

# Influence of Career Anchors, Work Values and Personality Traits toward Employability Orientation among Malaysian University Students

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## Abstract

Work environment is facing numerous challenges and this entails organizations to better understand the phenomenon of employability orientation. Thus, the primary aim of this study is to determine the level of employability orientation among university students and its influencing factors. This is a quantitative study whereby a total of 711 undergraduates were randomly selected from public universities in Malaysia to participate in the study. The dependent variable of this study was employability orientation and the independent variables were career anchors, work values and personality traits. The principal result of this study showed that there were eight sub-dimensions that contributed around 52.0% of the variation in employability orientation. It is believed that the findings will provide some interesting input in understanding the complexities associated with employability orientation among university students.

**Keywords:** employability orientation, career anchors, work values, personality traits

## 1. Introduction

Without a doubt, both organizations and individuals recognize the fact that employability orientation is a pertinent issue when it comes to compete in an evolving environment and for career development (Van Dam, 2004). According to Van der Heijden (2000), the term employability is referred to as the primary use of an individual's competences in continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work. In line with this, an employee that is extraordinarily employable would help organizations to cope up with the fierce competitions faced in the pursuit of delivering effective products and services.

Undeniably dramatic changes are also taking place in the work environment as a result of globalization, advancement of technology and borderless world and this had resulted in the orientation of employability to take center stage and currently much emphasize is given on organization and individual flexibility (Tomlinson, 2007). Consequently, there is a need for employees not only to be transparent for advancement but also have the capabilities to adapt to the ever changing work requirements and this is commonly known as employability orientation (Van Dam, 2004). Besides, employability orientation also demands workers to have a positive attitude to change and this requires workers to develop new knowledge and skills, and changing tasks or jobs regularly (Van Dam, 2004).

Previous studies had identified that the element of an increase in the number of costs takes place as organizations implement employability orientation (Campion & McClelland, 1991). A number of studies too had identified that a number of factors play an important role in influencing employability orientation, and these include career anchors or career orientation, work values and personnel variables (Nauta, 2009; Bezuidenhout, Grobler, & Rudolph, 2013). However, not many studies were carried out to seek the relationship between employability orientation and career anchors, work values and personnel variables among university students.

One of the potential employees in any organizations is university students and there is an ample need for them to possess employability orientation to face the various turbulences that organizations need to go through. Thus, the

aim of this study is to seek the level of employability orientation among undergraduates and to seek on the influence of career anchors/orientation, work values and personnel variables on their employability orientation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Employability Orientation*

Over the years the concept of employability orientation has remain an important issue and generally according to Van Dam, Van der Heijden, and Schyns (2006), there are three distinguish perspectives that employability orientation can be looked upon and these are in terms of the individual, organizational, and the economic-social perspective.

From an individual perspective, employability orientation has taken a great twist since the emergence of globalization and information and technology communications, as currently the trend is geared towards fulfilling the needs of the entire workforce compared to the underprivileged workers (Nauta, 2009). As a result, a number of definitions had emerged from the individual perspective highlighting issues pertaining to employability orientation such as career development, adaptability, mobility, occupational expertise, personal development and lifelong learning. Besides, with the emergence of a borderless world, more boundaries of working environment are traversed in compared with previous models of working environment that has a predictive hierarchical career (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000). As such, there is a great need for employees to realign themselves to pay attention on their readiness to adapt accordingly by focusing on their adaption strategies to maintain being employed. Consequently, employability orientation is perceived as a substitute to job security.

On the other hand, from the organizational perspective, the core attention is given to the flexibility of organizations' function. As had been mentioned earlier, the impact of globalization and information and communication technology for the past two decades is intense and organizations are mandatory to become more acclimatize to the changing environment (Guest, 1987). As a result, there is a need to make changes to workers' employability orientation and thus organizations had to implement a number of programs that include enhancing knowledge and skills of workers, besides reframing workers' attitude to accept deployment and multi-tasking.

In terms of the economic-social perspective, according to Finn (2000), employability orientation is seen as the means and ways how the various categories of the work force are able to obtain and maintain employment.

### *2.2 Career Anchors*

Recognizing the fact that individuals' characteristics can play a vital role in determining employability orientation, thus career anchors of individuals could be a possible factor that influences employability orientation. A career anchor as defined by Schein (1996) is a self-image of an individual depicting what a person can excel in, and it provides direction for individual's career values, wants and interests. Schein further added that in general there exists eight career anchors and usually each individual identifies mainly with one or two of these anchors. It is presumed that these anchors will be the catalysts for individuals to seek for their preferences in the areas that are available in their respective jobs. In line with Schein's thoughts, Coetzee and Schreuder (2009) and Feldman and Bolino (1996) further refined the concept of career anchors into three career enablers whereby it was mentioned that the first career enabler of talent-based anchors are technical/functional competence, general managerial competence, and entrepreneurial creativity, followed by nee-based anchors encompassing autonomy/independence, security/stability, and lifestyle, and the final career enabler is value-based anchors that comprise of service/dedication to a cause, and pure challenge. In detail, the eight career anchors that were depicted by Schein are as follows.

#### *2.2.1 Technical/Functional*

Individuals that are geared towards career anchor that is technical or functional based will grab every opportunity to further develop their skills in these areas and they are consistently on the move to upgrade their skills to a higher level. Thus, they develop their sense of identity from the application of these skills and they love to face numerous challenges pertaining to these skills including managing people in the areas of technical and functional management. However, these individuals generally keep away from general management as this will not allow them to demonstrate their technical and functional know-how.

#### *2.2.2 General Managerial*

People who are looked upon as possessing career anchor that is general managerial would emphasis on the output of an organization and be willing to integrate the functions of various individuals in different units to achieve the desired output. Thus, people in this category place much importance on results and associate themselves with the success of their respective organization.

### 2.2.3 Entrepreneurial Creativity

Individuals that possess the key career anchor entrepreneurial creativity enjoy developing new products or services, creating new organizations, and willing to take risks. Individuals in this career anchor are willing to work in organizations for the sake of gaining new knowledge and skills. However, once they feel that they are able to be independent, they would like to unleash their potentials and be working on their own as they believe their self-success will be the true indicator of their abilities.

### 2.2.4 Autonomy/Independence

A person who is inclined towards being autonomous/independence clearly will like to seek the opportunity to work in an environment that offers flexibility pertaining to when and how to work. As such, individuals in this career anchor have clearly defined goals that allow means of accomplishment and they welcome autonomy-oriented promotion systems.

### 2.2.5 Security/Stability

Someone who is in the security/stability anchor prefers employment security whereby work is stable and predictable. Consequently, they would like to be paid in a balanced manner, and the tenure of service as the indicator for pay increment and promotion. Thus, individuals in this category would like to be appreciated for their loyalty since their entire self-image is formed based on the concepts of security and stability.

### 2.2.6 Lifestyle

A person who has lifestyle as his/her key career anchor would like to fulfill individual, family and career needs. Thus, an integrative approach will be taken by the people in this career anchor in making wise decisions so that no one will have any ill-feelings. As such, organization flexibility plays an important role for people in this anchor since flexibility allows individuals to achieve integrated goals.

### 2.2.7 Service/Dedication to a Cause

Individuals possessing the career anchor of service/dedication to a cause will work towards achieving something that has a value to improve livelihood in this world. As such, they would like to seek opportunities to move into positions that will help them achieve their noble needs.

### 2.2.8 Pure Challenge

People whose career anchor is pure challenge expect to be working in an environment that is challenging and full of turmoil as this will provide them the avenue to demonstrate their self-ability in solving problems. Thus, the career that is most applicable to these individuals would be something that has novelty, variety and difficult.

## 2.3 Work Values

Each employee enters into the working environment with different work values and consequently it could be a critical variable that determines employability orientation. Previous literature defines work values as principles individuals held in high esteem and it determines choices, attitudes and action in work (Wollack et al., 1971; Roberts & Robins, 2000). Besides, according to Brown (2002) individuals firmly believe that their work values should be attained in the role that they play in their working environment. In line with this, an individual's work values play a paramount role in influencing individual's necessities in their workplace.

A number of domains had been established to measure work values by different researchers. Ginzberg et al. (1951) revealed the dimensions of work values as intrinsic work values, extrinsic work values, and concomitant values. Moreover, Wollack et al. (1971) too defined the domains of work values as comprising of intrinsic values, organization-man ethic, upward striving, social status of job, conventional ethic and attitude toward earning. Meanwhile, according to Meyer, Irving, and Allen (1998), three dimensions to measure work values are comfort and security, competence and growth, and status and independence

Furthermore, a number of researchers had mentioned that emotional attributes of individuals are closely related to intrinsic work values and this in turn will have an impact on employability orientation. On the other hand, it was also identified that maturity in career and employability orientation are negatively related with the existence of extrinsic work values. As a result, work values are considered as a critical variable that significantly effects employability orientation.

## 2.4 Personel Traits

Previous studies have also been carried out to investigate on the push and pull factors of personel variables on employability orientation (McArdle et al., 2007). Among personel domains that might influence role or job changes are religion, culture, family, interest, money and peers. These factors will be studied in the current study

to determine whether there exists any significant relationship between personnel traits and employability orientation.

### 3. Method

This study was a quantitative research and the strategy employed was a correlational survey whereby a cross-sectional survey was carried out to gather data from undergraduates in public universities in Malaysia pertaining to employability orientation and its' influencing factors. The items for the research instrument were adapted from previous literature and these items were validated both its construct and content validity prior to data collection. The dependent variable of this study was employability orientation while the dimensions of career anchors, work values, and personnel traits formed the independent variables.

Data for this study was randomly collected from undergraduates from five public universities in Malaysia. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, however only 711 respondents' feedback was used in the final analysis. A pre-test was carried out prior to the actual study and the overall Cronbach's alpha of all the variables were above the threshold of .7, indicating the soundness of the instrument in terms of its reliability.

Face-to face interview was implemented in the data collection process and the SPSS software was used as a tool to analyze the data both descriptive and inferential.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Demographic Background

Table 1 depicts the demographic background of the respondents. In terms of gender, out of 711 respondents, there were 564 female students and only 147 male students. Besides, majority of the students are aged between 20-24 years (n=520), followed by the age group of 16-19 years (n=162), 26 respondents were from the age group between 25-29 years, only two respondents that represented the age group between 30-35 years, and finally there was only one respondent that represented the age group above 35 years of age. Majority of the respondents were from the Malay ethnicity (77.9%) followed by Chinese (17.3%), Indians (3.4%) and other ethnic groups (1.4%). Moreover, majority of the students were also from the science stream academic program.

Table 1. Demographic background of the respondents (n=711)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	147	20.7
Female	564	79.3
<i>Age group (years)</i>		
16-19	162	22.8
20-24	520	73.1
25-29	26	3.7
30-35	2	0.3
Above 35	1	0.1
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Malay	554	77.9
Chinese	123	17.3
Indian	24	3.4
Others	10	1.4
<i>CGPA</i>		
3.5-4.0	223	31.4
3.0-3.49	354	49.8
2.5-2.9	126	17.7
2.0-2.49	8	1

<i>Academic program</i>		
Applied Science	360	50.6
Sciences	301	42.3
IT Communication	3	0.4
Environmental Science	8	1.1
Business & Economics	39	5.5

#### 4.2 Level of Employability Orientation

Figure 1 revealed the level of employability orientation among undergraduates and the bell-shaped curve showed that the data has a normal distribution. The mean score obtained was 4.38 (SD=.54) meaning that the undergraduates of this study was at a high level in terms of employability orientation. Indeed, this is a positive result as it postulates that Malaysian undergraduates are ready to endure employability orientation.

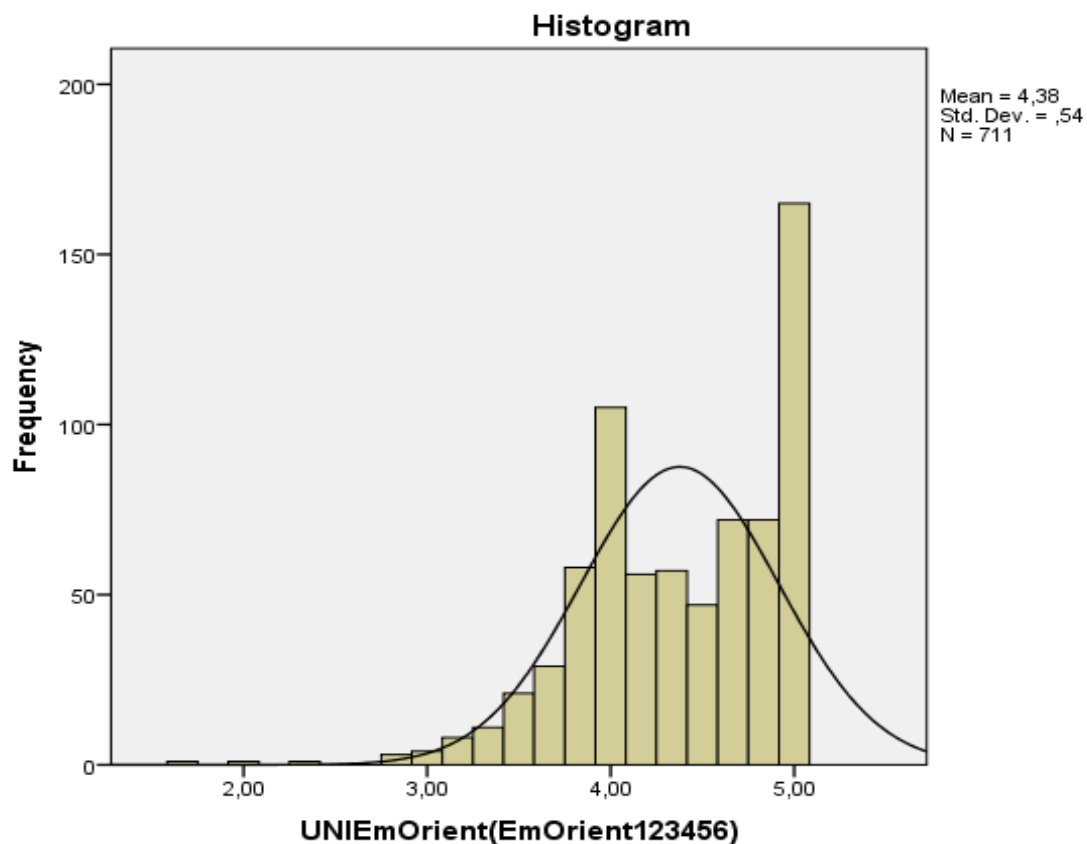


Figure 1. Distribution of scores obtained on employability orientation

#### 4.3 Correlation Coefficient Analysis

Next, a correlation test was carried out to determine on the correlation between the independent variables and dependent variable. The results are illustrated in Table 2. All the independent variables of this study have a positive significant relationship with employability orientation. Further investigations revealed that among the career anchor dimensions, the three strongest significant relationship with employability orientation were pure challenge ( $r=.451$ ,  $p=.000$ ), service/dedication to a cause ( $r=.442$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and lifestyle ( $r=.396$ ,  $p=.000$ ). The other dimension of career anchors – security/stability ( $r=.378$ ,  $p=.000$ ), technical/functional ( $r=.263$ ,  $p=.000$ ), autonomy/independence ( $r=.227$ ,  $p=.000$ ), entrepreneurial creativity ( $r=.172$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and general managerial ( $r=.118$ ,  $p=.000$ )—too had a significant positive relationship with employability orientation.

Besides, Table 2 also showed that there exists a significant positive relationship between employability orientation and sub-dimensions of work values. The highest correlation coefficient was .562 between work commitment and employability orientation, followed by pride in work and employability orientation ( $r=.527$ ,  $p=.000$ ) and success recognition and employability orientation ( $r=.509$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Based on Guilford rule of thumb, this indicated that the relationship between employability orientation and the sub-dimensions of work commitment, pride in work, and success recognition are substantial.

On top of it, the dimensions of individual personality traits too indicated a significant positive relationship with employability orientation. The strongest positive relationship was between my interests and employability orientation ( $r=.411$ ,  $p=.000$ ), followed by religion ( $r=.270$ ,  $p=.000$ ), money ( $r=.205$ ,  $p=.000$ ), family ( $r=.157$ ,  $p=.000$ ), peer ( $r=.139$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and culture ( $r=.133$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

Table 2. Pearson correlation analysis between employability orientation and dimensions of career anchors, work values and personality traits

<b>Career Anchor</b>	<b>Employability Orientation</b>
Technical/Functional	.263**
General Managerial	.118**
Entrepreneurial Creativity	.172**
Autonomy/Independence	.227**
Security/Stability	.378**
Lifestyle	.396**
Service/Dedication to a Cause	.442**
Pure Challenge	.451**
<b>Work Values</b>	
Success Recognition	.509**
Work Commitment	.562**
Pride in Work	.527**
Autonomy	.408**
Authority	.242**
Social Status of Job	.307**
Authentic Liking for the Job	.460**
Opportunities for Promotions or Privileges	.316**
<b>Personality Traits</b>	
Religion	.270**
Culture	.133**
Family	.157**
My interests	.411**
Money	.205**
Peer	.139**

#### 4.4 Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was carried out to determine the significant predictor variables of employability orientation. Based on Table 3, it showed that a significant portion of the variability of employability orientation is explained by the predictor variables.

Table 3. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	112.421	23	4.888	35.548	.000
Residual	94.325	686	.138		
Total	206.746	709			

a. Dependent Variable: Employability Orientation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Pee, Service, High Pay, UpSt, Tech., Family, Authority, Independence, StatusSoc, MyInterest, Creativity, Security, Religion, Money, PrideWork, PureChallenge, General Managerial, Lifestyle, Priv., WorkCom, Culture, Autonomy, SucRecog

Meanwhile, the coefficient depicted that there were eight significant predictor sub- dimensions that helped to explain the variation in employability orientation. These sub-dimensions were success recognition, work commitment, pride at work, authentic liking for the job, service/ dedication to a cause, pure challenge, culture and my interest. The regression equation derived from the result is as follows:

Employability orientation =  $.078 + .144$  (Success Recognition) +  $.209$  (Work Commitment) +  $.175$  (Pride at Work) +  $.144$  (Authentic Liking for the Job) +  $.075$  (Service) +  $.145$  (Pure Challenge) +  $.021$  (Culture) +  $.065$  (My Interest) +  $\epsilon$ .

On top of it, Table 4 showed that the adjusted  $R^2$  was .520. This explains that around 52.0% of employability orientation of Malaysian university students is affected by success recognition, work commitment, pride at work, authentic liking for the job form the dimension of work values, service/dedication to a cause, pure challenge from the dimension of career anchors, and culture, and my interest from the personality traits. However, there is still a necessity to carry out further research to identify other variables that affect the remaining 48.0% of the variation in employability orientation.

Table 4. Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.732 <sup>a</sup>	.535	.520	.37398

a. Predictors: (Constant), UNI\_Peer, UNI\_Service, UNI\_Authority (Auth 6, 7, 8), UNI\_Up\_St (Ups 7, 8), UNI\_Aut\_Independence, UNI\_Family, UNI\_Tech, UNI\_Status\_Soc (Soc 10\_11\_12), UNI\_Money, UNI\_Entr\_Creativity, UNI\_Religion, UNI\_Security, UNI\_My\_Interest, UNI\_Pride\_Work (Conv 13,14,15,16), UNI\_Pure\_Challenge, UNI\_Priv (Prv 16,18), UNI\_General\_Managerial, UNI\_Work\_Com (Val 1, 2, 3, Org 4, 6), UNI\_Lifestyle, UNI\_Culture, UNI\_Autonomy (Auto 9, 10, 11), UNI\_Suc\_Recog (Self 1, 2, 3, Slry 4, 5, Satis 13, 14)

## 5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to determine the level of employability orientation among university students and its influencing factors. It was identified that generally the level of employability orientation among Malaysian university students are at a high level. This is a good sign for future employers particularly in Malaysia as the outcome of the study had proposed that university students are prepared to face changes in organization, perform different tasks, and they are willing to grab the opportunity if the organization offered them a chance to obtain new work experience. The findings of this study is in parallel with what had been identified by Tomlinson (2007) that stated that many students currently recognize the need to advance with more proactive and aggressive labour market strategies to face numerous turbulences in workplace.

The study also found that all the dimensions of career anchors, personality traits, and work values had a significant positive correlation with employability orientation. The strongest significant positive correlation was between the sub-dimensions of work values and employability orientation. This depicts the importance of work values on career development and employability orientation as stated by Choi (2013). Furthermore, the significant positive relationship between personality traits and employability orientation further strengthens the need to focus on individual characteristics toward employability orientation as mentioned by Nauta (2009). Moreover, all the dimensions of career anchors too gave a significant positive relationship with employability

orientation compared to the findings by van Dam (2004) that showed that employability orientation was positively correlated with career anchors of managerial competence and variety, and negatively related to technical competence and security.

The present study resulted in the development of model to explain the variation in employability orientation. It was identified that the significant predictor variables and dimensions of employability orientation among university students were success recognition, work commitment, pride at work, authentic liking to a job, service to a cause, pure challenge, culture, and interests. Although the predictor variables and dimensions were able to account for only 52.0% of the variation in employability orientation, this is a significant contribution to the body of knowledge as there were only few studies implemented to examine employability orientation among university students. The findings showed the importance of work commitment and pride at work of university students as the primary significant predictor on employability orientation and this is in line with the Theory of Work Adjustment (Lofquist & Davis, 1978) that states that individuals work values have a major impact on the needs of individuals at their workplace.

On top of it, only two dimensions of career anchors, that is, service to a cause and pure challenges were found to be significant predictors of employability orientation among university students. The results implied that individual's dedication to work, seeking opportunities for career enhancement, and willing to face numerous challenges are among the positive attitudes required for employability orientation among university students.

Moreover, in terms of individuals' personality traits, the outcome of the study was culture and interests of university students were significant predictors of employability orientation. This is in line with the findings by Nauta (2009) and this implies that there is a need for each organization to infuse their employability culture among their potential employees from universities so that the negative individual culture could be arrested and eventually these employees will be able to accept employability orientation. Besides, individuals interests too is a predictive factor as the finding showed that the positive taste of individuals can lead to encouraging attitude and eventually contribute to employability orientation

## 6. Conclusion

In this study, it aimed to contribute constructively to the dilemmas organizations face in stimulating employability orientation among employees. The study was carried out on university students to determine on their level of employability orientation and its influencing factors as this will provide worthwhile feedback on organizations on their future workforce. It is recommended from this study that organizations need to pay great attention on work values of individuals, provide a working culture that provides challenges with many learning opportunities, and paying attention to one's culture and personnel interests to further boost employability orientation.

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