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The Impact of Individual and Organizational Career Management on Self-Perceived Employability: The Mediating Role of Career Satisfaction

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Background and Purpose: As careers become increasingly individualized, employability links individual career efforts and organizational support. However, little is known about how career engagement and perceived organizational career practices jointly shape self-perceived employability and the role of psychological mechanisms. This study examines how career engagement and employees' evaluations of the organizational career system are associated with self-perceived employability, with career satisfaction mediating the relationship.
Methods: Data were collected from 302 employees in finance and technology companies in Lithuania using a quantitative questionnaire. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze direct and indirect relationships among variables.
Results: Career engagement positively predicted self-perceived employability ($\beta = 0.450$, $p < 0.001$). Career satisfaction mediated this relationship ($\beta = 0.166$, $p < 0.001$), while employees' evaluation of the organizational career system was indirectly associated with self-perceived employability through career satisfaction ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.001$). Combined individual and organizational career efforts explained 40.8% of the variance in employability. Career engagement had both direct and indirect effects; organizational career support had an indirect-only, fully mediated effect.
Conclusions: Career satisfaction is a key psychological mechanism linking individual and organizational career actions to employability. The findings indicate that career engagement is directly and indirectly associated with self-perceived employability. In contrast, employees' evaluation of the organizational career system is associated with employability only indirectly through career satisfaction.

Keywords: Employability, Individual career management, Organizational career management, Career satisfaction, Career engagement

1 Introduction

Contemporary careers are increasingly individualized, with responsibility for career management shifting more strongly to employees themselves, as reflected in the concepts of boundaryless and protean careers. Nevertheless, the organizational role remains highly relevant, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors where employees' competences, learning, and adaptability constitute critical sources of organizational competitiveness. Within this context, employability emerges as a central concept,

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enabling the analysis of the interplay between individual career efforts and organizational human resource management practices.

Employability has been conceptualized and examined from a wide range of perspectives. According to Rothwell (2015), employability can be approached from political, educational, human resource management, and individual perspectives. The majority of employability research has focused on the individual level, examining both objective indicators of employability, such as competences and personal attributes, and subjective indicators, namely individuals' self-perceived employability (Vargas et al., 2018). Another prominent line of research highlights the benefits of employability for both individuals and organizations. At the individual level, higher perceived employability is associated with greater job security, career continuity, and confidence in future career opportunities (Bernstrøm et al., 2018; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). At the organizational level, employees with higher levels of employability tend to demonstrate higher productivity, stronger work engagement, better well-being, and lower turnover intentions (Fugate et al., 2004; Marzec et al., 2021).

Empirical research consistently shows that employees with higher employability make a significant contribution to organizational performance. However, the literature reveals a clear empirical gap regarding how organizational career development practices influence employees' self-perceived employability (Clarke, 2018; Forrier et al., 2018). Although contemporary career theories emphasize individual agency and proactivity (Doğanülkü & Korkmaz, 2025; Bazine et al., 2025), careers do not develop in isolation from organizational environments. Rather, career outcomes emerge from the interaction between individual efforts and organizational support mechanisms. Therefore, it is particularly important to understand how the two key components—the individual and organizational levels—contribute jointly to higher levels of perceived employability.

At the individual level, employability has been linked to various personal resources and career-related behaviors, including occupational competence, adaptability, social and human capital, and proactive career behavior (Fugate et al., 2004; Römgens et al., 2020; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). In this study, we examine the individual-level dimension of employability through individuals' overall career engagement, defined as their involvement in managing and developing their careers (Hirschi et al., 2014). Unlike isolated personal resources or specific competencies, career engagement provides a holistic perspective on how individuals consistently invest time, effort, and energy in their career development through activities such as learning, planning, and networking (Hirschi et al., 2014). Moreover, empirical studies investigating the relationship between career engagement and self-perceived employability remain limited, with existing research largely focusing on early career stages or transitions from education to work (e.g., Baluku et al., 2021; Ma & Bennett, 2021).

The novelty of our study is further reflected in its focus on the psychological mechanisms that explain how individual career efforts translate into higher levels of self-perceived employability. While previous research has predominantly examined career satisfaction as an outcome of employability (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013; De Vos & Soens, 2008), this study conceptualizes career satisfaction as a mediating motivational mechanism that explains the effect of career engagement on employability perceptions. Drawing on recent empirical evidence (Bargsted et al., 2021; Spurk et al., 2019), this approach enables the identification of a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between career engagement and employability, thereby extending the predominantly outcome-oriented focus of employability research.

In response to these gaps, this study adopts an integrated perspective that incorporates both individual and organizational contributions to self-perceived employability. This study primarily draws on Social Exchange Theory to explain how organizational career management practices influence employees' career-related evaluations, particularly career satisfaction. In addition, the Conservation of Resources Theory explains why career satisfaction serves as a psychological resource that contributes to higher self-perceived employability. In summary, these theoretical perspectives complement the broader conceptual framework of this study, which integrates individual career engagement, organizational career management, and career satisfaction to explain an individual's self-perceived employability.

Specifically, this study examines how employees' engagement in managing their own careers and their perceptions of career-related policies and practices implemented in the workplace jointly relate to self-perceived employability. In addition, the mediating role of career satisfaction in these relationships is explored. By analyzing both individual career efforts and the organizational context, we contribute to the employability and career management literature by elucidating how these levels interact to shape self-perceived employability. Furthermore, our findings provide empirically grounded, practical insights for human resource management practices that support sustainable careers in contemporary organizations.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Employability: A shared responsibility

Researchers investigating employability advocate shifting the focus from the individual to the organizational

level (Clarke, 2018; van Harten et al., 2020; Fugate et al., 2021; Akkermans et al., 2024). While employability has garnered considerable scholarly attention, the emphasis remains predominantly on the individual facet of career development. This stems from the perception of careers as purely personal endeavors, shaped by models such as the protean and boundaryless career models. Nonetheless, it is vital to recognize that employability benefits not only employees in maintaining competitiveness and career sustainability within organizations and the job market, but also companies, whose competitiveness and survival heavily depend on their human capital. In line with Forrier et al. (2018) and Fugate et al. (2021), we state that employability is not entirely determined by individual agency, as most employees remain embedded in interdependent employment relationships. In sum, employers and employees are interdependent in their efforts to compete, endure, and flourish. This necessitates that both parties adopt a proactive, strategic, and collaborative approach to addressing their individual and shared challenges (Fugate et al., 2021).

As stated by Van Harten et al. (2020), employability refers to a mutually beneficial relationship: skilled and adaptable workers possess knowledge, competencies, and flexibility, thereby providing organizations with a competitive edge. Employers can leverage employability to align human capital with strategic goals and manage talent supply and demand in dynamic internal and external labor markets. This makes employability a valuable component of an organization's strategic human resource management approach. Simultaneously, individuals are not confined to a single employer and can pursue alternative job opportunities as needed. From this perspective, employability is a shared obligation between employees and employers. Employers implement human resource management policies and practices that cultivate employability, while employees leverage these opportunities to develop and maintain their employability (van Harten, 2020).

While employability is recognized as an important resource for organizations, surprisingly, there is very little empirical research that covers both sides - the employee and the organization. For example, Fugate et al. (2021) found that most studies (2000-2019) fail to explicitly consider the employee-employer reciprocal relationship in employability studies. Those existing studies (on employee-employer relationship) mainly concentrate on employer investment in employability in terms of development opportunities (e.g., Solberg & Dysvik, 2016; Liu, 2018). Such investments increase employees' employability and, in turn, lead to favorable outcomes for organizations, such as loyalty (e.g., commitment, reduced turnover intention, internal employability orientation) and/or improved performance (Fugate et al., 2021).

Thus, to address the employability research gap identified by prior studies and to acknowledge the reciprocal benefits of employability for both stakeholders, this study investigates the impact of joint individual and organizational efforts on employability. To this end, we apply social exchange theory as an explanatory framework for this relationship. Social exchange theory posits that employment relationships are characterized by ongoing exchanges of valuable resources between employers and employees, fostering mutual and reciprocal commitments (Bordia et al., 2017). In this study, the principle of reciprocity is reflected in employees' responses to the organization's investments in their careers. When organizations provide career support and development opportunities, employees are expected to perceive these efforts as the organization's investment in their professional growth and respond with more favorable assessments of their careers, which will be reflected in greater career satisfaction.

In organizational contexts, a supportive career environment, combined with employees' personal career development efforts, is expected to enhance employability, benefiting organizations by strengthening competitive and adaptive advantages, as well as individuals seeking career continuity within and beyond the organization. Moreover, this study adopts a broader view of organizational career management, conceptualizing it as employees' evaluation of the organizational career system, encompassing career development practices, supportive managerial practices, work-life balance, fair HR processes, and an employability-oriented organizational culture. Finally, career satisfaction is examined as a potential mediating mechanism linking career management efforts and employability.

2.2 Employability, career satisfaction, and career engagement

Scholars widely recognize the importance of proactive career behavior in enabling individuals to take an active role in shaping their careers and achieving favorable career results (Peng et al., 2021). Proactive career behavior includes activities such as networking, feedback seeking (Römgens et al., 2020), skill development, and career planning (De Vos et al., 2009). In this paper, we seek to investigate the impact of overall proactive personal career management, without delineating specific behaviors, on career results. To this end, we examine career engagement and its impact on self-perceived employability. According to Hirchi et al. (2014), career engagement is characterized by the extent to which an individual actively pursues career development through various professional behaviors. It measures how involved someone is in managing and advancing their career through specific actions and initiatives. This behavior is expected to contribute to favorable career outcomes and relate to other advantageous career resources relevant in an unpredictable work landscape. Studies reveal that career engagement is positively associated with a wide range of favorable career-related out-

comes and resources that support effective career functioning (Hirschi et al., 2014; Doğanülkü, 2024).

We posit that higher levels of career engagement may be an important antecedent to self-perceived employability. The latter concept illustrates an individual's perception of their employability, influenced by personal and environmental factors (such as organizational and societal). These factors are believed to mold the subjective evaluation of one's employment capacity (Vanhercke et al., 2014). Accordingly, an individual-level activity, i.e., engagement in proactive career behavior, should enhance one's belief in one's ability to achieve and maintain employment.

Thus, we offer the following hypothesis:

H1. Career engagement predicts self-perceived employability.

When analyzing the link between the mentioned constructs, we consider that an additional mechanism may play a role in this association. To this end, we consider career satisfaction as an explanatory mechanism. According to Heslin (2005), career satisfaction is a major indicator of subjective career success. It relates to satisfaction with one's career status rather than to objective position (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Heslin, 2005). Career satisfaction has often been studied as a result of career engagement, and strong engagement leading to high levels of satisfaction in the context of work or education (Giallonardo et al., 2010; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2015). In turn, when examining self-perceived employability, career satisfaction is most frequently cited as an outcome (e.g. Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013). A recent study by Agnihotri et al. (2024) showed that self-perceived employability was one of the crucial factors of career satisfaction by IT professionals.

However, some career studies suggest that subjective career success should be viewed not only as an outcome but also as a resource shaping future career attitudes and behaviors. Spurk et al. (2019) argued that career success can function both as a consequence of past career experiences and as a predictor of future career outcomes. This means that career success becomes part of one's professional identity and, at the same time, serves as proof of competence and effectiveness. Therefore, career satisfaction can boost self-confidence, increase motivation, and encourage individuals to continue investing in their careers.

This mechanism can be explained by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that individuals seek to acquire, maintain, and accumulate valuable personal resources. From this perspective, career satisfaction can initiate a spiral of resource acquisition, in which self-esteem derived from positive past career achievements increases self-confidence and motivation, encouraging individuals to develop further and utilize their competencies (Spurk et al., 2019; Bargsted et al., 2021). Career satisfaction becomes not only the result of career development but also a psychological resource that supports future career activities.

Although empirical evidence is still limited, some studies support this perspective. For example, Bargsted et al. (2021) found that subjective career success positively predicts undergraduate students' self-assessed employability. This finding suggests that a positive assessment of one's career strengthens individuals' confidence in their competencies and future opportunities in the labor market. In this way, career satisfaction serves as a psychological mechanism whereby active engagement in one's career translates into a stronger perception of employability.

Thus, based on the information presented above and previous research findings, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H2. Career satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between career engagement and perceived employability.

2.3 Employability, career satisfaction, and organizational career management

The current discussion around employability largely overlooks the role of employers and their specific contributions through HRM policies and practices (Harten et al., 2020). In the present study, organizational career management is conceptualized from the employee perspective as a broader organizational career system. While formal career development practices constitute its core, employees experience career management within a wider organizational context that includes supportive leadership, fair HR practices, work–life balance, job security, and an organizational culture that fosters professional growth. Accordingly, the construct is operationalized through employees' evaluation of the organizational career system. Based on the recommendations of contemporary researchers (e.g., van Harten et al., 2017), we are examining how employees' perceptions of career-related policies and practices in the workplace impact their self-perceived employability. Previous studies in this area have identified positive connections among the concepts, particularly those related to internal employability. Cerdin et al. (2020) found that globally talented employees were more likely to perceive favorable internal career opportunities when they received organizational investments in training. The study by Fontinha et al. (2018) also revealed a positive association between career-oriented HRM practices (rewards, career progression, and training) and internal upward perceived employability; however, it did not have the same impact on external upward employability. Akkermans et al. (2019), in turn, found that training, development, participation, and communication practices influenced both employees' self-perceived external and internal employability. Nel-

issen et al. (2017) also confirmed the influence on both types of employability but found that it depended on the HRM process. Specifically, various development activities were positively related to perceived internal employability. Conversely, promotions increased employees' awareness of external employment opportunities, leading to higher perceived external employability and, in turn, higher turnover. These findings raise the question of whether investing in employees can have the unintended consequence of the "employability paradox" (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011) - an increase in external perceived employability resulting in employee turnover.

Overall, it appears that when organizations prioritize employee development, they tend to link career progression to current jobs. However, research findings regarding the impact on external employability are contradictory. Thus, in order to enhance our understanding of this relationship, we investigate how employees' evaluations of the organization's career system (including development practices, career opportunities, managerial support, employability culture, etc.) affect their perceived external and internal employability. We argue that favorable organizational career-focused practices and environments should increase workers' perceived employability, both within and outside the organization. Career-enhancing HRM practices should foster internal and external self-perceived employability by developing both firm-specific and transferable skills.

H3. A more positive evaluation of the organizational career system positively predicts self-perceived employability.

Studies demonstrate that HRM practices affect employees' attitudes and behaviors. Aktar and Pangil (2017) found that HRM practices, namely career advancement, job security, and performance, were significantly and positively related to employee engagement. Similarly, Budrienė and Diskienė (2020) reported the same effect through flexible HRM practices. Hence, employees assess various organizational processes and activities, which can lead to positive or negative attitudes. The same applies to organizational career development efforts. Various studies confirm that employees assess their career progress, evaluate their level of career success, and determine whether to remain in or leave their current positions based on the career satisfaction they have attained (Spurk et al., 2015; Nie et al., 2018). Career satisfaction is an important variable in organizational studies, reflecting employees' feelings about the work environment and the degree of accomplishment they have achieved in their careers (Van Der Weijden et al., 2016). In this regard, Yean and Yahya (2013) found a positive relationship between organizational career management and career satisfaction. They suggest that employees who perceive their organization as supportive of career development are motivated to engage in behaviors that enhance their careers, such as formulating and executing strategies to advance their goals. This ultimately leads to increased career satisfaction. The study by Aburumman et al. (2020) also supports this explanation, as their findings indicate that HRM dimensions such as training and development, performance appraisal, promotion opportunities, and compensation determine employees' career satisfaction.

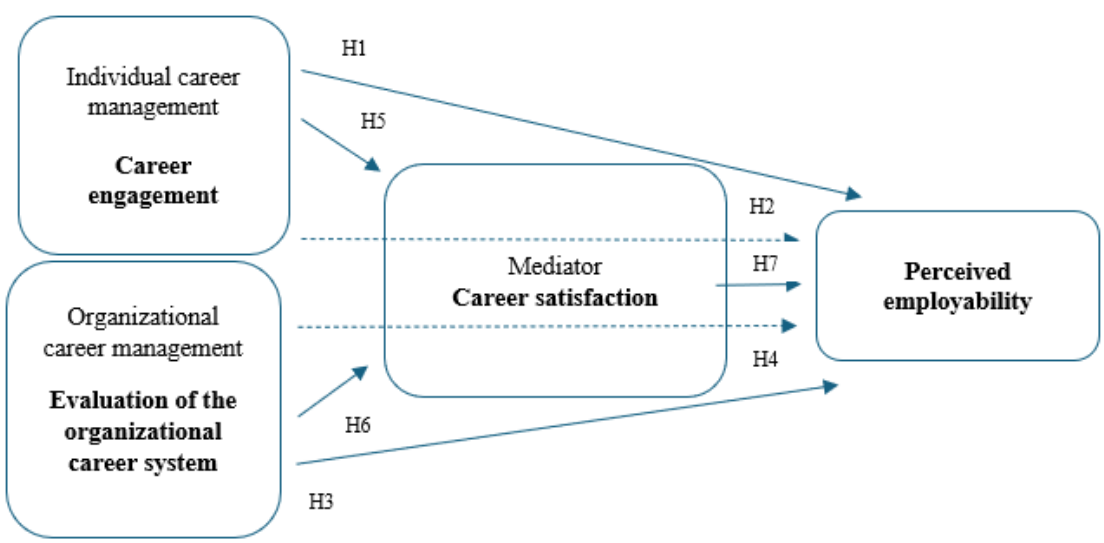


Figure 1: Research model

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, employees perceive organizational career management practices as organizational investments in their long-term career development. Employees typically view such investments as the organization's support and concern for their professional development. According to Social Exchange Theory, favorable actions by an organization are usually met with positive attitudes and evaluations from employees (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In the context of career development, one such positive evaluation is career satisfaction, which reflects employees' assessment of their career progress and prospects.

Based on the results of previous empirical studies showing that organizational career development increases career satisfaction (Yean & Yahya, 2013; Aburumman et al., 2020), as well as the assertion made in the previous section that career satisfaction functions as a psychological resource (Spurk et al., 2019; Bargsted et al., 2021), we believe that career satisfaction serves as a psychological pathway through which organizational career management contributes to employees' self-perceived employability. Organizations that provide a supportive career environment are likely to foster employees' career satisfaction. As employees' career satisfaction increases, they are likely to have greater confidence in their competencies and future career opportunities.

Consequently, favorable evaluations of the organizational career system are expected to enhance self-perceived employability by increasing career satisfaction.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Career satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between the evaluation of the organizational career system and self-perceived employability.

Based on the proposed research model, three additional direct relationships were formulated:

H5. There is a positive relationship between career engagement and career satisfaction.

H6. There is a positive relationship between evaluation of the organizational career system and career satisfaction.

H7. There is a positive relationship between career satisfaction and perceived employability.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants and procedure

The respondents for the survey were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the company had been registered and operating within Lithuania at the time of the research; 2) information technology and finance organizations were selected for this study due to their high technological sophistication and innovation; and 3) the study sample was limited to professionals with high-level qualifications whose work is directly associated with financial and information technology domains.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics

Variable		N	%
Gender	Female	222	74
	Male	80	26
Age group	18-24	39	13
	25-34	108	36
	35-44	115	38
	45-54	29	9
	>55	11	4
Education	Secondary	13	4
	Bachelor's degree	152	51
	Master's degree	133	44
	Doctor's degree	4	1
Tenure	<1	73	24
	2-3	100	33
	4-9	74	25
	>10	55	18

Prior to the main study, a pilot study was carried out to test the validity and comprehensibility of the survey instrument. 50 employees from the finance and technology sectors were interviewed in a pilot study. Respondents in the pilot study identified some items in the developed scale (organizational career system) as similar and redundant. Consequently, the number of scale items was decreased, and certain items were refined to address this feedback.

Data collection for the actual study took place between August and November 2023. Data were collected via a web-based survey that took approximately 15 minutes to complete. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. In total, 302 employees from finance and technology companies took part in the study.

The sample comprised 74% (N=222) women and 26% (N=80) men (Table 1). In terms of age distribution, there were 5 age categories of respondents, with the largest age groups being 25-34 (36 %, N=108) and 35-44 (38%, N=115). Regarding education, 4% (N = 13) of the respondents had secondary education, 51% (N = 152) held a bachelor's degree, 44% (N = 133) held a master's degree, and 1% (N = 4) held a doctoral degree. In terms of work tenure, 24 % (N=24) of respondents worked for less than 1 year, the vast majority (33%, N=100) of the participants worked for 2 to 3 years, 25 % (N=74) worked for 4 to 9 years, and 18 % (N=55) worked for more than 10 years for the same company.

3.2 Instruments

Career satisfaction scale. Career satisfaction was measured with the 6-item scale developed by Valickas (2011), which aims to measure the dynamic aspects of career satisfaction, assessing what has happened, what is happening, and what is expected to happen in an individual's career path, considering both the affective and the rational aspects of the changes in work and learning experiences. All items were positively worded and rated using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores represented a higher career satisfaction. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) of the scale was 0.854.

Career engagement. The construct was assessed using the Career Engagement Scale (Hirschi et al., 2014), which was developed to measure the general degree of engagement in self-directed career management behaviors. The scale consisted of 9 positively worded items and used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a higher level of career engagement. The scale was translated and adapted for use in Lithuania. The Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for the scale was 0.880.

Employability. It was measured using Lodi et al.'s (2020) 10-item scale to assess self-perceived employability in the current workplace and in the external environment. The scale was translated into Lithuanian and adapted for use in Lithuania. The items of the scale were positively worded and rated using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The internal consistency coefficient, Cronbach's α, of the scale was calculated as 0.836.

Evaluation of organizational career system. Employees' evaluation of the organizational career system was measured using 13 statements. Respondents had to evaluate their company's career system in terms of career possibilities, career support, opportunities for learning and development, etc. The scale was developed by integrating items from several validated instruments to capture employees' overall evaluation of the organizational career system, including both formal career management practices and broader organizational conditions that support career development. All items were positively worded and rated using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a more favorable evaluation of the organizational career system. Cronbach's α for the scale was calculated to be 0.908.

All instruments used in the study were based on self-reflection. Many well-known, widely cited, large-scale studies rely on self-report data. According to Cyders and Coskunpinar (2011), self-report data are appropriate for examining complex models that explain how various constructs interact, such as structural equation modeling for hypothesis testing about relationships among multiple variables. To assess the potential influence of common method bias associated with self-report measures, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The first unrotated factor accounted for 24.64% of the total variance, well below the recommended threshold of 50%, suggesting that common method variance was unlikely to affect the study findings substantially.

3.3 Methods of data analysis

Structural equation modeling was employed because it is well-suited to analyzing complex relationships among multiple variables and testing the hypothesized structural relationships. Specifically, SEM allows for the simultaneous examination of direct and indirect effects, making it ideal for mediation analysis, as conducted in this study.

3.4 Research ethics

The ethical principles of the study were carefully followed. Consent was obtained from the organizations'

managers before data collection began. Completion of the survey questionnaire was voluntary. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and had the right to withdraw at any time without completing the questionnaire. The data was collected using Qualtrics online survey software, which ensures anonymity. All data was collected by generating unique identifiers rather than personal information. The data was stored in password-protected files to which only the researcher had access. In presenting the findings, the data were aggregated to avoid identifying individual participants.

4 Results

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was the first step in demonstrating satisfactory measurement of the constructs. Then, structural equation modeling was used to analyze the direct and indirect relationships specified in the structural model.

Prior to CFA and SEM analyses, the normality hypothesis of the data distribution was tested. The normality assumption for each indicator's distribution was tested using the skewness index (SI) and kurtosis index (KI). The SI reported in this study was between – 0.951 and -0.176, whose absolute value is less than the recommended level of 3 (Kline, 2005). The range for KI is between -0.954 and 1,012, with an absolute value less than 10 (Kline, 2005). Therefore, the normality assumption for these indicators is not rejected.

In the CFA measurement model, indicators with standardized factor loadings below 0.50 were considered for removal following the recommendations of Xiong et al. (2015). Consequently, four items (CE5, INT1, INT2, and JS) with low factor loadings were removed from the model. As shown in Table 2, the result demonstrated that factor loadings ranged from 0.528 to 0.865.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, and standardized loadings of indicators

Construct and construct item.		Mean	St. Deviation	Factor Loading	t-test	P-value
Career Engagement						
CE1	Actively sought to design your professional future	3.43	0.984	0.848	10.570	0.000
CE2	Undertook things to achieve your career goals	3.48	0.983	0.865	10.710	0.000
CE3	Cared for the development of your career	3.37	0.991	0.857	10.646	0.000
CE4	Developed plans and goals for your future career	3.42	1.024	0.707	9.519	0.000
CE5	Sincerely thought about your personal values, interests, abilities, and weaknesses	3.86	0.803	0.446	6.734	0.000
CE6	Collected information about employers, professional development opportunities, or the job market in your desired area	2.93	1.211	0.563	8.117	0.000
CE7	Established or maintained contacts with people who can help you professionally	3.11	1.122	0.629	8.823	0.000
CE8	Voluntarily participated in further education, training, or other events to support your career	3.30	1.081	0.533	7.905	0.000
CE9	Assumed duties or positions that will help you progress professionally	3.57	0.921	0.560	10.570	0.000
Perceived employability						
INT1	Even if there were downsizing in this organization, I am confident that I would be retained	3.66	0.917	0.475	7.338	0.000
INT2	Among the people who do the same job as me, I am well respected in this organization	3.96	0.698	0.491	7.571	0.000
INT3	My personal networks in this organization help me in my career	3.57	0.921	0.535	8.181	0.000
INT4	I am aware of the opportunities arising in this organization, even if they are different from what I do now	3.53	0.919	0.528	8.843	0.000

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, and standardized loadings of indicators (continues)

Construct and construct item.		Mean	St. Deviation	Factor Loading	t-test	P-value
EXT1	I could easily retrain to make myself more employable elsewhere	3.74	0.896	0.609	9.343	0.000
EXT2	I have good knowledge of opportunities for me outside this organization, even if they are quite different from what I do now.	3.41	0.955	0.645	10.061	0.000
EXT3	If I needed to, I could easily get another job like mine in a similar organization	3.69	0.853	0.638	9.510	0.000
EXT4	I could easily get a similar job to mine in almost any organization	3.71	0.849	0.574	8.661	0.000
EXT5	Anyone with my level of skills and knowledge, and similar job and organizational experience, will be highly sought after by employers	3.46	0.870	0.577	8.624	0.000
EXT6	I could get any job, anywhere, so long as my skills and experience were reasonably relevant	3,55	0.866	0.724	7.338	0.000
Career satisfaction						
SC1	I think I am on the right career path	3.84	0.779	0.737	9.874	0.000
SC2	I am satisfied with what I have managed to achieve so far in my career path	3.88	0.840	0.744	9.862	0.000
SC3	Most of the jobs I have done in my life have been meaningful to me	3.86	0.875	0.572	9.418	0.000
SC4	I am generally satisfied with how my work experience and/or positions were changing	3.91	0.817	0.797	9.828	0.000
SC5	If I could restart my career, I would change almost nothing	3.32	1.114	0.703	9.459	0.000
SC6	I think my career prospects are excellent	3.72	0.855	0.759	9.418	0.000
Evaluation of the organizational career system						
CA	Opportunity for career advancement	3.43	1.050	0.624	10.129	0.000
CI	Receiving information about career opportunities within the organization	3.51	1.201	0.588	9.383	0.000
HC	Opportunity for a horizontal career	3.46	1.227	0.603	9.447	0.000
PFE	Pleasant and friendly working environment	4.15	0.885	0.642	9.614	0.000
JS	Job security	4.06	0.985	0.481	7.572	0.000
IJ	Interesting job, one promoting professional development	3.97	1.004	0.698	10.437	0.000
CPG	A culture of the organization that encourages professional growth and development	3.88	1.065	0.850	11.965	0.000
CS	Support concerning career development issues (e.g., seminars, training, coaching)	3.55	1.214	0.646	10.129	0.000
LO	Opportunities for learning, professional development, and personal fulfillment	3.74	1.091	0.734	11.017	0.000
WLB	Opportunities for the work-life balance	4.05	0.938	0.604	9.302	0.000
MS	Supportive managers	4	1.062	0.705	10.577	0.000
FTP	Fair and transparent promotion, payment, and other personnel management processes	3.75	1.088	0.660	10.103	0.000
GR	Good reputation of the employer in society	4.24	0.863	0.609	9.243	0.000

After eliminating statements with low factor loadings, we tested the model's fit. Table 3 shows the first trial of the measurement model. Several measures were adopted to decide the fitness of measurement and structural models. The first measure is the chi-square ratio with respect to degrees of freedom (DF). A ratio of three or less indicates an acceptable fit between the hypothetical model and the sample data. Second, Incremental Fit Index (IFI), which adjusts NFI for sample size and degrees of freedom, was considered. The recommended value for IFI is > 0.90 (Meyers et al., 2005). Next, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) for model fit was considered as well; values greater than 0.90 indicate a good fit (Bentler & Bonet, 1980). The CFI (Comparative Fit Index) was also applied, which should be at least 0.9 (Bentler, 1990; Hatcher, 1994). Finally, the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) is one of the most informative in SEM. Values less than 0.05 indicate a good fit, and values as high as 0.08 represent reasonable approximation errors in the population (Al-Refaie & Al-Tahat, 2014). Based on these indicators, the initial model was not a good fit and required improvement.

Modification indices (MI) were examined to identify areas of model misfit. However, correlated error terms were introduced only when they were theoretically meaningful. Specifically, covariances were specified only between indicators belonging to the same construct (or subdimension) that used similar wording or were closely related in content. For example, the correlated indicators represented similar aspects of career engagement, career satisfaction, internal and external self-perceived employability, and employees' evaluation of the organizational career system. As a result, eight error covariances were retained in the final measurement model (Table 4).

Table 3: The first trial of the measurement model

Model	χ^2	DF	P-value	χ^2/DF	GFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Default Model	1007.782	489	0.000	2.061	0.827	0.887	0.877	0.886	0.060

Table 4: Covariance with large MI values

Covariance	M.I.
e36 <- - > e37	18.663
e32 <- - > e33	17.162
e31 <- - > e 32	23.506
e25<- - > e26	35.585
e19<- - >e21	26.724
e13<- - >e14	27.837
e10<- - > e11	10.034
e1<- - >e2	14.313

Table 5: Fit indices of the measurement model

Model	χ^2	DF	P-value	χ^2/DF	GFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Default Model	822.303	481	0.000	1.710	0.858	0.929	0.918	0.925	0.049

Table 6: Reliability and validity measures

	CR	AVE	Cronbach alpha	MSV
Career Engagement	0.886	0.501	0.880	0.219
Perceived employability	0.801	0.402	0.812	0.345
Career satisfaction	0.866	0.522	0.854	0.345
Evaluation of the organizational career system	0.905	0.445	0.906	0.200

After this procedure, new model estimates were obtained. The values of fit indices are listed in Table 5. These values indicate the overall fit of the measurement model.

Next, we analyzed the reliability and validity of the CFA model (Table 6). Internal consistency, construct reliability, and construct validity in terms of convergent and discriminant validity of the scales were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, MSV, and ASV.

Table 6 presents the results of the assessment of the measurement model. CR of all variables was above 0.8, indicating good composite reliability (Hair et al., 2011). This study also computed the average variance extracted (AVE) of all variables. The initial AVE for perceived employability was 0.380; therefore, item INT4 was removed to improve the construct's convergent validity. The AVE for perceived employability increased to 0.402 but remained below 0.5. Similarly, the AVE value of the evaluation of the organizational career system was 0.445. These results suggest that the convergent validity of these two constructs should be interpreted with caution. However, AVE is considered a conservative measure of convergent validity (Pahlevan Sharif & Mahdavian, 2015). According to Malhotra and Dash (2011), researchers may conclude that convergent validity is acceptable when composite reliability is satisfactory, even if AVE is below 0.50. In the present study, both constructs demonstrated high composite reliability (CR > 0.80), all standardized factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70. Therefore, although the relatively low AVE values represent a limitation, the overall evidence suggests that the reliability and convergent validity of these constructs are reasonably supported.

For discriminant validity, AVE of each construct was greater than MSV (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and the values of the HTMT matrix (shown in Table 7) were less than 0.85 (Kline, 2005), which satisfied the criteria for discriminant validity.

Testing the total effects revealed a significant positive relationship between career engagement and perceived employability ($\beta = 0.450$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. When testing H3, we found a nearly significant positive relationship between employees' evaluation of the organizational career system and perceived employability ($\beta = 0.133$, $p = 0.05$). However, we could not confirm H3, which proposed that a more positive evaluation of the organizational career system predicts higher self-perceived employability. Testing the direct effects, we found significant relationships among all variables. Career engagement ($\beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$) and employees' evaluation of the organizational career system ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < 0.001$) were both positively associated with career satisfaction, supporting H5 and H6. Moreover, our study showed that career satisfaction has a direct positive effect on employability, confirming the validity of hypothesis H7.

Finally, the indirect relationship between career engagement and perceived employability through career satisfaction was significant, providing support for H2 ($\beta = 0.166$, $p < 0.001$). As shown in Table 8, the direct relationship between career engagement and perceived employability remained significant ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that career satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between career engagement and employability.

Furthermore, the indirect relationship between employees' evaluation of the organizational career system and perceived employability, mediated by career satisfaction, was significant, supporting hypothesis H4 ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < 0.001$). However, the direct effect of employees' evaluation of the organizational career system on self-perceived employability was not significant ($\beta = -0.055$, $p = 0.410$), indicating an indirect-only mediation effect between the two constructs. A more positive evaluation of the organizational career system was associated with higher career satisfaction, which, in turn, was linked to higher perceived employability.

We also analyzed the coefficients of determination (R2) for the endogenous construct to assess the model's explanatory power (Figure 2).

As shown, the combined effect of individual and organizational career management efforts explained 40.8% of the variance in perceived employability. Career engagement had both direct and indirect effects, whereas a more positive evaluation of the organizational career system was related to perceived employability only indirectly through career satisfaction.

Table 7: Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) matrix

Construct	Career engagement	Perceived employability	Career satisfaction
Perceived employability	0.465		
Career satisfaction	0.410	0.581	
Evaluation of the organizational career system	0.135	0.221	0.449

Table 8: Paths and hypotheses testing

Path	Standardized path coefficients	95 % Confidence Level		P value	Interpretation
		Lower bound	Upper bound		
Total effect					
H1 Career engagement → employability	0.450	0.300	0.580	0.001	Supported
H3 Evaluation of career system → employability	0.133	-0.003	0.262	0.05 (quasi-significant)	Not supported
Direct effect					
H5 Career engagement → career satisfaction	0.330	0.221	0.436	0.001	Supported
H6 Evaluation of career system → career satisfaction	0.386	0.272	0.491	0.001	Supported
H7 Career sat. → employability	0.489	0.277	0.670	0.001	Supported
Career engagement → employability	0.288	0.124	0.445	0.001	
Evaluation of career system → employability	-0.055	-0.203	0.082	0.410	
Indirect effects					
H2. Career engagement → career satisfaction → employability	0.166	0.089	0.255	0.001	Supported
H4. Evaluation of career system → career satisfaction → employability	0.188	0.107	0.292	0.001	Supported

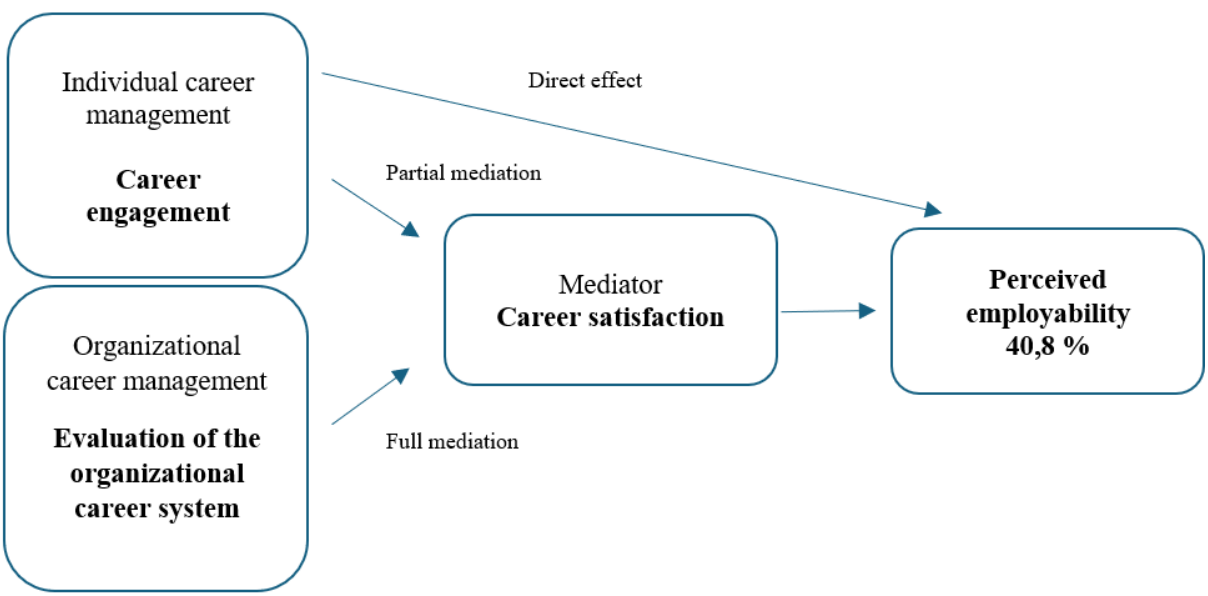


Figure 2: Revised model

5 Conclusions and discussion

The findings of the study indicate that active involvement in one's career is a strong predictor of individuals perceiving themselves as more employable, i.e., individuals who are more engaged in various proactive career activities demonstrate higher self-perceived employability (hypothesis H1 was confirmed). These findings align with other studies that have demonstrated individual resources, such as active engagement in one's career, are associated with higher perceptions of employability (Atitsogbe et al., 2020; Park et al., 2022). Proactive actions play a vital role in this, including actively pursuing opportunities for professional growth, networking, enhancing skills, and strategizing for career advancement. When individuals are fully committed to their careers, they are more inclined to take proactive steps to manage their professional lives and demonstrate greater dedication to their own progress. This not only raises expectations for maintaining current employment but also instills confidence in their ability to secure future job opportunities and navigate career transitions successfully.

H2 tested whether another factor, career satisfaction, is involved in the relationship between career engagement and perceived employability. This hypothesis was also supported. These findings suggest that those more involved in their careers have higher career satisfaction, and that higher career satisfaction predicts greater perceived employability. Previous studies have confirmed the relationship between these constructs (e.g. Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013). However, this study uniquely positions career satisfaction as the explanatory mechanism for self-perceived employability, rather than the reverse. Consistent with the Bargsted et al. (2021) study, our findings suggest that higher career satisfaction is associated with stronger beliefs in their ability to sustain and secure employment.

Although career satisfaction is a mediator, not all the effects of career engagement on perceived employability could be explained by it (mediation is partial). When testing for mediation, the direct relationship between career engagement and self-perceived employability remained statistically significant, suggesting that some career engagement directly predicts higher perceived employability. At the same time, some of it can be explained by career satisfaction. To summarize findings regarding hypotheses H1 and H2, career engagement predicts self-perceived employability both directly and indirectly (through career satisfaction).

The hypothesis that employees' perceptions of the organizational career system predict their self-perceived employability (H3) was not supported. However, previous research has found that HR policies and practices do influence employees' employability, particularly their internal employability (e.g., De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; Cerdin et al., 2020). It is important to note that the model refinement process removed the statements related to internal employability. As such, the conclusions of this analysis pertain solely to external employability and its relation to HR policies. The finding that a more positive evaluation of the organizational career system did not directly predict external employability is not unexpected, as prior research (Fontinha et al., 2018) has indicated that an organization's efforts to develop an employee's career do not necessarily translate directly into enhanced perceptions of their external employability.

However, H4 confirmed that the relationship between organizational career system evaluation and perceived employability can be explained by the mediator - career satisfaction. Hence, career satisfaction fully mediates this relationship. Employees who evaluate the organizational career system more favorably also tend to report higher career satisfaction, which, in turn, is associated with higher self-perceived external employability.

These findings also provide theoretical support for both Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory, employees may perceive organizational career management practices as investments in their professional development and reciprocate these investments through higher career satisfaction. Furthermore, the results support the assumptions of Conservation of Resources Theory by suggesting that career satisfaction functions as a valuable psychological resource that may strengthen employees' confidence in their self-perceived employability.

While these findings strengthen the theoretical explanation of the proposed relationships, they also raise an important practical dilemma for organizations. Is it appropriate for organizations to invest in employees' careers and provide support if such investments may indirectly contribute to higher perceptions of external employability through increased career satisfaction? Although we did not investigate whether such considerations of employability encourage the search for better external opportunities, the results of the study implicitly suggest another side of employability incentives, which could be considered as an employability paradox (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011), that may be related to talent circulation practices noticeable in many international companies. Overall, talent circulation can lead to a more skilled, engaged, and adaptable workforce at the organizational level, which is essential for maintaining competitiveness and driving long-term success in today's global business environment by encouraging the transfer of knowledge and innovations, skills development methods, adaptable cultural patterns, and career imprints among leading companies.

Finally, these last hypotheses (H5, H6, H7) were also confirmed. Positive relationships were confirmed between career engagement and career satisfaction, between evalu-

ation of the organizational career system and career satisfaction, and between career satisfaction and self-perceived employability. In conclusion, the research highlights the interconnectedness between career engagement, evaluation of the organizational career system, career satisfaction, and perceived employability. It suggests a positive relationship among these elements, emphasizing the importance of being engaged in one's career, evaluating the organizational career system, and experiencing satisfaction with one's career. Additionally, career satisfaction is linked to perceived employability, further emphasizing the importance of a fulfilling, meaningful career in individuals' lives.

The results of this study have important implications for both organizations and individuals. The key finding of our study is that career satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between organizational career practices and employability. This finding provides useful implications for organizations seeking to develop more effective HRM practices in knowledge-intensive industries. Leaders and HRM professionals can foster employees' career satisfaction by creating supportive, career-accelerating environments. As the findings suggest, career satisfaction serves as the mechanism by which employees' evaluation of the organizational career system is associated with higher self-perceived employability. This can be achieved by developing encouraging managers, cultivating a culture of learning and growth, and implementing diverse career paths and growth opportunities.

However, the fact that a more positive evaluation of the organizational career system is indirectly associated with a higher perception of external employability may raise doubts about the value of investing in employees' careers. Nevertheless, we believe that organizations that promote employability should embrace the associated risks, such as the potential increase in the search for external career opportunities by highly employable individuals. We argue that the benefits of employability, such as the knowledge and creativity that are the primary drivers of business today, outweigh the risks of increased employees' perception of external employability. Even the most robust career development systems may be unable to fully retain talent in the long term, as employees may still pursue external career and self-realization opportunities in the global marketplace. The key is for organizations to strike a balance between promoting employability and retaining talent by creating an environment that fosters career satisfaction and growth, while also acknowledging the inherent risks.

As far as employees are concerned, the findings suggest that both personal effort and a supportive organizational context are associated with higher self-perceived employability, with the latter relationship operating through career satisfaction. Thus, in a knowledge-based economy, every individual should develop the competencies needed for career development and actively build a meaningful working life. In addition, employees should take advantage of the comprehensive career development opportunities offered by organizations. All of this may contribute to more sustainable careers in a context of high uncertainty.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between individual and organizational career management practices and self-perceived employability, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may influence the generalizability of the findings. Firstly, the study sample was drawn from specific industries (finance and technology). Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other sectors with different work cultures, career paths, or organizational structures. Future research should consider broader samples to explore the nuances of career management across diverse industries. Secondly, the sample was predominantly female. Therefore, the experiences of male employees regarding career management and employability may not be fully represented. Finally, the study relied on self-reported measures. While self-report data offer valuable insights into individual perceptions and allow direct access to participants' internal perceptions and interpretations, it is important to acknowledge potential biases. Nevertheless, Harman's single-factor test indicated that common method variance was unlikely to have materially influenced the study findings. Future research could further reduce this risk by collecting data from multiple sources or by employing longitudinal research designs.

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