

Predicting career adaptability of fresh graduates through personal factors

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to determine the contribution of personal factors towards career adaptability among fresh graduates who had been employed for less than two years. This cohort is considered as entry-level employees in organisations. Several dimensions of personal factors focussed in this study were self-esteem, conscientiousness, spiritual intelligence and social support.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey. This study sample comprised fresh graduate employees ($n = 423$) from four Malaysian public universities.

Findings – The regression model fitted the data; the personal factors significantly predicted fresh graduates' career adaptability, $F(4,418) = 31.982$, $p < 0.001$. Conscientiousness showed the highest contribution compared to other variables, with social support being the lowest.

Practical implications – Owing to challenges faced by fresh graduates as entry-level employees, continuous career adaptation in the working environment is crucial for achieving satisfaction and success in life. All stakeholders, especially in higher education institutions, play an important role in inculcating the requisite personal traits in undergraduates to enhance their career adaptability upon joining the job market.

Originality/value – This study was conducted with fresh graduates as entry-level employees in Malaysia. It is hoped that the findings of this study would provide a better understanding of the impact of personal factors on career adaptability of fresh graduates in Malaysia so that the stakeholders involved could act accordingly to help fresh graduates enter the job market with the confidence to adapt to changes at the workplace.

Keywords Social support, Career adaptability, Self-esteem, Conscientiousness, Spiritual intelligence, Fresh graduate

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In this 21st century, job prospects worldwide are impacted by various challenges such as globalisation and technological advancement. These challenges have fundamentally changed economic policies and global trade activities, especially in terms of human capital, an aspect of significant interest by governments across all countries (Mzee, 2012). Malaysia is not immune to these challenges. In recent times, the slow-down in the Malaysian economy, triggered by declining global growth, has adversely affected human resource development and employment opportunities, especially for fresh graduates. Although the unemployment



rate of 3.36% (Department of Statistics, 2018) is generally considered low and should not be a cause for concern, most of the job offers or vacancies, however, are in the blue-collar industries (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). As job opportunities for graduates are not plentiful, job seekers may have to take up jobs for which they are over-qualified. Moreover, graduates may have difficulty being hired because their fields of study have not provided them with the requisite expertise or skills required by certain jobs. To make ends meet, fresh graduates may, therefore, have little option but to take up any job offer, thus giving rise to the problem of skill mismatch (Koen *et al.*, 2017).

Skill mismatch in Malaysia is not a new phenomenon (Norman *et al.*, 2018) and could result in individuals having to adapt themselves to situations outside of their expectations to secure a job offer. Career adaptability is, without doubt, an indispensable asset, helping the individual forge ahead regardless of numerous challenges at the workplace. Career adaptability is generally conceptualised as readiness to adapt to changes at the workplace. Such an attitude should be inculcated especially in new graduates who are entry-level employees. According to Savickas (2007), the ability to adapt among employees (especially fresh graduates) will improve the quality of work in a new or changed environment. Savickas (2007) also adds that individuals with adaptability skills would be better equipped to address or handle career-related tasks, organisational changes and job trauma. Hence, career adaptability is essential to enable fresh graduates overcome the numerous challenges that they face when they enter the labour market.

Career adaptability has gained prominence, as it has been found to contribute significantly to successful career development, increased job satisfaction and better employment credibility (Chan *et al.*, 2015; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012; Zacher, 2015). According to Bocciardi *et al.* (2017), the ability to adapt to the working environment is essential for career development. As young adults, fresh graduates have to learn to handle various challenges in their transition to working adults, e.g. commitment to relationships with family members and friends, career choices and to any major decision made (Super, 1980). Pavlova *et al.* (2017) believed that challenges faced by fresh graduates in their transition from university to work may force them to acquire the ability to adjust, attune and accommodate to the new environment. This acquired skill is an indication of the flexibility one needs to have when adjusting to the uncertainties of the job market.

In many past studies on career adaptability, the study sample comprised university students (Chan *et al.*, 2015; Creed *et al.*, 2009; Ghosh and Fouad, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2015; van Vianen *et al.*, 2012) or public school students (Janeiro *et al.*, 2014). In Malaysia, research on career adaptability has not been extensively done. The few studies that have been conducted (David *et al.*, 2016; Haryanni *et al.*, 2017; Morshidi *et al.*, 2012; Munap *et al.*, 2015; Rasul *et al.*, 2012) focussed on career adaptability under the roof of employability discourse. Owing to the lack of studies on the specific discourse of career adaptability in Malaysia, therefore, it was felt that a suitable population for this study would be fresh graduates, i.e. those who had been employed at entry-level in various organisations and had been working not more than two years. Assessing career adaptability of fresh graduates in Malaysia would provide new insights that are beneficial to career development.

Theorizing career adaptability

This study builds on the career construction theory (CCT) popularised by Savickas (1997) that describes the attributes that can contribute to career adaptability. The theory is an extension of the career development theory (Super and Jordaan, 1973), the developmental self-concept theory (Super, 1980) and the life span and life space theory by Super (1980). Career adaptability was first introduced as a construct within a life span based on the life

space theory by [Super and Knasel \(1981\)](#), who define career adaptability as an adult's readiness to cope with changing work and working conditions. [Savickas \(1997\)](#) further proposed career adaptability as a central construct of the CCT on how to deal with predictable and unpredictable tasks and adjustments prompted by changes in the world of work. He also added that career adaptability represented the vocational behaviour that an individual adopted in constructing his career path ([Savickas, 2013](#)).

Conceptually, there are four situations when individuals become adaptive which, according to [Savickas \(2013\)](#), are when these individuals become concerned over their future as a worker; increase personal control over their vocational future; display curiosity in exploring possible selves and future scenarios; and strengthen their confidence to pursue their aspirations. Based on these concepts, career adaptability has four constructs, as proposed by [Savickas and Porfeli \(2011\)](#). These constructs are: *concern* (ability to be aware of future career), *control* (personal control over the future and personal responsibility of own career), *curiosity* (tendency to explore possible self and scenarios) and *confidence* (self-confidence in being able to face and solve career problems or challenges). These constructs of career adaptability underscore the dynamic process linking self and occupational knowledge towards congruence over time ([Rottinghaus and Van Esbroeck, 2005](#)). Thus, career adaptability is one of the personal attributes that can assist the individual in handling a variety of situations related to career uncertainties and job ambiguities, especially in the current, challenging times of the labour market ([Chong and Leong, 2017](#)).

Both the CCT ([Savickas, 1997](#)) and the career development theory ([Super and Jordaan, 1973](#)) discuss vocational identity and self-concept that influence career development, stressing that self-concept changes and develops over time as individuals gain experiences. Self-concept in career development is mostly referred to as the consideration of personal and desired attributes in certain jobs ([Super and Jordaan, 1973](#)). Hence, as individuals develop themselves further with time, the roles, personality and abilities of the person would be intertwined to that of their career. Self-concept elements such as personalities (e.g. Big Five personality), attributes (skills and intelligence) and characteristics of self (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy) are all linked to self-perception, attitudes and values about oneself.

Personal factors and career adaptability

Every individual possesses unique attributes which can influence his or her competence in handling any given situation at work. According to [Savickas and Porfeli \(2012\)](#), the readiness to participate in career development activities is reflected by the fundamental characteristics portrayed in existing theories on personalities. [Guan et al. \(2017\)](#) are of the view that basic personality traits may affect career adaptability through dispositional factors which can strongly motivate individuals and their intention to build adaptive career resources. For example, for fresh graduates in particular, learning to survive in the working world is crucial as they may not be sufficiently equipped with the necessary competence in terms of skills and abilities to establish themselves amidst the challenges of the working world ([Ismail, 2017](#)). With appropriate skills and attributes, any individual is capable of coping and adapting to the working environment. A study by [Rasul et al. \(2012\)](#) showed that Malaysian employers are of the view that personal factors such as self-esteem, sociability, accountability, honesty and conscientiousness are imperative regardless of how well qualified the employees are academically. These values are seen as contributing to organisational unity, efficiency, harmonious relationships and leadership. It is thus important to understand how such factors or values impact career adaptability as individuals navigate constant change towards career development and success ([Hall and Chandler, 2005](#); [Maree, 2012](#)).

Self-esteem

Why does self-esteem deserve attention in career adaptability? The vast majority of self-concept study deals with self-esteem (Betz, 1994; Kidd, 1984; Rusu *et al.*, 2015; Shavelson *et al.*, 1976). Self-esteem is defined as an individual's self-perception of his or her worthiness across the differentially weighted life domain (Pierce *et al.*, 2016). It appears to be a dimension that involves the full spectrum of behaviour, development, personality or identity (Mruk, 2013, p.3). For instance, the individual with low self-esteem experiences more negative emotions which can affect his or her mental health than the individual with higher self-esteem. In the hierarchy of basic needs by Maslow (1973), one of the stages that is critical to achieving self-actualisation is the need for esteem. Such a need reflects a desire for stability, high evaluation of oneself and respect from others. According to Rosenberg *et al.* (1995), global self-esteem is the individual's positive or negative attitude towards the self as a totality. Global self-esteem also refers to the individual's attitude towards an object as a whole (feeling of self-worth). In contrast, specific self-esteem refers to the individual's attitude in a particular setting (Rosenberg *et al.*, 1995). For example, one may have higher self-esteem towards his/her body image but lower self-esteem towards his/her presence around strangers.

Various aspects of self-esteem have been studied extensively in many fields. In the career adaptability context, past studies have posited that self-esteem is an imperative predictor of career development and success (Ataç *et al.*, 2018; Cai *et al.*, 2015; Hall and Chandler, 2005; Janeiro *et al.*, 2014; van Vianen *et al.*, 2012). The satisfaction of self-esteem leads to feelings of self-worth and self-confidence that are necessary for success in life. Judge and Bono (2001) suggested that individuals with elevated self-esteem view a scenario as a chance, while individuals with low self-esteem anticipate the same scenario as a challenge that they may not be able to meet successfully. However, an individual's self-esteem can change over time as he or she develops. It is, therefore, pivotal to have the field of self-esteem studied repeatedly over a considerable period of time. In this study, however, owing to time constraints, the individual's self-esteem was examined, focussing on specific self-esteem of the employee (referring to fresh graduates) only in a workplace context. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H1. Self-esteem contributes significantly to career adaptability.

Conscientiousness

Several studies on employers' discourse have highlighted gaps in skills and personality among fresh graduates such as lack of communication skills, organisational skills and problem-solving skills. For example, in a survey among JobStreet employers (JobStreet.com, 2015), it was reported that 59% of unemployed fresh graduates had weak personality and attitude. Personality is an individual's distinctive characteristics of thinking, feeling and behaving (Holzman, n.d) that encompass five personality factors, namely, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism and extroversion. The five-factor model of personality has been the predominant framework for exploring the relationship between individuals and career development (Sackett and Walmsley, 2014). The interest in personality evaluation has increased among applied psychologists because of studies demonstrating that variables in personalities can be used to predict performance across a diverse array of occupational groups. Based on the validity of generalisation studies on the five-factors of personality, conscientiousness is found to have consistent validity across organisations, jobs and workplace situations (Boudreau *et al.*, 1999; Hogan and Ones, 1997; Li *et al.*, 2015).

Conceptually, conscientiousness, in relation to an employee, is defined as the extent to which he or she is hardworking, conforming, achievement-oriented, persevering and values work (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Judge *et al.*, 2003). Conscientiousness has also been defined as social conformity and impulse control, i.e. the degree to which a person makes an effortless adaptation to authority (Hogan and Ones, 1997). According to Boudreau *et al.* (2001), conscientiousness is correlated to being goal-oriented, persistent and having well-organised skills associated with career achievement. A conscientious person is also one who is careful, responsible and organised (Becker, 1998).

The general consensus among scholars is that employees who are goal-oriented, hardworking and dependable are likely to be more productive and successful. In particular, conscientiousness facilitates adaptive behaviours that require planning and persistence such as career exploration and job search (Lent and Brown, 2013). In their study on an integrative model of career adaptability, Chong and Leong (2017) concurred that conscientiousness was positively related to career adaptability. Zacher (2015, 2016) posits that daily manifestation of career adaptability is influenced by an individual's personality, particularly conscientiousness. Therefore, based on past studies, it is hypothesised that:

H2. Conscientiousness contributes significantly to career adaptability.

Spiritual intelligence

We tend to forget the importance of spirituality in our daily life. Spirituality is not only about discussing religiosity, but it is also about the moral values and positive well-being of an individual. Spirituality can be categorised into two components, namely, sense of connection to something beyond the individual; and search for meaning, purpose and integration in life (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Positive spiritual beliefs can help an individual avoid deviant or destructive behaviour (Emmons, 2000).

However, spirituality or spiritual development among fresh graduates did not attract much interest among researchers (Love and Talbot, 2009) until recently when developments in the study of intelligence stirred new interest in investigating spiritual intelligence as a part of standard intelligence (Cady, 2004). Spiritual intelligence/quotient is not merely combining intelligence with spirituality. From a broader perspective, it is the ability to address issues concerning meaning and purpose that influence the individual's actions (Zohar and Marshall, 2004). Marques (2006) highlights the significant contribution of spiritual intelligence at the workplace. She reported that the internal aspects of spiritual intelligence at the workplace were: understanding the importance of work; understanding objectives and their value; drawing on the strengths of colleagues; respecting the environment; and being a good listener. Perceiving or treating work as spiritual enables the employee to consider his or her contribution to the world, and this view gives value to each career (Bloch, 2005). For example, at the workplace, fresh graduates may encounter work problems, conflicts and dilemma. If he or she is endowed with high spiritual capabilities, such an individual is likely to handle challenges successfully and proceed along the right path to attain the identified goals (Abdul Rani *et al.*, 2013; Hosseini *et al.*, 2010; Tee *et al.*, 2011; Wigglesworth, 2011). Thus, if fresh graduates inculcate higher spiritual intelligence, they are very likely to have higher career adaptability. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H3. Spiritual intelligence contributes significantly to career adaptability.

Social support

Social support plays a very important role in one's life. The National Cancer Institute (USA) defines social support as "a network of family, friends, neighbours, and community members that is available in times of need to give psychological, physical, and financial help" (NCI, n.d). [Fabio and Kenny \(2015\)](#) advocated social support as a contextual factor related to the progression of education and career development. Fresh graduates transitioning from school to work inevitably face various challenges and would need strong social support from family and friends. For example, when job hunting or choosing a suitable job, fresh graduates may need advice from parents or friends. When faced with the difficulty of being employed, they may have to rely on their family and friends for financial and moral support.

Career adaptability is more likely to emerge and improve in contexts shaped by positive emotions and support by friends, family and significant others who can contribute to positivity at the workplace. [Wang and Fu \(2015\)](#), in their study on 879 Chinese college graduates, observed that social support had a positive effect on career adaptability. A supportive environment provides an atmosphere in which the capacities for adaptability can be developed and increased. [Zacher \(2016\)](#) suggests that daily supervisory and career mentoring could potentially alleviate employees' career concerns by providing them with emotional and instrumental social support (e.g. listening and sharing information). Therefore, social support at the workplace was considered relevant to this study.

Research on workplace social support generally shows that it can have a positive impact on a worker's performance and his or her organisational commitment ([Gates, 2000](#)). Workplace social support is practised in organisational settings, whereby mentors, supervisors and colleagues guide the novice worker in familiarising and orientating work procedure, protocol and behaviour for career advancement ([Jackson, 2016](#); [Eby et al., 2013](#)). [Han and Rojewski \(2015\)](#) examined the influence of perceived social support and career adaptability on subsequent job satisfaction of work bound adolescents (four months after they transitioned from high school to work). They found that social support prompted adolescents' successful entry into the labour market. [Ghosh and Fouad \(2017\)](#) conducted a study on graduating college seniors and reported that career concern (construct of career adaptability) was significantly predicted by social support. This finding further supports the argument that the more adaptable graduates are, the less support they would need ([Creed et al., 2009](#); [Zacher, 2016](#)). Conversely, social support would aid graduates who are lacking in adaptability attain those skills. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H4. Social support contributes significantly to career adaptability.

Method

Research design

A quantitative research design was used in this study. A cross-sectional survey method ([Creswell, 2012](#)) was used to collect data from the sample over a period of a month.

Variables

Dependent variable: career adaptability.

Independent variables: self-esteem, conscientiousness, spiritual intelligence and social support.

Sample and procedure

The population for this study consisted of fresh graduates (with bachelor's degree) from selected public universities. The participants graduated in 2018 and had been working for at least three months but not more than two years at the time of this study. Multi-stage cluster sampling was used, whereby the universities selected were based on the location and by zone/region (north, west, central and east of Peninsular Malaysia). Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) represented the northern region, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) the central region, Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) the eastern region and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) the southern region. The alumni and relations office of the selected universities were contacted by email and phone for permission to conduct the self-administered survey questionnaire via email. Participation in this study by 439 respondents (26.7% men and 73.3% women) was voluntary, and they were assured of data confidentiality. Demographic questions were included together with selected scales to elicit further information. Before the actual data collection was conducted, the Cronbach's alpha reliability test was performed on 30 respondents who were graduates from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) to evaluate the internal consistency of the variables.

Profile of respondents

The majority of the respondents (88.8%) were Malays, followed by Indians (2.5%) and Chinese (6.6%). Most of the respondents had been employed for more than a year (35.1%), followed closely by those with three–six months employment (30.5%) and seven–nine months employment (18.7%). Only 15.7% of the respondents had been employed for 10 to 12 months. In addition, 64.7% of the respondents were working in the private sector, 18.5% in the public sector and 4.8% with government-linked companies (GLC); the rest were either working with non-profit organisations or were self-employed.

Measurement

The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012) that was used to measure career adaptability consists of 24 items, and the responses were scored on a five-point scale (1 = *not strong* to 5 = *strongest*). Permission to use the scale was granted by the owner. The respondents were asked respond to statements such as “*I am planning how to achieve my goals*”, “*I am concerned about my career*” and “*I am looking for opportunities to grow as a person*”. The reliability score for this scale was 0.89–0.94.

For self-esteem, there were few available instruments that could be adopted such as the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. As these instruments were not suitable for measuring self-esteem in a work setting, the Professional Self-Esteem Scale (Iqbal *et al.*, 2016) was used to measure perceived self-esteem of the respondents based on their occupation or what they did at the workplace. Permission to use the instrument was granted by the owner. In total, 36 items were used, and responses were scored on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample questions were: “*My profession is very important to me*” and “*I have not yet adopted the values of my profession*”. The reliability score was 0.60–0.93 for this scale.

The International Personality Item Pool Conscientiousness Scale (Goldberg, 1999) (available from the owner's website) was selected to measure conscientiousness. The respondents were required to relate items in the questionnaire to their work setting. Ten items were scored on a five-point scale (1 = *very inaccurate* to 5 = *very accurate*). Sample questions were: “*I do want everything to be just right*” and “*I always know what I am doing*”. The reliability score reported was 0.82–0.86 for this scale.

The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (King, 2008) (available from the owner's website) was used to evaluate spiritual intelligence. Responses to the 24 items were scored on a four-point scale (not true at all with me, is not true with me, quite true to me, very true to me, is true to me). Sample items: "*I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people*" and "*I can control myself when I enter a higher state of consciousness or awareness*". The reliability score was 0.78–0.88 for this scale.

Social support was evaluated in the form of supervisor and co-worker support (Yoon and Thye, 2000) in this study. The instrument consisted of six items; the responses were scored using a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The result of the reliability score was between 0.70 and 0.92.

Analysis

Before starting the analysis, the researchers performed data cleaning of the 439 respondents. In total, 16 respondents who were outliers were excluded, leaving 423. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for descriptive analysis and to test the hypotheses of the contributions of selected personal factors towards career adaptability.

Results

Prior to the analysis, preliminary data checking was used to ensure that the assumptions of normality, linearity, independent error, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity were not violated. Table 1 shows the results of the means, standard deviations and correlation matrix for personal factors and career adaptability. The results indicated that conscientiousness had the highest mean value ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.55$), whereas self-esteem had the lowest ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.37$). Based on the correlation matrix, there was a positive and significant relationship among the various personal factors and career adaptability at 0.05 significance level. However, the magnitudes of the relationship among variables were medium to small.

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to test the research hypotheses. The results of the regression analysis are displayed in Table 2. Collectively, the personal factors significantly predicted fresh graduates' career adaptability, $F(4, 418) = 31.982$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, the regression model fitted the data.

The results of the regression indicated that the variables accounted for 23.4% of the variance in personal factors. According to Cohen (1998), this is a medium effect size of variance. The most statistically significant predictor was conscientiousness with $\beta = 0.329$, $p < 0.001$, followed by spiritual intelligence with $\beta = 0.230$, $p < 0.001$; self-esteem with $\beta = -0.113$, $p < 0.05$; and social support with $\beta = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Career adaptability	3.82	0.72	–	–	–	–	–
2. Self-esteem	3.45	0.37	0.087*	–	–	–	–
3. Conscientiousness	4.16	0.55	0.423*	0.283*	–	–	–
4. Spiritual intelligence	3.74	0.59	0.347*	0.417*	0.420*	–	–
5. Social support	4.03	0.69	0.240*	0.097*	0.275*	0.243*	–

Notes: *indicates levels of statistical significance: $p < 0.05$ level (two-tailed)

Table 1.
Means, standard
deviations (SD) and
correlation matrix
($n = 423$)

Discussion

In this study, all the four hypotheses were supported. The personal factors (self-esteem, conscientiousness, spiritual intelligence and social support) predicted career adaptability in varying degrees. A positive coefficient indicates that when the value of a variable increases, the value for the other variable to which it is matched also tends to increase (Darusalam and Hussin, 2019, p. 236). Therefore, it is assumed that when there is an increase in the individual's self-esteem, conscientiousness, spiritual intelligence and social support, this would result in higher career adaptability.

Based on the findings of this study, the relationships of the variables lent support to Savickas's CCT on "self-making". The individual composes a self by adjusting to a situation using a unique capacity to construct a career (Savickas, 2013). The individual is an agent who portrays his or her intention to act meaningfully. By his or her actions, the individual adjusts further to changes and challenges along the career path.

The findings in this study indicated that the self-esteem of fresh graduates did not make a very sizable contribution to career adaptability. Based on past studies, individuals with relatively high self-esteem would tend to have higher motivation to plan and strive to achieve their career goals (van Vianen *et al.*, 2009). Such individuals tend to perceive themselves as talented and worthy of their career and thus gain satisfaction. On the other hand, higher self-esteem could be misconstrued as narcissism. Such individuals may feel that their self-value is superior. Hence, it is important that fresh graduates be assisted to ensure that their self-esteem is directed towards achieving career goals instead of focussing on a false sense of superiority. Social standing is closely related to the level of self-esteem (Mruk, 2013, p. 65). For example, the closest circle of people in one's life are family, friends and neighbours. How these people perceive or evaluate fresh graduates will affect their self-esteem.

Another personality trait we examined was conscientiousness, a construct that is consistently related to work performance. A very conscientious fresh graduate would be perceived as a persevering, well-organised, goal-oriented and hardworking employee. However, having too much conscientiousness could make others think that he or she is a perfectionist or not being flexible. The results here showed that conscientiousness made a bigger contribution than self-esteem to career adaptability, as this study evaluated conscientiousness in the working environment. In different social environments, the results might be different.

Generally, fresh, inexperienced graduates would feel insecure and lack confidence in a new environment such as workplace. With social support from colleagues and supervisors, a fresh graduate could learn to adapt to the workplace and handle the task at hand.

Table 2.
Multiple linear
regression analysis
for predictors of
career adaptability
(*n* = 423)

Relationship between variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardised coefficients		<i>t</i>	Sig.
	B	Std. error	beta			
(Constant)	1.309	0.347	–		3.771	0.000
Self-esteem	–0.219	0.092	–0.113		–2.373	0.018
Conscientiousness	0.429	0.063	0.329		6.778	0.000
Spiritual intelligence	0.280	0.062	0.230		4.538	0.000
Social support	0.108	0.046	0.105		2.324	0.021

Notes: **p* < 0.05; β = standardised regression coefficient; *t*-values = test statistics of β ; *R* = 0.484, and *R*² = 0.234

Co-workers could share the dos and don'ts in their organisation so that the fresh graduate would feel more comfortable at the workplace. According to [Fabio and Kenny \(2015\)](#), social support helps the individual to progress and develop his or her career. However, the results in this study showed that social support did not contribute as much as might be expected, even though statistical significance was attained. Perhaps further in-depth studies should be conducted so as to have a more accurate picture of the relationship.

Spiritual intelligence is a trait that the individual can count on to give him or her inner strength. Besides IQ and EQ, spiritual intelligence helps the individual deal with the vagaries of life, including challenges at the workplace. The results of this study showed that the contribution of spiritual intelligence was significant. According to [Marques \(2006\)](#), spiritual intelligence plays an important role in helping the employee understand the objective and value of work, foster better relationships with colleagues and the environment and be a good listener. With higher levels of spiritual intelligence, fresh graduates would understand the reasons for working and appreciate their being employed. Therefore, they should be more capable of adapting to uncertainties at the workplace and advance in their careers.

Limitation and conclusion

The study has several limitations that should be considered for generalising the findings. First, this study examined only four personal factors that were predicted to influence career adaptability. Other variables or domains could potentially give better results and might provide a more refined understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, relying on a cross-sectional survey could lead to the results being potentially limited to causal inferences compared to a longitudinal study, whereby the predictors of career adaptability could be investigated over a longer duration. Secondly, the other instruments available might offer different findings based on different settings and altered perceptions of the respondents. This would alter the interpretation of the findings. Thirdly, the selected respondents in this study were graduates from only four universities. Future research may include other universities and non-graduate employees for comparison. In addition, a different technique of analysis with different sets of instruments could be used. Finally, the generalisation of this study may be limited owing to the lack of relevant empirical data in Malaysia.

In conclusion, this study has shed light on predicting career adaptability through personal factors. It is hoped that universities could implement effective strategies to enhance career adaptability of students so that they are capable of career adaptability upon joining the job market after graduation. It is important that strategies are in place to help engage individuals in self-improvement activities towards optimal adaptation ([Betz, 1994](#)). The employer also plays a role in their employees' career development by conducting sharing sessions and training on grooming the employees to be assertive. In addition, to further understand the demands of the industries in hiring new graduates, consultations and discussions with the industrial sector should be arranged to ensure both parties are aware of the requisite skills and attributes that graduates should possess to become employable in the job market.

Theoretically, this study further validates what Savickas has postulated in his CCT. The findings add to the ongoing discussion of various relevant factors that contribute to career adaptability, namely, self-esteem, conscientiousness, spiritual intelligence and social support.

In terms of implications on policies, assigning career support service within and outside of the workplace would further support the readiness and effectiveness in decision-making by fresh graduates so that they will be better equipped with relevant skills. On the other hand, a more practical implication is the awareness of career adaptability would be as a guide to equip fresh graduates with the adequate skill of adaptability when faced with

uncertainties. For example, adapting to the use of information and communication technology can improve the career competencies of an individual. An employer or superior could potentially strategise the steps in motivating their employees using the dimensions of career adaptability and also, offer opportunities for professional training to improve the relevant skills needed by the employees. This study hopes to provide knowledge for future researchers towards understanding the needs to create or redesign existing programmes that cater to the career development of fresh graduates.

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