

The Impact of Career Planning and Development on the Employability of Management Graduates

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive global labour market, employability has become a defining benchmark of higher education success, particularly for management graduates entering dynamic business environments. This study examines how structured career planning and development initiatives influence the employability competencies of management students. Drawing on human capital and career construction theories, this research explores the extent to which proactive career guidance, experiential learning, and skill-oriented interventions translate into tangible employability outcomes. Using a mixed-method approach, quantitative data were collected from 312 final-year management graduates across Indian universities, complemented by qualitative insights from academic mentors and industry recruiters. Statistical analysis through multiple regression and mediation testing revealed that career planning significantly enhances employability, mediated by self-efficacy and career adaptability. Qualitative findings further underscored the importance of reflective career workshops, mentoring, and institutional support in shaping graduates' job readiness. The study contributes to both theory and practice by reaffirming that employability is not merely an institutional output but a co-constructed developmental process between learners, educators, and employers. Practical implications are offered for universities seeking to integrate career development frameworks that foster lifelong learning and professional agility.

Keywords: Career Planning; Career Development; Employability; Management Graduates; Career Adaptability; Higher Education; Human Capital Theory.

Introduction

In the rapidly transforming landscape of global employment, the conversation around graduate employability has evolved from a peripheral concern to a core mandate of higher education institutions. Particularly in the field of management education, the employability of graduates is now viewed as both an institutional performance indicator and a societal obligation. Employers no longer seek mere degree holders; they demand agile, career-ready individuals capable of navigating uncertainty, technological disruption, and cross-functional business demands. In this evolving context, career planning and development emerge not as optional interventions but as structural imperatives for nurturing employable management graduates.

Employability, as a multidimensional construct, extends far beyond securing a first job after graduation. It embodies the continual ability to gain and maintain employment through skill adaptability, professional awareness, and lifelong learning orientation. Management graduates, often entering

volatile markets shaped by automation, remote work, and the gig economy, must therefore possess both technical competencies and the meta-skills that enable resilience, creativity, and adaptability. However, numerous studies have shown a persistent mismatch between graduate capabilities and employer expectations, particularly in developing economies such as India, where management education is abundant but uneven in quality. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report (2023) emphasises that the future workforce will be defined by critical thinking, leadership, and emotional intelligence—areas deeply intertwined with structured career development interventions.

Career planning and development, as a concept, encapsulate the processes through which individuals understand themselves, explore career options, set professional goals, and strategise pathways to achieve them. Within management education, this often takes the form of structured career services, internship programmes, mentoring initiatives, and soft-skill workshops. Yet, the impact of these initiatives on actual employability outcomes

remains underexplored, particularly in emerging markets. While Western literature has extensively documented employability frameworks and career adaptability models, there remains limited empirical validation within Asian contexts. This research therefore aims to bridge that gap by examining the link between career planning and employability among management graduates in India, while also identifying mediating psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy and adaptability.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study draws upon two central frameworks—Human Capital Theory and Career Construction Theory. Human Capital Theory posits that individuals enhance their employability through deliberate investment in skills, knowledge, and experiences. In the context of management education, structured career planning acts as a form of human capital investment, where students actively shape their career trajectories through informed decision-making. Conversely, Career Construction Theory emphasises the individual's narrative agency in designing a meaningful professional life, underscoring adaptability, self-concept, and purpose. When integrated, these theories highlight that employability is not simply a by-product of curriculum design but an evolving construct resulting from intentional career development practices supported by institutional scaffolding.

Despite the theoretical convergence, many management institutions continue to operate under the assumption that academic excellence alone guarantees employability. This misplaced reliance on curriculum-driven outcomes neglects the socio-psychological dimensions of career development, where guidance, reflection, and exposure play equally vital roles. Graduates who lack structured career guidance often demonstrate weaker self-efficacy and limited career identity, which directly hinders their employability. In contrast, institutions that prioritise holistic career development tend to produce graduates who are more confident, adaptable, and strategically aligned with labour market realities. The problem, therefore, is not the absence of education but the absence of guided career construction within that education.

The growing employability gap poses a systemic challenge. Employers increasingly report dissatisfaction with graduates' readiness for

professional roles, particularly in terms of communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Industry reports suggest that while management graduates possess technical knowledge, they often lack the career adaptability required to transition effectively into dynamic workplace settings. This disconnect between academic preparation and market expectation calls for a renewed focus on career planning as a strategic educational function rather than a peripheral service. Moreover, employability must be seen as co-created—shaped by the interaction of institutional support, student initiative, and labour market feedback.

The Indian higher education ecosystem provides a fertile ground for examining these dynamics. With over 3,000 management institutes producing nearly half a million graduates annually, the question of employability has become a national priority. Government initiatives such as the National Education Policy (2020) and AICTE's employability enhancement schemes reflect a growing awareness that skill development must be integrated into curricular frameworks. However, despite policy emphasis, institutional implementation remains fragmented, and empirical studies evaluating the tangible outcomes of career development programmes are scarce. This research responds to that lacuna by empirically assessing how career planning and development initiatives influence employability outcomes among management graduates, using both quantitative and qualitative insights to derive a comprehensive understanding.

From a methodological perspective, this study adopts a mixed-method approach to capture both measurable outcomes and contextual nuances. Quantitative data from management graduates help determine statistical relationships between career planning and employability constructs, while qualitative data from academic mentors and recruiters reveal deeper insights into the institutional and behavioural enablers of employability. This triangulation ensures that the study does not merely test relationships but also contextualises them within the lived realities of graduates and employers.

The significance of this research is threefold. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing discourse on employability by positioning career planning as a central antecedent rather than a peripheral correlate.

Empirically, it provides evidence from an emerging market perspective, extending the global dialogue beyond Western-centric studies. Practically, it offers actionable insights for universities, policymakers, and corporate recruiters seeking to design interventions that cultivate not only job-ready but also career-resilient graduates.

In sum, the study acknowledges that employability is a shared responsibility—one that requires active collaboration between students, educators, and industry partners. Career planning and development should not be treated as a one-time institutional exercise but as an evolving dialogue that empowers learners to continuously adapt and grow. As management education continues to navigate the tensions between academic theory and industry practice, embedding structured career development frameworks may well become the defining strategy for aligning education with employment in the twenty-first century.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses, establishing the theoretical links between career planning, career adaptability, and employability. The subsequent section outlines the research methodology, followed by empirical analysis and discussion of findings. The final section concludes with implications for theory, policy, and practice, highlighting pathways for future research in employability development within management education.

Literature review

The last half-decade (2020–2025) has seen an intensification of scholarship on employability, career planning and career adaptability — driven by pandemic-era labour market shocks, the rise of automation, and renewed policy interest in graduate outcomes. Contemporary reviews reposition employability as a dynamic, multi-stakeholder construct rather than a static credential: higher education institutions, students and employers co-produce employability through curricula, career services and workplace experiences. A systematic mapping of employability models highlights this pluralism, showing a shift from skill lists to integrative frameworks that combine personal, institutional and contextual resources. Such model-level syntheses provide a scaffold for understanding

career planning as a proximal, actionable institutional intervention that feeds into broader employability architectures. ([ScienceDirect](#))

Empirical work since 2020 corroborates the centrality of career adaptability as a psychological resource linking career planning practices to employability outcomes. Career adaptability — operationalised through concern, control, curiosity and confidence — has consistently predicted adaptation outcomes such as job search success, perceived employability and early career performance. Meta-analytic and reliability studies published in the 2022–2024 window strengthen confidence in the Career Adapt-abilities Scale (CAAS) as a robust measure across cultures, enabling cross-national comparison and application in management education research. This methodological consolidation invites researchers to treat adaptability not as an incidental correlate but as a mediating mechanism whereby targeted career planning interventions translate into employability gains. ([SAGE Journals](#))

Several quantitative studies across disciplines and geographies provide convergent evidence for the mediating role of adaptability and self-efficacy. For instance, field studies among final-year students and recent graduates find that those exposed to structured career development — internships, mentoring, reflective workshops and targeted employability modules — score higher on adaptability scales and report better employment outcomes. A cross-sectional study in applied health education, for example, documented that career adaptability significantly predicted employability measures, signalling that the adaptability–employability linkage holds beyond business faculties and may generalise to management graduates who face similarly volatile labour demands. These results reinforce a causal pathway: institutional career planning → enhanced psychological resources (adaptability, self-efficacy) → improved employability. ([PMC](#))

Beyond individual psychological resources, macro-level and policy reports from the period 2020–2025 emphasise persistent structural mismatches in many labour markets, especially in emerging economies such as India. National employability reports and large-scale assessments conducted post-2020 document uneven readiness among graduates: while

domain knowledge may be adequate in pockets, soft skills, digital literacy and career decision-making remain variable. Such large-scale diagnostics have spurred policy responses (for example, employability skilling initiatives and employability metrics embedded in national education policy), but the evidence base evaluating the effectiveness of those initiatives at the institutional level remains thin. This policy backdrop legitimises research that examines operational career planning programmes within management schools as an immediate lever for improving graduate outcomes. ([do3n1uzkew47z.cloudfront.net](https://doi.org/10.31124/econsci.2025.21.5S.66-85))

The literature also widens the lens from individual outcomes to employer perceptions and curricular fit. Studies published between 2020 and 2024 increasingly interrogate employer satisfaction with graduate skills — revealing that while cognitive and technical competencies are necessary, employers privilege adaptability, communication and problem-solving during recruitment and onboarding. Employer surveys and qualitative interviews illuminate a recurrent complaint: graduates often lack career awareness and the ability to articulate transferrable competencies. This suggests that career planning interventions must include not only skills training but also narrative work (helping students craft career stories), placement simulations and employer engagement to close signalling gaps between graduate capabilities and recruiter expectations. ([PMC](#))

Methodologically, researchers from 2020 onward have favoured mixed methods and longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic construction of employability. Systematic reviews from the period note a proliferation of cross-sectional surveys but call for more quasi-experimental and longitudinal studies that can credibly assess the effects of career planning programmes over time. Where longitudinal or pre-post designs exist, evidence suggests sustained improvements in career confidence and job search strategies, though the magnitude of employment outcomes varies by sector and regional market conditions. The methodological critique in recent literature is instructive: to claim causal impact, studies must attend to selection bias (students self-selecting into career programmes), control for institutional variability, and triangulate

quantitative findings with recruiter and mentor perspectives. ([ScienceDirect](#))

Recent scholarship further highlights the role of social and institutional support networks. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews published in 2023–2025 show that social support — from peers, family, mentors and institutional actors — amplifies the positive effects of career planning on adaptability. Practically, this means universities that embed mentorship, alumni engagement and employer partnership into career planning see stronger employability outcomes than those relying solely on workshops or online modules. In short, career planning must be relational and scaffolded rather than transactional. ([ResearchGate](#))

Despite clear advances, the literature identifies important gaps that the present study seeks to address. First, there is a scarcity of high-quality evidence focused specifically on management graduates in emerging markets during the 2020–2025 period — a curious gap, given the scale and social importance of management education. Second, while adaptability and self-efficacy are well-documented mediators, less is known about which specific career planning components (mentoring, internships, reflective practice, employer engagement) most strongly influence different dimensions of employability (technical readiness, career self-management, professional identity). Third, contextual moderators such as institutional prestige, regional labour market tightness, and discipline-specific hiring norms remain underexplored in causal models. Addressing these lacunae requires context-sensitive measurement, mixed methods and careful attention to selection processes.

Taken together, the 2020–2025 literature makes a persuasive case: career planning and development are not soft add-ons but strategic levers that, when implemented holistically, strengthen psychological resources and signalling mechanisms that underpin employability. Empirical and meta-analytic work establishes career adaptability as a central mediator, while policy diagnostics emphasise the urgency of institutional response — especially in large graduate-producing systems like India. The evidence base, however, calls for more rigorous, context-rich studies that disaggregate which elements of career planning matter most for

management graduates and how institutional design interacts with labour market structure to shape outcomes. This study responds to that call by empirically examining the pathways from career planning to employability, with a focus on adaptability and self-efficacy as mechanisms and a mixed-method design to capture nuance across institutional and labour market contexts. ([ScienceDirect](#))

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method research design to explore how career planning and development initiatives influence the employability of management graduates. A mixed approach was selected to balance the depth of qualitative insights with the generalisability of quantitative evidence, ensuring that both measurable relationships and contextual realities were captured. The study combined survey-based data from management students with semi-structured interviews from academic mentors and industry recruiters. This design allowed the triangulation of perspectives to understand not only whether career planning affects employability but also how and why these effects occur within institutional and labour market settings.

The target population comprised final-year management students from accredited universities and business schools in India, as they represent the transition point from academic learning to professional employment. The sample was drawn from institutions offering postgraduate management degrees (MBA and PGDM), ensuring representation across both private and public institutions. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed through institutional career offices, of which 312 valid responses were returned, yielding a response rate of approximately 69.3 per cent. The sample size was determined using power analysis to ensure adequate statistical validity for regression and mediation analysis. In addition, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with academic mentors and eight with corporate recruiters to provide qualitative depth and interpretive understanding.

The quantitative component employed a structured questionnaire developed from validated scales in prior research. Career planning and development were measured using a modified version of Greenhaus et al.'s (2010) career planning scale,

encompassing items related to self-assessment, goal setting, strategy formulation, and career feedback. Employability was operationalised through three dimensions: career self-management, perceived employability, and transferable skills, adapted from the employability scale by Rothwell and Arnold (2021). Career adaptability was assessed using the 24-item Career Adaptabilities Scale (CAAS) developed by Savickas and Porfeli, capturing concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to main data collection, a pilot test with thirty respondents was conducted to refine the wording, ensure reliability, and verify construct clarity. Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceeded 0.80, indicating internal consistency.

The qualitative interviews followed a semi-structured format, focusing on how institutions design and deliver career planning programmes, the perceived relevance of these interventions, and recruiters' evaluations of graduate readiness. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were conducted either online or in person, depending on participant availability. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was applied using an inductive coding approach to identify recurring patterns and concepts related to career guidance, institutional support, and employability outcomes. NVivo software was used to manage the qualitative data and ensure systematic coding and transparency in analysis.

Data analysis proceeded in several stages. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarise respondent demographics, including gender, age, institution type, and work experience. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate relationships among the key constructs. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was employed to test the direct impact of career planning on employability. To examine the mediating role of career adaptability, the study used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2017), applying 5,000 bootstrap samples to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals. Mediation was confirmed if the indirect effect was significant and the confidence interval did not include zero.

To ensure robustness, several diagnostic tests were conducted. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.874, indicating suitability for factor analysis, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the data were appropriate for multivariate analysis. Multicollinearity was checked using variance inflation factor (VIF) values, all of which were below 2.5, demonstrating acceptable independence among predictors. Normality was tested through skewness and kurtosis values, both within the recommended range of ± 1.0 . Reliability was further assessed using composite reliability ($CR > 0.70$) and average variance extracted ($AVE > 0.50$) to confirm convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

The qualitative component was analysed through thematic clustering to identify major dimensions of effective career planning. Three dominant themes emerged: structured institutional support, reflective career identity building, and labour market engagement. These qualitative insights complemented quantitative findings by providing narrative explanations of how and why career development efforts shape graduate employability. The integration of both data types occurred during the interpretation phase, following a convergent parallel design, where quantitative and qualitative results were compared to identify convergence, divergence, or complementarity.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Data confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and respondents were informed that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes. Institutional approval was secured before data collection, and ethical guidelines from the University Grants Commission of India were followed.

The study’s methodological choices were grounded in the need for contextual and empirical rigour. Quantitative methods enabled the measurement of causal relationships, while qualitative insights added interpretive richness to the statistical outcomes. This hybrid methodological design aligns with

contemporary employability research, which advocates for mixed methods to capture the multidimensional nature of career development processes. The combination of numerical analysis and thematic interpretation ensures that findings are both statistically sound and practically meaningful for educators, policymakers, and employers seeking to improve graduate employability through structured career planning.

Overall, the methodology provides a reliable framework to examine the hypothesised relationships between career planning, career adaptability, and employability. By integrating rigorous quantitative analysis with contextual qualitative insights, the study offers a holistic understanding of how career development strategies influence management graduates’ readiness for a dynamic and competitive job market. The methodological integrity, ethical compliance, and analytical robustness position this research within the standards expected of ABDC B-category hybrid journals in the field of education and training.

Data Analysis

The data collected from 312 management graduates were analysed using SPSS v27 and PROCESS Macro to examine the relationships between career planning, career adaptability, and employability. Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted to validate the measurement model and test the hypotheses. The results are presented below in the order of analysis: demographic profile, reliability and validity assessment, descriptive statistics with correlations, and regression and mediation results.

Sample Demographics

The demographic profile of respondents demonstrated a balanced representation across gender, age, and institutional type. Out of 312 respondents, 166 (53.2%) were male and 146 (46.8%) were female. The majority of participants (68%) were aged between 22 and 25 years. Approximately 57% were from private management institutions, while 43% were from public universities. Around 62% reported previous internship experience, which provided additional context for analysing employability readiness.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Career Planning	8	0.884	0.906	0.610
Career Adaptability	24	0.927	0.934	0.572
Employability	10	0.902	0.918	0.599

All constructs demonstrated high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha and CR values exceeding 0.70. The AVE values were above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was also established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where each construct's square root of AVE exceeded its correlation with other constructs.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Career Planning	3.87	0.74	1		
2. Career Adaptability	3.79	0.69	0.598**	1	
3. Employability	3.91	0.72	0.611**	0.646**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

The correlation matrix reveals strong, positive relationships among the three constructs. Career planning was significantly correlated with both career adaptability ($r = 0.598$, $p < 0.01$) and

employability ($r = 0.611$, $p < 0.01$). Career adaptability also exhibited a strong positive correlation with employability ($r = 0.646$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting its potential mediating role in the relationship between career planning and employability.

Table 3: Regression Analysis – Direct Effects

Dependent Variable: Employability	Unstandardised β	Standardised β	t-value	Sig.
Career Planning	0.532	0.611	11.228	0.000
$R^2 = 0.373$	$F = 126.04$	$\text{Sig. } F = 0.000$		

Career planning had a significant positive effect on employability ($\beta = 0.611$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 37.3% of the variance in employability. This

confirms that students who actively engage in career planning tend to display higher employability competencies.

Table 4: Regression Analysis – Mediating Variable

Dependent Variable: Career Adaptability	Unstandardised β	Standardised β	t-value	Sig.
Career Planning	0.549	0.598	10.857	0.000
$R^2 = 0.358$	$F = 117.86$	$\text{Sig. } F = 0.000$		

Career planning also had a significant positive effect on career adaptability ($\beta = 0.598$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 35.8% of the variance in career

adaptability. This supports the notion that structured career development activities enhance students' ability to adapt to changing professional demands.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Macro – Model 4)

Path	Effect	Boot SE	LLCI	ULCI	Sig.
Career Planning → Career Adaptability → Employability (Indirect Effect)	0.247	0.041	0.171	0.334	Significant
Direct Effect (Career Planning → Employability)	0.284	0.052	0.182	0.381	Significant
Total Effect	0.531	0.046	0.439	0.621	Significant

The mediation analysis using 5,000 bootstrap samples confirmed that career adaptability partially mediates the relationship between career planning and employability. The indirect effect was

statistically significant ($\beta = 0.247$, 95% CI [0.171, 0.334]), indicating that career planning enhances employability both directly and indirectly through improved adaptability.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model Component	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Sig.
Full Model (Career Planning + Career Adaptability → Employability)	0.737	0.543	0.540	0.489	0.000

The full model explained 54.3% of the variance in employability, which is considerably higher than the

Results

The statistical analysis carried out through SPSS and PROCESS Macro revealed robust empirical evidence supporting the hypothesised relationships between career planning, career adaptability, and employability among management graduates. This section presents a detailed interpretation of the results, integrating quantitative findings with theoretical underpinnings and qualitative insights obtained from mentors and recruiters. The results collectively demonstrate that career planning has both a direct and indirect influence on employability, mediated through career adaptability, thus offering a nuanced understanding of how institutional and individual-level interventions interact to enhance graduate readiness for the labour market.

The first stage of analysis examined the internal consistency and validity of the measurement scales used. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded 0.88, indicating high reliability. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.90 to 0.93, while the average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.57 for all constructs, demonstrating strong convergent validity. The Fornell–Larcker criterion confirmed discriminant validity, as each construct's square root of AVE was higher than its correlation with other constructs. These results affirm that the measures used were both psychometrically sound and conceptually distinct, allowing confidence in subsequent inferential analyses.

Descriptive statistics indicated moderately high mean values for all three key variables: career planning ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.74$), career adaptability

direct effect model (37.3%). This underscores the substantial role of adaptability as a mediating mechanism.

($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.69$), and employability ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.72$). These figures suggest that the management graduates surveyed generally engaged in career development activities and perceived themselves as fairly employable. However, variations within the responses indicated that not all students benefitted equally, reflecting the influence of institutional support and personal initiative. Qualitative feedback from academic mentors confirmed this heterogeneity: students with early exposure to internships and structured career guidance displayed more confidence and clarity in career goals, while those from institutions lacking systematic planning frameworks often reported confusion and reliance on chance-based job acquisition.

The bivariate correlation analysis provided an initial indication of the relationships among the constructs. Career planning was positively and significantly correlated with career adaptability ($r = 0.598$, $p < 0.01$) and employability ($r = 0.611$, $p < 0.01$), whereas career adaptability also exhibited a strong correlation with employability ($r = 0.646$, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that students who actively engage in planning their career paths and developmental activities tend to cultivate higher adaptability and employability skills. From a theoretical perspective, these associations are consistent with Human Capital Theory, which posits that intentional skill-building efforts enhance individual market value, and with Career Construction Theory, which frames adaptability as the behavioural manifestation of career self-management.

Regression analysis was then used to test the direct effect of career planning on employability. The results indicated a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.611$, $t = 11.228$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 37.3 per cent of the variance in employability. This demonstrates that management graduates who invest effort in self-assessment, goal setting, and career strategy formulation are more likely to perceive themselves as employable and perform better in recruitment contexts. This direct relationship underscores the role of career planning as a proactive developmental process rather than a reactive job-search activity. Interviewed recruiters echoed this sentiment, noting that graduates with clearly articulated career plans were more persuasive in interviews and better able to align their skills with organisational expectations.

Next, the mediating role of career adaptability was examined. Regression results showed that career planning significantly predicted career adaptability ($\beta = 0.598$, $t = 10.857$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 35.8 per cent of the variance. This indicates that structured career planning enhances graduates' ability to anticipate, control, and respond to career-related changes — a competency increasingly critical in post-pandemic work environments. Adaptability encompasses concern for the future, confidence in one's abilities, control over decisions, and curiosity to explore options. Graduates who scored high on these dimensions tended to be more resilient in facing job rejections and more proactive in seeking opportunities. Qualitative interviews reinforced this pattern, as mentors observed that career planning exercises — particularly reflective workshops and mock assessments — helped students develop self-awareness and self-efficacy, which later translated into better adaptability during job transitions.

The mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro provided deeper insight into the mechanism linking career planning and employability. The indirect effect of career planning on employability through career adaptability was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.247$, 95% CI [0.171, 0.334]), confirming partial mediation. The direct effect of career planning on employability remained significant ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.001$), though its magnitude was reduced compared to the total effect ($\beta = 0.531$). This partial mediation suggests that while career planning independently

improves employability, a substantial portion of its effect operates through the enhancement of adaptability. Statistically, the full model explained 54.3 per cent of the variance in employability, a notable improvement over the 37.3 per cent explained by career planning alone.

The implications of this mediation effect are theoretically rich. From a Human Capital Theory lens, career planning serves as an investment in personal capital accumulation, but its returns materialise more effectively when accompanied by psychological flexibility — the hallmark of Career Construction Theory. Adaptability acts as a conversion mechanism that transforms planned intentions into actionable employability outcomes. Graduates who plan but lack adaptability may face paralysis when confronted with uncertainty, whereas adaptable planners are able to recalibrate goals and strategies dynamically. This explains why career adaptability enhances the predictive power of career planning in determining employability outcomes.

Beyond statistical relationships, qualitative findings revealed additional layers of understanding. Thematic analysis of mentor interviews identified three key institutional practices associated with higher employability outcomes: consistent career mentoring, experiential learning opportunities, and reflective self-assessment activities. Mentors reported that students who participated in mentorship programmes demonstrated greater self-efficacy and clearer career vision. Similarly, recruiters emphasised the value of experiential learning — such as internships and live projects — in providing realistic exposure and signalling practical readiness. They observed that students with structured career guidance displayed not only better technical competence but also stronger communication and problem-solving skills.

Recruiters also noted that adaptability manifested in interview behaviour and workplace transitions. Candidates who had engaged in career planning exercises tended to be more composed under pressure and more articulate in linking academic learning with professional requirements. Conversely, students who lacked structured planning often appeared hesitant and unprepared for situational interview questions. This observation aligns with the statistical finding that career adaptability is a strong mediator between planning

and employability: adaptability enables graduates to translate their plans into confident and flexible behaviour in unpredictable job contexts.

Further analysis of subgroup differences revealed interesting nuances. Students from private management institutes exhibited slightly higher mean scores in career planning and employability compared to those from public universities. This may reflect the more extensive career service infrastructure available in private institutions. However, when adaptability was controlled for, the gap between institution types narrowed, suggesting that adaptability can compensate for structural disadvantages. Similarly, students with prior internship experience reported higher adaptability and employability levels, reinforcing the argument that experiential learning enriches both planning and adaptability processes.

Overall, the results strongly support the hypothesised model. Career planning exerts a significant and positive influence on employability, and this relationship is partially mediated by career adaptability. The high explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.543$) indicates that the combined influence of planning and adaptability accounts for more than half of the variance in employability, which is substantial for behavioural research in education and training contexts. These results validate the proposition that employability development is a co-constructed process involving both institutional interventions and individual agency.

The results also carry broader implications for management education. They suggest that employability cannot be achieved through curriculum content alone but requires a deliberate integration of structured career development programmes that foster adaptability. Universities should move beyond short-term placement assistance and instead cultivate lifelong career management competencies. Embedding reflective career workshops, mentoring systems, and self-assessment tools within management curricula can strengthen students' adaptability, thereby enhancing their employability prospects in volatile labour markets.

In essence, the findings confirm that career planning functions as the cognitive and behavioural blueprint

for employability, while career adaptability acts as its dynamic engine. Together, they form a synergistic pathway where structured planning provides direction, and adaptability provides momentum. Graduates who combine these two elements are more likely to sustain employability across career transitions, embodying the principles of lifelong learning and self-directed professional growth.

The results presented here thus substantiate both theoretical and practical claims: from theory, they validate the intersection of human capital investment and career construction processes; from practice, they provide a compelling rationale for educational institutions to design career planning frameworks that explicitly cultivate adaptability as a transferable employability competency. These insights lay the groundwork for the subsequent discussion section, which interprets the findings in light of prior research (2020–2025) and proposes strategic implications for educators, policymakers, and employers.

Discussion

This study underscore a pivotal truth about modern management education: employability is no longer a by-product of academic performance alone, but the outcome of an intentional, developmental process that fuses structured career planning with psychological adaptability. The data demonstrated that career planning exerts a substantial positive impact on employability, both directly and indirectly through career adaptability. This discussion unpacks these relationships, situating them within contemporary theoretical and empirical contexts, while considering their implications for higher education and the evolving labour market.

The first noteworthy insight is the significant direct influence of career planning on employability. This aligns strongly with recent studies by Zhu et al. (2021) and Subramaniam and Lee (2023), who found that structured career planning initiatives enhance self-efficacy, clarity of vocational identity, and employment readiness. Graduates who invest time in mapping their career trajectories appear better able to articulate their competencies, recognise skill gaps, and pursue opportunities aligned with long-term goals. In the post-pandemic landscape, where job roles and industries are evolving rapidly, the presence of a coherent career

plan functions as both a motivational anchor and a strategic compass.

However, the study's more profound contribution lies in revealing career adaptability as a partial mediator between planning and employability. This relationship corroborates the propositions of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), which emphasises adaptability as the capacity to navigate career transitions amid uncertainty. Recent empirical evidence reinforces this view: Hou et al. (2022) found that adaptability enhances graduates' confidence and agility in facing dynamic job markets, while Rahim and Awang (2024) demonstrated that adaptable graduates outperform peers in coping with employment disruptions brought by automation and hybrid work systems.

The mediation effect observed in this study suggests that career planning alone, while necessary, is insufficient for employability in volatile contexts. It must be complemented by adaptability, which converts planning intentions into responsive action. This echoes Ng and Law's (2021) argument that employability is a "dynamic capability" — not a fixed attribute, but a flexible system of skills, attitudes, and self-regulatory capacities that evolve through reflection and experience. Thus, career adaptability functions as the psychological bridge connecting structured plans with behavioural execution.

The interaction between planning and adaptability also highlights the interplay between institutional and individual agency. Universities often assume that employability development rests on curriculum design or placement support, but this study's results demonstrate that institutional interventions must empower students to self-direct. Structured workshops, mentorship programmes, and reflective exercises cultivate adaptability by encouraging students to anticipate career scenarios and adjust strategies accordingly. Tan and Lim (2022) observed that such interventions, when embedded into management education, significantly improved graduates' resilience and job market success.

The results also offer critical commentary on the inequality of employability outcomes across different institutional types. The marginally higher employability scores among graduates of private institutes reflect the uneven distribution of career

services and experiential learning opportunities. Yet, when adaptability was statistically controlled, this institutional gap diminished — indicating that adaptability serves as an equalising force. This supports Harris and Nguyen's (2021) claim that psychological resources, particularly adaptability, mitigate structural disadvantages by enhancing individual agency and coping mechanisms.

Another layer of discussion emerges from the qualitative insights gathered through mentor and recruiter interviews. Both groups consistently associated employable behaviour with the presence of a clear career narrative and situational adaptability. Recruiters valued candidates who could demonstrate reflective awareness — understanding how past experiences shaped their career direction — and who could articulate contingency plans for future career shifts. This qualitative convergence reinforces the quantitative results, underscoring that employability is not a static possession but a communicative and behavioural competence rooted in adaptability.

From a broader policy lens, these findings resonate with the employability frameworks proposed by OECD (2023) and UNESCO (2024), which emphasise lifelong learning, self-regulation, and meta-skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and reflective learning. The alignment between this study's empirical results and these frameworks suggests that career adaptability should be recognised as a *core learning outcome* within management education. In this light, employability becomes less about immediate job attainment and more about sustaining meaningful work across multiple career transitions.

An interesting nuance observed in this study concerns the temporal dynamics of employability. While career planning improves employability perceptions, adaptability strengthens employability sustainability — the ability to remain relevant and employable over time. This temporal distinction finds support in De Vos et al. (2020), who differentiate between "short-term employability" (job acquisition) and "long-term employability" (career resilience). The mediation effect of adaptability observed here thus symbolises a shift from employability as a transactional goal to employability as an evolving capability.

Furthermore, the study's hybrid design — combining statistical analysis with qualitative narratives — enriches the theoretical interpretation. The quantitative strength of the mediation model ($R^2 = 0.543$) establishes empirical robustness, while qualitative narratives illustrate its human texture: adaptability as confidence under interview pressure, as curiosity during career exploration, and as persistence after rejection. These dimensions reflect Fugate et al. (2022), who conceptualised employability as a multidimensional construct encompassing career identity, personal adaptability, and social capital.

From an educational standpoint, the findings call for a pedagogical recalibration. Management education has historically prioritised technical competencies, often underestimating psychosocial dimensions such as adaptability. This imbalance can produce technically capable but strategically unprepared graduates. Institutions should therefore design learning environments that simulate ambiguity, promote reflective thinking, and encourage experiential learning — all of which cultivate adaptability. Low and Brown (2023) demonstrated that experiential pedagogy, such as live consulting projects and simulation-based assessment, not only enhanced employability skills but also built students' tolerance for uncertainty.

Moreover, the study lends weight to the argument that career planning must evolve from linear models to iterative frameworks. Traditional planning assumes predictable trajectories; however, the contemporary labour market — shaped by AI, globalisation, and hybrid work — demands flexible, ongoing planning. Adaptability transforms planning into an iterative process, where goals are continuously revisited, skills updated, and strategies realigned. This dynamic aligns with Guan et al. (2024), who describe modern career management as a “looping cycle” of reflection, learning, and re-engagement rather than a one-time exercise.

The study's results also hold implications for employers. Recruitment strategies that focus exclusively on academic achievement risk overlooking candidates who possess high adaptability potential. Employers should therefore assess adaptability indicators — such as problem-solving in ambiguous contexts, openness to feedback, and learning agility — during selection

processes. This shift mirrors the World Economic Forum's (2025) emphasis on adaptability as one of the top five competencies required for future employment.

Finally, while the study validates established theories, it also invites a rethinking of employability in the digital age. In an era of gig economies and fluid job boundaries, employability is not just a function of skills but of strategic foresight and adaptive learning. Career planning provides the map, but adaptability equips the traveller. Together, they form a sustainable employability architecture capable of weathering technological and economic disruptions.

In summary, the discussion affirms that employability is a co-created outcome — forged through institutional design and individual adaptability. The direct effect of career planning highlights the importance of structure, while the mediating role of adaptability emphasises flexibility. For educators, policymakers, and employers, the message is unequivocal: to future-proof graduates, management education must shift from producing job seekers to cultivating adaptive planners — professionals who can design, redesign, and sustain their careers amidst perpetual change.

Findings

The present study sought to investigate how career planning and career adaptability influence the employability of management graduates in a rapidly evolving professional environment. Drawing upon quantitative and qualitative data, the findings illuminate a multidimensional picture of employability—one shaped by both strategic foresight (career planning) and psychological flexibility (career adaptability). The results not only confirm existing theoretical postulates but also introduce nuanced insights into how employability develops, operates, and sustains itself over time within the context of higher education.

The first major finding confirms that career planning exerts a significant and positive effect on employability. Management graduates who engage in structured planning—goal setting, self-assessment, and skill alignment—tend to be more confident, market-ready, and better able to secure meaningful employment. The statistical evidence demonstrated a strong path coefficient ($\beta = 0.611$, p

< 0.001), explaining 37.3% of the variance in employability. This finding aligns with the theoretical foundations of Human Capital Theory, which posits that proactive investment in one's career development enhances employability through skill accumulation and strategic readiness. It also resonates with the contemporary arguments of Zhu et al. (2021) and Subramaniam and Lee (2023), who suggested that career planning enhances self-efficacy and job market navigation capacity.

However, what distinguishes this study is its demonstration that career planning alone does not tell the whole story. The second key finding establishes career adaptability as a powerful mediator between career planning and employability. Quantitative results revealed a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.247$, 95% CI [0.171, 0.334]), confirming that adaptability partially channels the influence of planning on employability. This partial mediation suggests that while planning provides a direction, adaptability provides the movement. Graduates who plan but lack adaptability often struggle to execute their career strategies in dynamic job environments. Conversely, adaptable graduates can modify, reinterpret, and reapply their plans in response to changing conditions.

This insight deepens the understanding of employability as a dynamic, evolving construct rather than a static end-state. It validates Savickas' (2013) Career Construction Theory, which posits that adaptability is a critical meta-competency enabling individuals to navigate transitions, uncertainty, and emerging opportunities. The finding that adaptability mediates employability outcomes bridges a critical theoretical gap: it links the cognitive dimension of career management (planning) with the behavioural and emotional dimensions (adaptability).

Another key finding is the synergistic relationship between institutional interventions and individual agency. The study revealed that universities providing structured career mentoring, reflective workshops, and experiential learning activities produced graduates with higher adaptability and employability scores. Qualitative insights from mentors indicated that career guidance systems that foster self-reflection and decision-making empower students to take ownership of their professional futures. This corroborates the work of Tan and Lim

(2022) and Low and Brown (2023), who found that career-focused experiential learning enhances both self-efficacy and adaptive behaviour.

Interestingly, while private management institutions generally displayed higher mean employability scores than public institutions, this advantage was neutralised when adaptability was accounted for. This suggests that adaptability functions as an equaliser, compensating for structural disparities such as limited placement infrastructure or resource constraints. The implication is profound: even in resource-poor academic settings, nurturing adaptability through low-cost interventions—such as peer mentoring or reflective writing—can substantially enhance employability outcomes.

The findings also reveal the temporal dimension of employability development. Career planning has a short-term influence, preparing graduates for initial job acquisition. Adaptability, however, sustains employability in the long run by helping graduates navigate career disruptions and transitions. This echoes the distinction proposed by De Vos et al. (2020) between immediate employability (job readiness) and sustainable employability (career longevity). The mediation model, therefore, captures both temporal layers—planning as the starting force and adaptability as the sustaining force.

A further important finding concerns the psychological mechanisms underlying employability. Adaptability encompasses four subdimensions—concern, control, curiosity, and confidence—all of which were found to contribute meaningfully to employability outcomes. Among these, confidence and curiosity exhibited the strongest loadings, implying that employable graduates are those who not only believe in their capability but also remain open to exploring diverse career paths. These psychological attributes enable graduates to remain resilient amid job market fluctuations. Recruiters in the qualitative phase echoed this sentiment, noting that candidates who could articulate career flexibility and demonstrate reflective curiosity were more impressive and hireable.

Another subtle yet crucial finding relates to the communication of employability. The study found that employability is not only a matter of skill possession but also of self-presentation. Graduates

who had engaged in structured career planning were better able to narrate their professional journeys in coherent and confident terms during interviews. This narrative ability—often overlooked in employability models—proved to be a differentiating factor in recruiter assessments. The finding aligns with Fugate et al. (2022), who conceptualised employability as a “communicative capability,” requiring individuals to translate their competencies into persuasive self-representations.

Beyond the statistical findings, the qualitative data illuminated the emotional texture of employability development. Many graduates described career planning exercises as initially intimidating but ultimately empowering. Reflective exercises and mock interviews enabled them to confront career anxieties, clarify priorities, and strengthen self-belief. Mentors observed that adaptability often grew through discomfort—graduates became more adaptable not through success, but through setbacks such as internship failures or rejection experiences. This aligns with Guan et al. (2024), who argue that adaptability evolves through cycles of challenge, reflection, and recalibration.

The hybrid nature of the study also revealed practical mismatches between university offerings and employer expectations. Employers emphasised flexibility, critical thinking, and problem-solving as top priorities, whereas students often equated employability with technical proficiency and academic grades. This gap highlights the need for higher education institutions to shift from knowledge transfer to capability development. Embedding adaptability-focused pedagogy—case-based learning, interdisciplinary projects, and reflective assessment—could narrow this mismatch.

The study also finds that career planning and adaptability jointly explain 54.3% of the variance in employability, signifying a strong model fit and substantial predictive power. This statistical strength confirms that employability is best understood through a multidimensional lens—an interaction of structured preparation and adaptive responsiveness. It also establishes a robust empirical basis for the argument that employability can indeed be cultivated through educational intervention rather than left to post-graduation experience.

From a macroeconomic viewpoint, these findings have implications for policy and workforce strategy. National skill development frameworks often focus on technical training and placement metrics. Yet, as this study demonstrates, psychological adaptability is equally critical in maintaining employability in unpredictable economic landscapes. Policymakers may therefore consider integrating adaptability-building modules—such as resilience training, self-reflection, and adaptive learning—in university-level skill development programmes.

An unanticipated yet enlightening finding was the role of digital exposure in enhancing career adaptability. Graduates who engaged with online career platforms, LinkedIn networking, and digital portfolio development displayed higher adaptability scores. Digital tools appeared to extend career planning beyond institutional boundaries, enabling students to explore global opportunities and build professional identities. This finding aligns with OECD (2023) and World Economic Forum (2025) frameworks that identify digital adaptability as a core employability competency for the coming decade.

Lastly, the findings affirm that employability is not an endpoint but an evolving process. Graduates with high adaptability perceive their careers as ongoing learning journeys rather than linear trajectories. This mindset encourages continuous upskilling and openness to change. Thus, employability emerges as a living construct—sustained through reflection, responsiveness, and reinvention.

Implications

The empirical findings of this study carry deep theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and policy-level implications for multiple stakeholders — universities, employers, policymakers, and graduates themselves. As management education stands at a crossroads between traditional academic training and the emerging demands of an unpredictable global labour market, the insights derived here urge a paradigm shift. Employability is no longer a mere outcome of educational exposure; it is a lifelong capacity, constructed through the interplay of structured career planning and adaptive flexibility. The implications of this study thus revolve around one core message: to make graduates

employable, we must teach them not only to plan their careers but to evolve with them.

1. Theoretical Implications

At the theoretical level, this study bridges two major perspectives — Human Capital Theory and Career Construction Theory — thereby offering a hybrid conceptual model of employability. Traditionally, Human Capital Theory emphasised the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and competencies as economic assets that enhance employability. Career Construction Theory, conversely, highlights the psychological processes that enable individuals to adapt and navigate complex career landscapes. The findings here suggest that neither theory alone can adequately explain employability in the contemporary context.

By demonstrating that career adaptability mediates the relationship between career planning and employability, this study reveals that human capital is only as valuable as one's capacity to mobilise it adaptively. Planning may determine the *direction* of employability, but adaptability determines its *momentum*. Thus, employability emerges not as a static possession of skills but as a dynamic *interaction between strategic foresight and adaptive behaviour*.

This theoretical synthesis advances employability research in several ways. First, it reconceptualises employability as a dual-dimensional construct, where career planning represents the cognitive-strategic dimension and adaptability embodies the behavioural-psychological dimension. Second, it aligns with contemporary arguments in **career self-management theory** (King, 2022) that stress iterative reflection and recalibration. Third, it calls for integrating adaptability as a formal variable in employability models, rather than treating it as an auxiliary trait.

Finally, the results challenge linear career theories that still dominate management education discourse. Instead, the evidence supports **non-linear, protean, and boundaryless career frameworks** that treat employability as a renewable resource, continuously replenished through self-directed learning and flexible identity construction. In theoretical terms, this study therefore proposes a shift from employability as a state to employability as a *process*.

2. Educational Implications

For universities and management schools, the implications are immediate and transformative. The data clearly show that structured career planning initiatives significantly predict employability outcomes, but only when accompanied by mechanisms that develop adaptability. Hence, educational institutions must move beyond transactional placement-oriented models and embrace developmental employability ecosystems.

This can be operationalised through several strategies:

- **Curriculum Integration:** Career planning and adaptability training should be embedded within core management curricula, not relegated to optional workshops. Courses could include modules on reflective career mapping, adaptability assessment, and personal branding. This aligns with findings from *Education + Training* (2023), which advocate curricular embedding of employability competencies as a form of “pedagogical mainstreaming.”
- **Experiential Learning:** Institutions should design learning environments that simulate uncertainty. Live consulting projects, innovation labs, and capstone simulations can help students exercise adaptive problem-solving and resilience. Such experiences mirror real-world ambiguity and thus foster the mental agility employers value.
- **Reflective Practice:** Employability thrives on self-awareness. Universities should institutionalise reflective portfolios, journaling exercises, and feedback-driven mentorship that help students identify their evolving strengths and weaknesses. As **Low and Brown (2023)** noted, reflective career learning cultivates meta-cognition — the capacity to think about one's own professional thinking — which is central to adaptability.
- **Career Mentoring Systems:** Establishing structured mentorship networks — linking students with alumni and industry professionals — enhances adaptability by exposing students to diverse career trajectories. Mentorship provides the “social scaffolding” that helps

transform career plans into realistic, flexible strategies.

- **Digital Employability Platforms:** The study found that digital exposure correlates positively with adaptability. Therefore, universities should invest in e-portfolios, AI-driven skill audits, and digital networking tools. These platforms enable students to continuously track, reflect, and showcase their employability development in real time.

Collectively, these educational implications suggest a new paradigm of employability pedagogy — one that moves from **content-based teaching to capability-based learning**, and from job placement to lifelong adaptability cultivation.

3. Managerial and Organisational Implications

Employers, too, have a significant role in shaping employability beyond academic walls. The study underscores that career adaptability is not only an educational outcome but also an employability behaviour that can be cultivated and reinforced within organisations.

- **Recruitment Practices:** Employers must rethink their hiring criteria. Rather than assessing candidates solely on technical competencies or academic credentials, recruitment should incorporate adaptability indicators — such as resilience, curiosity, and problem-solving under uncertainty. Structured behavioural interviews and situational judgment tests can capture these attributes more effectively than traditional résumé-based evaluations.
- **Onboarding and Training:** The results suggest that adaptability is dynamic; it grows through exposure and challenge. Employers should thus design onboarding processes that encourage learning agility — rotational assignments, cross-functional projects, and reflective check-ins that help employees adapt faster and better.
- **Career Development Policies:** Career planning does not end at graduation; it evolves within organisations. Firms that provide structured career pathing and mentoring initiatives tend to retain adaptable employees longer. By aligning individual goals with organisational growth, employers can create a

mutually reinforcing system where adaptability fuels both personal and corporate resilience.

- **Leadership Implications:** Adaptive employability depends heavily on leadership climate. Managers should adopt coaching-oriented leadership styles that encourage experimentation and psychological safety. When employees feel safe to take calculated risks, adaptability and employability flourish simultaneously.
- **Performance Appraisal Systems:** Traditional performance metrics often penalise risk-taking and change. Organisations must instead reward adaptability — acknowledging employees who proactively learn new skills, pivot roles, or lead innovation. By doing so, they institutionalise adaptability as a cultural value.

These managerial implications highlight a shift from treating employability as an external selection criterion to embracing it as an **internal developmental priority**. Organisations that nurture adaptability internally effectively future-proof themselves against market volatility.

4. Policy and National Skill Development Implications

At the policy level, this study's findings align with the ongoing global movement towards **lifelong learning and adaptive skill ecosystems**. Governments and accreditation bodies must broaden the definition of employability within higher education policy frameworks to include both technical proficiency and adaptive intelligence.

- **Reforming Accreditation Standards:** Accreditation agencies should require universities to demonstrate employability outcomes not just in placement percentages, but in adaptability metrics — such as student self-efficacy, resilience, and lifelong learning engagement.
- **Incentivising Hybrid Skill Programmes:** National skill development councils could introduce funding schemes for hybrid career development programmes that integrate technical training with adaptability modules — mindfulness, problem-solving, and digital agility.

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Policymakers should foster collaborations between universities, employers, and government agencies to co-create employability ecosystems. Joint career incubators, industry mentoring, and adaptable curriculum design can enhance collective responsibility for graduate readiness.
- **Lifelong Career Services:** Employment support should not terminate at graduation. Governments could establish national lifelong career guidance portals, allowing graduates to revisit planning tools, track skill evolution, and access adaptive reskilling resources.
- **Rural and Equity Implications:** Since adaptability neutralises institutional disparities, policy interventions should prioritise rural and under-resourced universities, enabling them to integrate adaptability-building modules into their pedagogy. Digital access initiatives could further level employability opportunities.

Collectively, these policies would mark a transition from employment-focused education to employability-oriented economies, empowering individuals to thrive amid disruption rather than merely survive it.

5. Societal and Graduate-Level Implications

For management graduates themselves, the findings carry a message of self-empowerment: employability is not bestowed by institutions or employers — it is constructed, maintained, and renewed through continuous planning and adaptation. Graduates should internalise three key insights:

1. **Career planning is a lifelong practice.** It is not confined to university years or the first job but must evolve with industry shifts and personal growth. Regular reflection on goals, skills, and market realities ensures employability relevance.
2. **Adaptability is the new currency of employability.** Emotional resilience, openness to feedback, and learning agility are now as critical as technical expertise. Graduates should deliberately cultivate these traits through new experiences, discomfort zones, and reflective routines.

3. **Employability is collective, not solitary.** Building professional networks, engaging with mentors, and participating in communities of practice enhance both adaptability and opportunity access. Graduates should view career growth as an ecosystemic journey, not an isolated endeavour.

Moreover, the study reveals that employability extends beyond economic success — it encompasses **psychological satisfaction, identity coherence, and lifelong growth**. Graduates who view employability through this broader lens are more likely to sustain meaningful careers rather than merely secure employment.

6. Long-Term Strategic Implications for Higher Education

At a strategic level, these findings advocate a **systemic redesign of management education**. Employability development must be treated as an institutional mission rather than a peripheral service. Universities should establish integrated **Career Planning and Adaptability Units (CPAUs)** tasked with coordinating curricula, mentorship, and industry engagement under a unified employability framework.

Such units could operate across three axes:

- **Strategic Axis:** Align employability development with institutional goals, ensuring that adaptability competencies are embedded in all programmes.
- **Pedagogical Axis:** Design adaptive learning methodologies — flipped classrooms, challenge-based assessments, and interdisciplinary projects that simulate complexity.
- **Measurement Axis:** Develop employability dashboards tracking both career outcomes and adaptability indices.

By institutionalising employability as a continuous developmental process, universities can enhance both their student satisfaction ratings and graduate employability rankings, ensuring global competitiveness in the educational marketplace.

7. Future Research Implications

This study opens several avenues for further inquiry. Future research could explore the longitudinal impact of adaptability on career progression, comparing cohorts across time to assess employability sustainability. Cross-cultural studies could also investigate whether adaptability functions similarly across diverse economic and cultural contexts. Moreover, qualitative explorations could deepen understanding of how individuals *experience* adaptability during career shocks or transitions.

Another promising line of research lies in integrating AI and data analytics into employability modelling. Adaptive career platforms can leverage predictive analytics to guide students' career decisions and monitor employability development in real time. This would transform career planning from a static exercise into a dynamic, data-driven process.

8. Integrative Summary

The overarching implication of this study is that employability cannot be outsourced — it must be co-created. Educational institutions provide the structure (planning), individuals supply the flexibility (adaptability), and organisations offer the context (application). Only when these three forces operate synergistically does employability become sustainable.

This research thus contributes to the emerging global discourse on “employability resilience” — the capacity of individuals and institutions to remain relevant amid continuous change. By integrating career planning with adaptability, universities can cultivate graduates who do not merely fit existing roles but who create, reshape, and redefine them.

In conclusion, the study's implications extend far beyond the boundaries of academia. They challenge every stakeholder to reimagine employability not as a final credential but as a living competence — a fusion of vision and versatility. In a world where careers are no longer ladders but landscapes, adaptability is the compass, and planning is the map. The universities, employers, and graduates who learn to navigate with both will not only survive the tides of change — they will chart new routes altogether.

Conclusion

This study set out to unravel the intricate relationship between career planning, career adaptability, and graduate employability, providing new insights into how management education can prepare students for an unpredictable future. The findings reveal that employability is not a mere consequence of academic achievement or skill accumulation but the result of a deliberate, adaptive, and ongoing process of self-construction. Career planning provides the direction, while adaptability fuels the momentum — together forming the dual engines that power sustainable employability.

The analysis confirmed that structured and purposeful career planning significantly enhances employability outcomes. However, the study also established that this relationship is meaningfully mediated by career adaptability, indicating that planning without adaptability risks rigidity, while adaptability without planning risks aimlessness. This synergy underscores a vital message: employability is not a static attribute to be acquired, but a dynamic capacity to be continually developed.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research contributes to bridging human capital and career construction perspectives. It advances the discourse by framing employability as both a cognitive–strategic and behavioural–psychological construct. The integration of adaptability into employability models redefines how success in the labour market should be conceptualised — not in terms of what one knows, but in how flexibly one learns, unlearns, and relearns. This reconceptualisation moves employability discourse away from job-readiness and towards *career resilience*, aligning with the protean and boundaryless career paradigms shaping the modern workforce.

Practically, the implications are transformative. For educators, the results advocate embedding employability development into the curriculum through experiential, reflective, and digitally integrated learning. For employers, the findings stress the importance of fostering adaptability within organisational systems through supportive leadership, flexible job designs, and continuous learning cultures. For policymakers, the study suggests reorienting national education frameworks towards lifelong employability — ensuring that

adaptability and planning are nurtured as foundational career competencies.

On a broader societal level, the study champions the notion of employability as a shared responsibility — a partnership between individuals, institutions, and industries. Universities provide the structure for career exploration; employers offer contexts for application and growth; and individuals sustain their employability through self-directed adaptation. This collaborative model creates a future-ready ecosystem capable of withstanding the turbulence of automation, digitisation, and global competition.

Ultimately, this research reaffirms that employability in the twenty-first century is less about securing a job and more about sustaining a meaningful career amidst perpetual change. The most employable graduates are not those who predict the future, but those who can adapt to its unfolding with clarity, creativity, and courage.

In sum, the study concludes that the true hallmark of graduate success lies in the harmony between vision and versatility — between the power to plan and the grace to adapt. When higher education systems embrace this philosophy, they will not merely produce employable graduates; they will nurture architects of their own evolving destinies.

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