Impact of Protean Career Attitudes on Career Outcomes via Job Crafting Behavior: A Serial Mediation Model

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study proposes that the individuals with protean career attitudes employ best work practices through job crafting behaviors and attain desired career outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of protean career attitudes on career outcomes, i.e., Perceived Employability (PE) and Subjective Career Success (SCS) through job crafting behavior.

Methodology: The study has a quantitative, deductive research design that mainly focuses on the testation of the hypotheses. This study has been conducted on full-time faculty members of public and private sector Universities of Pakistan

Findings: The data from the employees working in the universities of Pakistan revealed that PCA has a positive impact on individual career outcomes. It was also found that there exists a pathway of serial mediation from job crafting towards perceived employability to achieve career success. The individuals who craft their jobs are more likely to enhance their employability, ultimately leading to career success. The study highlights the importance of PCA and Job Crafting behaviors, yet un-explored phenomena, for the employees for career development.

Implications: Employees who want to progress and develop their careers should actively engage in task crafting behavior in task crafting, relational crafting, or cognitive crafting.

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Introduction

Globalization has not only brought rapid changes in the new world order, but it also has made the traditionally employees' careers less promising by reducing job security and increasing unpredictability. Due to this labor market shift, work arrangements demand that more personally responsible workers develop their respective careers (Guan et al., 2019; Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020). The labor market shift has also affected the academic career models, which have also been transformed from a collegial (professional) model to a more flexible managerial model. Universities have been commercialized with a more customer-focused orientation. Since then, the world of academe has been under the scrutiny of various researchers. Moreover, Due to the emerging unemployment rate from 5.1% to 5.7% (Bureau of Statistics, 2020), unemployment has become a severe concern in Pakistan. Despite producing many graduates yearly around but getting a desirable job is still a problem.

Moreover, existing employees are also are struggling to get up-gradation and to make their career successful. This is a very alarming situation Govt. seems to fail to cope up with this problematic issue. Likewise, these paradigm shifts have caused several career problems for academicians as well. HEC has set different standards and checks to evaluate the performance of the faculty members, and employees have to fulfill specific criteria including research publications, availing of research grants, number of PhDs or MPhil produced, etc., to meet set standards. It has become challenging to secure good jobs, but it has also become challenging to sustain employability. Therefore, there is a dire need to determine how employees can make their careers successful by enhancing their employability.

In this situation, there is pertinent to examine the modern career attitudes, i.e., characterized by the self-directed career with values-driven attitude and boundaryless career attitudes with the specific relationship with the career outcomes, i.e., employability and career success (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019). These proactive career attitudes have also gained importance and are relevant to positive career growth (Wiernik & Wille, 2017). These two career concepts, i.e., protean career by Hall (1996) and the boundaryless career by Arthur and Rousseau (1996), comprehended the paths through which individuals may attain career outcomes.

Protean employees are self-directed and prefer their personal goals and values (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). There exist extent research related to proactive career attitudes and work-related outcomes like commitment, passion for work, and satisfaction (e.g., Redondo et al., 2019; Gulyani & Bhatnagar, 2017), but according to Wiernik and Kostal (2019), there is a very scarce study related to their relationship with the individual career outcomes. There are very limited studies related to the impact of PCA on individual career outcomes like employability, objective career success, and subjective career success. Their results are also not conclusive within the context of Pakistan. So, there is still a grey area in which further investigating is needed to determine how PCA may help achieve career success. So. The study aims to investigate the impact of PCA on individual career outcomes, i.e., employability and subjective career success.

The study will also find how individuals may achieve this success by adopting protean career attitudes. To find the solution to this question, the study inculcates the job crafting behavior as a mediator through which individuals may achieve desired career outcomes. To examine this process, the study includes two theories, i.e., job crafting theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and career motivation theory (London, 1983), that might be helpful to understand the reason of how the individual may achieve their respective career outcomes by having protean career attitudes. Many studies highlight that job crafting behavior and motivation theory are certain positive factors that affect the employees' decision-making and behavior at work (Petrou et al., 2018). Still, there is scarce research that relates them with the literature of proactive career

attitudes. London's (1983) theory provides insight into how a person's motivation affects achieving his desired outcomes in his career. Still, it does not offer practical guidelines to determine which behaviors must demonstrate to achieve said success. Job crafting fills this gap to propose that these are the job crafting behaviors through which employees can make themselves competitive and resourceful to achieve their career outcomes (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Based on these theories, the study proposed that job crafting behavior may be a strategy and a link between PCA and successful career outcomes. So, the purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of PCA on individual career outcomes through job crafting behavior.

PCA, Employability, and Subjective Career Success

PCA refers to the career mindset of the employees, which helps understand the employees' careers and working styles (Baruch, 2014). Generally, individuals with a PCA mindset do not depend on others, i.e., organization, for their career but rather on their own. According to the change, they remain self-directed, adaptable, and flexible according to the need (Hall, 2004). Similarly, PCA refers to a self-directed approach, and employees manage their respective careers according to their values (Hall et al., 2018). So, the PCA has two dimensions: self-directed and personal values-driven. Based on these two dimensions, individuals plan their career paths on their own and have their own unique set of career successes (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

Career success posits "positive psychological or Work-related achievements one accumulates as a result of his or her work experiences" (Judge et al. 1995, p. 03). Career Success has two dimensions: objective career success (OCS) and subjective Career success. OCS means tangible success in nature, measurable directly by indicators like salary, promotion, upward job enhancement, and increments (Judge et al., 1995). SCS is the employees' perception and personal evaluation regarding their career regarding career outcomes like satisfaction, work-life balance, perceived success (Shockley et al., 2016). Hence, it depends more on the individual career perception and personal goals or success vital for them (Seibert et al., 2001).

Several studies, especially in the meta-analysis based on 45,288 employees from different professions, it is found that PCA link with the objective career success indicators like promotion, salary, increments is not substantive (Wiernik and Kostal, 2019), and it is also supported that the employees with PCA pay great focus to your subjective career success (Stauffer et al., 2019). The study performed by Kundi et al. (2020) has found a significant positive impact of PCA on career satisfaction. Therefore, based on this literature, the study has proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive impact of PCA subjective career success

Employability is vital for surviving in today's competitive work environment. Perceived employability refers to the employees' perception regarding their chances to get another same or better job inside or outside the organization (Cuyper & Witte, 2008). Further, employability has also transformed into two-dimension: objective and subjective employability (Emmerik et al., 2012). Employability plays a vital role in individuals' career development (Thijssen et al., 2008) and refers explicitly to the new career attitudes, i.e., PCA and BCA. Zafar and Mat (2012a) found a positive association between PCA and employability. Employability as the mediator of PCA has also been tested in the study. Studies have also found the direct relationship of PCA with employability (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Volmer & Spurk, 2011, Sultana, 2020), but most literature is closely related to general employability. Van den Broeck et al. (2014) has differentiated employability into internal, external, and quantitative, and qualitative employability. Based on the relationship found in the literature of PCA with generalized employability, the study has proposed the following;

H2: There is a positive impact of PCA on the Perceived employability of the employees PCA & Job Crafting

The concept of the PCA careerists suggests that such individuals are more often involved in handling their respective career paths (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019) by engaging themselves in proactive career behaviors, i.e., networking, planning, and chasing the opportunities (Li et al., 2019). According to Kostal and Wiernik (2017), Proactive individuals recognize the opportunities to excel and towards their career desires. Moreover, such employees are more interested in new work-related experiences and intend to work differently to develop new competencies through proactive work behaviors (Abessolo et al., 2017; Guan et al., 2019; Lo Presti et al., 2018). Job crafting is also a proactive work behavior. Job crafting theory (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) also posits that the employees, involved in job crafting behavior, change their task boundaries, i.e., Task Crafting, develop new relationships at work, i.e., relational crafting, and change their perceptions related to the work, i.e., cognitive crafting. Different studies have suggested the various antecedents of job crafting by the different researchers (e.g., Butuceanu et al., 2020; Petrou et al., 2018). Similarly, the more proactive individuals in their career paths incline to engage in job crafting behavior at the workplace (Zhang & Parker, 2019). Kundi et al. (2020) also tested and found a significant relationship between PCA and job crafting behavior. Based on these studies from the literature, the study proposed the following;

H3: There is a positive impact of PCA on Job Crafting

Job Crafting and Career Outcomes

Kim and Beehr (2018) conducted a longitudinal study in the USA. They concluded that employees perceived positive work-related attitudes and achieved career-related outcomes through pro-active work behaviors, i.e., job crafting. Employees employ job crafting behavior, asserts control over their jobs, project a positive image at their workplace and accomplish career outcomes (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). According to Kim and Beehr (2017), job crafting significantly impacts employees' career success. Moreover, different studies posit that proactive behaviors are significantly associated with positive career outcomes (e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Cenciotti et al., 2017; Kundi et al., 2020). Based on this literature, this study also proposed the following hypothesis;

H4: Job crafting has a positive impact on Employability

H5: Job crafting has a positive impact on Subjective Career Success

Job Crafting as a Mediator

From the past studies, it is asserted that there exists a link between PCA and individual career outcomes, i.e., satisfaction, success, commitment, engagement (e.g., Li et al., 2019; Lo Presti et al., 2018; Ngo & Hui, 2018; Kundi et al., 2020). However, there is still an un-clarity regarding the mechanism through which such outcomes have been achieved by practicing PCA. London's (1983) theory of motivation posits the importance of positive encouragement to achieve desired results through certain behaviors, but those behaviors are not cleared yet. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by introducing job crafting behavior as a mediator between PCA and career outcomes. The study proposed that job crafting behavior is the proactive career behavior through which individuals achieve career outcomes. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in the study;

H6: There is an impact of PCA on career outcomes a) Employability b) Subjective career Success through job crafting behavior.

Although in the studies, there is a neglect of the indirect relationship of the PCA on Subjective career success through job crafting and perceived employability. There are few studies in which indirect serial mediation of career commitment and job crafting is tested (Kundi et al., 2020), but still, there is a scarcity of research on this area. To address this gap, the study has proposed a serial mediation of job crafting and employability between PCA and Subjective Career Success.

H7: PCA is positively related to subjective career success through job crafting and employability

Methodology

The study has a quantitative, deductive research design that mainly focuses on the testation of the hypotheses. In quantitative research design, it is a survey study, and the data is collected through questionnaires. This is a cross-sectional study as the data is collected at one single time only. This study has been conducted on full-time faculty members of public and private sector Universities of Pakistan. The unit of analysis is the individual in the study.

Total Universities of Pakistan (HEC Approved) =177						
First Stratification (Province Wise)						
	Punjab	Sindh	KPK	Baluchistan	Federal	Total
Universities	61	53	35	08	20	177
Second Level Stratification (Sector Wise)						
	Punjab	Sindh	KPK	Baluchistan	Federal	
Public	35	23	25	7	14	104
Private	26	30	10	1	06	73
Proportionate 10% of universities from each stratum						
Public	4	2	2	1	2	11
Private	3	3	1	---	1	8
	7	5	3	1	3	19

Proportionate Stratified sampling has been used to select the sample, and provinces based on five strata have been made, i.e., Punjab, KPK, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Islamabad. In each province, on the proportion of 10% universities have been selected from all the provinces. According to the HEC, there are 177 universities, of which 104 are public, and 73 universities are private (list attached). The selected number of universities have been chosen from the capital of each province.

A total of 600 questionnaires have been distributed among the permanent faculty members of the universities, and 490 have been returned. Among 490 questionnaires, some questionnaires have been dropped due to missing data, and finally, 435 questionnaires' data has been used to run the analysis. The response rate was 72%.

Instruments and Measurement

All variables will be measured by using modify/adopted scales originally developed by the following researchers. All the items have been measured on 05 points Likert scale.

Protean Career Attitude

PCA is measured by using Porter et al., (2016) scale with six items. "(E.g., In general, I independently manage my career)."

Boundaryless Career Attitude

BCA would be measured by using Porter et al., (2016) scale with six items "(e.g., I enjoy working with people outside of my organization)."

Job Crafting

In this study, Job crafting uses a Multi-dimensional Construct, i.e., Relational, Cognitive, and Task. Job Crafting is measured by using Slep & Vella-Brodrick, (2013) 5 points Likert scale. This scale has overall 15 items "(e.g., I choose to take on additional tasks at work)."

Subjective Career Success

SCS is measured by Pan & Zhou (2015) scale with three dimensions, i.e., external compensation (EC), Intrinsic fulfillment (IF), and work-life balance (WLB). Overall, the scale has ten items, 04 items for IF, and the rest have 03 items. "(e.g., I like my job and I am happy during my work)."

Employability

De Cuyper and De Witte (2008) perceived employability scale with 04 dimensions and 04 items for each dimension have been used to measure the perceived employability in the study "I can change jobs easily if I wanted)."

Control Variables

The study has taken demographic variables, i.e., Age, University type, Organizational size, gender, organization age, as control variables linked to the Individual career Outcomes.

Marker Variable

The study has also inculcated the Fear of Covid-19 with 06 items as a marker variable. This variable is not related to the other variables in the model, and biases have been tackled by this common method. There is no CMV issue present in the data.

Results & Analysis

Data is analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM) using Smart-PLS 3.0. Both measurement and structural models have been run as suggested by the literature (Chin, 2000; Henseler et al., 2009; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). First of all, a measurement model has been run to check the reliability, validity, effect sizes, and R square of the model; after that structural model has been run to test the hypotheses.

Demographics

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	260	59
	Female	175	41
	Total	435	100
Marital Status	Single	122	28
	Married	313	72
	Total	435	100
Qualification	MPhil	144	33
	PhD	226	52
	Post PhD	65	15
		435	100
Age	21-30	148	34
	31-40	165	38
	41-50	83	19
	above 50	39	9
		435	100
Overall Exp	1 to 5	139	32
	6 to 10	144	33
	11 to 15	70	16
	16 to 20	44	10
	above 20	39	9
		435	100
Qualification	Lecturer	165	38
	Assistant Professor	161	37
	Associate Professor	65	15

	Professor	44	10 100
University	Public	11	58
	Private	8	42
		19	100

Measurement Model (MM)

In the MM, reliability, along with the validity of the constructs, has been measured. Loadings of all the items are within the threshold level, the value of more than 0.7 (Henseler et al., 2009) with no < 0.4 (Churchill, 1979) is recommended. Some items have been deleted from the model due to low factor loading. The table shows that all the items loadings are between the ranges from 0.591 to 0.8. After that, inter-consistency reliability was measured by both the Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability. The minimum acceptable value is 0.6 (Cronbach, 1951) and 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), respectively, and all matters of constructs are above the threshold value (i.e., >0.7).

Convergent validity has been measured by the AVE values, more significant than the threshold level, i.e., >0.5. The table shows the value of AVE above 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which means that the constructs do not have any convergent validity issue. Discriminant validity has been tested by the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion as well as with the cross-loadings of the indicators (Sarstedt et al., 2014). The square root of AVE values must be greater than the values in the diagonal, and the same has been reported in the table. As shown in the table, cross-loadings show that item-level discriminant validity has been established in the model. Every item showed higher loadings on their constructs than other constructs. HTMT criteria (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016) have also established the discriminant validity as all the correlations in the model are significantly less than threshold criteria, i.e., <1.

Measurement Models

Latent Variable	Indicators	Loadings	Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Discriminant Validity?
PCA	SD1	0.773	0.800	0.861	0.559	Yes
	SD3	0.812				
	SD4	0.847				
	VD2	0.591				
	VD3	0.719				
JC	CC3	0.702	0.845	1.845	2.845	Yes
	CC4	0.788				
	CC5	0.718				
	RC1	0.761				
	RC2	0.796				
	RC3	0.736				
SCS	IF1	0.796	0.834	0.883	0.601	Yes
	IF2	0.719				
	IF3	0.802				
	WLB2	0.758				
	WLB3	0.799				

Employability	ILM1	0.829	0.863	0.907	0.709	Yes
	ILM2	0.896				
	ILM3	0.847				
	ILM4	0.794				

Fornell & Larcker Criterion

	Employ	JC	PCA	SCS
Employ	0.842			
JC	0.63	0.751		
PCA	0.666	0.628	0.747	
SCS	0.665	0.686	0.694	0.775

Cross Loadings

	Employ	JC	PCA	SCS
ILM2	0.896	0.524	0.568	0.594
ILM3	0.847	0.443	0.491	0.459
ILM1	0.829	0.603	0.656	0.629
ILM4	0.794	0.527	0.501	0.529
CC4	0.524	0.788	0.484	0.524
RC1	0.517	0.761	0.49	0.569
CC3	0.478	0.702	0.411	0.397
RC3	0.464	0.736	0.465	0.497
RC2	0.449	0.796	0.468	0.532
CC5	0.405	0.718	0.503	0.555
SD1	0.493	0.511	0.764	0.536
SD3	0.615	0.597	0.814	0.603
SD4	0.486	0.468	0.843	0.559
VD3	0.511	0.411	0.736	0.552
VD2	0.339	0.298	0.544	0.262
IF1	0.588	0.531	0.552	0.796
IF2	0.513	0.499	0.444	0.719
IF3	0.48	0.536	0.637	0.802
WLB2	0.449	0.576	0.497	0.758
WLB3	0.547	0.52	0.549	0.799

HTMT

	Employ	JC	PCA
Employ			
JC	0.728		
PCA	0.781	0.744	
SCS	0.774	0.814	0.822

Outer VIF Values

	VIF
CC3	2.060
CC4	2.347
CC5	1.560
ET2	1.657

ET4	1.661
IF1	2.069
IF2	1.893
IF3	1.812
ILM1	1.987
ILM2	2.720
ILM3	2.222
ILM4	1.797
INFO1	2.413
INFO2	2.178
RC1	1.876
RC2	2.330
RC3	1.867
SD1	1.709
SD3	1.850
SD4	2.219
SOC4	1.915
SOC5	2.266
VD2	1.446
VD3	1.749
WLB2	1.947
WLB3	2.133

f Square

	Employ	JC	PCA	SCS
Employ				0.071
JC	0.659			0.147
PCA		0.65		0.135
SCS				

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employ	0.519	0.516
JC	0.393	0.392
SCS	0.62	0.613

Measurement Model

Structural Model (SM)

After the sound MM, the next step SM has been statistically verified, and the hypothesis is tested. The bootstrapping procedure with 5000 sub-samples (Ringle, Wende,&Becker, 2015) was performed in Smart PLS-SEM 3.0. The results of the bootstrapping are mentioned in the table below. According to the result, all direct hypothesis has been supported at 1% significant level. The variations explained by the perceived employability, J.C., and SCS are 51%, 39%, and 62%, respectively.

The Predictive Relevance Q^2

In addition, with the predictive accuracy of the model explained by the R^2 . Predictive relevance Q^2 has also been calculated in the model. The threshold value of Q^2 is greater than the ZERO (Hair, Hult, Ringle,&Sarstedt, 2017). In the model, Q^2 of all the constructs is above the minimum threshold. The f^2 of all the exogenous constructs has also been calculated to assert the specific effect of each construct on the relevant endogenous construct (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014). The values of "0.02", "0.15", and "0.35" indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively. J.C. and PCA have a moderate effect size on Subjective Career Success, and employability has a weak effect size, i.e., 0.07. The rest of all have substantial effect sizes, as detail shown in the table.

Hypothesis-Testing (Direct Effects)

Hypotheses	Paths	Path Coefficients	T Statistics	P Values
H1	PCA → SCS	0.329*	6.413	0
H2	PCA → Employ	0.448*	11.073	0
H3	PCA → JC	0.627*	20.864	0
H4	JC → Employ	0.349*	8.928	0
H5	JC → SCS	0.317*	6.403	0
Not Hypothesized				
	Age → SCS	-0.017	0.561	0.575
	Gender → SCS	0.059	1.96	0.05
	Org. Age → SCS	-0.033	1.145	0.252
	Org. Size → SCS	-0.045	1.512	0.131
	University_ → SCS	-0.051	1.597	0.11

Note: **, * indicate at 1%, 5%, respectively.

Mediation Testing

The mediation has been tested through bootstrapping with 5000 sub-samples in PLS-SEM 3.0 as

advocated by Hair et al. (2017) and Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) despite using Baron and Kenny (1986) approach for mediation testation. Hair et al. (2017) proposed two different types of Non-mediation and three different categories of mediation as offered in the table;

No Direct, NO Indirect Effect	No-effect No Mediation
Direct only, No Indirect	Direct Only Non- Mediation
“Direct and Indirect Both Significant in the same direction”	Complementary Partial Mediation
“Direct and Indirect effects are both significant but in the opposite direction.”	Competitive partial mediation
“The only indirect effect is significant.”	Full Mediation

The mediation result table showed that H6a, H6b, and H7 all are statistically significant, as well as direct path from PCA -> SCS is also significant. That means there exists a complementary partial mediation, as well as Complementary serial mediation, also exist in the model.

Mediation Results

Hypotheses	Paths	Coefficients	T Statistics	Total Effect	
				Coefficients	P value
H6a	PCA -> JC -> Employ	0.219	7.886	0.349	0
H6b	PCA -> JC -> SCS	0.199	6.067	0.684	0
H7	PCA -> JC -> Employ -> SCS	0.051	4.126	0.684	0

Note: **, * indicate at 1%, 5%, respectively.

Q²

	Redundancy	Communality
EMPLOY	0.356	0.507
JC	0.218	0.388
PCA_	-	0.351
SCS	0.365	0.401

Structural Model

Discussion and Conclusion

The PLS-SEM analysis confirms the relationships of proactive career success with job crafting, employability, and subjective career success. Although the individual career success area has gained significant attention in research (Spurk et al., 2019), a gap still exists in the process

induced by the PCA to achieve work-related outcomes (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019). The study's main objective was to understand the process of achieving career success through proactive career behaviors; therefore, job crafting behavior has been considered. The current findings are similar to the conclusions of the research conducted in different countries and contexts (e.g., Kundi et al., 2020; Stauffer et al., 2019; Lo Presti et al., 2018). These studies also found the significant impact of PCA on Subjective career success, job crafting, commitment, and serial mediation between PCA and subjective career success but through career commitment. In this study, the PCA relationship is statistically supported through serial mediation from Job crafting and employability to subjective career success.

The role of job crafting is pivotal while depicting career success (Dubbelt et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020), and the importance of job crafting for university faculty members is well established. Employees who want to progress and develop their careers should actively engage in task crafting behavior in task crafting, relational crafting, or cognitive crafting.

The study has contributed to the literature as it provides a mechanism of job crafting as an effective strategy to attain career goals in life. The findings of the study contribute to the literature on job crafting and career-related outcomes. Further, provide insight to the researchers to unexplored areas of the related kind. The study provides deeper insight regarding understanding the role of PCA mindset employees while developing careers. Finally, the study has extended the career understanding by directly examining the PCA to Career success, job crafting, and career motivation theory. The study empirically tested that why and how job crafting plays an essential role in individual career development.

Limitation and Future Direction

The study has several limitations in that it has used a uni-dimension construct of job crafting. In the future, job crafting dimensions can be tested separately to check their effect on career outcomes. Secondly, data has been collected at one time. In the future, longitudinal studies can be conducted to see the impact of practicing PCA through job crafting on the employees' career success, and it will become a sustainable career.

Career shocks have not been included in the study to find out their impacts on individual career life. In the future, career shocks can be used as a moderator to predict career success. The study has conducted on University employees in Pakistan in the future. The study can also be conducted on other services sectors to check how this model works in those particular sectors. The role of gender has not been tested in the study, as females comparatively with men, have less freedom, and the model may work differently in males and females separately. In the future, a multi-group model may be tested to check gender role in the success.

Conclusion

It is concluded that employees' protean career attitudes tend to achieve their respective career success and enhance their employability by practicing the job crafting behavior at their workplace.

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