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“It Is All in the Game!” : The Role of Political Skill for Perceived Employability Enhancement

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Running Head: POLITICAL SKILL FOR PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY ENHANCEMENT

”It is all in the game!” The Role of Political Skill for Perceived Employability Enhancement

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POLITICAL SKILL FOR PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY

Abstract

The current study was aimed at assessing the extent that job-seeking networking may explain the positive association between career planning and self-perceived employability. In addition, the moderator role of political skill in strengthening the relationship between career planning and job-seeking behavior was explored. A sample of $N = 2,561$ students and graduates searching for jobs from one of the largest Italian universities filled out an online questionnaire. The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. Results showed that the positive relationship between career planning and self-perceived employability was mediated by job-seeking networking. Furthermore, the association between career planning and job-seeking networking appeared to be stronger for people who possessed greater political skill. This study may advance the comprehension of the added value of proactive career behaviors within the process that links career planning and self-perceived employability. In addition, primary intervention aimed at maximizing graduates' possibilities of attaining employment was suggested.

Keywords: Job Search, Career proactive behaviors, Perceived employability, Career planning, Job-seeking networking, Political skill

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3 "It is all in the game!" The Role of Political Skill for Perceived Employability Enhancement
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5 **Introduction**
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7 Although the average unemployment rate in the European Union for people aged between
8 25 and 64 with a tertiary education (5.6 %) is about three time less than for those with a secondary
9 education qualification (17.4 %) (Eurostat, 2015), graduate-level credentials are not a guarantee of
10 employment success, because the opportunities for highly skilled employees are limited (Clarke,
11 2008). Therefore it is necessary to understand the possible antecedents of graduates' employability.
12 Despite the growing body of literature examining the relationship between higher education and
13 employability, the number of studies that examine the skills and attributes that are linked to new
14 graduates' employability is still limited (Tymon, 2013). Several employability definitions have been
15 developed. Among the various perspectives and levels that can be used to analyze employability,
16 this contribution focused upon a micro-individual level, in which employability may be described as
17 the individual's potential to be employed (Berntson & Marklund, 2007), or as the job opportunities
18 in the labor market, internal or external to the same organization (Forrier & Sels, 2003).
19 Specifically, perceived employability refers to the subjective perception of possibilities of
20 maintaining the current employment, or of future opportunities to secure an equal or better one
21 (Berntson, 2008; Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2014). This perception is highly
22 important because it is potentially associated with a personal feeling of security and independence
23 with regard to contextual circumstances (Berntson, 2008). Additionally, perceived employability is
24 known to be related to objective indexes as the national employment rate in a large sample of Italian
25 graduates (Caricati, Chiesa, Guglielmi & Mariani, 2016). Vanhercke and colleagues (2015)
26 classified perceived employability as an important resource within the Conservation of Resources
27 (COR) theory framework (Hobfoll, 1989; 2002). The COR theory argues that resources which
28 people strive to acquire and gather in order to cope with stressful situations include personal
29 characteristics, energies, objects, and conditions that are either valued by the individual, or that act
30 as a means of obtaining valued objectives. Firstly, perceived employability is an important resource
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3 because it improves personal sense of mastery on career opportunities, which is essential to
4 survival in the current labor market (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Schyns, Torka, &
5 Gössling, 2007) and to achieve career success (see Van der Heijden, De Lange, Demerouti, & Van
6 der Heijde, 2009). Moreover, perceived employability is associated with the gain of additional
7 resources through progression in education or job training (Wittekind, Raeder, & Grote, 2010).
8
9 According to COR theory, gaining new resources involves an investment of personal resources, so
10 the capability of gaining resources is higher for people who possess more resources. Given its
11 relevance, the present study is interested in understanding what extent a proactive approach to the
12 transition from university to work may influence perceived employability.
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23 Currently, the economic and technological changes that are affecting the world of work has
24 increased graduates' responsibility for the successful management of their own careers, especially
25 when they try to enter the labor market for the first time (Vanhercke, De Cuyper, & De Witte,
26 2016). This means that graduates need to define the type of job they want, and the competences that
27 this specific type of job requires in order to maximize their possibilities of securing employment
28 (Rothwell, Jewel, & Hardie, 2009). In other words, they need to build up a broad spectrum of
29 'knowing why', 'knowing how', and 'knowing whom' competences that are necessary in the age of
30 boundary-less careers (De Fillippi & Arthur, 1994). We consider career planning as a cognitive
31 aspect of proactive career behaviors related to the competence of "knowing why," while the job-
32 seeking networking may be defined as a proactive career behavior related to the competence of
33 "knowing how." Finally, concerning the competence of "knowing whom" we consider political
34 skill relevant. Ferris and colleagues (2005) define it as the ability to understand others and to
35 maximize relationships in order to achieve individual and organizational goals. Although its
36 positive effect on job performance and career success has been well documented (see for instance,
37 the recent meta-analysis of Munyon, Thompson, Summer and Ferris, 2015), the role of political
38 skill in managing the transition from university to work has not been explored yet. The current
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study intends to test its moderating effect on the relationship between career planning and perceived employability via job-seeking networking.

Career planning and perceived employability

In line with Career Construction theory, active career planning has been defined as an important process of individual construction and reconstruction, clarification of career paths, and formation of a coherent and meaningful identity (Savickas, 2002). De Vos and colleagues (2009) considered career planning as a relevant indicator of the cognitive component of proactive career behaviors during the transition from college to work, which means that it is part of preventive actions implemented by individuals in order to identify and exploit job opportunities (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). It includes strategic vision of career development and of setting and pursuing career objectives. As such, it corresponds to an individual's efforts to manage his or her career consciously (Gould, 1979). Saks and Ashforth (2002) found positive relationships among career planning, pre-entry and post-entry person-job and person-organization fit perceptions. In addition, Zikic and Klehe (2006) reported that career planning was associated to re-employment quality as well after a period of unemployment. As regards career and employability outcomes, Spurk, Kauffeld, Barthauer, and Heinemann (2015) showed that an improvement in career planning due to a career coaching intervention increased the perception of career success. Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that career planning was related to less career distress and to higher perceived employability (Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015). The arguments mentioned above lead us to hypothesize the following:

H1. Career planning correlates positively with perceived employability.

The Mediating Role of Job-seeking Networking

Job-seeking networking is defined as “expressing those behaviors that are aimed at building, maintaining, and using informal relationships, and that bring about the (potential) benefit to facilitate work-related activities of individuals, by voluntarily granting access to resources and maximizing common advantages” (Wolff & Moser, 2009, p.196). In this sense, it can be considered

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3 as part of proactive career behaviors, which are actions set out by employees to achieve their career
4 objectives (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; King, 2004). Previous research has shown that
5 subjective and objective career success are positively related to networking. In particular, Langford
6 (2000) revealed that networking behaviors predict self-evaluation of career success and satisfaction,
7 current remuneration, and increments in income over the last five years. According to this author,
8 networking behaviors are relevant to an individual's career path because they entail extensive social
9 interactions with multiple subjects and constitute a plain expression of one's responsiveness to job-
10 related opportunities. Further results suggest that engaging in professional activities and adopting
11 behaviors aimed at increasing employees' internal visibility represent specific types of networking
12 behaviors that may positively affect long-term subjective and objective career outcomes, as
13 perception of career success, as well as number of promotions and total wage (Forret & Dougherty,
14 2004). In a similar vein, De Vos et al. (2009) found that networking predicts salary level and career
15 satisfaction measured one year later.

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31 While the relationship between networking and career success has been well documented,
32 little is known about the relationship between networking and employability. Given that perceived
33 employability refers to the subjective perception of employment possibilities, we consider it a
34 subjective career success indicator. For graduates, employability deals with preparing for the
35 future's instability within the ambiguous constraints of the new careers, and it requires taking a
36 proactive approach. Proactively preparing for the attainment of personal career goals through career
37 planning enables the individual to perceive more control within an uncertain labor market, and to be
38 better equipped to select the career strategy that will realize one's personal career objectives. More
39 specifically, De Vos and colleagues (2009) showed that the cognitive mechanism of career planning
40 organized and enacted a specific career behavior as job-seeking networking, and we expect that
41 these actions oriented toward future career outcomes may enhance the self-perception of
42 employability. Therefore, we formulated the following hypothesis:
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3 *H2. Job-seeking networking mediates the relationship between career planning and*
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5 *perceived employability.*

The Moderating Effect of Political Skill

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9 Analyzing the relationship of job search to re-employment, Wanberg, Kanfer, and Banas
10 (2000) defined job-seeking networking as a particular job search method that is used more or less
11 intensively by various job seekers. In particular, they indicated that differences in dispositional
12 tendencies, especially in extraversion, affected job-seeking networking intensity in such a way that
13 individuals with a higher score for extraversion displayed greater levels of job-seeking networking
14 intensity during the job search process, in comparison with individuals who were less extravert.
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16 These authors found that people were less inclined to use this job search method if they worried that
17 the use of job-seeking networking may be perceived as an exploitation of friendship.
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22 In this contribution, we aimed to understand how individual differences in competences that
23 are necessary for executing specific job-seeking networking behaviors may influence the
24 relationship between career planning, job-seeking networking, and perceived employability.
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26 Specifically, we focused on individual differences in political skill, as “a comprehensive pattern of
27 social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations, which have both
28 direct effects on outcomes, as well as moderating effects on predictor–outcome relationships”(Ferris
29 et al. 2007; p.291) . As competencies, political skill consists of “a set of observable performance
30 dimensions, including individual knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors” (Athey & Orth, 1999,
31 p. 216). Munyon et al. (2015) confirmed it affects self-evaluations of self-efficacy and that it is
32 more predictive of task performance than extraversion. In this sense, in accordance with COR
33 theory, Ferris and colleagues (2007) underlined the fact that political skill plays a critical role of
34 internal resource that facilitates the acquisition and the protection of valued resources in the work
35 contexts. Politically skilled people are more confident about their ability to control images,
36 interactions, and impressions at work; thus, they are less likely to see their interpersonal situation as
37 stressful.
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3 Although interpersonal skills are considered to be highly relevant for graduates'
4 employability (i.e., Andrews & Higson, 2008; Jackling & De Lange, 2009), very little is known
5 about their political skill. In general, political skill is “the mechanism through which goal-directed
6 behavior is activated in pursuit of interpersonal objectives and/or outcomes achievement” (Ferris et
7 al. 2007, p. 300). It means that political skill affects the way individuals assess personal resources
8 and establish values and goals. It is also associated with the ability to identify the appropriate
9 influence tactic for a given situation, and, subsequently, to execute the tactic effectively in order to
10 maximize its effect (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012). The competence in developing
11 and using diverse networks of people allows politically skilled individuals to build social capital
12 and leverage it in order to achieve personal goals. Accordingly, we expected that the cognitive
13 mechanism of career planning may induce job-seeking networking (being a specific type of
14 proactive career behavior), especially in the case of a great degree of political skill. Hence, we
15 formulated the third hypothesis:

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31 *H3. Political skill moderates the relationship between career planning and job-seeking*
32 *networking in a mediation model with perceived employability being the outcome.*

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35 The conceptual model framing the study variables in a moderated mediation relationship is
36 reported in Figure 1.

Method

Participants and Procedure

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Subscribers to the electronic newsletter of one of the largest Italian Universities were
provided with background information about the general purpose of the study, including individual
factors influencing graduates' level of employability. They received an e-mail that invited people
who were searching for a job to participate in the research; it included a link to answer an online
survey. At the beginning of the survey, respondents' anonymity and data confidentiality were
emphasized. After completion, all participants obtained an individual profile reporting the main
results on their employability score and the association between this outcome and factors

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investigated through the survey. A total of $N = 2,561$ people participated in the study: 56.9% of them were students, 41.9% were just graduate, 0.2% did not indicate their state. Women formed the majority (62%) and the average age was 24.68 ($SD = 2.24$), ranging from 21 to 32 years. Most respondents held a masters degree (62.6%) and had at least one year of work experience during university (78.2%).

Measures

Career planning, job-seeking networking, and political skills were measured using scales which were translated from the original English version into Italian as follows: a) translation of the scales by two experts familiar with all the constructs and the English language; b) comparison between the experts' two versions to produce a single version for every scale; c) back-translation of this version by a mother-tongue English speaker—this translation was “blind,” that is, the original versions of the scales were not known; d) definition of the final version in light of the indications yielded by the entire translation process (Hambleton, Merenda, & Spielberger, 2005). The Italian version of Berntson and Marklund's (2007) scale developed by Caricati et al. (2016) was used to test perceived employability.

Career planning was measured using four items taken from the Career Planning scale developed by Gould (1979). This measure has been widely used to test career self-management strategies and proactive behaviors among university students, and it known to be correlated, for instance, with intentions to pursue graduate education (Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, & Pierotti, 2013), career engagement (Hirschi, 2013), core-evaluation, and career adaptability (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2017). A sample item was: “I have a strategy for achieving my career goals.” All items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In the present study, the reliability of this scale was $\alpha = .81$.

Job-seeking networking was assessed with five items from the nine-item Networking Intensity scale (Wanberg et al., 2000). The one-factor structure of the scale showed by Wanberg et al. (2000) was confirmed in subsequent studies (i.e. Lambert, Eby & Reeves, 2006). Lambert, Eby

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3 & Reeves (2006) found that networking intensity was related to obtaining higher quality
4 information among white-collar job seekers. A sample item was: "In the last two weeks, how often
5 have you called or visited someone just to get more information about a certain job or place to
6 work?" These items were scored on a five-point frequency scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very*
7 *often*). The internal consistency of this scale was $\alpha = .85$.

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Perceived employability measure consisted in the Italian version of Berntson and Marklund (2007)'s five-item scale developed by Caricati et al. (2016). The original version of the scale performed well in previous studies (see Berntson, Näswall, & Sverke, 2010; de Cuyper et al., 2011). Recently, it showed a positive association with career management competencies in a sample of English business undergraduates (Jackson & Wilton, 2016). Caricati et al. (2016) confirmed the uni-dimensional structure and invariance of the Italian version of the scale, and found a significant correlation between this measure and the Italian national employment rate in a large sample of graduates. A sample item was: "My competence is sought after in the labour market." All items were scored on a five-point Likert scale with a response format ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was $\alpha = .74$.

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Political skill was assessed using the Interpersonal Influence scale taken from the Political Skill Inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). This scale included four items that assess the respondents' ability to adapt their behavior to various targets and contextual conditions in order to attain their goals. Lvina et al. (2012) showed the cross-cultural invariance of the scale, and Munyon et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis found that political skill was positively related to self-evaluations (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs), work attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction and organizational commitment), and negatively related to physiological strain. A sample item was: "I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others." Participants were invited to specify their level of agreement with each item, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .81$.

Strategy of Analysis

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3 The forms of invariance at both the measurement and structural levels were tested using
4 structural equation modeling (SEM). To this purpose, the AMOS 22 software package with
5 maximum likelihood estimation methods (since the observed variables of the models displayed
6 normal distributions) was employed (Arbuckle, 2013). To interpret the significant interaction effect,
7 the full sample ($N = 2.561$) was divided into two groups using the cut-off points of 1 *SD* above and
8 1 *SD* below the mean: group one included participants reporting low political skill ($M \leq 3.38$; $N =$
9 366) and group two included participants with a high level of political skill ($M \geq 4.71$; $N =$
10 514).

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13 Measurement and structural invariance testing in SEM entailed a sequence of hierarchical
14 steps that compared several parameters of the hypothesized model across groups, in order to
15 determine the specific levels of between-group differences (Kline, 2016). Accordingly, the
16 hypothesized moderation effect was tested using three forms of invariance: configural invariance,
17 factorial invariance, and direct-effect invariance. Each model included all items as indicators of the
18 corresponding latent factor. Invariance was tested by computing the difference in the χ^2 values
19 across a series of nested models imposing constraints on the parameters (Yuan & Bentler, 2004).
20 When the chi-square difference value ($\Delta\chi^2$) between nested models is statistically significant, it
21 indicates that the models are not equal across differentiated groups. In contrast, a non-significant
22 $\Delta\chi^2$ implies that all specified equality constraints are acceptable. In addition to the χ^2 goodness-of-fit
23 statistic, the models' fit was also evaluated through the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Comparative
24 Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). As a general rule,
25 an acceptable fit should report values greater than 0.90 for TLI and CFI, and equal to or lower than
26 0.08 for the RMSEA (Byrne, 2001).
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48 The prerequisite for testing invariance encompassed the estimation of the baseline model,
49 where no between-group constraints were imposed on the parameters, for each group separately.
50 This preliminary step was aimed at verifying that the model showed a satisfactory fit to the data for
51 both groups. Subsequently, configural invariance (Model 0) was tested in order to obtain a multi-
52 group representation of the baseline model. Specifically, this first step entailed the simultaneous
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3 estimation of the unconstrained model across the two levels of political skill. Subsequent models at
4 increasingly more stringent levels were compared against this multi-group model, which
5 represented a baseline model. Factorial invariance was tested using a model wherein all estimated
6 factor loadings were constrained to be equal across both groups (Model 1). This second step was
7 aimed at determining whether the factor loadings from the observed indicators onto the latent
8 constructs were the same across the two differing levels of political skill.

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16 As a final step of the moderation analysis, Model 2 was used to test for direct-effect
17 invariance. Accordingly, equality constraints were assigned to the direct relationship between the
18 latent constructs of career planning and job-seeking networking, in order to evaluate significant
19 differences in the strength of their association, according to the level of political skill.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

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Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistencies of the
variables under investigation. Pearson's r coefficients revealed that the associations between the
variables were significant and in the expected direction.

Model Testing

As reported in Table 2, the baseline model showed a good fit to the data, both when using
the entire sample, and within each separate group (i.e., low vs. high political skill); TLI and CFI
indices both exceeded 0.90 (Byrne, 2001), with a RMSEA < 0.08 . In the baseline model, all
indicators loaded significantly on their latent factors. In addition, career planning showed a positive
relationship with perceived employability ($\beta = 0.38, p = .000$), thus supporting *Hypothesis 1*.

The subsequent series of analyses used bootstrapping in order to assess the mediation effect
assumed in the study hypotheses. The indirect effect of career planning on employability through
job-seeking networking was significant as well ($p = .01$). More specifically, the bias-corrected
confidence interval (B-CCI) limits were equal to 0.019 and 0.037. These outcomes provided support
for *Hypothesis 2*.

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Table 3 shows that the configural model in which no equality constraints were imposed appeared to have a satisfactory fit to the data. Thus, the hypothesized model fitted well to the data, for participants with both low and high political skill levels. As previously stated, the invariance was assessed using the configural model as a criterion against which the subsequent models were compared.

The second row of Table 3 indicates constraining factor loadings to be equal; the factorial invariance model appeared to have a substantially comparable fit to the data ($\Delta\chi^2 = 17.77$, $\Delta df = 10$, $p = .059$). Therefore, we accepted the more parsimonious Model 1, which hypothesized the invariance of factor loading across the two groups.

Subsequently, the factorial invariance model (Model 1) was compared to the direct-effect invariance model (Model 2), in which the path coefficient from career planning to job-seeking networking was specified as invariant across the two groups. This approach ensured just one degree of freedom in the chi-square difference test, implying that a $\Delta\chi^2$ higher than 3.84 is statistically relevant at a significance level of $p = .05$. The direct-effect invariance model (Model 2) revealed a better fit to the data in comparison with the factorial invariance model (Model 1) ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.96$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p = .047$). Moreover, the coefficient that described the relationship between career planning and job-seeking networking was found to differ across the two groups of respondents. As shown in Table 4, the relationship was statistically significant for those respondents who reported a high level of political skill, yet career planning appeared to have no significant effect for graduates reporting a low level of political skill. These results suggested that the relationship between career planning and job-seeking networking was moderated by political skills, thus supporting *Hypothesis 3* as well.

Discussion

The current study aimed at exploring the association between cognitive and behavioral components of proactive career behaviors respectively: career planning and job-seeking networking on the one hand, and perceived employability on the other hand, within the theoretical perspective drawn by Hobfoll's COR theory. In doing so, this study defined employability as the individual

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3 opportunity to obtain employment on the labor market (Berntson & Marklund, 2007; Forrier &
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5 Sels, 2003). As for the direct relationship between career planning and perceived employability, in
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7 line with the notion of gain spiral formulated by COR theory, the individual resource of career
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9 planning boosted each graduate's chance to attain the additional resource represented by his/her
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11 possibility of being employed.
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14 Moreover, this study provides empirical evidence for career construction theory that
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16 considers career planning as a crucial indicator of the cognitive component of proactive career
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18 behaviors: that is, the insights that people evolve into their own career ambitions (De Vos et al.,
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20 2009). According to this perspective, career planning is deeply connected to job-seeking
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22 networking, since it constitutes the cognitive mechanism that allows people to arrange and put into
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24 practice specific career behaviors such as job-seeking networking. Our findings supported the
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26 hypothesized mediation role of job-seeking networking in the association between career planning
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28 and perceived employability, thus confirming the definition of job-seeking networking as a concrete
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30 activity that enhances the likelihood of attaining individual career goals. In other words, the specific
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32 type of networking aimed at supporting job searching corresponds to the behavioral component of
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34 proactive career behaviors (e.g., King, 2004; Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Mackenzie Davey, 2002).
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36 The results portray job-seeking networking as a specific strategy aimed at promoting graduates'
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38 career paths through the enhancement of their employment possibility and, in this sense, they
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40 expand previous research on the association between job-seeking networking on the one hand, and
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42 career success indicators on the other hand (Forret & Dougherty, 2004).
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47 Furthermore, this research represents an exploration of the circumstances under which
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49 career planning may boost job-seeking networking. In particular, we focused on the personal
50
51 resource of political skill as the ability to take advantage of interpersonal relationships in order to
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53 facilitate the attainment of personal career-related objectives (Ferris et al., 2005). Our results
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55 indicate that the association between career planning and job-seeking networking is stronger for
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57 graduates characterized by a high level of political skill. This outcome is consistent with the fact
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POLITICAL SKILL FOR PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY

1
2
3 that political skill allows people to develop networks and use them in order to achieve personal
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5 goals (Ferris et al., 2007). In addition, it confirms previous evidence that dispositional
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7 characteristics may influence the exploitation of a specific strategy such as job-seeking networking
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9 (Wanberg et al., 2000). Thus, the cognitive mechanism of career planning has been shown to
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11 promote a specific type of proactive career behavior—i.e., job-seeking networking—particularly
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13 when graduates are highly competent in choosing a suitable influence tactic for each specific
14
15 situation (political skill).
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18 All in all, the present findings represent a further step towards a deeper insight into the gain
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20 spiral cycle that links two personal resources as career planning and perceived employability, with a
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22 specific focus on job-seeking networking and political skill.
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Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

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26 There are several limitations to this study. First, despite the large sample size, all findings are
27
28 based on cross-sectional, single-source data. Although we think it is unlikely that this may have
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30 affected our results, more specific information about the stability and change of the model variables,
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32 and about cross-lagged (i.e., over time) relationships may be provided by multi-wave research
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34 designs (De Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, & Bongers, 2004; Taris & Kompier, 2003). Further,
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36 more evidence is needed to confirm the generalizability of our outcomes to other countries,
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38 especially as we might expect that the prevalence and impact of the moderating effect of political
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40 skill may differ across cultures (Lvina et al., 2012). Further research should consider the impact of
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42 internal and external labor market opportunities in order to clarify the added value of proactive
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44 career behaviors. Especially in cases of a serious lack of employment chances, high commitment, as
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46 well as suitable career planning and job-seeking networking behaviors may be not enough to
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48 maintain high levels of well-being and health (Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, & Nätti, 2005;
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50 Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002) at the beginning of graduate careers. It is of utmost importance
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52 to discover whether some other antecedents or moderators can make a difference to graduates in
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54 terms of being able to secure the available jobs.
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Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that graduates may differ significantly in their approach towards the labor market, as well as in the strategies adopted to both monitor and to manage their employability, which is a crucial resource in attaining high-quality employment, going beyond the critical situations (Vanhercke et al., 2015). Fortunately, higher education may contribute substantially to a graduate's perceived employability, and as a result, their overall employment outcomes (Thompson, Clark, Walker, & Whyatt, 2013). Current changes within the labor market have led to a new pattern of career progression that is less grounded in single organizations and specific job roles. Consequently, higher education institutions may support the employability of students and graduates by providing career-related courses or activities that are embedded in, and aligned with, the academic curricula. These courses or interventions should help graduates to be aware of their objectives, values, needs, abilities and labor market opportunities (career planning), and may guide them in developing proactive career behaviors such as job-seeking networking, in order to enhance their perceived employability.

The current study also points out that graduates need to possess a high level of political skill to translate their career planning into job search behaviors focused on networking. Consistent with previous findings, graduates are more likely to be employed if they are characterized by both hard and soft skills. Thus, both adaptive and social competences are needed in today's labor market, along with domain-specific knowledge and skills (Rodriguez, Patel, Bright, Gregory, & Gowing, 2002). Accordingly, our study encourages higher education institutions to pay close attention to the development of soft skills, especially interpersonal ones, as a specific facet of their curricula as well. Specifically, political skill can be substantially developed through training, role modeling, mentoring, and socialization (Ferris, Anthony, Kolodinsky, Gilmore, & Harvey, 2002). Professors should provide feedback to students on their academic performance, including their level of self-awareness in social circumstances, i.e. interactions during classes or oral exams, in order to

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facilitate the development of the ability to adapt and calibrate their behavior in various situations in order to obtain the desired responses from others.

For Peer Review

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Running Head: POLITICAL SKILL FOR PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY ENHANCEMENT

Tables

Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas (on the diagonal), and Correlations Among all Study Variables ($N = 2.561$).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>			
			1	2	3	4
1. Career planning	3.31	.89	.81			
2. Job-seeking networking	2.80	.91	.21***	.85		
3. Self-perceived employability	2.85	.73	.35***	.22***	.74	
4. Political skill	4.03	.66	.24***	.29***	.24***	.81

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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Table 2.

Goodness-of-fit Indices

Baseline model	χ^2	df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Full sample ($N = 2,561$)	856.69***	62	.913	.931	.071
Low political skill ($N = 366$)	207.21***	62	.877	.902	.080
High political skill ($N = 514$)	227.75***	62	.909	.928	.072

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; χ^2 = Chi-square, df = degrees of freedom; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

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Table 3.

Invariance Tests across Political Skill Levels

Model	χ^2	df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	Model comparison	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf
Model 0. Configural invariance (no constraints)	434.98***	124	.897	.918	.053	–	–	–
Model 1. Factorial invariance (equivalent factor loadings)	452.75***	134	.902	.916	.052	M1 - M0	17.77	10
Model 2. Direct-effect invariance (equivalent relationship between career planning and job-seeking networking in both groups)	456.70***	135	.902	.915	.052	M2 - M1	3.96*	1

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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Table 4.

Standardized Regression Coefficients from Career Planning to Job-Seeking Networking

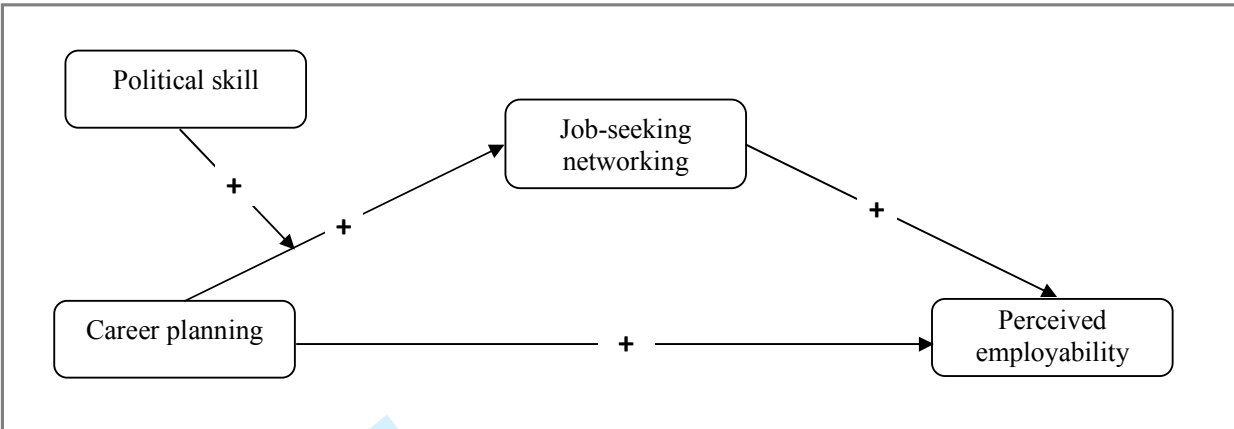
Career planning → Job-seeking networking	β
Full sample ($N = 2,561$)	.249**
Low level of political skill ($N = 366$)	.122
High level of political skill ($N = 514$)	.273**

Note: ** $p < .01$

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Figure



Note: The model predicts that career planning is positively related to job-seeking networking, which will subsequently increase perceived employability. Moreover, political skill is expected to foster the relationship between career planning and job-seeking networking, such that the effect is stronger for graduates reporting a high level of political skill.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the moderated mediation relationship

Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas (on the diagonal), and Correlations Among all Study Variables ($N = 2,561$).

	<i>r</i>					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Career planning	3.31	.89	.81			
2. Job-seeking networking	2.80	.91	.21***	.85		
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Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2.

Goodness-of-fit Indices

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Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; χ^2 = Chi-square, df = degrees of freedom; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

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Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

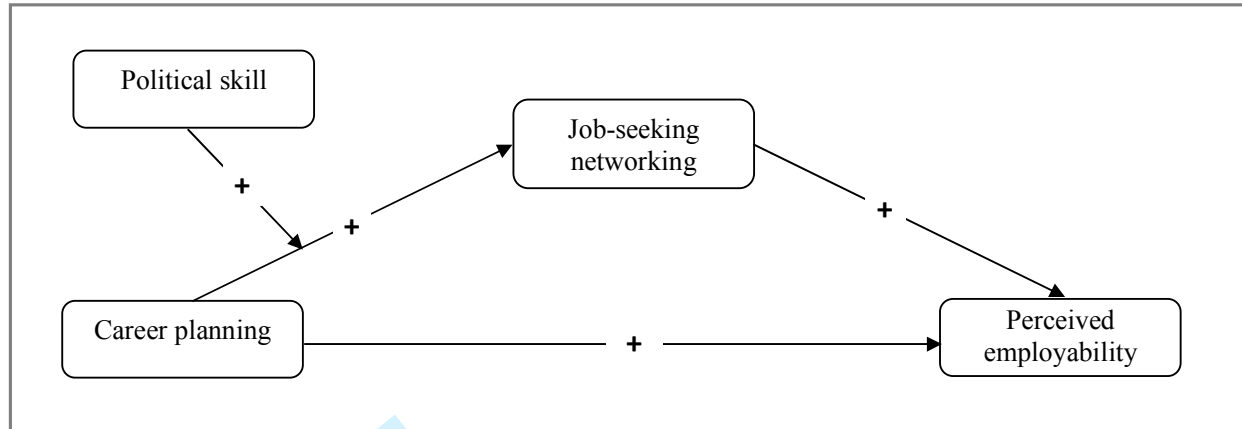
Table 4.

Standardized Regression Coefficients from Career Planning to Job-Seeking Networking

Career planning → Job-seeking networking	β
Full sample ($N = 2,561$)	.249**
Low level of political skill ($N = 366$)	.122
High level of political skill ($N = 514$)	.273**

Note: ** $p < .01$

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Note: The model predicts that career planning is positively related to job-seeking networking, which will subsequently increase perceived employability. Moreover, political skill is expected to foster the relationship between career planning and job-seeking networking, such that the effect is stronger for graduates reporting a high level of political skill.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the moderated mediation relationship

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