

Belgin Okay–Somerville and Dora Scholarios Career Self–Management, Perceived Employability, and Employment Success during University–to–Work Transitions: A Social Cognitive Career Theory Perspective

Adopting concepts from Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), the paper examines the role of various career self–management (CSM) behaviors in influencing job search self–efficacy and employment success for graduates during university–to–work transitions. It also considers barriers to employment conceptualized in perceived internal and external employability. Hypotheses were tested using data from UK graduates. The results show that most CSM measures are indirectly related to employment success. Moreover, one CSM behavior, networking, was more beneficial with respect to likelihood of job offers or being in employment for those who held poor perceived internal employability. The findings have theoretical and practical implications for the role of CSM on employment success during university–to–work transitions.

Key words: career self–management, job search self–efficacy, employment success, university–to–work transitions, Social Cognitive Career Theory

University graduates face uncertain labor markets. Across developed economies, a substantial proportion of graduates are in jobs for which they are overqualified [Barcena–Martin, Budria, and Moro–Egido, 2012; Frenette, 2004]. This is true at least at the start of their careers. There are also concerns regarding graduate unemployment. This is largely a result of the decline in high–skill jobs relative to the increasing supply of new graduates [Brown, Lauder, and Ashton, 2011]. Although graduate unemployment is less of a concern than in the years immediately following the 2008 financial crisis, the employment rate of recent graduates in some EU countries remains problematic. For example, in 2014 rates were 45 and 44 percent in Italy and Greece, respectively, compared to the EU average of 76 percent [Euro-

stat, 2015]. Moreover, cohorts who graduate in recessionary economies have been shown to experience persistent, negative labor market consequences in terms of being stuck in lower-level occupations and accessing future career opportunities [Kahn, 2010; Oreopoulos, von Wachter, and Heisz, 2012].

In this employment context, it seems appropriate to question contemporary career theory, which places individual agency at the heart of successful career development. Through career self-management (CSM), it is argued, individuals gain awareness of themselves and the labor market. This helps them develop a relatively realistic view of their own skills, abilities, and ambitions as well as opportunities that are available in the environment [de Vos, Dewettinck and Buyens, 2009]. Such an understanding of the realities of labor markets is argued to be crucial in successful university-to-work transitions [Wendlandt and Rochlen, 2008]. For inexperienced new entrants into the labor market, work experience, career exploration, guidance, and networking are proactive behaviors associated with CSM, which are thought to be important for positioning them in the competition for high-skill jobs. Career exploration is especially important in understanding the work environment and career options as well as shaping career self-assessments and job choices, and thereby overcoming career indecision [Van Vianen, Pater, and Preenen, 2009].

Career expectations are likely to be lowered in recessionary job markets [de Hauw and de Vos, 2010]. Available career options are fewer or less visible and what is initially viewed as the “ideal” job, in terms of pay, opportunities, and other characteristics, is often unattainable. What is the contemporary relevance, then, of research that has shown unequivocally a positive link between proactive career behaviors and career progression? For example, CSM has been shown to improve the individual’s own perceived employability [Barber, 1998; Eby, Butts, and Lockwood, 2003] and actual employment outcomes, such as number of interviews, job offers, and job characteristics [Zikic and Saks, 2009]. If these outcomes become harder to attain because of structural economic conditions, what role does CSM play in guiding new entrants through this labor market?

In this paper, we consider how and for whom CSM enhances employment outcomes amongst university graduates following the 2008 economic recession. We approach this by adopting concepts from Social Cognitive Career Theory [SCCT; Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994, 2000; Lent and Brown, 2013]. CSM comprises crucial career-relevant learning experiences that foster job search self-efficacy [JSSE], which has been linked to career adaptability, one dimension of which is career confidence [Savickas, 2005]. We test a model that relates CSM, JSSE, and employment success, while also taking into account perceived opportunity structures in the labor market. We aim to understand further how CSM may operate alongside perceived

career barriers, in particular with respect to how they may influence JSSE. It is suggested that subjective experience of such barriers may play either an enabling or constraining role in career transitions [Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, and Roper, 2012]. We, therefore, consider the moderating effects of perceived contextual barriers to employability on the relationships between CSM, JSSE, and employment outcomes.

The paper begins with a review of research linking CSM to JSSE and employment success, highlighting the role of Social Cognitive Career Theory in understanding successful transitions. We then argue for consideration of context in understanding the job search process of new graduate entrants and propose a moderated-mediation model explaining the effect of CSM on employment outcomes (see Figure No. 1). Following the presentation of a study of two UK cohorts of graduates, we consider the findings with respect to the role of CSM for new entrants who hold varying perceptions of employability and the practical implications for guiding job search processes during university-to-work transitions.

New Entrant Career Self-Management and Job Search Self-Efficacy

Career exploration refers to “a complex psychological process, which sustains the search of information as well as hypothesis testing about self and environment in order to attain career goals” [Taveira and Moreno, 2003, p. 190]. Being one of the markers of career adaptability [Savickas, 1997] for inexperienced entrants into the labor market, career exploration will be especially important in understanding the work environment and career options as well as in shaping the entrant’s own career self-assessments and job choices, leading to the overcoming career indecision [Fan, Cheung, Leong, and Cheung, 2012; Porfeli and Skorikov, 2010; Shea, Ma, Yeh, Lee, and Pituc, 2009].

Career exploration comprises two types of processes—environmental exploration (i.e. proactive gathering of information about jobs, organizations, and the wider labor market to inform choices) and self-exploration (i.e. reflection on one’s preferences and experiences in order to identify capacities for different types of work environments) [Stumpf, Collareli, and Hartman, 1983]. In turn, career exploration helps individuals prepare more effectively for job search, although the mechanisms through which environmental exploration and self-exploration have an influence may differ. Environmental exploration, but not self-exploration, is found to relate to re-employment quality six months following job loss [Zikic and Klehe, 2006]. Environmental exploration also is related to job search intensity (i.e. the frequency of behaviors likely to lead to interviews and job offers, such as making multiple

applications), which, in turn, explains the positive effects of environmental exploration on initial compensation in graduating students' first jobs [Werbel, 2000]. Thus, at least environmental exploration seems to have a direct effect on job search intensity and employment outcomes.

The process of self-exploration for new entrants may hold special significance as their job search occurs when they are still in the process of gathering information about their own preferences as well as developing career goals and strategies. Self-exploration also highlights the self-regulatory and self-reflective processes theorized as underlying such career activities, whereby the individual's cognitive processes and behavior interact with the environment through a reciprocal process to shape goals and strategies for implementing these goals [Bandura, 1986; Karoly, 1993].

Building on Bandura's [1986, 1997] Social Cognitive Theory, understanding career behavior has progressed by applying Social Cognitive Career Theory [SCCT; Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994; Lent et al., 2000]. SCCT assigns a pivotal role to self-efficacy beliefs (i.e. people's confidence in their abilities), which are shaped by career-related learning experiences. In Bandura's [1986, 1997] original model these sources of self-efficacy beliefs are more explicitly referred to as mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and affective states. In the context of the present study, we focus on graduates' confidence in securing employment through job search, i.e. job search self-efficacy beliefs. All sources of self-efficacy, but one (affective states), may be mapped onto the CSM behaviors frequently discussed in literature.

Mastery experiences (personal attainments) are the strongest determinants of self-efficacy beliefs [Bandura, 1986]. For new entrants into the labor market, mastery experiences in job search and securing employment are likely to be limited to work experience during university education. Work experience is argued to be beneficial for job search and employment success. More specifically, such experience within the context of higher education enhances (i) career identity and adaptability by providing a realistic preview of working life and its requirements, (ii) human capital via hands on work experience, and (iii) social capital via professional network development [Wilton, 2012].

Particularly when individuals lack experience, observing other similar individuals perform the tasks (vicarious learning) and their verbal persuasion of one's abilities (social persuasion) also serve to strengthen self-efficacy beliefs [Bandura, 1986]. For new entrants to the graduate labor market, this highlights the importance of career exploration, guidance seeking, and networking to vicariously find out and be persuaded about their own job search capabilities and employment prospects. Ca-

reer exploration has thus been shown to constitute part of the learning experiences relevant to the formation of JSSE beliefs [Zikic and Saks, 2009] and to facilitate better person-occupation/job fit [Zikic and Klehe, 2006; Werbel, 2000]. Similarly, career-related guidance seeking can be argued to foster career adaptability. High guidance seeking individuals have been observed to engage in more career compromises, to experience less career-related distress, and more positive career-related outcomes [Creed and Hughes, 2013].

Networking can be defined as “building, maintaining and using social relationships” [Wolff and Moser, 2009, p. 196]. In the context of university-to-work transitions, this involves contacting friends and acquaintances with the aim of receiving career-related advice and job leads [Wanberg, Kanfer, and Banas, 2000]. Networking positively impacts job search and employment success as it affects the flow of job/vacancy relevant information and enhances social capital [Hoye, van Hoof, and Lievens, 2009; de Janasz and Forret, 2007]. In fact, networking was cited among the most important methods used by graduates in the UK in finding the first job after graduation [Brennan and Shah, 2003].

Finally, Bandura [1986] argues that psychological affective states influence how the information is perceived and interpreted, and therefore partly inform people’s judgments of their own capabilities. CSM literature often focuses on certain career relevant behaviors, such as those discussed above. However, affective states may govern how the individual approaches his/her overall career management, and therefore job search and employment related expectancy judgments. For instance, positive affect (i.e. “the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active and alert” [Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988, p.1063]) has been argued to influence the kind of career-relevant information individuals focus on and thereby to increase expectancy judgments [Seo, Barrett, and Bartunek, 2004] and to engender success [Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener, 2005].

Based on previous research on CSM and Bandura’s [1986] postulates on sources of self-efficacy beliefs, our first hypothesis considers the effects of CSM on employment success through JSSE. SCCT [Lent and Brown, 2013] hypothesizes that self-efficacy expectations as well as influencing career-related goals and actions are directly related to career-related outcomes/attainments because such beliefs help individuals organize their actions—e.g., job search. We therefore expect CSM to act as learning experiences that are relevant in the formation of JSSE beliefs and to indirectly influence employment success through this effect. With respect to indicators of employment success, most new entrant studies have focused on job offers, starting salary, or job and organizational attitudes. Researchers interested in job search for new entrants have been encouraged to think of the employment life-

cycle and to consider broader outcomes than employment success, including the nature of the job obtained [Boswell, Zimmerman, and Swider, 2012]. We focus here on three employment success indicators that are relevant for university graduates.

Hypothesis 1: CSM (i.e. work experience, career exploration, guidance seeking, networking, and positive affectivity toward a graduate career) directly and indirectly, through JSSE beliefs, affects (a) job offers, (b) employment status, and (c) employment quality.

Contextual Barriers and the Role of Employability Perceptions

Even though the wider literature shows more active job search behaviors to be related to positive employment outcomes [Boswell et al., 2012], in labor markets characterized by relatively high unemployment and underemployment rates, a large proportion of early job search experiences are likely to be unsuccessful despite extensive CSM. Some graduates will be underemployed in traditionally non–graduate occupations or experience periods of unemployment.

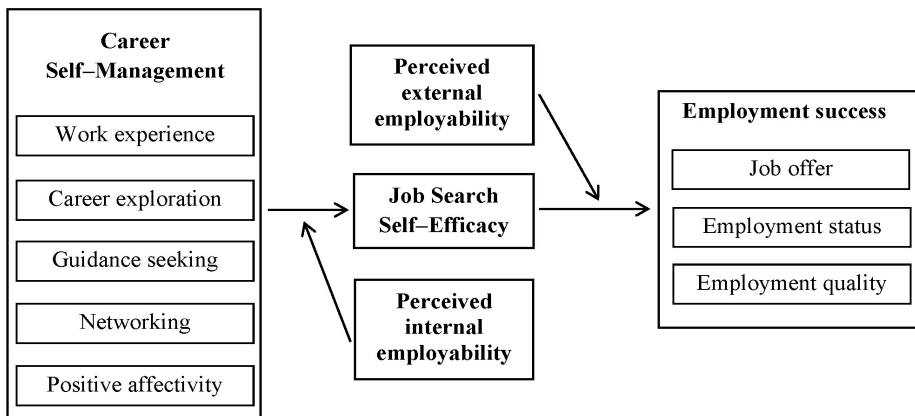
Such early experiences may influence perceptions of future employability, that is, an individual's perceived ability to secure employment commensurate with qualifications. This may occur both with regard to self–evaluations, such as confidence in knowledge, skills, and abilities, and evaluations of external labor market conditions [Barber, 1998]. SCCT prescribes a moderating role for contextual supports/barriers. Graduate perceptions of their own internal and external employability are two key dimensions that capture these contextual factors [Rothwell, Herbert, and Rothwell, 2008; Tomlinson, 2008]. Internal employability refers to factors associated with perceptions of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and job search. External employability is associated with factors outside the individual's control—e.g., demand for studied major, prestige of the university, and the overall state of the labor market.

Employability and self–efficacy have been demonstrated to be related yet distinct constructs [Berntson, Näswall, and Swerke, 2008]. Of interest in this study is how employability perceptions moderate the effect of CSM on employment success. In studies where job seekers report low personal control [Saks and Ashforth, 1999] or high external job search locus of control [van Hooft and Crossley, 2008], they are shown to engage in more intense search behavior, perhaps as a compensatory reaction to try to increase control. For graduate new entrants, CSM may enhance self–concept and vocational identity development and therefore be more beneficial in terms of the confidence (i.e. JSSE) of those who hold unfavorable internal employability perceptions. CSM will have less effect on those who already have greater confidence in their own abilities.

In SCCT terms, we take perceived internal employability to reflect the distal contextual opportunities/barriers to employment. SCCT hypothesizes that these distal barriers influence self-efficacy beliefs, and therefore employment outcomes, through their effects on career-relevant learning experiences (i.e. CSM). With respect to controlling for social and educational determinants of graduate learning opportunities, we argue that such distal barriers will influence the extent to which CSM enhances JSSE and therefore employment success. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: CSM will have a stronger indirect effect on employment outcomes through JSSE for graduates who hold unfavorable internal employability perceptions because it has a stronger effect on JSSE for these graduates when compared with those who hold favorable internal employability perceptions.

Figure No. 1. The hypothesized model of conditional indirect effect of career self-management on employment success via job search self-efficacy



Studies show that when labor demand lags behind supply, those who are better positioned in the queue for limited vacancies (e.g., due to their educational background) are more likely to secure the better jobs as employers favor them [Brown, 2003]. This is likely to be reflected in their subjective experiences of CSM and job search. Research shows that educational credentials (especially majors) influence the extent to which graduates will experience career indecision and discouragement from the high-skill labor market during their early career [Okay-Somerville and Scholarios, 2014]. Other perceived barriers may result from the higher education

institution attended or one's socio-economic background, which provides fewer opportunities for appropriate networking. For those who perceive their chances of securing a job as high due to their educational credentials (i.e. external employability), JSSE is likely to have a greater impact on employment success. These graduates are less likely to be discouraged in their job search than those who lack such confidence in their labor market power. Therefore, CSM may be more beneficial to those who hold favorable external employability perceptions, as JSSE is more likely to lead to better employment outcomes. More specifically, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3: Career exploration will have stronger indirect effect on employment outcomes through JSSE for graduates who hold favorable external employability perceptions because JSSE has a stronger effect on employment outcomes for these graduates when compared with those who hold unfavorable external employability perceptions.

Method

Sample

A survey instrument was administered to two cohorts of UK graduates (2009 and 2010). The list of universities obtained from the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) website (<http://wwwucas.com>) was used as the sampling frame. Sampling methods included contacting university alumni and career services as well as the heads of departments for the announcement of the survey. The survey was also announced on university social networks (e.g., Facebook). The final sample consisted of 293 participants who intended to find work or were already employed (60% female; mean age=23, SD=3 years). Twenty-six percent had graduated from post-1992 "new" universities, which were the result of the expansion in higher education in the UK and are often considered less prestigious universities [Tomlinson, 2008]. Graduates in non-professional degree majors (i.e. social sciences, arts, creative arts, and humanities) constituted forty-two percent of the sample. Seventy percent received a 1st [70–100%] or 2:1 [60–69%] degree.

Measures

Work experience. Two dichotomous measures were used to measure work experience. The first concerned whether participants engaged in part-time work during university [1=No, 2=Yes] and the second asked whether they had work experience relevant for their major [1=No, 2=Yes].

Career exploration. This was measured using the environment and self-exploration subscales of the Career Exploration Scale [CES; Stumpf et al., 1983]. Stumpf et al. conceptualize environment exploration as “the extent of career exploration regarding occupations, jobs, and organizations within the last 3 months” (six items; e.g., “investigated career possibilities”) and self-exploration as “the extent of career exploration involving self-assessment and retrospection within the last 3 months” [p. 196] (five items; e.g., “focused my thoughts on me as a person”). In the original scale, respondents were asked to think over the last three months and indicate the extent to which they had engaged in each of the behaviors on a 5-point Likert scale (1=little, 2=somewhat, 3=a moderate amount, 4=a substantial amount, 5=a great deal). In the present study, respondents were asked “to think over the last few months.” This was because the sample was approached soon after their graduation ceremonies, where before the ceremony they were preoccupied with final examinations and dissertations and may not necessarily have concentrated on their careers. The internal consistency coefficients were 0.86 and 0.88 for environment exploration and self-exploration subscales, respectively.

Guidance seeking was measured by asking whether the participant had received any guidance in making career decisions (1) or not (0). Subsequently, six options were presented to select as appropriate: career advisors, academic advisors, professional contacts in the graduate’s academic field, other professional contacts, parents, and friends. A total guidance score was computed ($\alpha=0.70$).

Networking. Wanberg, Kanfer, and Banas’ [2000] 8-item Networking Comfort Scale was used—a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree, e.g., “I am comfortable asking my friends for advice regarding my job search”; $\alpha=0.81$).

Positive affectivity toward a graduate career. The Positive Affect Scale [Watson et al., 1988], which consists of 10 mood related items (e.g., excited; $\alpha=0.88$), was used. A change to the original scale was made in the instructions. Watson et al. [1988] asked participants to rate the extent to which they feel each item (a) at the moment, (b) today, (c) past few days, (d) last week, (e) past few weeks, (f) last year, or (g) in general. Instead, respondents in the present study were asked to think about “when I think about my career as a graduate.”

Job search self-efficacy. Ellis and Taylor’s [1983] 10-item scale was used—five-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree, e.g., “I know a lot more than most students about how to use a wide range of job opportunity sources”; $\alpha=0.86$).

Perceived internal and external employability. The self-perceived employability scale for university students by Rothwell et al. [2007] was used—sixteen items, a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Rothwell et al. [2007] iden-

tified four factors to employability perceptions—(1) subject-related, (2) outward-facing, (3) individual attributes, and (4) engagement with studies and academic performance—and reported $\alpha=0.75$. CFA suggested that the four factor structure applied similarly across cohorts ($\Delta\chi^2=137.98$, $\Delta df=116$, $p>0.05$). Perceived internal employability (PIE) was measured using six items loading onto the individual attributes factor (e.g., “The skills and abilities that I possess are what employers are looking for”; $\alpha=0.73$). Perceived external employability (PEE) was measured using ten items loading onto the remaining three factors (e.g., “Employers are eager to employ graduates from my university”; $\alpha=0.86$).

Employment success. This was measured using three items—(a) job offer, whether the participant received at least one job offer (0=no, 1=yes), (b) employment status, whether they accepted the job offer (0=no, 1=yes), and (c) a composite measure of employment quality for those who were in employment, six items asking whether the job provides opportunity to use skills, initiative, training and development, job security, variety in job content, and good pay, each dichotomous items (0=No, 1=Yes), where $\alpha=0.89$. This was intended to provide a broader view of “success” than most “new entrant” research, which has focused on job offer or starting salary [Boswell et al., 2012].

Control variables. Due to the variability in sampling methods, we controlled for cohort (1=2009, 2=2010), survey announcement (1=announced via university channels, e.g., careers and alumni, 0=via social networks or friend referral), and time elapsed between the respondents’ graduation and completion of the survey. At the time of the survey, on average, participants were 2.5 months into their “graduate lives.” Additional controls were age, sex (0=female, 1=male), socio-economic status (0=both parents in low or intermediate skilled occupations, 1=at least one parent in a high-skill occupation), university type (0=old university, 1=new university), degree class achievement (0=2:2 or lower, 1=1st/2:1), and major (0=professional subject, e.g., medicine, engineering, 1=non-professional major, e.g., arts, humanities, and social sciences).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics consisting of mean, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations were computed first. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the PROC-ESS tool for SPSS [Hayes, 2012]. Specifically, models 4, 7, and 14 were used to test (i) the direct and indirect effects of CSM on employment success (Hypothesis 1), (ii) the conditional indirect effect of CSM on employment success when the moderators had perceived internal employability (Hypothesis 2), and (iii) perceived ex-

ternal employability (Hypothesis 3). Control variables were included in the analyses along with study variables. All analyses were conducted using 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Results

Table No. 1 presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and bivariate correlations among study variables. This shows that guidance seeking, networking, and positive affectivity were positively associated with all three measures of employment success (i.e. job offer, employment status, and employment quality). Term-time work, work experience, and self-exploration were not significantly related to any measure of employment success. Environment exploration was positively associated with employment quality. JSSE was positively associated with perceived internal ($r=0.47$, $p<0.05$) and external employability ($r=0.41$, $p<0.05$), and all measures of CSM, except term-time work. Moreover, JSSE—perceived internal and external employability—were positively associated with all measures of employment success.

Direct and indirect (through JSSE) effects of CSM on job offers, employment status, and employment quality are reported in Table No. 2. This shows that among the CSM measures included in this study, only guidance seeking had a positive direct effect on employment status ($B=0.19$, $SE=0.09$, 95% CI: 0.02 to 0.36) and employment quality ($B=0.23$, $SE=0.10$, 95% CI: 0.03 to 0.42). Environment exploration and networking had indirect effects on all employment success measures through JSSE, while guidance seeking and positive affectivity indirectly predicted job offers and employment status, but not employment quality. Self-exploration had an indirect effect on employment quality through JSSE. Term-time work and work experience had no direct or indirect effect on employment success. These findings partially support Hypothesis 1.

Table No. 3 shows the conditional indirect effect of CSM on employment outcomes via JSSE, based on perceived internal (Hypothesis 2) and external employability (Hypothesis 3). Only CSM variables that were found to have an indirect impact on employment success were included in this analysis. The indirect effect of networking on job offers ($B=0.08$, $SE=0.07$, 95% bias corrected CI=0.06 to 0.23) and employment status ($B=0.09$, $SE=0.07$, 95% bias corrected CI=0.06 to 0.24) was conditional on perceived internal employability, such that this effect was higher for those who had low perceived internal employability in comparison to those who held high perceptions (see Figure No. 2). Hypothesis 3 was not supported for any of the CSM and employment success variables.

Table No. 1. Means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and bivariate correlations [N=293]

No	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	2010 cohort	1.37	0.48												
2	University announcement	0.74	0.44	0.42**											
3	Months after graduation	2.66	2.88	-0.62**	-0.45**										
4	Age	23.14	3.39	-0.11	0.12*	0.01									
5	Male	1.40	0.49	0.00	-0.09	-0.02	0.01								
6	No highly skilled parents	0.62	0.49	-0.06	-0.02	0.07	-0.32**	0.00							
7	New university	0.26	0.44	-0.04	-0.16**	0.14*	0.20**	-0.03	-0.15*						
8	Non-professional degree	1.40	0.49	-0.16*	-0.01	0.03	0.07	-0.23**	0.05	-0.01					
9	Poor degree achievement	0.31	-0.46	-0.12*	0.04	-0.05	0.21**	0.11	-0.11	-0.01	0.00				
10	JSSÉ ^a	3.60	0.64	-0.11	-0.17**	0.03	0.14*	0.01	-0.15*	0.00	0.01	-0.02	[0.86]		
11	PIE ^b	3.67	0.63	-0.04	-0.07	0.00	0.08	0.04	-0.08	0.01	-0.03	0.14*	0.47**	[0.73]	
12	PEE ^c	3.20	0.73	0.09	-0.02	-0.06	-0.03	0.12	-0.07	-0.19**	-0.22**	0.02	0.41**	0.55**	[0.86]
13	Term-time work ^d	1.73	0.44	0.03	-0.02	-0.08	0.01	-0.06	-0.08	-0.04	0.02	0.04	0.02	-0.06	-0.15*
14	Work experience ^d	1.25	0.44	-0.04	0.01	-0.01	0.17**	0.02	-0.17**	0.04	0.08	0.15*	0.15*	0.11	-0.06
15	Environment exploration	3.38	0.86	-0.16**	-0.23**	0.20**	-0.10	0.02	-0.07	0.05	0.01	0.00	0.33**	0.35**	0.21**
16	Self-exploration	3.38	0.87	-0.18**	-0.15*	0.17**	-0.13*	-0.06	-0.12*	0.16**	0.11	0.16**	0.20**	0.17**	0.07
17	Guidance seeking	1.64	1.73	0.05	-0.02	-0.03	-0.18**	0.08	0.01	-0.08	0.02	-0.03	0.13*	0.22**	0.18**

No	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
18	Networking	3.61	0.64	0.03	0.09	-0.19**	0.13*	0.09	0.04	-0.11	0.07	0.07	0.44**	0.33**	0.16**
19	Positive affectivity	3.67	0.76	-0.09	-0.09	-0.01	0.15*	0.09	-0.10	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.62**	0.62**	0.39**
20	Job offer ^e	0.56	0.50	-0.04	-0.17**	0.02	-0.04	-0.02	-0.06	-0.02	-0.06	-0.08	0.35**	0.21**	0.13*
21	Employment status ^f	0.52	0.50	-0.01	-0.17**	0.01	-0.12	-0.04	-0.01	-0.03	-0.03	-0.14*	0.32**	0.20**	0.15*
22	Employment quality	1.71	2.13	-0.05	-0.15*	0.02	-0.13*	0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.15*	-0.12	0.36**	0.33**	0.30**

No	Variable	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
13	Term-time work										
14	Work experience	0.35**									
15	Environment exploration	-0.10	0.00	[0.86]							
16	Self-exploration	0.07	0.24**	0.41**	[0.88]						
17	Guidance seeking	0.06	0.16*	0.08	-0.06	[0.70]					
18	Networking	0.06	0.08	0.11	0.03	0.30**	[0.81]				
19	Positive affectivity	-0.04	0.10	0.38**	0.23**	0.14*	0.40**	[0.88]			
20	Job offer	0.12	0.08	0.07	0.00	0.19**	0.20**	0.23**			
21	Employment status	0.09	0.05	0.06	-0.02	0.21**	0.18**	0.23**	0.91**		
22	Employment quality	0.02	0.00	0.17**	0.03	0.26**	0.19**	0.32**	0.71**	0.77**	[0.89]

Notes: ^a Job search self-efficacy; ^b perceived internal employability; ^c perceived external employability; ^d 1=No, 2=Yes; ^e 0=no job offers, 1=received at least one job offer; ^f 0=unemployed, 1=employed; * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table No. 2. Direct and indirect effects of CSM on employment success (Model 4, Hayes, 2012)

	Job offer [N=293]			Employment status [N=293]			Employment quality [N=139]		
	B	SE	95% bias corrected CI	B	SE	95% bias corrected CI	B	SE	95% bias corrected CI
<i>Direct effects</i>									
Term–time work	0.49	0.32	-0.12 to 1.11	0.34	0.32	-0.28 to 0.95	-0.40	0.36	-1.12 to 0.32
Work experience	0.23	0.33	-0.43 to .88	0.11	0.33	-0.54 to 0.76	-0.28	0.36	-1.00 to 0.44
Environment exploration	-0.18	0.18	-0.53 to .18	-0.23	0.18	-0.59 to 0.13	0.22	0.20	-0.18 to 0.62
Self–exploration	-0.20	0.18	-0.55 to .14	-0.22	0.18	-0.56 to 0.12	0.09	0.19	-0.30 to 0.47
Guidance	0.16	0.09	0.00 to .33	0.19	0.09	0.02 to 0.36	0.23	0.10	0.03 to 0.42
Networking	0.46	0.26	-0.06 to .97	0.44	0.26	-0.07 to 0.95	0.07	0.31	-0.55 to 0.68
Positive affectivity	0.19	0.24	-0.28 to .67	0.32	0.24	-0.16 to 0.79	0.49	0.27	-0.04 to 1.02
<i>Indirect effects via JSSE</i>									
Term–time work	0.02	0.12	-0.19 to .27	0.01	0.11	-0.19 to 0.25	0.03	0.09	-0.15 to 0.23
Work experience	0.19	0.13	-0.02 to .47	0.19	0.13	-0.02 to 0.48	0.03	0.13	-0.20 to 0.31
Environment exploration	0.30	0.10	0.13 to .51	0.31	0.10	0.15 to 0.51	0.23	0.12	0.04 to 0.51
Self–exploration	0.14	0.08	-0.01 to .29	0.14	0.07	-0.01 to 0.29	0.18	0.10	0.03 to 0.45
Guidance	0.06	0.03	0.01 to .13	0.06	0.03	0.01 to 0.12	0.01	0.03	-0.05 to 0.08
Networking	0.45	0.16	0.17 to .78	0.44	0.16	0.16 to 0.78	0.38	0.17	0.12 to 0.78
Positive affectivity	0.52	0.19	0.17 to .89	0.47	0.18	0.11 to 0.82	0.26	0.16	-0.03 to 0.59

Note: Analyses based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

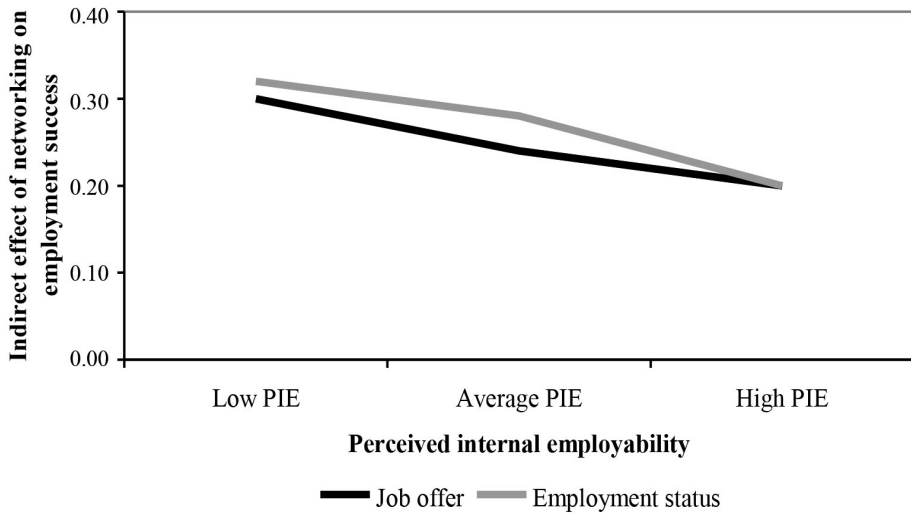
Table No. 3. Conditional indirect effects of CSM on employment success

	Job offer [N=293]			Employment status [N=293]			Employment quality [N=139]		
	B	SE	95% bias corrected CI	B	SE	95% bias corrected CI	B	SE	95% bias corrected CI
<i>Moderator: Perceived internal employability^a</i>									
Term-time work	N/A			N/A			N/A		
Work experience	N/A			N/A			N/A		
Environment exploration	0.04	0.11	-0.15 to 0.29	0.04	0.11	-0.14 to 0.29	0.00	0.06	-0.13 to 0.13
Self-exploration	N/A			N/A			-0.03	0.06	-0.17 to 0.07
Guidance	-0.01	0.04	-0.08 to 0.08	-0.01	0.04	-0.08 to 0.07	N/A		
Networking	0.08	0.07	0.06 to 0.23	0.09	0.07	0.06 to 0.24	-0.09	0.09	-0.27 to 0.10
Positive affectivity	-0.01	0.14	-0.37 to 0.13	-0.01	0.13	-0.35 to 0.11	N/A		
<i>Moderator: Perceived external employability^b</i>									
Term-time work	N/A			N/A			N/A		
Work experience	N/A			N/A			N/A		
Environment exploration	0.05	0.14	-0.27 to 0.27	0.09	0.14	-0.20 to 0.33	-0.03	0.08	-0.08 to 0.12
Self-exploration	N/A			N/A			-0.03	0.05	-0.13 to 0.06
Guidance	0.01	0.03	-0.07 to 0.06	0.02	0.03	-0.05 to 0.07	N/A		
Networking	0.09	0.29	-0.61 to 0.49	0.17	0.28	-0.50 to 0.56	-0.05	0.10	-0.25 to 0.16
Positive affectivity	0.10	0.30	-0.67 to 0.46	0.19	0.28	-0.53 to 0.52	N/A		

Notes: ^a Analysis based on Model 7 [Hayes, 2012];

^b analysis is based on Model 14 [Hayes, 2012]; all analyses based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Figure No. 2. Conditional indirect effect of networking on job offer and employment status, based on perceived internal employability



Note: PIE: (Perceived Internal Employability).

Discussion

Concentrating on new entrants into the graduate labor market and on university-to-work transitions, this study examined one possible explanation for how CSM impacts employment success (through JSSE, Hypothesis 1) and, perhaps more importantly, for whom (based on perceived internal and external employability differences among graduates, Hypotheses 2 and 3). The findings provide support for the indirect effect of most measures of CSM, except for those of work experience, on employment success (i.e. job offers, employment status, and employment quality) via JSSE. The indirect effect of networking, through JSSE, was conditional on perceived internal employability. Networking was more beneficial for job offers and the employment status of those who held poor internal employability perceptions. This supports the pivotal role prescribed to CSM on employment outcomes for new entrants into the labor market and shows it is especially important for those lacking confidence in their job search strategy. Our data shows this lack of confidence was higher amongst the younger graduates, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and with less work experience (Table No. 1). Although we also expected

the introduction of perceived contextual supports/barriers to employment to play a role in the relevance of JSSE for employment success, our measure of perceived external employability was not a significant moderator.

The study makes several contributions to understanding CSM in contemporary contexts. Firstly, the finding that most measures of CSM, except for those of work experience, indirectly influence employment outcomes, through JSSE, supports and extends previous research by applying this to university leavers during their transition to work. More specifically, while career exploration has been shown to constitute part of the learning experience that informs self-efficacy beliefs [Kanfe, et al., 2001; Zikic and Saks, 2009], our findings show that other proactive career behaviors, i.e. guidance seeking and networking, may also foster development of such expectancy judgments about one's job search capabilities, and thereby influence employment outcomes, even early in a graduate's career. This highlights the need to consider a range of behaviors that reflect proactive career management when studying the development of self-efficacy judgments and their impact on employment outcomes during career transitions.

In this sense, our findings correspond to the call for research examining particular aspects of CSM at different stages in the career life cycle [Lent and Brown, 2013]. Moreover, by using multiple indicators of employment success, the findings also show the impact of CSM not only for securing employment, but also for securing meaningful employment. This shows that, for instance, environment exploration and networking have indirect effects, via JSSE, on all measures of employment success. Guidance seeking and positive affectivity toward graduate career indirectly predict job offers and employment status, while self-exploration predicts employment quality.

Most previous research concentrates on career behaviors. Using the SCCT framework, our findings also suggest a role for affective states in managing career transitions. The absence of direct and indirect effects of work experience measures on employment outcomes suggests that, as Bandura [1986] argues, vicarious learning and/or social persuasion may have a greater impact on efficacy judgments and their consequences in comparison to mastery experiences when tasks are novel (e.g., securing the first graduate job). These findings suggest that the construct of CSM, just as that of employability is argued to be [Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth, 2004], may be multidimensional and can be expanded from one that is primarily behavior focused to one that also incorporates cognition (e.g., vicarious learning and social persuasion) and affect.

Our second contribution concerns the role of CSM on employment success during university-to-work transitions. We found little support for the direct relationship

between CSM and employment success, only between guidance seeking and employment status and quality. One possible explanation for the lack of direct relationships between CSM and employment success may be that for inexperienced, new entrants into the labor market, CSM, on its own, may not be sufficient to secure employment, particularly a job commensurate with qualifications and subject to unfavorable economic conditions. Table No. 1 shows that guidance seeking, networking, and positive affectivity are positively associated with all measures of employment success. Nevertheless, these effects disappear with the inclusion of control variables. This may suggest that, contrary to the prevalent contemporary career theory discourse, employment success in today's turbulent graduate labor markets is not predominantly determined by the proactive behaviors of the career actors, but more by individual persistence in the face of labor market obstacles [McKeown and Lindoff, 2011].

It is argued that the nature of contemporary career barriers is changing [Inkson et al., 2012]. Yet, research often ignores the role of barriers. Acknowledgement and understanding of how individuals, in affecting labor market behavior, perceive these boundaries, potentially have significant contributions to vocational psychology, which largely focuses on employment and career success, yet neglects failure. SCCT is a useful tool for examining the possibility of "not so successful careers" as it not only concentrates on socialization into certain careers (e.g., in Hackett and Betz's [1981] early work on women), but also implies that contextual variables will differentially impact on one's confidence as well as performance on career-related tasks.

Our study highlights the prominence of such contextual factors, in particular perception of personal capabilities in influencing the gatekeepers in favor of the individual's employment. When career barriers originate from within the person (i.e. poor internal employability perceptions), networking has a stronger impact on JSSE and thereby on the likelihood of receiving at least one job offer and employment status. It can be argued, therefore, that networking functions as a coping resource when perceived internal employability is low. Of the measures of CSM included in this study, only networking shows that such conditional indirect impact on employment success may be explained by the prevalence of social media and social networking in our lives in general and during our job search in particular. While social networks have always been included as part of job search strategies to secure employment, recent advancements in information technologies have made it possible to develop these social and professional networks more easily through the use of social media [Nikolaou, 2014].

Contrary to our hypothesis, we did not find a conditional role for perceived external employability on the indirect effect of CSM on employment success. Recent

research highlights how perceived external employability may be associated with employment success (e.g., prolonged unemployment or underemployment) during early careers due to career indecision [Okay-Somerville and Scholarios, 2014]. This research, however, also shows that the prevalence of such instances is more common among graduates with less prestigious educational backgrounds, i.e. graduates of less prestigious universities, from non-professional majors, and/or those who achieved a poor degree classification. An examination of the bivariate correlations in Table No. 1 shows that even though these educational background variables have limited impact on employment success—i.e. a non-professional major is associated with poorer employment quality in comparison to a professional major ($r=-0.15$, $p<0.05$) and those who graduated with 2:1/1st class degree were more likely to be employed at the time of survey in comparison to those who achieved a 2:2 or lower degree classification ($r=0.14$, $p<0.05$)—they do have an impact on perceived employability. In particular, graduates from “new” universities ($r=-0.19$, $p<0.05$) and of non-professional majors ($r=-0.22$, $p<0.05$) report poorer perceived external employability in comparison to fellow graduates from “old” universities and of professional majors. Although post-hoc analyses did not suggest a conditional effect based on university type or major, the effect of educational background may account for the lack of the hypothesized moderation effect by perceived external employability.

Understanding the moderating effects of context in this way focuses attention on the dynamics of job search for those faced with less than optimal employment outcomes, such as underemployment [Boswell et al., 2012], as is potentially the case for new entrants to the increasingly uncertain graduate labor market. Equally, it has implications for understanding the effects of job search processes on employment quality for different populations, such as the unemployed. Considering attempts to conceptualize job search quality, as opposed to the more conventional focus on job search quantity [van Hooft, Wanberg and van Hove, 2012], it may be that more tailored individual strategies will result in better quality searches. For example, some of the effects observed in this study could be explained in terms of the way that different components of CSM reduce job search uncertainty at different stages of the process [Lopez-Kidwell et al., 2013]. Uncertainty is likely to be high at the early stages of job search for graduating students and for some graduates. It is possible that they will display varying perceptions of internal employability given less time spent on career self-management. For those graduates who hold a poor perception of internal employability, networking will increase JSSE and hence be effective in reducing uncertainty.

Implications for Practice

The findings have implications for students/graduates, counselors, and perhaps to a lesser (more indirect) extent for employers/policy-makers. There is no doubt that proactive career behaviors play a critical role in shaping careers, which is realized in the context of multiple career boundaries [Klehe et al., 2012]. For the inexperienced, new entrants into the labor market, the findings from this study also support this for university-to-work transitions. Increasing oversupply of graduates in the labor market implies that some graduates will necessarily be unemployed or underemployed. Proactive career behaviors are therefore essential in locating opportunities, including perhaps those that require lower skills, but may later be associated with career opportunities. The study shows that career-relevant vicarious learning, social persuasion, and affective states impact employment success at this crucial transition point by enhancing JSSE.

For those involved in counseling university students/graduates for employment in today's turbulent labor market, the findings suggest that for successful employment outcomes individuals must not only engage in proactive career management, but must also feel confident of their job search abilities. More importantly, the results propose that this kind of support, particularly for networking, is most beneficial when individuals perceive they lack the knowledge, skills, and abilities to secure employment. There is some evidence that graduates with the poorest job prospects tend towards formal job search strategies, such as public employment services, rather than more diverse, informal methods [Try, 2005]. Students/graduates who have self-doubts over career outcomes may be encouraged towards interaction with experienced individuals in their field—e.g., alumni or professionals—to increase opportunities for vicarious learning and social persuasion. The findings suggest environmental exploration, guidance seeking, and networking—e.g., through exploring a breadth of options in career counseling sessions, attending careers fairs, and visiting graduate recruitment websites—as possible options for such CSM.

In securing “good” jobs (i.e. ones that afford the individual not just good salary and job security, but also opportunities for skill use, use of initiative, training, and development), findings also highlight the importance of environment, self-exploration, and networking for enhancing JSSE, and thereby employment quality. This is also in line with earlier vocational psychology research, which clearly underlines the role of self- and environment-exploration in matching vocational interests and aptitudes to opportunities [e.g., Holland, 1973].

There is also a role for affective states in indirectly influencing employment success, in particular the likelihood of receiving at least one job offer and securing

employment. Counselors should aim at helping advisees maintain positive mood throughout the job search process, perhaps through sharing success stories of other similar individuals. Nevertheless, given that CSM facilitates formation of realistic expectations and that this study controlled for the major indicators of external employability for graduates (i.e. university prestige and major), the findings also point to interventions geared towards generating more favorable employment opportunities on the demand side of the labor market—e.g., working with employers to encourage more creative and efficient utilization of graduate skills.

Limitations and Future Research

This study aimed at incorporating the differential role of perceived internal and external career barriers into our understanding of how CSM is associated with employment success for new entrants into the labor market. There are, however, a number of limitations that need to be addressed in future research.

Firstly, the cross-sectional and self-report design of this study limits the confidence with which we can infer causality among study variables. For instance, one alternative explanation to these findings may be that CSM influences perceived internal and external employability and thereby employment success, although post-hoc analyses show otherwise. While perceived employability has been shown to be relatively stable, at least over a period of one year [Mäkikangas, de Cuyper, Mauno, and Kinnunen, 2013], during such crucial transitions as that from university-to-work, these perceptions may be more volatile. In delineating these alternatives, longitudinal designs may help clarify temporal relations between proactive career behaviors and perceptions of barriers to employment. This may also incorporate other career behaviors that have a more proximal effect to employment success—e.g., job search.

Secondly, in this study we attempted to extend measurement of employment success beyond job offers or employment status by including a job quality variable (opportunity to use skills and abilities on the job) that is relevant for graduate career development. Future research would benefit from more comprehensive conceptualization and operationalization of employment success. For instance, studies have shown that at the start of a career, lack of challenge or progression opportunities are important determinants for perceived underemployment [Nabi, 2003].

A final limitation concerns the use of multiple sampling strategies. This was largely due to the upcoming Destinations Survey administered by the Higher Education Statistical Agency [HESA] in the UK, which takes place six months after graduations. Alumni and career service officers were reluctant to announce the

survey, as this may cause survey fatigue. Difficulty of access to the sample resulted in the rather small sample sizes for the two cohorts. Future research should aim at better collaboration with university representatives and relevant institutions (e.g., HESA).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to apply concepts from Social Cognitive Career Theory to understand the role of CSM and perceptions of employability on the employment outcomes of new graduate entrants to the labor market. Our results show the positive effects of CSM, except work experience, on employment success through JSSE, and the differential impact of perceived internal employability on employment success, particularly for the impact of networking on job offers and employment status. Most existing studies of career exploration focus on adolescents, the unemployed, or laid-off workers. Our focus on university-to-work transitions represents a critical transition point that may influence future career outcomes, not always in the direction of desirable employment. Similarly, SCCT research often either looks at school pupils and career choice outcomes or within organizational settings. University-to-work transitions provide a relatively unexplored context within which to study employment outcomes in relation to the development of self-efficacy in the job search process.

A second contribution of the study is in its consideration of how CSM, particularly as a key component of career adaptability [Lent and Brown, 2013], is associated with employment success via self-efficacy expectations—an important predictor of career-related well-being [Lent, Taveira, and Lobo, 2012]. While the self-efficacy construct has been useful in understanding the formation of goals, interests, and choice outcomes, career-related learning experiences that inform, these expectancy judgments have received scarce attention [Maurer, 2001]. Understanding such learning experiences may contribute to the development of more anticipatory interventions that foster career preparedness and resilience [Lent, 2013], particularly for new entrants into the labor market. We had attempted to show the effects of perceived contextual barriers. We approached this through varying perceptions of internal employability (reflecting confidence in knowledge, skills, and abilities) and external employability (reflecting confidence in wider labor market factors influencing marketability) on the part of the graduates, although only the former showed significant effects. Career research has tended to emphasize proactive behaviors without considering career barriers. This study makes an initial attempt at incorporating both individual and contextual factors in understanding graduate careers.

Overall, we show the significant role of CSM and JSSE on fostering positive employment outcomes among university graduates who are likely to be faced with a recessionary employment context, and hence are likely to struggle with finding their preferred jobs. This is especially the case for some who enter the labor market relatively more disadvantaged (e.g., as a result of lower major classifications, lower socio-economic status backgrounds, or from less prestigious institutions). We suggest that tailored job search guidance on the part of career counselors or other intervention is appropriate for enhancing self-efficacy in the search process at different points as a way for reducing uncertainty.

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**Między studiami a pracą – samodzielne zarządzanie karierą,
zatrudnialność, sukces zawodowy. Spojrzenie na teorię kariery
z perspektywy społeczno-kognitywnej**

Streszczenie

W niniejszej pracy, korzystając z pojęć zawartych w społeczno-kognitywnej teorii kariery, oceniono rolę różnorodnych zachowań samodzielnego zarządzania karierą (career self-management – CSM) oraz ich wpływ na skuteczność poszukiwania pracy i sukces zawodowy absolwentów będących na etapie przechodzenia ze studiów do życia zawodowego. Praca zawiera także rozważania na temat barier w zatrudnieniu w koncepcji postrzegania wewnętrznej i zewnętrznej zatrudnialności. Postawione hipotezy przetestowano na podstawie danych dotyczących absolwentów uczelni wyższych w Wielkiej Brytanii. Wyniki wykazały, że środki CSM mogą być pośrednio powiązane z sukcesem zawodowym. Szczególnie jedno zachowanie CSM – networking (nawiązywanie szerokich kontaktów) okazało się bardziej korzystne dla zwiększenia prawdopodobieństwa otrzymania ofert pracy lub zatrudnienia dla osób, których postrzegana wewnętrzna zatrudnialność wykazywała niski poziom. Wyniki badań mają praktyczne i teoretyczne implikacje w odniesieniu do roli CSM w sukcesie zatrudnienia w okresie przechodzenia z życia akademickiego do kariery zawodowej.

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