new approach toward achieving a high career adaptability among youths in Malaysia. This could be the transfer of enhanced traits in these youths which will lead to career adaptability and smoothen school to work transition.

Guan et al., (2017) opines the importance of using basic traits to predicting career adaptability. Furthermore, he suggested the replication of basic traits studies in other cultural background to ascertain its consistency over different cultural background among university students. Therefore, we shall be using researched traits such as social support and proactive personality to predict the career adaptability of final

year undergraduate students. This is because social support is all about encouragement of youths by their family, friends, lecturers, and government by providing assistance through emotional, financial, personal developmental and relevant information support in order to boost the confidence, decision making and preparedness toward career goals. Further proactive personality trait is chosen because of its propensity for changing the status quo in the career environment to what an individual desires, which is a successful career.

This study is essential in the unpredictable and competitive labour market that exists in Malaysia, this is because career related skills attainment such as career adaptability is vital for the development of the graduating students as they transit from University to the work place (Duffy, 2010). This will ensure that they are prepared for the volatile nature of the organizations, and also can be able to meet the changing career demands throughout their career lifetime.

Researches showed that Career adaptability is positively related with some individual characteristics factors such as social support (Ebenehi et al., 2016) and proactive personality (Tolentino et al., 2014).

In this research, the objective is to identify the linkage between proactive personality and social support with career adaptability amidst final year undergraduate students at a public university in the northern part of Malaysia.

2. Literature review

Career adaptability

Career adaptability is defined as a set of psychosocial resources that assist people to successfully accomplish career-related tasks and transitions (Rudolph, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2016). Career adaptability skill is viewed as the impetus in adjusting to changing work situation or demands by an individual. This shows that students with high level of career adaptability can gain a smooth transition from school to work without much resistance or delay. Skills in career adaptability enable unceasingly creation of avenues for constant adjustments in the bid to efficiently react to shifting work situations (Ebenehi et al., 2016).

Career adaptability can be conceptualized as a “meta-competency”, able to predict relevant advancement in career development as well as professional effectiveness (O’Connell et al., 2008; Morrison and Hall, 2002). According to career construction theory (Savickas, 2002; 2005), career adaptability reflects a diverse array of behaviours, attitudes and competencies aiding in the proactive adaptation to changing work situations (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Bocciardi et al., (2017) opined that the development of career adaptability competences and attitudes in the labour market could be very useful in times of heightened uncertainty and volatility.

Savickas, (2002) stated that career adaptability, consist of four dimensions: concern (planning, being planful), control (decision-making, being decisive), curiosity (exploring, being inquisitive) and confidence (problem-solving, being efficacious) (Hirschi et al., 2014). This enable fresh graduates from the university to have the right attitude, behaviour and competencies that is required of them to achieve career goals, which in conversely is lacking in most fresh graduates of today.

Many studies show that career adaptability has a positive impact on career success, in terms of subjective but also objective measures such as promotability, salary and performance (Guan, Zhou, Ye, Jiang, & Zhou, 2015; Hirschi, Herrmann, & Keller, 2015; Sibunruang, Raymund, Garcia, & To-, 2015; Tolentino, Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2013; Zacher, 2015). Likewise career adaptability has also been found to be negatively related to work stress (Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013) and turnover intention (Guan et al., 2015). This indicates the positive effect created through the attainment of career adaptability among fresh graduates aspiring to work in dynamic organizations of today.

Likewise, career adaptability has been researched to be positively related with proactive personality (Cai et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2017, 2015) and Social support (Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Ebenehi et al., 2016; Ute-Christine Klehe, Jelena Zikic, Annelies E. M. van Vianen, 2015).

Proactive personality

Youths are in dire need to excel in the dynamic working environment. The aggressive approach toward quick learning, detecting opportunities and seizing it could be of profound competitive advantage for these youths. Proactive personality denotes predisposition of an individual toward proactive behaviours to influence significant changes in the environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). The formation of career adaptability is heavily reliant on effective disposition of proactive behaviour (Tolentino et al., 2014). A person with a proactive behaviour plans ahead of time in an anticipatory manner to set goals on what they want to achieve or change in the future and necessary steps and approach in the attainment of these goals with a proactive and self-initiated manner. This indicates that youths with high proactive personality can easily attain career adaptability during their school to work transition due the carefully planned goals, seizing opportunities and exerting efforts in ensuring this goals are achieved.

The above statement is supported by (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Tolentino et al., 2014) stated that proactive individuals are well equipped for pertinent changes in their vocation. This is due to their propensity to identify opportunities and act upon such work environments that is appropriate for their vocational interests. Since the approach trait reflects individuals' tendency to seek positive outcomes, it can motivate individuals' tendency to take actions to achieve these goals (Zimmerman, Boswell, Shipp, Dunford, & Boudreau, 2011), which is reflected in proactive personality.

Consequently, proactive youths are vigorously motivated to develop adaptability resources to ease career development (Jiang, 2016), in which career adaptability is a focal point. Proactive people successfully effect change to their surrounding in order to suit their desires and preferences more efficiently (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Therefore, there is higher tendency for such proactive youths to be better equipped to successfully achieve career demands and transitions compared to less proactive youths.

The individual's propensity to be proactive has been found to be associated with self-regulative strategies, such as goal setting (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004); optimism (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005); as well as coping, information seeking, and self-direction (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). Past research has also demonstrated its positive relationship to an amount of significant job-related outcomes, such as stress tolerance in demanding jobs (Parker & Sprigg, 1999), job performance (Crant, 1995) and effectiveness of leadership (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant & Bateman, 2000; Deluga, 1998). Similarly, career researchers pointed out the role of proactivity in relation to a boundaryless career mindset (Jackson, 1996; Mirvis & Hall, 1996) and protean career orientation (Creed, Macpherson, & Hood, 2010). Furthermore, some empirical studies support the positive association between proactivity and desirable career outcomes (Morrison, 1993; Ashford & Black, 1996) career planning (Frese, Fay, Hillburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997) and career success (Seibert et al., 1999, 2001).

In tandem with the emphasis on personal agency in Career Construction Theory by (Savickas, 2005) the proactive viewpoint posits that individuals can enact transformation to progress their present circumstances and do not continuously pose as passive recipients of environmental restraints (Crant, 2000). This shows that a student proactive personality will go out of their way to ensure that they change the constraint caused by the dynamic nature of the labour market.

Previous studies have revealed that individuals with proactive personality are more engaged in career development and display more career initiative (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001; Fuller & Marler, 2009). These include the involvement in career fair events and interactive society. Moreover, proactive individuals are more frequently engaged in networking behaviors (Thompson, 2005), such as organizing motivational talks from industries experts to students on developing their career. Due

to these reasons, career adaptability is likely to be better developed among individuals with a strong proactive personality, and empirical studies have provided supportive evidence for the positive relationship between proactive personality and career adaptability (Cai et al., 2015; Tolentino et al., 2014).

Previous researches have highlighted the positive relationship of proactive personality and career adaptability among university students in Australia, China and Turkey (Cai et al., 2015; Tolentino et al., 2014; Hou et al., 2014; Öncel, 2014).

Therefore it is proposed that:

H1: Proactive personality will be positively related to career adaptability

Social support

Social support is defined as rendering aid in the form of information, guidance, emotional nourishment, physical resources, or interactions of encouragement delivered via relationships made accessible to an individual (Vietze, 2011). This means that when an individual obtains social support, it must be regarded as helpful alongside the concern shown or assistance rendered in achieving a specific goal. Social support is universally used in the facilitating educational research, and in social development of adolescent and social interaction research (Vietze, 2011).

The purpose of perceived social support for young students is to ease the university to work life transitions (Murphy et al., 2010). Previous researches have indicated that there is significant and positive correlation between perceived social support and career development (Chen et al., 2012) in which career adaptability is the focal point of career development. It proposes that the improvement process of career adaptability skill among undergraduate students may be contributed by perceived social support.

The importance of social support and relations in adolescent career development has been highlighted by previous researches (Kracke, 2002; Rogers et al., 2008, Hirschi, 2009). During the youths' phase of making critical life decisions, such as their vocation future, perceived social support has proven to be an essential resource in helping them make a good decision (Ebenethi et al., 2016).

This is supported by (Kracke, 2002; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001) that stressed that social support is a possible tool for detailed career information and counsel and serves as a vital resource for students trying to manage the demands of change (Cutrona, 1996). Family and friends, and higher institution of learning, are some of the social supports accessible to students (Weisenberg & Aghakhani, 2007). Though previous research opined friends to exhibit the utmost effect in the aspect of career (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Other researches highlighted family as the greatest influence in career adaptability (Işık, 2013). This indicates that relevance of this social factor in the achievement of career adaptability among youths in Malaysia, which essentially possess a collective culture.

This is highlighted by (Wang and Fu, 2015) who agreed that using social support in this study is grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994) and previous career research, that revealed the degree or magnitude to which career adaptability is swayed by social factors such as social support during a student's transition period. For instance, the school-to-work transition, an amount of doubt and ambiguity is usually borne by students, resulting to mixed perceptions, dissonance, and often reactions toward, social support that essentially influence career-related conclusions.

Social support has been researched to have positive relationship with career adaptability (Wang & Fu, 2015). Perceived social support, has been researched to be correlated significantly with the career exploration (Turan, Celik, & Turan, 2015). Past researches have declared that social support would improve Chinese university fresh graduates' career adaptability (Wang & Fu, 2015).

Thus, it is hypothesised that;

H2: Social support will be positively related to career adaptability.

Figure 1: Research framework

3. Research methodology

3.1 Sampling Design

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to respondents among final semester BBA students at a public university in a northern state of Malaysia. The researchers went to the classes to distribute the questionnaire. Students were informed of the research objective and guidelines to answer all items in the questionnaire.

The questionnaires comprised of items to measure career adaptability, self-esteem and pro-active personality. The instrument developed by Savickas & Porfeli, (2012) with 24 items were utilized to measure career adaptabilities of individuals. Proactive personality instrument of ten items developed by Bateman & Crant, (1993) was used in this study. Social support instrument of 12 items developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, (1988) were adapted for this study. Respondents were asked to respond to the items by indicating their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

3.2 Research Procedure

Purposive sampling method was utilized for the data collection among final year BBA undergraduate students of a public university in the northern state of Malaysia. The unit of analysis is undergraduate students, irrespective of their age. The questionnaires were distributed to the undergraduate final year students of the Bachelor of business administration (BBA) who are taking the seminar course. The reason for these target participants is to identify the relationship between their self-esteem and proactive personality with their level of career adaptability before they actually get into the labor market. This will give feedback on what attribute and skills the students have attained throughout their study.

4. Data analysis and results

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 22. Various tests were conducted to determine the reliability, validity and relationship between variables. A total of 257 questionnaires were distributed but only 188 set of questionnaires were returned and used for further analyses.

4.1 Descriptive and reliability results

The 188 respondents comprised of 107 (56.9%) being 23 years old, while 4 (2.1%) indicated being more than 25 years old. In terms of gender, 144 (76.6%) were female while 44 (23.4%) were male. For ethnicity, 123 (65.4%) of participants were Malays. In terms of numbers of siblings, 42 (22.3%) of participants indicated having 4 siblings. Majority of them totaling 149 (73.3%) indicated that the most influential person in their education and career plans being their parents. Most of the participants are single at 185 (98.4%) while 3 (1.6%) are married. With regards to their parents/guardian combined monthly income, 84 (44.7%) indicated less than RM2000, and 150 (79.8%) uses PTPTN as a source of their university education funding.

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and correlations of the variables for the study. The reliability results of the measures are also presented (in bold). As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach alpha for career adaptability is 0.91, proactive personality 0.79, and social support 0.86. The table also reveal significant positive correlation results between career adaptation with proactive personality and Social support. The results suggested that the undergraduate career adaptability and proactive personality have a positive moderate strong significant correlation at 0.59 ($p \leq 0.01$). Likewise, career adaptability and social support have a positive moderate strong significant correlation at 0.53 ($p \leq 0.01$).

Table 1: *Mean, Standard Deviation, Cronbach alpha and Correlation results*

	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1	Career Adaptability	4.1722	.37907	.911		
2	Proactive personality	3.8569	.43755	.598**	.790	
3	Social support	4.1587	.52910	.532**	.442**	.866

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; M=mean; SD= standard deviation, significance, reliability result in bold

4.2 Regression results

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the hypothesis. The results in Table 2 reveal that 44.7% (R Square = 0.447, F value = 74.711) of the variance in career adaptability was explained by proactive personality and social support. The result indicated that proactive personality ($\beta = 0.451$, $p < 0.01$) was positively associated to career adaptability indicating being the most significant in influencing career adaptability compared to social support.

Social support has a standardized beta value of 0.332 which is also significant with career adaptability. Hence, it can be concluded that career adaptability is influenced by proactive personality and social support. Therefore, the higher the students' proactive personality and social support, the higher their level of career adaptability. Hence, hypothesis H1 and H2 are supported.

Table 2: *Predictors of Career Adaptability's Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Result*

Independent variables	Standardized Beta	t
Proactive personality	.451	7.405
Social support	.332	5.450
F value	74.711	
R Square	.447	
R	.668	

Note: * $p < 0.05$

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between proactive personality and social support with the career adaptability level of final year undergraduate students in a university of the northern part of Malaysia. It was found that proactive personality and social support has a positive significant relationship and correlation with career adaptability. This result is supported by previous researches (Cai et al., 2015; Creed et al., 2009; Ebenehi et al., 2016; Guan et al., 2017; Hirschi, 2009; Işik, 2013).

Proactive personality has the highest influence on career adaptability with the Standardized beta 0.451. This indicates that the students possessing proactive personality has a higher chance of attaining job position due to their endeavour in effecting changes towards achieving career goals. This could indicate students actively partaking in various extra curriculum activities official position such as career fair officers and interactive society official in order to cause changes in the environment for easier access to job procurement or career goals attainment. Thereby achieving a smooth school to work transition. Career counsellors could implement relevant and strategic interventions, such as proactive thinking training to assist in proactive thoughts, identify and grab opportunities, and know when to take actions to turn opportunities into adaptive means.

Social support also has some influence on career adaptability with the Standardized beta of 0.33. Encouraging career adaptability may benefit fresh university graduates to secure suitable jobs, notwithstanding the high economic uncertainty. These outcomes endorse the significance of social connections in aiding youths, most especially fresh graduate to effectively manage school to work transition within the ferociously competitive career environment. There is urgent need of social support resources for fresh graduates to develop the confidence in handling looming career-related responsibilities during the dynamic phase of work setting. When students are supported most especially by their parents and friends, there is a high chance of achieving career success which is an indication career adaptability. This could be through emotional, financial support, provision of relevant information, and advice.

The result of this research which reinforces the importance of conducting exercises to boost the proactive personality of students and ensure they have sufficient social support to enable a successful shift from school to work. This is an implication of this findings for career counsellors, lecturers, and parents/guardians. Thus, equipping students transiting from school to work with career adaptability skills will enable a more motivated, self-regulated workforce in Malaysia, and this will increase productivity and performance of organizations and the economy as a whole.

Due to the purposive focus sampling of research on final year students in the field of Bachelor of Business administration (BBA) taking the seminar course, there is a need for future research to survey other BBA final year students. Also there is a need to distinguish the career adaptability of full time students and working class students, a future research on this aspect will come handy to shed light on the discrepancies between these two groups.

In conclusion, the results support that pro-active personality and social support have an effect on career adaptability with proactive personality, having the highest effect. This paper has shed light on the importance of engaging undergraduate students with activities to boost their proactive personality. This could be included by the policy makers about the importance of this attributes to achieving a smooth transition from school to work. Furthermore, social support by government, parents/guardians and friends in providing relevant information, advice and support in different facet will go a long way in ensuring that fresh graduates go through the terrainous transition from school to work with ease. By possessing or developing themselves with the right skills and attitude required by prospective employers. This will ensure career success, which is an indication of career adaptability for such fresh graduates.

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