

# Is Employability Orientation More Enhanced by Career Self-Efficacy or Leadership Attribute?

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## Abstract

This paper aim to determine the association between employability orientations, leadership attribute and career self- efficacy. This study further investigates the influences of employability orientation among Malaysian university students. Data were collected randomly from 711 undergraduate students from five Malaysian public universities. The dependent variable of this study was employability orientation and the independent variables were career self- efficacy and leadership attribute. Supporting the hypotheses, the results of study showed career self- efficacy and leadership attribute was positively related to employability orientation. MLR results showed that variables selected for this study explained 43.1% of the variance in employability orientation. Leadership attribute proved a stronger predictor for employability orientation.

**Keywords:** employability orientation, career efficacy, leadership attribute, Malaysia, university students

## 1. Introduction

Recently focus is given on employability orientation in organizations. Organizations need to adopt flexibility to keep up with fast changes in technology and globalization. This requires new abilities of the employees (Legge, 1995). Highlighting on organizational flexibility, employability orientation is very important (Van Dam, 2004). Employees need to maintain their employability for the organization when changes in the work condition occur and these involve developing new knowledge and skills and changing task. On the other hand, Career Self –Efficacy has been shown to be a very beneficial for evaluating the career development process (Gainor, 2006). Self-efficacy has been applied well to career choice, job decision-making, and career indecision (Hackett, 1995). Employability reflects the perceived opportunity of getting new employment whereas self-efficacy carefully related to the self and an overall feeling of how to perform jobs. Leadership is another work related skill that is the ability to influence others to act in order to achieve a common goal. It helps team members to work productively together. Despite difference among the three concepts, a relationship may exist since individuals who have more leadership attribute and self- efficacy skills may have positive attitudes towards employability interventions.

Work relevant skills are important for students, especially where competition for employment is very high. To compete successfully, it is imperative for graduates to have more than subject-specific skills as employers seek a wide range of skills when recruiting graduate students (Deeley, 2014; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). According to Deeley (2014), there is an emphasis on employability skills and a belief that it should be a main part of student's university experience. Overall, it is clear from the literature that employability is a complex concept covering more than a set of practical skills because it also involves students' development of intellectual skills, competencies and personal attributes (Gravells, 2010; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Knight, 2006). Employability, therefore, refers to more than practical skills. It also refers to being able to learn from new experiences, to apply new knowledge, and thus includes competencies, capabilities and attributes (Knight & Yorke, 2002).

Considering university students as the potential employees in future so there is essential for them to have employability orientation skill prior become an employee in any organization. To our knowledge, no study carried out to seek the relationship between employability orientations, career decision making self –efficacy and leadership attribute among university students in Malaysia. Thus, this study aims to seek the influence of career

decision making self –efficacy and leadership attribute on employability orientation of university students. Hence, the central question that this article seeks to address is whether employability orientation more enhanced by career self –efficacy or leadership attribute. To address this, we begin with a literature on employability orientation, leadership attribute and career efficacy.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Employability Orientation*

Employability refers to establish the personal and professional capacity to increase one's employment potential (Smith, 2010). According to Kelan (2008), people may feel stressed to improve their skills and knowledge when they get new positions. However, within an unreliable economy it is necessary that employees constantly improve their skills to enhance their marketability. Therefore, people who work for incomes need consistently update their skills and search for jobs more frequently. Literature recommends that employability is more than getting a job. Employability orientation refers to the attitudes toward changes that aim to boost the organizational flexibility (Van Dam, 2004). Therefore, employability is a critical requirement for both organizations and individuals. It is a psycho-social construct that nurture adaptive cognition, behaviour, and increase the individual-work interface (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). According to Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth (2004) the concept of employability refers to work adaptability that help employees to identify career opportunities. As such, employability helps the movement among jobs and within organization. It actually increases an individual's chance of getting job. In summary, employability reveals the perceived probability of getting new employment (Berntson, Näswall, & Sverke, 2008; Forrier & Sels, 2003).

### *2.2 Career Decision Making Self –Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is a self- perceived ability to perform a task (Rollins & Valdez, 2006). It related to the overall feeling of how to perform tasks (Bandura, 1997). It determines how much effort he or she will dedicate for the activity that chose to undertake, and how long will continue when confronted with challenges (Bandura, 1982). People with a high level of self-efficacy are not give up easily when face obstacles. Nevertheless, those with low level of self-efficacy tend to skip out on uncertain activities and easily discourage when challenges occur (Bandura, 1982). Scholars consider self-efficacy as significant parts of career choice, tenacity, career performance, and career development (Betz & Hackett, 1997). According to Choi et al. (2012) career self –efficacy is one of the most factors studied in career literature. Several studies using the social cognitive career theory framework have proved that career self –efficacy plays an important part in an individual's career development (Guay, Ratelle, Senécal, Larose, & Deschênes, 2006; Lease, 2006; Lent, 2001). Choi et al. (2012) suggested two areas of career self –efficacy: the content and the process. The content part refers to self-efficacy in some career area such as math or science; whereas the process refers to self-efficacy in using the required strategies for successfully navigating a decision-making process. The concept of career decision-making self-efficacy is considered a way of measuring self-efficacy with respect to career decision-making tasks and behaviour (Taylor & Betz, 1983; Taylor & Popma, 1990). McAuliffe (1992) suggested that career decision-making self-efficacy as an important instrument in recognizing personal emotional barriers and helping employees who are having trouble with the career decision-making process.

### *2.3 Leadership Attribute*

The concept of leadership attributes is indeed an old one exist before the scientific study of leadership (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). According to Machiavelli (1997), the main leadership attribute is the ability to understand social situations and to manipulate them in the practice of leadership. Several authors have written about the importance of character as a leadership attributes (Barlow, Jordan & Hendrix, 2003). Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991) suggested that leadership character involves six elements such as; desire to lead, drive, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business. Tait (1996) found that leadership character consisted of honesty, fairness, compassion, humility, and being one's own person. Similarly, Barker & Coy (2003) identified seven qualities such as humility, courage, integrity, compassion, humour, passion, and wisdom. (Cycyota et al. (2011) suggest that students' leadership skills are involved in the academic evaluations of classroom assignments such as participation in team, service learning processes, and other very relevant areas. Moreover, leadership is an essential part of the physical education evaluation with a certain emphasis on the capability to work in teams while maintaining personal performance.

### *2.4 Association among the Three Concepts*

The literature review suggested that individual characteristics are important contributors of employees' attitudes toward career development activities. Two personality traits were considered important antecedents of

employability orientation namely openness and initiative. Openness defined as being open to new ideas and changes. Initiative defined as being self-started and proactive instead of being reactive. Researchers have revealed relationships between initiative and some career related variables, such as career planning, career initiative, and employability (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng & Tag, 1997; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). According to Berntson, Näswall, & Sverke (2008) employability refers to individuals' beliefs about their opportunities of getting new employment, it is accepted to associate it to self-efficacy. Similarly, Knight & Yorke (2002) mentioned that efficacy beliefs are an important aspect of employability. Several scholars suggested that employability is mostly depending on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Velde & Berg, 2003). Additionally, self-efficacy has been shown to be related positively to job search behavior among unemployed (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine & Boswell, 2003). They are more likely to change jobs, which changing the job would affect their level of self-efficacy positively (Berntson, Näswall & Sverke, 2008). Similarly, result of another study showed that self-efficacy positively related to employability. It appeared that employees who have higher level of self-efficacy perceived themselves as highly employable (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013). Finding of study by Berntson et al. (2008) reveal that although employability and self-efficacy are two separate concepts but separate qualities. Furthermore their data supported the opinion that employability causes self-efficacy, rather than the reverse relationship that reported by scholars in past studies (Bandura, 1997; Velde & Berg, 2003). Finding of study conducted by (Nauta, Kahn, Angell, & Cantarelli, 2002) revealed that relationship between employability and self- efficacy is mutual. In relation to leadership attribute according to Camps & Rodríguez (2011) there is a connection between leadership and the employability.

In line with these findings, self- efficacy and leadership attribute expected to positively related to employability orientation (Hypothesis 1 & 2).

The following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive correlation between employability and career self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive correlation between employability and leadership attribute.

### **3. Objectives of Study**

- 1) To determine respondents' employability orientation, career self -efficacy and leadership attribute
- 2) To determine the relationship between variables
- 3) To determine those variables that help to explain variation of employability ordination

### **4. Method**

#### *4.1 Participants*

Public universities namely; USM Penang, UPM Selangor, UTM, UMT, and UPNM were randomly selected from four zones of peninsular Malaysia. Data were collected using a questionnaire that was distributed among 800 respondents. A pool of 764 questionnaires were returned (response rate 95.5%) and 53 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete data (N=711).

#### *4.2 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument*

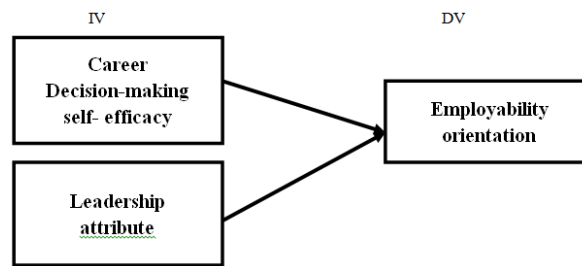
A panel of experts at Universiti Putra Malaysia validated the instrument. Reliability analysis was conducted to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. The pilot-tested conducted at one public university prior to conduct the actual study. Following pilot-test, some items were modified. The results of reliability statistics for variables were all above 0.70.

#### *4.3 Measuring Variables*

**Employability:** the dependent variable was measured with a 6-item scale. Respondents were asked to mark their degree of agreement with each statement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

**Career decision-making self-efficacy:** the independent variable of study was assessed using three dimensions namely; seeking occupational information, goal setting, and self- appraisal. Again, the response scale ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

**Leadership attribute:** was measured by two sub domain; acceptance of leadership and visionary and change leadership with eight statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Leadership attribute is the second independent variables of the study.



## 5. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Analysis of Variables (Objective1)

Means and standard deviations for employability, career self- efficacy, and leadership attribute are listed in Table 1. For the employability orientation mean score was (M=4.37, SD=0.53), for leadership attribute, the mean score of (M=4.01, SD=.48), and for career decision-making self-efficacy (M=4.08, SD=0.511). The overall mean of response on employability orientation, leadership attribute and career self- efficacy divided into three levels for reporting purpose. Majority of the respondents, 48.9% (n=632) had high level of employability, 5.6% (n=76) had moderate of employability and only 2 respondents (0.2%) reported low level of employability. Regarding leadership attribute, 55 % (n=711) of students had high level of Leadership attribute while 12.2% (n=158) had moderate level and only one (% 0.1) reported low level of leadership attribute. For the career self -efficacy (n=42.7) % 552 reported high level of self- efficacy, %12.2 (n=158) had medium level and only 1 student (% 0.1) reported low level of career self- efficacy.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for variables of study (N=711)

Variables	N	M	SD
<b>Employability Orientation</b>	711	4.37	.539
<b>Leadership attribute</b>	711	4.01	.483
<b>Career Decision-making self-Efficacy</b>	711	4.08	.511

### 5.2 Correlation Coefficient Analysis (Objective2)

To measure the relationship among the variables of study, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used. The statistical analyses were conducted using IBM® SPSS® Statistics 20. The results show that employability orientation is positively related to leadership attribute and career decision-making self- efficacy. There is a significant positive relationship between employability orientation and leadership attribute ( $r=0.646$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). There is a significant positive relationship between employability orientation and career decision-making self-efficacy ( $r=0.512$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). The highest correlation coefficient was .646 between leadership attribute and employability orientation, followed by career decision-making self-efficacy and employability orientation ( $r=.512$ ,  $p=.000$ ). (See table 2).

Table 2. Pearson correlations coefficient of independent and dependent variables

Variables	Y	X1	X2
<b>Employability Orientation</b>	1.000		
<b>Leadership attribute(X1)</b>	.646**	1.000	
<b>Career-Decision-making self-Efficacy(X2)</b>	.512**	.655**	1.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 5.3 Regression Analysis (Objective3)

A regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictor variables of employability orientation. We applied MLR to assess two-factor regression model explaining the variation of employability orientation.

The equation proposed by the MLR is as follows:

$$Y = 1.271 + .606 (X_1) + .165 (X_2) + e$$

According to this method, two variables found to be significant in explaining employability orientation. The predictor variable is leadership attribute ( $t=14.47$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and career decision-making self- efficacy ( $t=4.155$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). As depicted in table 2, the largest beta coefficient is (.543), which is for leadership attribute followed by career decision-making self- efficacy (.156). The  $R^2$  value of 0.431 implies that two predictors explain 43.1% of the variances in the employability orientation. In other words, 43.1% of the variability of employability orientation is explained by leadership attribute and career decision -making self-efficacy. (See table 3).

Table 3. Estimates of coefficients for the regression model

Model	Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	1.271	.138		9.213	.000
Leadership attribute	.606	.042	.543	14.473	.000
CareerDecision-making self-Efficacy	.165	.040	.156	4.155	.000

$R=0.656$ ;  $R^2=0.431$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.429$

## 6. Discussions and Conclusion

Career decision -making self- efficacy involves planning and seeking information about one's career, and making important decisions regarding career options. Positive levels of ability to plan and make decisions about career will likely also encourage a developed level of awareness of the need to acquire and enhance more or higher skills and knowledge in order to gain employment or to advance further in career in one's choice of employment. The more one has skills in seeking information and planning one's career, the more likely one would demonstrate the ability and commitment to invest in up scaling of skills and knowledge to also advance in one's career or to remain employed. Hence, it makes sense that career decision-making skills have quite a strong relationship with employability orientation. Leadership attributes on the other hand demonstrates self-confidence in one's ability to take on responsibilities, and to work with others to create and achieve visions and goals. Formulating visions of what may be achieved, and strategically planning how to achieve those goals indicate high levels of awareness of the importance of team cohesion which effectively deploys all the different types of knowledge and skills to achieve the goals. Leadership attributes, namely visionary leadership, supports the principle that people are constantly trying to improve their lives through better work, and better careers. Hence, the strong relationship between leadership attributes and employability orientation.

In terms of career preparation programs in universities, it is recommended that educators develop an integrated program to enhance the employability orientation of their undergraduates that assimilate leadership development within career decision activity. By helping undergraduates to focus on what they hope to achieve for themselves in terms of transforming their individual identity, their personal capacity, their social responsibility, and the social status and they might aspire towards in the future through the work or career they choose, universities will then become more successful in enhancing the meaning of work itself as a transformative agent or medium to achieve fulfilment in the development of the individual's identity, vision and capacity. Only then will the purpose of career decision making and developing positive employability orientation go beyond just securing financial stability. Instead the integrated employment orientation program will offer a blended medium through which undergraduates seek to find, and in turn bring forth value, to the meaning of careers, and of being employed in their future lives.

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