



T.C.

ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**LINKING PROTEAN CAREER ORIENTATION TO
EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF
PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY**

MASTER'S THESIS

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BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

ANKARA, 2023

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ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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ONAY SAYFASI

Nadide ERDÖNMEZ tarafından hazırlanan LINKING PROTEAN CAREER ORIENTATION TO EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY” adlı tez çalışması aşağıdaki jüri tarafından oy birliği / oy çokluğu ile Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü İşletme Anabilim Dalı’nda Doktora/Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Tez Savunma Tarihi: 07.09.2023

Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü İşletme Anabilim Dalı’nda Yüksek Lisans tezi olması için şartları yerine getirdiğini onaylıyorum.

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürü

Prof. Dr. Yaşar Yiğit

BEYAN

Bu tez çalışmasının kendi çalışmam olduğunu, tezin planlanmasından yazımına kadar bütün aşamalarda patent ve telif haklarını ihlal edici etik dışı davranışımın olmadığını, bu tezdeki bütün bilgileri akademik ve etik kurallar içinde elde ettiğimi, bu tezde kullanılmış olan tüm bilgi ve yorumlara kaynak gösterdiğimi beyan ederim. 05.09.2023

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the mediating role of perceived employability in the relationship between protean career orientation and life satisfaction as a dimension of employee well-being. Data were gathered from a total of 359 Information technology sector employees in Türkiye. Hypothesis tests were employed using structural equation modelling and bootstrapping method. The results indicated that protean career orientation has a significant and positive effect on life satisfaction. Moreover, perceived employability were found to have a mediating role in the relationship between protean career orientation and life satisfaction. This thesis contributes to the scholarly literature by conducting an empirical investigation into the predictive impact of protean career orientation on life satisfaction. Additionally, it explores the mediating role of perceived employability in this relationship, utilizing a sample of employees working in information technology sector. Because this study employs a cross-sectional research approach and solely gathers data from employees, causality between variables cannot be inferred.

Keywords: Career, employability, life satisfaction, perceived employability, protean career orientation, well-being.

ÖZET

Çok Yönlü Kariyer Yönelimini Çalışan İyi Oluşuyla İlişkilendirmek: Algılanan İstihdam Edilebilirliğin Aracı Rolü

Bu tez, çok yönlü kariyer yönelimi ile çalışanların iyi olma halinin bir boyutu olarak yaşam tatmini arasındaki ilişkide algılanan istihdam edilebilirliğin aracılık rolünü incelemektedir. Veriler, Türkiye'deki toplam 359 bilgi teknolojileri sektörü çalışanından toplanmıştır. Hipotez testleri yapısal eşitlik modellemesi ve önyükleme yöntemi kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, çok yönlü kariyer yöneliminin yaşam memnuniyeti üzerinde anlamlı ve pozitif bir etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, algılanan istihdam edilebilirliğin, çok yönlü kariyer yönelimi ve yaşam memnuniyeti arasındaki ilişkide aracı bir role sahip olduğu bulunmuştur. Bu tez, çok yönlü kariyer yöneliminin yaşam tatmini üzerindeki yordayıcı etkisine ilişkin ampirik bir araştırma yaparak akademik literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca, bilgi teknolojileri sektöründe çalışanlardan oluşan bir örneklem kullanarak, algılanan istihdam edilebilirliğin bu ilişkideki aracılık rolünü araştırmaktadır. Bu çalışma kesitsel bir araştırma yaklaşımı kullandığından ve yalnızca çalışanlardan veri topladığından, değişkenler arasında nedensellik çıkarımı yapılamamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algılanan istihdam edilebilirlik, çok yönlü kariyer yönelimi, istihdam edilebilirlik, iyi oluş, kariyer, yaşam tatmini.

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LIST OF FIGURES AND ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	: Average Value Extracted
CFA	: Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	: Comparative Fit Index
CI	: Confidence Intervals
CR	: Composite Reliability
df	: degrees of freedom
GFI	: Goodness-of-fit Index
IFI	: Incremental Fit Index
KMO	: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
LS	: Life Satisfaction
NFI	: Normed Fit Index
PCO	: Proten Career Orientation
PE	: Percevied Employability
RMR	: Root Mean Squared Residual
RMSEA	: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
TLI	: Tucker–Lewis Index

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of a career has utmost importance for individuals. The concept involves a complex and dynamic path that includes an individual's professional development, ambitions, and future objectives, embracing not only career pursuits but also personal and social aspects. As people go through their professional journeys, they actively participate in an ongoing cycle of self-evaluation, acquisition of skills, and adjustment to external influences such as economic patterns and evolving job markets. These elements together play a significant role in establishing their professional identities and trajectories in life.

Individuals turn to various sectors and businesses to gain different experiences and improve themselves throughout their working lives. They try to take advantage of the opportunities that may arise with this mobility. However, with the influence of developing technology and globalization in the 21st century, changes have occurred in the working lives of individuals. In the information and technology age we live in, the labor market has entered a dynamic and competitive process. This process shapes individuals' situations of finding and owning a job and their career processes.

A career is defined as the sequence of work experiences that evolve over the individual's life course (Arthur et al., 1989; De Vos et al., 2021). Individuals aim for a sustainable working life by following a stable path throughout their careers. On the other hand, businesses are trying to cope with the competition in the labor market. Businesses trying to survive in difficult market conditions have started to have problems in providing employment to their employees.

Businesses that are more selective towards their employees focus more on human capital. This situation enabled the knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals to come to the fore. In this way, individuals have realized that they need to take more responsibility and take initiative in their careers. Thus, a transition has been made to a more global and individual career perception by moving away from the traditional and organizational career perception.

Individuals who manage their careers themselves aim to work in different businesses and in different positions in different sectors. These individuals, who are open to

development and change, strive for a more effective career with their increased motivation and performance. In line with this mobility in the careers of individuals, various career orientations have emerged.

The first notable career orientation was the "Protean Career" (Hall, 1976, 1996). Protean career, which is open to individual development, is an orientation in which individuals who take initiative in their own careers are in constant change without being tied to the organization. It is natural for individuals who adopt this career orientation, who are not dependent on organizations but on themselves, to want to be satisfied with their careers, their work and their lives. However, this study focuses on life satisfaction, since there is a lot of reference to variables related to the work environment, such as job satisfaction, in the literature. Individuals who are satisfaction-oriented in their working life will want to ensure their well-being by increasing their life satisfaction throughout their careers.

In order to contribute to the literature, in this study, the relationship between protean career and life satisfaction under the heading of well-being is included. Life satisfaction has an undeniable importance in the careers of individuals. It is predictable that individuals with high life satisfaction will display a more effective attitude in their careers. At the same time, it can be predicted that the life satisfaction of individuals who take responsibility in their careers and are open to development may increase. As a result, individuals are more likely to be successful in their careers.

The research is carried out to understand the relationship between protean career and life satisfaction among IT workers in Turkey. In addition, the mediating role of perceived employability in the above relationship is examined. The integration of perceived employability as an intermediary role is also important in terms of the gap in the literature. Employability refers to the continuation of the working processes of individuals open to development. The active development of individuals in their careers is under the influence of employability. Employability is conceptualized as a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004, p.16). From this point of view, employability, which triggers the mobility in the career of the individual, also affects the mobility within and between businesses.

As a result of the changing conditions in the labor market, the employment guarantee contracts between the worker and the employer have been replaced by more individual

contracts. Individual contracts, on the other hand, are between self-interested employees who can take initiative for their careers and businesses that act according to their own needs. This clearly highlights the relationship between protean careers and perceived employability. Also, work experience is an important factor in a protean career. It is an assurance provided by employability for individuals to gain work experience. From this point of view, there is a link between protean career and employability.

Perceived employability concerns the workers' perceptions about available job opportunities (Berntson and Marklund, 2007; Rothwell and Arnold, 2007; Vanhercke et al., in press; De Cuyper et al., 2014, p. 537). It is the individual's perception of being able to find a suitable job in the domestic and foreign labor market in line with her/his knowledge, skills and abilities. It can also be described as the ease experienced by the individual in finding a new job. Like every career value, the protean career has its own characteristics. In a protean career, value-driven and self-directed are the main features. This career, in the context of today's labor market, can enable individuals to be employed thanks to their developing skills. Individuals with protean career attitudes can be expected to have high perceived employability.

In addition, individuals with high perceived employability can be expected to have high well-being. Having an effective stance in their careers and high employability can have a positive effect on their life satisfaction. Individuals with high perceived employability can be predicted to have a life above the standards in the socio-economic environment. It can be said that this situation has a positive effect on the life satisfaction and direct well-being of individuals.

In line with the information in question, the thesis study consists of six chapters. The first section contains the introduction. In the second part, information is given about the development of protean career orientation from past to present. Afterwards, the concept of life satisfaction is mentioned under the heading of well-being. Finally, the concept of perceived employability is shed light on the concept of employability. In the third part, hypotheses are put forward. Firstly, the the relationship between protean career orientation and well-being is discussed. Then, in addition to this hypothes, the mediating role of perceived employability is integrated. In the fourth chapter, research findings on information technology workers are included in order to determine the relationship between career orientation and well-being. Accordingly, demographic findings are explained first and then

the results of the correlation and regression analysis are explained. Finally, the discussion section is included.

1.1. Research Question

Based on the previous considerations and in accordance with the established theoretical framework, this study presents the following research questions. These inquiries are designed to shed light on the complexities of the issue being investigated and to provide nuanced insights into the intricate phenomena being examined. The purpose of these inquiries is to facilitate a thorough investigation of the connections, interactions, and probable causal processes within the study area, so making a valuable contribution to the growth of knowledge in this particular subject. Moreover, these research inquiries function as the fundamental principles on which the empirical examination is constructed, promoting a systematic and rigorous methodology for investigation, data gathering, and analysis in the pursuit of credible scholarly results:

- (1) To what extent is the protean career orientation related to well-being of employees?
- (2) Does the perceived employability mediates the relationship between protean career orientation and well-being of employees?

1.2. Objective of the Research

This study attempts to evaluate the impact of people's protean career orientation on their overall life satisfaction, referring employee well-being, in line with the aforementioned research goals. Furthermore, the study aims to dive further into the complexities of this connection by examining the mediating function provided by perceived employability. By conducting this multifaceted analysis, the study hopes to not only advance the scholarly understanding of protean career orientation and its implications for individuals' life satisfaction, but also to contribute to the larger discourse on career development, employee well-being, and the numerous factors that interact in today's workplace.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Protean Career Orientation

One of the new career approach of the 21st century is the protean career. Although Hall first wrote about the idea of the protean career in 1976, it was not until the publication of his book, *The Career Is Dead—Long Live the Career*, in 1996 that the concept gained widespread popularity (Sullivan & Baruch, 2013, p. 1544). The term protean stems from a metaphor of Proteus, a sea god in Greek mythology who had the gift of prophecy and used metamorphosis to hide his knowledge from others (Volmer & Spurk, 2011, p. 209).

Using the metaphor of the Greek god Proteus, who could change his shape at will, Hall described the protean careerist as able to repackage his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities to fit the changing work environment in order to remain marketable (Sullivan & Baruch, 2013, p. 1544). "Protean Career", which has become a career concept that attracts more attention, especially after 1996, emphasizes the individual's self-management of his/her career. According to Hall (1996), this career approach is expressed as a career shaped by the individual and restructured over time as the individual and the environment change.

Briscoe and Hall (2006) considered protean career orientation as two dimensions. These two dimensions are considered value-driven (VD) and self-directed (SD). According to the dimension on which the person is focusing on values, it qualifies that the individual's intrinsic values provide guidance and measurement in his/her career. Individuals with a VD orientation generally rely on their own definition of career success and endorse personal, rather than organizational, values (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006; Stauffer et al., 2019, p. 339). The protean career concept provides a self-directed perspective and reveals that a person makes choices according to his/her own will.

In addition, the other dimension emphasizes the ability to adapt in terms of performance and learning demands while the individual can manage his/her career. The SD dimension describes people who prefer to rely on themselves to make career decisions and plans rather than others, such as their employers, to do it for them (Stauffer et al., 2019, p. 339). Moreover, protean individuals with low levels of value-driven and self-directed characteristics are considered dependent, and neither follow their own principles nor manage their career themselves (Lin, 2015, p. 755).

A protean career attitude has been characterized as involving a broader perspective, a developmental progression, and viewing a career as a calling and a way to self-fulfillment (Hall 2002; Volmer & Spurk, 2011, p. 208). Individuals exhibiting this attitude are in constant development in their careers without focusing on physical or material rewards. Protean careerists are flexible, value freedom, believe in continuous learning, and seek intrinsic rewards from work (Hall, 1996a, 1996b; Sullivan & Baruch, 2013, p. 1544-1549).

The protean career, which consists of education, training, and various work experiences of the person as a professional, is a process managed by the person, not the organization. Therefore, protean careerists are individuals who value freedom and continuous learning, who seek professional commitment, who are more interested in intrinsic rewards than extrinsic, and who tend to pursue meaningful work to discover their true calling (Hall, 1996a, 1996b, 2004; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Stauffer et al., 2019, p. 338).

In addition, the protean individuals value individual freedom and self-growth; and define career success in terms of psychological factors, such as the degree of job satisfaction, self-actualization, personal accomplishment, and sense of self-fulfillment (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Chin & Rasdi, 2014). Personal career choices and self-actualization processes of these individuals, whose success criteria consist of internal factors, are integrated with each other. Moreover, the protean career individual anticipates work challenges in pursuing career paths (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

Also, protean individuals have attitudes that can manage themselves in internal and external environments. It is known that these individuals continue their careers by adapting to environmental conditions. However, these environmental conditions can also be affected by each other and become complex. These environmental conditions can be taken as globalization, knowledge-intensive economies, the advent of technology, right-sizing or downsizing of the organizations, competitive pressures, work-life balance, decentralization, decreased job security, increase of workplace diversity, expanding outsourcing and increase in temporary or part-time workers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Joseph et al., 2012; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Zafar, Farooq, & Qudoods, 2017, p. 134-135).

2.2. Well-being

Well-being is a situational assessment of an individual's life. Well-being in general refers to the presence of pleasant affect (e.g., feelings of happiness) and the absence of unpleasant affect (e.g., psychological distress) (Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012; Mäkikangas, Feldt, Kinnunen, Tolvanen, Kinnunen, & Pulkkinen, 2006; Vanhercke et al., 2016, p. 11). Also, the concept of well-being refers to optimal psychological functioning and experience (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 142).

It is known that the concept of well-being has a long history. From the past to the present, individuals have wanted to have the concept of well-being with the meaning it expresses to them. The subject of well-being, which is the subject of the psychology literature, was discussed and researched as two different philosophies at first. The first of these can be broadly labeled hedonism (Kahneman et al 1999) and reflects the view that well-being consists of pleasure or happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 143).

The other approach is eudaimonism. In the second view, it is thought that well-being is not just about happiness, and it is argued that people's psychological well-being cannot be confirmed by reports of being happy. The two traditions—hedonism and eudaimonism—are founded on distinct views of human nature and of what constitutes a good society (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 143). These approaches answer the questions asked by considering the importance of well-being in the development process of societies. In line with these answers, they acquire new values for their lives.

Today, in the literature, the concept of well-being appears as subjective well-being and psychological well-being. Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to the various ways that we experience and evaluate our lives positively (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Tov et al., 2021, p. 3). Subjective well-being consists of positive and negative affects, and these affects are seen as emotional components of subjective well-being.

In addition, life evaluations such as life satisfaction are also related to subjective well-being. Since these evaluations are related to our living conditions, it is a subject where thought comes to the fore. This constitutes the cognitive component of subjective well-being, unlike emotional experiences. Though the affective and cognitive components are often correlated with each other; they are also associated with different outcomes (Tay & Diener, 2011; Tov et al., 2021, p. 3). Therefore, each component needs to be measured separately.

Another concept is psychological well-being. As cited in Ashleigh et al., (2018), various factors like health, marriage, family, work, finance, educational opportunities, self-esteem, creativity, and trust in others determine one's quality of life and involve a complex mix of physical, mental, and social well-being like happiness and satisfaction (Rahim, 2020, p. 30). These factors are the measurement and evaluation of elements in an individual's life. They are also essential elements of subjective well-being.

On the other hand, the above-mentioned approaches to hedonism and eudaimonism are two components of psychological well-being. Nevertheless, over time, these points of view amongst scholars have changed and the paradigm of psychological well-being has become more holistic, instead of philosophical (Rahim, 2020, p. 31).

Well-being plays an active role in business life as well as in every dimension of the individual and society. In a similar vein, work-related well-being can be framed positively, for example in terms of work engagement, or instead negatively, for example in terms of burnout (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007; Vanhercke et al., 2016, p. 11). The active role of the concept of well-being in business life is clearly perceived by the individual and the organization. Also, it is seen that the individual aspect of well-being directly affects the institution and society in which it is located.

In addition, from the behavioural science perspective, WB is defined as the satisfaction of individual needs and wants through the actualization of their abilities and lifestyle (Emerson, 1985; Karani et al., 2021). When we look at the previous studies, it is seen that well-being is handled from different perspectives. The most frequently discussed dimensions are life satisfaction and job satisfaction. In this study, life satisfaction, which is the most studied dimension of well-being, and psychological distress, which has been the focus of attention recently, were analyzed.

2.2.1. Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction, which is one of the important dimensions of individual well-being in terms of subjective well-being, is shaped by social, economic, individual, and cultural factors. According to Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin (1985) recognize three separable components of subjective well-being: positive affect (PA), negative affect (NA), and life satisfaction (Prasoon & Chaturvedi, 2016, p. 26). The fact that life satisfaction is one of the

most important components of the concept of well-being can be understood from the fact that we encounter it in many studies in the literature.

Life satisfaction for Sumner (1966) is "A positive evaluation of the conditions of your life, a judgment that at least on balance, it measures up favorably against your standards or expectations" (Prasoon & Chaturvedi, 2016, p. 25). In another saying, life satisfaction is characterized, in agreement with the cognitive theory, as "individual's cognitive judgment about comparisons based on the compatibility of their own living conditions with the standards" (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985; Prasoon & Chaturvedi, 2016, p. 25). Also, life satisfaction can be understood as a cognitive appraisal of the overall degree of satisfaction an individual has with his/her life (Hart, 1999; Karani et al., 2021).

In line with the definitions, it can be said that the well-being level of individuals in a society that develops and changes materially and spiritually is higher. The perception of life satisfaction is higher in countries that offer opportunities and meet the expectations of individuals. In addition, the society's economic, social, etc. the fact that it is advantageous in terms of social and business life affects the expectations and goals of individuals. Work satisfaction emerges as a result of meeting these expectations and valuing opportunities. The work satisfaction of the employee could determine fifth quarter of the employee's life satisfaction (Campbell, Converse & Rodgers, 1976; Rahim & Zainal, p. 17).

Moreover, life satisfaction is an ultimate goal in human existence and has a number of further positive concomitants, e.g., having more friends and being healthier (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008; Hagmaier et al., 2018, p. 142). The active role of life satisfaction in the social life of the individual is more clearly understood in the circle of family and friends. Life satisfaction leads to a happy and healthy life, and such individuals treat others better (Pasupuleti et al., 2009; Karani et al., 2021).

The theoretical framework developed by Campbell et al. (1976) states that an individual's perceived level of satisfaction with life in general is related to levels of satisfaction in various life domains, such as work, family, community, health, and so on (Hagmaier et al., 2018, p. 143). These features of the individual in his/her social life create opportunities in business life. Each value that an individual adds to himself is important for the effect of the experiences he/she has gained throughout his/her career on life satisfaction. It is assumed that the less the incongruity between the individual's desires and achievements,

the more life satisfaction he/she has (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Prasoon & Chaturvedi, 2016, p. 25).

Life satisfaction is a situation that increases the advantage that an individual takes from life, and therefore it is a factor that affects life. An individual's high life satisfaction leads to being a more efficient and effective person. It was pointed out by Donovan and Halpern (2002), "When people are happier, they tend to be more open-minded and creative in their thinking while people who are unhappy, stressed or dissatisfied tend to exhibit 'tunnel vision' and rigid thinking" (p. 32; Karani et al., 2021).

2.3. Employability

Employability has become a topic of interest due to changes in the broader economy and adverse employment conditions, which made employees more vulnerable and exposed to employment uncertainty (Clarke, 2008; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van der Heijden, 2002; Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2013; Baranchenko et al., 2020, p. 241). Organizations that want to display a sustainable attitude in the global competitive environment focus on the human capital of their employees. This situation emphasizes the employability of employees. Reaching a sustainable business process with the skills and abilities, experience, and knowledge gained by the individual shows his employability.

There is information about the history of this concept in the employability literature. The concept of employability, which emerged for the first time in the twentieth century, emphasized the difference between employable individuals and unemployable individuals. Employable individuals are defined as individuals who need to work and who have the will and ability to work. On the other hand, unemployable individuals are described as individuals who need help and are able to work.

In the 1950s, the concept of employability was reached in the resources. In the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of employability was viewed from the perspective of individuals' work attitudes and self-image. In those years, employability was aimed at full employment in line with the economic goal. In those times of economic prosperity and a tight labour market, this was closely connected to encouraging the underprivileged unemployed to take part in the labour process (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 103).

In the 1970s, the concept of employability began to change with economic changes. The main purpose of employability has been human capital-oriented due to the increase in unemployment. The abilities and knowledge of individuals have increased their importance for employability. Increasing the employability of the employees has started to make them more advantageous economically.

In the 1980s, the concept of employment began to be more remarkable for companies. Particular attention was paid to the flexibility and sustainability of the labor market. Therefore, in the 1980s organizational approaches emerged that considered employability and the development of transferable skills as a way to increase people's flexibility (Guilbert et al., 2016, p. 71). Employability has been seen as a concept that can provide the flexibility of organizations with the functionality of employees. Employability was no longer approached as a labour market instrument, but rather as an HR instrument to optimise the deployment of staff within companies (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 104).

From the 1990s to the present, employability as an important part of the labor market has been evaluated over the active population. The concept of employability, which is not focused on the unemployed and deprived population, is seen as an option for job security for the active population. In addition to incentives to increase employment in the labor market and reduce unemployment, job opportunities within and outside organizations should also be provided. Accordingly, the steps individuals take for their careers have become an important factor for employability.

In the literature, employability deals with the individual's ability to maintain business continuity in the labor market despite internal and external factors. Because employability is defined as 'the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires' (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 25; Baranchenko et al., 2020, p. 241). The individual has become a more important factor for employability than the employer or the state. Especially, literature in the area of management science and work and organizational psychology has portrayed employability as the upcoming critical resource for employees (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth 2004; Van Dam 2004; Broeck et al., 2014, p. 1904).

The importance of the concept of employability is supported by arguments from the past to the present. In short, the employability of individuals throughout their career has serious importance both in the transition from one profession to another profession and in a

certain profession. Employability is often viewed as the probability of obtaining or keeping a job, or to give an indication of “how easy it will be for an individual to enter into a new employment position” (Bernston & Marklund, 2007, p. 280; Guilbert et al., 2016, p.75). Therefore, employability, which has recently become a concept that has been more emphasized with global competition, is defined in different ways.

Forrier and Sels (2003) defined the concept of employability in three different dimensions in their study. First, it is covered in the basic definition. According to its basic definition, employability is defined as the individual ability to carry out various jobs. The focus is on the real employability of people. Many authors have focused on the basic definition (For example, Groot and Maassen van den Brink, Feyter et al.). Second, the broader definition of employability has been articulated. According to this definition, the individual capacity required to use and develop the obtained or existing employability is important. The focus of this definition is the development and use of employability and individual factors. Finally, a comprehensive definition has been proposed. Thijssen’s comprehensive definition includes in addition context-related factors that promote or inhibit the effective use of employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003, p. 106). These contexts include opportunities provided by employers to increase employability. It also addresses the factor of discrimination in the labor market.

On the other hand, all employability definitions refer to the individual’s ability to make labour market transitions (Brown et al., 2003; Forrier & Sels, 2003a; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; De Cuyper et al., 2008, p. 490). According to another definition, employability is generally seen as the employee’s ability to retain a job or to get another job (Forrier and Sels 2003; Fugate et al. 2004; Broeck et al., 2014, p. 1904). These abilities of the individual are related to his knowledge, skills, and adaptability in the market and are generally evaluated depending on his position in the labor market. The position is indicated by objective indicators such as education level or professional status.

Employability interpreted at the level of the individual concerns “an individual’s chance of a job in the internal and/or external labour market” (Forrier and Sels, 2003, p. 106; Vanhercke et al., 2013, p. 594). Studies in the literature take the chances of finding a job in different ways. For example, factors that increase this chance are examined as inputs to employability. Other studies examine outcomes as outcomes of employability. The most common example in research is perceived employability.

The employability of employees also affects the development and change in their careers for many reasons mentioned above. Employability is conceptualized as a form of work-specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 16). Employees who take advantage of career opportunities are likely to increase their employability. A person has a successful career when s/he's "continuously employable in the internal and external labor market during one's working life" (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 103; Guilbert et al., 2016, p.71).

2.3.1. Perceived Employability

With globalization, it becomes difficult for organizations to achieve sustainability and gain a competitive advantage. It is a necessary step for organizations that integrate development and change to gain a competitive advantage by becoming more flexible. However, globalization affects not only organizations but also employees' continuity in their work.

Employees, like organizations, strive to gain continuity in their work by gaining an advantage in a challenging competitive environment. It is known that especially employees who have the advantage of education and experience are advantageous in this competitive environment. Every employee faced with this competitive environment evaluates the possibilities of staying in their current job, being promoted, or finding a new job. Employability perception emerges in the process of self-questioning of individuals. Perceived employability concerns the individual's beliefs about how easy it is to find new employment (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; De Cuyper et al., 2011, p. 253).

Perceived employability refers to individuals' perceptions of their employment possibilities be with the current employer (i.e. on the internal labor market) or with another employer (i.e. on the external labor market) (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2008, 2010; Rothwell and Arnold, 2007; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Eby et al., 2003; Lin, 2015, p. 756).

According to another definition, perceived employability is generally defined in terms of an individual's perceived chance of finding a new job in the external labor market (Berntson and Marklund, 2007; Philippaers et al., 2016 p. 1). This concept encourages employees to manage their careers beyond the organizational boundaries. Moreover, this

perception encourages organizations to be more careful about the issue of occupational safety.

Perceived employability has been defined as “The individual’s beliefs about the possibilities of finding new, equal, or better employment” (De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen, & Makikangas, 2011; Zafar et al., 2017, p. 135). The high perceived employability of individuals in the process of finding a job or changing a job provides motivation and productivity. However, there are situations that arise in the labor market for reasons that do not originate from individuals themselves.

Findings of unpredictability and flexibility in the labor market significantly affect the perception of employment. Therefore, perceived employability is the appraisal of one’s possibilities of getting new and better employment (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Zafar et al., 2017, p. 135). It is necessary for the individual to be aware of the environment as well as to be self-aware. In this way, individuals will be able to increase their perceived employability.

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

3.1. The Relationship Between Protean Career Orientation and Well-being

Changes in the structure of changing institutions with globalization affect the expectations of individuals in their career processes and their self-development. However, it brings new approaches to the meaning of career. While career is generally used in terms of development and progress, it now refers to a psychological process in which the individual adapts to change. It also emphasizes that the individual should be satisfied with this process and be compatible with new jobs and institutions.

Within the framework of this issue, individuals who manage their careers by themselves in line with their own values, out of the perspective of the organization, have begun to increase. This type of career appears in the literature as a protean career. In addition, the concept of well-being can be expressed as a serious topic in the protean career orientation. Prior studies have established associations between protean career orientation and a spectrum of work- and career-related outcomes, encompassing job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, proactivity in career management, and job change (Briscoe et al., 2006; Gasteiger, 2007; Superli & Creed, 2016; Ngo & Li, 2018, p. 427).

Protean careerists take initiative in their careers. They direct their own careers by focusing on their values. Individuals displaying a pronounced protean career orientation proactively assume responsibility for orchestrating their career advancement to align with their personally derived values and objectives (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006; Ngo & Li, 2018, p. 427). In addition, according to Hall (1996), the protean career is a career that varies according to the individual and the environment. In this case, the individual must have a harmonious character. In this way, he will be able to transfer the success in his career to his social life. They are accustomed to defining career success based on their individual values and actively pursue actions aligned with these personalized success criteria (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Gubler et al., 2014; Ngo & Li, 2018, p. 427).

The relationship between life satisfaction, which is a dimension of well-being, and a protean career is examined. Protean careerists, who have the sole say in their careers, can reach career satisfaction. Numerous studies have explored the constructive association

between a protean career orientation and career satisfaction. In many studies, career success has been linked to career-encompassing behaviors and aspects of well-being. These are frequently encountered concepts such as mentoring, self-guidance, networking, positive emotional states and life satisfaction.

When considered from this context, individuals who want to be satisfied in their careers will also want to be satisfied in their lives. Protean careerists, who want to get the most out of both their professional and social lives, will follow an effective path by assuming their responsibilities as usual. The management of one's own career with a multi-faceted career tendency creates positive psychological results such as career and life satisfaction, personal development, and individual well-being (King, 2004, p.118).

In addition, protean career is an approach that is guided by the values of the individual, as well as integrated with the individual's family and life goals. In line with this feature, it is seen that it is directly related to well-being. While reaching career success and satisfaction, the individual should not ignore his personal interests. Individuals who take initiative in their careers are successful in progress and inner satisfaction (Seibert et al., 2001, p.845).

H1: Protean career orientation is positively related with life satisfaction.

3.2. Mediating Role of Perceived Employability in the Relationship between Protean Career Orientation and Well-being

Perceived employability has been defined as “The individual’s beliefs about the possibilities of finding new, equal, or better employment” (De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen, & Makikangas, 2011; Zafar et al., 2017, p. 135). The high employability perceived by individuals in the process of finding a job or changing a job reflects positively on their careers. The relationship between perceived employability and individual career orientation shows its importance in empirical studies. Studies in the literature support that protean career attitudes are related to employability.

Lin (2015) found that both perceived external and internal employability were found to be associated with protean career orientations. Moreover, the more highly protean attitudes that are self-directed alongside the values-driven attitude of the protean career result in higher external employability than internal employability. De Vos and Soens (2008), protean career orientations exert a positive impact on perceived employability, with career

insight serving as a mediating factor in this relationship. Lo Presti et al. (2018) revealed that the protean career attitudes were positively associated with employability activities. Hofstetter and Rosenblatt (2016) found that there exists a positive correlation between perceived work alternatives and protean career attitudes. Additionally, in several studies, a significant and favorable link has been identified between protean career orientation and the perception of one's employability (Rodrigues et al., 2019; Zafar et al., 2017).

In addition, recognizing the decreased stability and increased uncertainty in the work environment as well as changes in employment relationships, including reduced job security, protean careerists have taken responsibility for managing their own career (Hall, 2002; Hall & Moss, 1998; Mirvis & Hall, 1996; Sullivan & Baruch, 2013, p. 1549). Protean careerists, who take the initiative in their career decisions, will be able to manage their perceived employability by taking responsibility.

In addition, as we mentioned above, there is a close relationship between employability or perceived employability and well-being. In some studies, job insecurity has been considered as a close concept to employability. Job insecurity refers to employees' perceptions and concerns about potential involuntary job loss (e.g., De Witte 1999; Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt 1984; Heaney et al. 1994; Van Vuuren 1990; Silla et al., 2009). This is a factor that reduces the perceived employability of employees. Perceived employability can be helpful in dealing with the individual's perceived job insecurity.

Based on the link between perceived employability and job insecurity, we focus on the relationship between life satisfaction, which we consider as one of the two dimensions of well-being. These relationships have been revealed by empirical evidence. According to Silla et al., (2009), job insecurity is positively related to psychological distress, and it is negatively related to life satisfaction. And also, they revealed that perceived employability is negatively related to psychological distress, and it is positively related to life satisfaction. Moreover, they found that perceived employability moderates the relationship between job insecurity and well-being. So that the positive relationship between job insecurity and psychological distress is weaker under the condition of high versus low perceived employability, and so the negative relationship between job insecurity and life satisfaction is weaker under the condition of high versus low perceived employability (Silla et al., 2009). De Cuyper et al., (2008) found that employability was negatively associated with job insecurity, as well as positively associated with employability and life satisfaction.

H2: Perceived employability mediates the relationship between protean career orientation and life satisfaction.



4. METHODS

4.1. Participants and Procedure

Quantitative research was designed in line with the purpose of the research and the survey method was preferred as the data collection tool. The sample of the research consists of IT employees in Turkey. Survey questions were sent to companies with e-mail addresses on social media. In the first part of the questionnaire, there are four question statements created with the aim of determining the demographic characteristics of the participants. In the second part of the scale, the protean career scale consisting of seven question statements; In the third part, there is the life satisfaction scale, which consists of five questions, and in the last part, the perceived employability scale, which consists of four questions.

4.2. Measures

4.2.1. Protean Career Orientation Scale

The study consists of three scales. The first scale used in the research is the Protean Career scale introduced by Baruch (2014). This scale consists of seven questions.

4.2.2. Life Satisfaction Scale

The second scale is the Life Satisfaction scale, which was developed by William Pavot and Ed Diener (1993). This scale consists of five questions.

4.2.3. Perceived Employability Scale

The last scale used is the Perceived Employability scale, which was selected and combined by De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen & Makikangas (2011). This scale consists of four questions. The scales consisted of 5-point Likert type scales. (The choices range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)).

5. RESULTS

5.1. Frequency Analysis

Table 1 indicates that demographic characteristics of the respondents. Data were collected from 359 people in total. Out of all the participants, 39.3% were male (n= 141) and 60.7% were female (n=218). 60.4% of the participants fall within the age range of 20-29 (n=217), while 25.9% are aged between 30-39 (n=93), and 12% fall within the age range of 40-49 (n=43). Furthermore, a total of 1.7% of the participants fell into the age group of 50 and above (n=6). 44.6% of the participants have bachelor degree (n= 160), 20.9% have high school degree (n=75), 17.3% have associate degree (n=62), 14.5% have master degree (n=52), and finally 2.8% have PhD (n=10). 52.6% of the participants have 0-5 years of tenure (n=189), 21.2% have 6-10 years of tenure (n=76), 10.3% have 11-15 years of tenure (n=37), 7.5% have 16-20 years of tenure (n=27), 3.6% have 21-25 years of tenure (n=13), 2.5% have 26-30 years of tenure (n=9), and 2.2% have 31 years and more of tenure (n=8).

Table 5.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Characteristics	Classifications	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	141	39.3
	Female	218	60.7
Age	20-29 years	217	60.4
	30-39 years	93	25.9
	40-49 years	43	12.0
	50 years and above	6	1.7
Education level	High school degree	75	20.9
	Associate degree	62	17.3
	Bachelor degree	160	44.6
	Master degree	52	14.5
	PhD	10	2.8
Tenure	0-5 years	189	52.6
	6-10 years	76	21.2
	11-15 years	37	10.3
	16-20 years	27	7.5
	21-25 years	13	3.6
	26-30 years	9	2.5
	31 years and above	8	2.2
Total		359	100

5.2. Validity and Reliability

Firstly, exploratory factor analysis and then confirmatory factor analysis were performed to reveal the structural validity. As a result of the measurement model, fit indices were determined. In addition, average value extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) values were determined by using the factor loadings obtained as a result of the measurement model.

5.3. Explanatory Factor Analysis

In order to determine the structural validity, firstly, explanatory factor analysis was performed. The principle components extraction approach with the varimax rotation was employed. Because the factor loading on the third (3rd), sixth (6th), and seventh (7th) items of the protean career scale was less than 0.5, they were eliminated from the scale. As a result, the explanatory factor analysis was conducted again, revealing three components with eigenvalues greater than 1. These components accounted for a total variance of 66.63 percent. According to the data presented in Table 2, all items exhibited standardized factor loadings that exceeded 0.5. The statistical significance of Barlett's test of sphericity was determined to be $p < 0.001$. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was found to be 0.88, surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.50.

Table 5.2. Rotated component matrix.

Items	1	2	3
PC1			0.72
PC2			0.66
PC3*			-
PC4			0.71
PC5			0.77
PC6*			-
PC7*			-
LS1	0.78		
LS2	0.85		
LS3	0.79		
LS4	0.70		
LS5	0.77		
PE1		0.82	
PE2		0.84	
PE3		0.80	
PE4		0.86	

Notes: n= 359. PC=Protean career, LS=Life satisfaction, PE=Perceived employability.

KMO measure of sampling adequacy: 0.88

Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2 (78)=2217.485$ ($p < 0.001$)

*PC3, PC6, PC7 were taken out of the scale for having a factor load less than 0.5.

5.4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the subsequent stage, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the data set in order to investigate the structural validity of the findings. χ^2 (chi-square discrepancy)/df (degrees of freedom), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), incremental fit index (IFI), Normed fit index (NFI), Goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and root mean squared residual (RMR) values were calculated to show how well the model fit our data. the full measurement model shows acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2/df=109,003/62=1,758$; $p < 0.001$; $RMR=0.04$, $GFI=0.95$; $IFI=0.98$; $TLI=0.97$; $CFI=0.98$; $NFI=0.95$; $RMSEA=0.04$). Moreover, all of the factor loadings obtained as a result of the dfa performed together are greater than 0.50 (see Table 3).

Table 5.3. Full measurment model, AVE, and CR Values.

Construct	Items	Estimate	AVE	CR	Cronbachs alpha
Protean Career	PC1	0.52	0.44	0.75	0.74
	PC2	0.56			
	PC4	0.76			
	PC5	0.77			
Life Satisfaction	LS1	0.78	0.57	0.87	0.87
	LS2	0.84			
	LS3	0.80			
	LS4	0.71			
	LS5	0.65			
Perceived employability	PE1	0.82	0.68	0.89	0.89
	PE2	0.83			
	PE3	0.75			
	PE4	0.90			

A CFA for the full measurement model was also performed to evaluate convergent and discriminant validity, as well as composite reliability. Table 3 shows the extracted average variance (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Table 3, The CR and AVE for perceived employability and life satisfaction both above the 0.70 and 0.50 threshold levels, respectively (Hair et al., 2006). The AVE of protean career did not exceeded the cut-off value of 0.5, however, the CR value is greater than the AVE value of each construct ($CR > AVE$) (see Table 3). This findings indicated that the convergent validity of the full measurement model was confirmed. The square roots of the AVE scores for each concept were higher than the correlations between the constructs, as shown in Table 4, confirming discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2006).

5.5. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 4 summarizes the inter-correlations of all variables, as well as the means and standard deviations. Protean career was related significantly and positively with life satisfaction ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$). Perceived employability was related significantly and positively with life satisfaction ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, protean career was related significantly and positively with perceived employability ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$). As shown in Table 4, the highest mean value belongs to protean career (mean=4.01; SD=0.65), followed by perceived employability (mean = 3.52; SD=0.96), and the lowest mean value belonged to life satisfaction (mean=2.96; SD=0.91).

Table 5.4. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.60	0.48	1						
2. Age	1.55	0.76	-0.19**	1					
3. Education Level	2.61	1.05	-0.08	0.03	1				
4. Tenure	2.04	1.49	-0.29**	0.83**	-0.02	1			
5. Protean career	4.01	0.65	-0.07	-0.02	0.01	0.07	(0.66)		
6. Perceived employability	3.52	0.96	-0.15**	0.21**	0.02	0.28**	0.39**	(0.82)	
7. Life satisfaction	2.96	0.91	-0.13*	0.09	-0.04	0.14**	0.34**	0.46**	(0.75)

Notes: n=359, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; Values in parentheses on the diagonal are the square of AVE of each scale.

5.6. Hypothesis Testing

As a result of the path analysis performed (see Table 5), protean career was related significantly and positively to perceived employability ($\beta = 0.50$; $p < 0.001$), and life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.24$; $p < 0.001$), respectively. Therefore, H1 was supported. Moreover, perceived employability was related significantly and positively to life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.40$; $p < 0.001$). Fit indices of the model was acceptable ($X^2/df = 109,003/62 = 1,758$; $p < 0.001$; RMR=0.04, GFI=0.95; IFI=0.98; TLI=0.97; CFI=0.98; NFI=0.95; RMSEA=0.04).

Table 5.5. Path analysis result.

Paths	Estimate	S.E.	t	p
Protean career → Perceived employability	0.50	0.10	7.53	***
Perceived employability → Life satisfaction	0.40	0.06	5.99	***
Protean career → Life satisfaction	0.24	0.10	3.40	***

Notes: n=359, ***p<0.001.

As shown in Table 6, the effect of protean career on life satisfaction through perceived employability was significant and positive ($\beta_{\text{indirect effect}} = 0.20$; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H2 was supported.

Table 5.6. Standardized direct, indirect and total effects.

	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Protean career → Perceived employability	0.50**	0.50**	-
Protean career → Perceived employability → Life satisfaction	0.44**	0.24**	0.20**
Perceived employability → Life satisfaction	0.40**	0.40**	-

Notes: n=359; **p<0.01; 2,000 bootstrap samples with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) to determine the indirect effect.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of the study were evaluated by considering their consistency and deviations among the literature. The protean career, which is an important value in the career literature, has a series of effects on the working and socio-economic environment of individuals. As tested in this study, it is clear that a protean career has a positive effect on individuals' life satisfaction and perceived employability. Therefore, the findings obtained in this study are valuable. It also confirms some findings found in the literature. For this reason, the study clearly states that individuals who adopt a protean career may have a high life satisfaction and at the same time have an improving effect on the perceived employability of these individuals. It also shows that perceived employability has a significant impact on life satisfaction. It is seen that the findings in this study are consistent with various findings in the literature. Most studies between Protean careers, well-being, and perceived employability have yielded results that are in line with each other.

Findings from this survey confirmed the existence of a positive and significant relationship between protean career and life satisfaction. In addition, a positive and significant relationship was found between protean career and perceived employability. The findings of the study showed significant positive effects on protean career and perceived employability, perceived employability and life satisfaction. In addition, the mediating role of perceived employability has emerged. This findings contributes significantly to the career development literature by unveiling a key mechanism through which protean career orientation exerts its influence on life satisfaction.

The established link between protean career orientation and life satisfaction emphasizes the need of cultivating a flexible and self-directed career mentality. Individuals who embrace multifaceted professional principles like self-direction and constant learning report greater levels of life satisfaction. This shows that career flexibility, fueled by a protean orientation, is not only beneficial professionally but also personally gratifying.

The function of perceived employability as a mediator gives insight on the underlying processes. It implies that people with a protean career orientation regard themselves as more employable, which impacts life satisfaction. This highlights the practical significance of

supporting diverse values and skill sets in professional development and education programs. The mediating function of perceived employability reveals a fundamental mechanism via which a protean career orientation correlates to higher levels of life satisfaction. Individuals that adopt the protean career perspective see themselves as flexible, adaptable, and valuable assets in the work market. This self-perception of increased employability may empower people in a variety of ways. It may increase their confidence and self-esteem, both of which are important components in general well-being. Feeling employable may reduce job-related stress and anxiety because people who are confident in their abilities see setbacks or shifts in their employment as manageable tasks rather than insurmountable problems. This study also emphasizes the importance of diverse values and skill sets in defining people's professional narratives. Encouragement of such principles, such as self-directed learning and a proactive attitude to career management, may not only ease job transitions but also add to a feeling of personal progress and success. By integrating personal and professional goals, this may improve overall life satisfaction. Thus, the significance of perceived employability in mediating role of the relationship between protean career orientation and life satisfaction shows the practical importance of promoting protean ideals and skill sets in both individual career management and educational programs.

6.2. Limitations and Future Directions

These results imply that firms may develop a work climate that encourages people to take charge of their careers and promotes their ongoing learning, resulting in a more pleased and engaged workforce. HR policies and initiatives that encourage multifaceted values, such as skill development and self-directed career planning, may help workers improve their job satisfaction as well as their overall life satisfaction. Individuals may drive their career choices and growth by knowing the advantages of a protean career orientation. It means that investing in skill development, networking, and flexibility may improve not just employability but also lead to a more meaningful existence.

Despite the useful insights offered by this research, it is critical to recognize its limits. Future study might look at how the connection differs between demographic groups, sectors, and cultural situations. The long-term impact of protean career orientation on life satisfaction may also be better understood via longitudinal investigations.

Finally, this study emphasizes the positive relationship between protean career orientation and life satisfaction, with perceived employability serving as a mediating factor. These results provide useful insights for people looking for meaningful employment as well as firms looking to establish conditions that promote employee well-being. Individuals and organizations may both contribute to increased life satisfaction and a more engaged and productive workforce by supporting diverse values and encouraging the growth of perceived employability. Future study may help us better grasp these processes and their ramifications in different circumstances.



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8. SCALES

Appendix-1. Protean Career Orientation Scale (BARUCH, 2014)

1. For me, career success is how I am doing against my goals and values.
2. I navigate my own career, mostly according to my plans (s)
3. If I have to find a new job, it would be easy (1)
4. I am in charge of my own career
5. I take responsibility for my own development
6. Freedom and autonomy are driving forces in my career
7. For me, career success means having flexibility in my job

Appendix-2. Satisfaction with Life Scale (William Pavot & ED Diener, 1993)

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.



Appendix-3. Perceived Employability Scale (De Cuyper ET AL., 2011)

1. Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all.
2. I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking.
3. My experience is in demand on the labour market.
4. It would not be very difficult for me to get an equivalent job in a different organization.

