Paths from Proactive Personality and Family Influence to Employability

by Dian Ratna Sawitri

PATHS FROM PROACTIVE PERSONALITY AND FAMILY INFLUENCE TO EMPLOYABILITY

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Abstract

Employability has become an increasingly relevant construct in modern turbulent world economic markets especially in this industrial revolution 4.0 era. Perceived employability involves self-perceived ability to achieve sustainable employment appropriate to one's level of qualifications. Individual and family-related variables have been identified as predictors of employability in undergraduate students. However, the roles of career action behaviors of planning the future career and exploration of the world of work in these relationships are rarely known. This study aimed to examine the paths from proactive personality and family influence to employability via career planning and exploration. We collected data from 321 undergraduate students from a university in Semarang, Indonesia, M age = 19.89 years, SD age = 5.39, 67.3% female. We used scales of proactive personality, family influence, career planning, career exploration, and employability to collect the data. Structural equation modeling showed that the paths from proactive personality and family influence to employability were all partially mediated by career planning and exploration. Our results underlined the roles of career planning and exploration as mechanisms by which proactive personality and family influence exerted their influences on employability in undergraduate students. The recommendations of the findings of this study are discussed.

Keywords: *Employability, Career exploration, Career Planning, Family, Proactivity.*

A. Introduction

Emerging adulthood' is the period between adolescence and adulthood, approximately 18–25 years and this period involves the transition from high school to work or further education and training (Arnett, 2000). During this phase, individuals manage their goals, plan their future career and life, and initiate actions to achieve them (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). Proactive personality, family influence, career planning, and exploration become important as individuals develop goals and engage in actions relevant to shape a meaningful occupational future (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010). They also need to develop employability skills early on to help them gain employment and cope with labor downturns in the future (Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015a).

Perceived employability has become an increasingly relevant construct in the 21st-century (Rothwell, Herbert, & Rothwell, 2008). In turbulent world economic markets, individuals need to be able to cope effectively with career transitions (Wittekind, Raeder, & Grote, 2010) and be proactive and adaptable to realize their career goals (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Furthermore, Bridgstock (2009) argues that in the rapidly changing information era, employability involves more than possession of the generic skills but graduates must be able to proactively navigate the world of work and career.

To date, no research has assessed a comprehensive range of processes identified as crucial mechanisms in employability. To address this, we tested a cross-sectional model, where proactive personality and family influence were the meaningful internal and contextual antecedents; employability was the important outcome, and career action behaviors of planning and exploration mediated between antecedents and outcome. The study aimed to test whether career planning and exploration mediated the paths from proactive personality and family influence to perceived employability.

B. Literature Review

Perceived employability is defined as ''self-perceived ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to one's qualification level''

(Rothwell et al., 2008). It reflects internal factors, such as confidence in one's career-related skills and abilities, and external factors, such as positive perceptions about the labor market. In the context of goal-setting theory, perceived employability is a belief about future goal attainment (Wittkind, et al., 2010) or career outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994).

Previous studies have examined various antecedents of perceived employability. For example, Praskova et al. (2015a) demonstrated that employability and life satisfaction in emerging adults were predicted by career calling was related positively to life satisfaction and employability, and these associations were mediated by the self-regulatory mechanisms of work effort, career strategies, and emotional regulation. Previous studies also demonstrated that the use of career self-management strategies of networking, self-control, and career knowledge) was associated with greater perceived employability among university students and employed young adults (De Vos et al., 2009; van der Heijden, 2002).

Praskova, Creed, and Hood's (2015b) study in young adults demonstrated that career planning and exploration and were correlated with higher perceived employability. Career planning refers to a continuing activity to create future orientation and knowledge of what actions are needed to pursue career aspirations (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). It relates to thinking about and preparing for a career-related future (Sharf, 2010). Career exploration activities refer to the use of relevant resources which are triggered particularly during career-related transitions (Blustein, 1997).

Career exploration involves activities of gathering information relevant to the individual's career progress (Blustein, 1997; Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983) It captures self-exploration, i.e., the exploration of individuals' own interests, values, and experiences in order to reflect on their career choice and to obtain a better understanding of themselves, and environmental exploration, i.e., individuals' investigation of various career choices that leads to more well-informed career decisions, which includes collecting information on various jobs, organizations, and occupations (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Career exploration allows individuals to better manage challenges associated with a transition (Savickas, 1997).

Previous studies showed that career planning and exploration were predicted by parent/family-related variables and also personal factors. For example, Sawitri, Creed, and Zimmer-Gembeck (2014) demonstrated that parental career expectations and adolescent-parent career congruence were associated with career planning and exploration via self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career aspirations. Family influence refers to perceived informational support, financial support, values/beliefs, and expectations from the family (Fouad et al., 2010).

In another study, career exploration was also predicted by a proactive personality (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). Proactive personality involves an individual's capacity to identify opportunities, initiate change, and build external environments (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). Therefore, proactive individuals are not passively taking and agree with their current situation, as they are more likely to express adaptive actions (Cai et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2017).

To date, there is limited understanding of the development of an individual's employability from the perspective of person factor (e.g., proactive personality) and contextual factors (e.g., family influence), and career action behaviors of career planning and exploration. To address this, we examine the process individuals experience when they are proactive and perceived family influence, and the mediating roles of planning and exploration in these relationships. We expected that proactive personality and family influence would be associated with perceived employability indirectly via career planning and exploration (Figure 1).
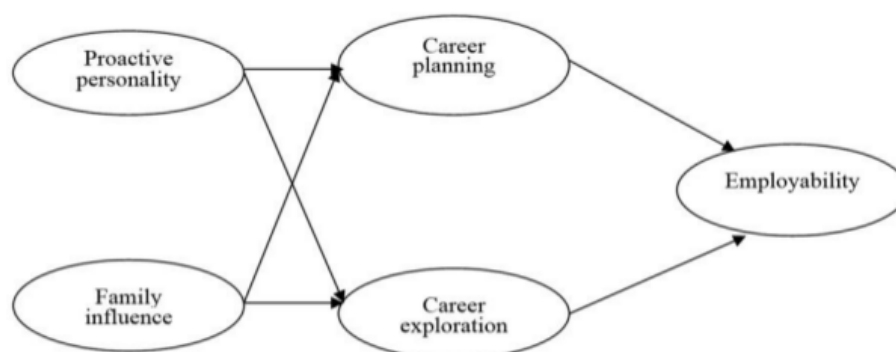

Figure 1. Hypothesized model

C. Method

1. Participants

We collected data from 321 undergraduate students from a university in Semarang, Indonesia, *M* age = 19.89 years, SD age = 5.39, 67.3% female, 23.4% From Fisheries and Marine Science, 20.9% Economics and Business, 17.8% Social and Political Science, 16.5% Medicine, 10.9% Animal Science, and 10.6% Science and Mathematics faculties. Of those, 57% were freshmen, 30.8% sophomores, 9.3% juniors, and 2.8% seniors. *M* GPA = 3.2.

2. Research procedures

First authors and research assistants administered the survey after class time. Three hundred and forty-one students agreed to participate in the survey. Twenty students were unable to complete the survey satisfactorily, therefore, we obtained 321 usable surveys.

3. Measuring instruments

The survey packets contained measures of proactive personality, family influence, career planning, career exploration, and employability, and several questions about demographic variables such as age, gender, GPA, and faculty.

Proactive personality. Proactive personality was assessed using the 10-item shortened version of Bateman dan Crant's (1993) original 17-item Proactive Personality Scale (Seibert et al., 2001). This scale is unidimensional (i.e., initiative to take action when seeing something improper). Participants responded on a 6-point Likert-type scale, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Sample item: "If I see something I don't like, I fix it". Higher scores indicate a higher proactive personality. The reliability coefficient of > .90 has been reported, and validity was supported by expected relationships with STEM major commitment, active planning, and behavioral disengagement (Major, Holland, & Oborn, 2012).

Family influence. The 22-item Family Influence Scale (Fouad et al., 2010) was administered to examine the role of family influence on careers. The FIS is

comprised of four subscales: (1) informational support, (2) financial support, (3) values/beliefs, and (4) family expectations Sample item: "My family shared information with me about how to obtain a job," Convergent validity of the FIS was reported by finding expected correlations with Parental Attachment Questionnaire, Individualism/Collectivism Scale, the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale (Fouad et al.).

Career planning. We assessed participants' engagement in career planning using the 8-item Career Thinking and Planning Subscale of the Career Salience Scale (Greenhaus, 1971). This scale is unidimensional (i.e., thinking and planning). Responses were made by indicating participants' level of agreement along a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect higher involvement in career planning. Sample item: "Planning for and succeeding in a career is my primary concern." This scale showed internal consistency of .70 (Sawitri et al., 2014), and demonstrated expected associations with parental career expectations and career outcome expectations (Sawitri et al., 2015).

Career exploration. We assessed participants' involvement career exploration activities using the 11-item Career Exploration Survey (Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983). It consists of self-exploration and environmental exploration aspects. Participants responded using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *almost never* to 6 = *very often*). Sample item: "I have been contemplating my past life and experiences in relation to my career." Higher scores on the full scale indicate more involvement in career exploration. Internal consistency for the full scale has been reported as .83 - .85 (Sawitri et al., 2015). Validity evidence was demonstrated by finding expected associations with parental career expectations and career decision-making self-efficacy (Sawitri et al., 2014).

Perceived employability. The 16-item Self-Perceived Employability Scale (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007) was used to assess individuals' perceptions of their value in the labor market. It contains aspects of university's reputation, individual self-confidence and proactivity, external labor market, and individuals' engagement with study and academic performance. We used a 6-point Likert-type scale (1=*strongly*

disagree to 6=*strongly agree*). Higher summed scores reflect higher levels of perceived employability. Sample item: "People who do the same job as me in this organization are valued highly". Cronbach's alpha for the original scale with employed adults was .83; concurrent validity was supported by expected correlations with career success and professional commitment (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007).

4. Methods of data analysis

We manage the data for model testing in order to achieve a ratio of 10:1 for sample size to parameters estimated in the latent variable analysis (Kline, 2011) by creating item parcels representing all scales (Landis, Beal, & Tesluck, 2000). We used item-to-construct balance procedure to create parcels for each latent variable (Hau & Marsh, 2004).

We then tested the model by examining the measurement model to ensure that all latent variables, i.e., proactive personality, family influence, career planning, career exploration, and employability were represented by their parcels adequately. Subsequently, we assessed the hypothesized structural model. All analyses were conducted in AMOS using maximum likelihood estimation. We used $\chi 2$, Goodness of Fit (GFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) to assess the model fit (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

D. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The fit statistics for the measurement model were good, $\chi 2(124, N = 321) = 235.99$, $p < .001$, $\chi 2/df = 1.90$, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .05. Factor loadings ranged from .56 to .88. Table 1 reports summary data, zero-order correlations, and correlations among the latent variables.

The structural model demonstrated good fit statistics, $\chi 2(127, N = 321) = 263.39$, $p < .001$, $\chi 2/df = 2.07$, CFI =.94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .06. All paths were significant. The model accounted for 33% of the variance in

career planning, 44.4% in career exploration, 30.9% in perceived employability. See Figure 2.

We tested the mediation pathways in the final model (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). First, we tested if there was an indirect path from proactive personality to employability (via career planning and exploration). There was a direct effect for proactive personality to employability (β = .34, p < .001), establishing the first criterion for mediation. Using 1,000 bootstrapped samples, we then tested the direct and indirect effects together. Here, There was a direct effect for proactive personality to career planning (β = .45, p < .001) and to career exploration (β = .19, p < .05), career planning (β = .17, p < .05) and exploration (β = .19, p < .05) predicted employability, showing all requirements for mediation were met. Proactive personality remained significantly associated with employability (β = .22, p < .05), and as the indirect CI did not contain zero (CIs = .06 to .33), career planning and exploration partially mediated the effect for proactive personality to employability.

Using the same procedures, we tested the indirect effects for family influence to employability. We found partial mediation effect for family influence to employability via career planning; CIs = .04 to .17 and career exploration. In sum, our results demonstrated that the paths from proactive personality and family influence to employability were all partially mediated by career planning and exploration.
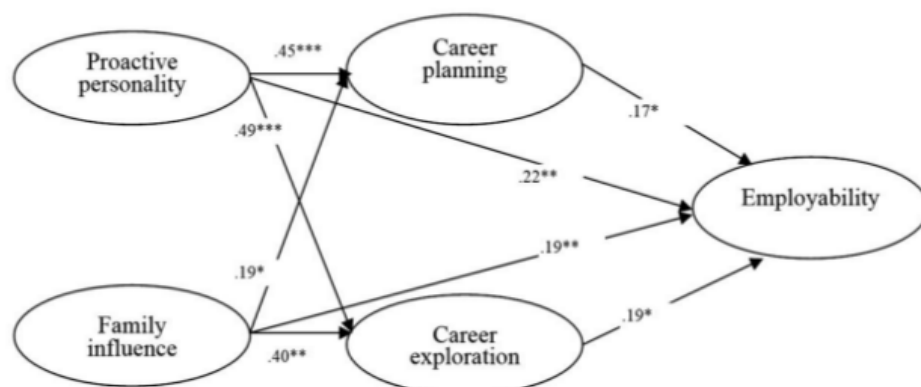

Figure 2. Final model

2. Discussion

We tested a mediation model, in which proactive personality and family influence were associated with a more positive perception of employability, and these associations were mediated by involvement in career planning and exploration. We found that the paths from proactive personality and family influence to perceived employability are not only indirectly via career planning and exploration, but also directly.

In this study, career planning and exploration served as partial mediators, suggesting that these career-related action behaviours served as one of the mechanisms by which proactive personality and family influence exerted their effects on perceived employability. Proactive personality and family influence were also directly and positively associated with perceived employability, suggesting that those who are more proactive and perceive greater family influence are more likely to report higher perceived employability.

The relationships between proactive personality and family influence are positively associated with employability directly and indirectly by way of career planning and exploration. Our results suggest that, when assisting undergraduate students to develop perceived employability, counsellors need to be cognisant of students' levels of proactive behaviour and degree of family influence. They also need to be aware of students' involvement in career planning and exploration activities. In addition, those working with undergraduate students should help them: (a) to identify and to be aware of family influence and students' proactivity, and to understand how family influence and proactive personality can lead to students' career planning, exploration, and employability; and (b) to master the skills to make career plans and explore the world of work.

Additionally, the results suggest that parents and family should: (a) be aware of the effects of family influence on their children's career planning, exploration, and employability; (b) encourage students to be proactive in looking for current, relevant career information, so that this might inform their career planning, exploration, and enhance their employability.

This study contributed to the literature in a number of important ways. First, we demonstrated that both person factor (i.e., proactive personality) and contextual factor (i.e., family influence) serve as predictors of perceived employability by ways of career planning and exploration. Second, career planning and exploration serve as mediators. As action behaviours, these two activities are prominent for individuals to link their personal capacity and family influence with their perceived employability.

E. Conclusion

Consistent with previous research of the association between proactive personality and between family influence and positive career outcomes (e.g., Ghosh & Fouad, 2016), both greater proactive personality and family influence were positively associated with perceived employability. In addition, consistent with propositions that individuals with a higher proactive personality engage in more career action behaviours (Seibert et al., 2001). In line with previous research of the relationship between family influence and positive career-related outcomes (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016), those with higher proactive personality and family influence reported more involvement in career planning and exploration activities. Consistent with Praskova, et al.'s (2015b) study in young adults that both career planning and exploration and were correlated with higher perceived employability, this study demonstrated the same results.

Our study tested a model which consists of proactive personality, family influence, career planning, career exploration, and perceived employability using a sample of undergraduate students from one university, and this condition limits the results' external validity. Therefore, we need to be cautious when generalising the findings to other subgroups, and future studies should involve students from broader samples. Finally, these data were obtained at one point in time, thus, future studies should use an across time design to assess the longitudinal associations among variables.

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