Political Skills and Perceived Employability: Exploring the Mediating Role of Career Self-efficacy

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This research study aims to explore the impact of political skills on perceived employability, focusing on the mediating effect of career self-efficacy among faculty of higher education institutes in Pakistan. By examining the employability issues faced by faculty in Pakistan's higher education institutes, this study shed light on the challenges and opportunities for professional development in this domain. The survey was conducted using an administered questionnaire. A sample of N= 340 was selected through convenience sampling technique, ensuring representation from various higher education institutes of Pakistan. Data was collected from respondents through online Google forms. The questionnaires determine three variables: perceived employability, career self-efficacy, and political skills. The results indicated that career self-efficacy has a mediating role between political skills and perceived employability. Regression analysis also confirmed that political skills are positively correlated with perceived employability. Faculty members in higher education institutions should prioritize Self-managed career behaviors, such as developing career goals and implementing career tactics, as a means of enhancing their employability. In addition, management should launch formal and informal training programs for employees to strengthen feeling of success and career development. Providing employees with sufficient support and resources can help them improve their career self-efficacy and ensure their future employability.

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1. Introduction

The social, political, cultural, and economic upheavals in the contemporary era forced employees to empower and capable themselves to lead evolving institutes. To stand out and put forward in a competitive environment, individuals need to understand the significance of perceived employability because it is a progressively persistent concern for employees. Employability is defined as "The subjective perception of possibilities of maintaining current employment or for accessing future opportunities to obtain an equivalent or superior position" (Berntson, 2008; Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2014). In the education sector, the global academic landscape has witnessed profound transformations, prompting faculty members in higher education institutes to encounter new challenges and opportunities. Among the various factors influencing academic career success, the role of political skills has garnered considerable attention. Political skills refer to "an individual's capacity to proficiently comprehend, exert influence upon, and navigate social networks and power dynamics within an organizational context" (Ferris et al., 2007). Scholars have argued that political skills can significantly impact perceived employability, which in turn affects faculty members' job satisfaction, career advancement, and overall productivity, and emphasize the significance of using political skills for the betterment of the institution rather than personal gain. It is crucial for long-term success in the higher education sector.

The milieu of Pakistan's higher education sector is particularly intriguing. Over the past decade, the country has seen a significant expansion of higher education institutions, leading to a growing demand for skilled and employable faculty members. In this dynamic environment, the role of political skills in shaping perceived employability becomes particularly relevant. However, the relationship between political skills and perceived employability may not be direct, as other psychological factors could influence this association. Moreover, the mechanism through which political skills may impact perceived employability could be mediated by career self-efficacy. It refers to "an individual's confidence in their aptitude to successfully achieve career-oriented goals". Faculty members with high career self-efficacy are more likely to demonstrate proactive career behaviors, seize career development opportunities, and view themselves as valuable assets to their institutions. Therefore, career self-efficacy could serve as a vital mediating variable that explains how political skills translate into perceived employability.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Building
2.1. Political skills and Perceived Employability
Political skills, an essential component in navigating the complex landscapes of both professional and personal relationships, are rooted in four distinctive dimensions. These dimensions encompass the mastery of social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Each dimension is pivotal in enhancing an individual's ability to understand and leverage power dynamics, making it a valuable asset in the multifaceted world of contemporary interactions. Studies on gaining political skills and perceived employability show that employability is related to a more proactive job search behavior and favorable outcomes because it keeps the individual determined to find better and not get laid back or depressed on what has been lost (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). This shows that the more politically skilled an individual is, the better they perceive themselves in terms of their job and job searches, having a positive impact on their perceived employability.

2.2. Social Astuteness and Perceived Employability
Politically skilled individuals are also known to have this dimension of political skills in them, which is called 'social astuteness' and, according to the definitions provided, is the ability to interpret one's behavior and the behavior of others around them. This mechanism seems to be a superpower because if a person already knows their surroundings and how others would react to their actions, they can plan many things and focus on target-oriented measures that would help them and in turn, the organizations achieve their set objectives (Atay, 2010). Moreover, individuals possessing social astuteness skill can manage their workplace according to their personal goals and abilities and have more power over what they do, which would lead the organization towards success as well as the individual perceiving themselves on a better pedestal and having more job success as well as higher perceived employability (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Basit, Hassan, & Sethumadhavan, 2020; Klassen et al., 2012; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002).

H1A: There is a relationship between social astuteness and perceived employability
Interpersonal Influence and Perceived Employability

Another dimension of political skills is the interpersonal influence that an individual has, whereby they can turn events to influence people and make everything work in their favor. Such individuals achieve their goals and help the organization achieve specific goals by having a positive influence on their surroundings, the people and the processes. According to Petani and Krajinović (2019), people who are successful in influencing others are those who can communicate effectively and collaborate with other members to achieve success, especially when it comes to teachers and their students or colleagues. When teachers can influence their colleagues to work in a certain way along with controlling their students to study rather than taking strict measures, they are not only enhancing their own performance but also taking their institutes towards success and meeting both their personal and the organization's goals efficiently (Bostancı, Tosun, Gidiş, & Karaca, 2016).

H1B: There is a relationship between interpersonal influence and perceived employability

2.3. Networking Ability and Perceived Employability

Politically skilled individuals are perceived to be able to have lasting relationships and maintain their connections effectively, especially within their workplaces, and can also to access any resources they require without any feelings of isolation. This ability is widely known as 'networking ability' and is quite a significant characteristic that is essential for being successful and feeling good about oneself (COSTA & Gatt, 2009; García-Chas, Neira-Fontela, Varela-Neira, & Curto-Rodríguez, 2019). As far as the education sector is concerned, networking behavior plays an important role in teacher's relationships with their students and colleagues at their institutions and their commitment to their work (Khan, 2016). This would help them build positive relationships within the workplace and enhance their status in their institute (Bostancı et al., 2016; Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000). Chen (2017) suggests that social networks can improve individual employability. Networking is distinct as a goal-oriented activity within and outside a team that focuses on building, developing, and leveraging relationships. Positive networking and higher work engagement with colleagues or subordinates enhance one's performance as well as organizational outcomes if everyone works together towards a common goal which is of interest to the human resources and the management of their institutions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2009; Gamero-Burón & Lassibille, 2018; Khan, 2016).

H1C: There is a relationship between networking ability and perceived employability

2.4. Apparent Sincerity and Perceived Employability

The last dimension of political skills that individuals may possess is that of sincerity, more specifically, apparent sincerity, which is the one that people can see, such as work accuracy, fairness, justice, reliability, and honesty. Not only are they the ones that show such abilities in their workplace and have people trust them and show fairness and sincerity Atay (2010); Ferris et al. (2007); Gallagher (2007); Meurs (2008); Moss and Barbuto Jr (2010); Treadway, Breland, Adams, Duke, and Williams (2010) but they also look for gaining justice and support from their supervisors, the principal and colleagues to feel more engaged towards their job increasing their perceived employability (Choochom, 2016).

H1D: There is a relationship between apparent sincerity and perceived employability

2.5. Mediating Effect of Career Self-Efficacy

Career self-efficacy, a critical concept in the realm of career development, reflects an individual's confidence in their capacity to achieve success in their chosen career path. Understanding and nurturing career self-efficacy has become essential, not only for individuals seeking career advancement but also for organizations aiming to support their employees in achieving their full potential. As individuals navigate through the ever-changing professional landscape, this self-belief becomes a cornerstone for setting and achieving career aspirations and contributing to the broader field of career development. Perceived employability and career self-efficacy are distinct but related (Berntson, 2008). Employability is a significant reason that can decide the quality of employees; Tentama and Nur (2021) explored the role of career self-efficacy and partner interaction on employability. They reported career self-efficacy is associated with perceived employability (Liu, Chen, & Tai, 2017). Recent research has explored the interplay between political skills, career self-efficacy, and perceived employability. For instance, a study by Li and Zhang (2022) found that political skills positively influenced individuals' perceived employability, which was mediated by career self-efficacy. Political skills were positively associated with career self-efficacy, which, in turn, enhanced individuals' beliefs in their employability and career prospects.

Individuals who have social astuteness have more stable control over their surroundings because they can read other people and behave accordingly, which is why Choochom (2016) found that people who have social astuteness and personal resources of a positive nature are known to have greater work engagement and self-efficacy. Such people, especially teachers who possess these skills, can manage their work environments in a better way and have greater perceived employability too (Choochom, 2016). A study by Gokhale (2015) saw a significant and moderate positive correlation between teachers having social astuteness and more control over their surrounding workplace and workers and their decision-making and engagement abilities, which are positive factors for self-efficacy. Interpersonal influence is essential for people to be successful in whatever job they are performing and wherever they are working so

that they can have a positive impact on others around them as well as have some degree of control over their tasks and teams. This is the reason that Wang and McChamp (2019) conducted an analysis and found that politically skilled employees had a better physiological and psychological standing and better self-efficacy at their work because they influenced others the exact way they wanted.

There is much research and studying available to examine what role academia plays in the development of working skills that can eventually improve an individual's capability to make proper decisions, develop self-efficacy through networking, and behavior and how it influences the academicians' perceived employability. In one study by Iyer (2016), multiple variables and their relationships were studied, which included the relationship between self-efficacy and turnover, self-efficacy and job satisfaction, work engagement and job satisfaction, work engagement and turnover, self-efficacy and organizational commitment, and self-efficacy and perceived employability. There were positive correlations seen amongst all the variables, and the same variables were further tested on teachers as well, where studied the way they networked through their institutes. The ability to contact and establish connections with future employers in advance of job prospects makes networking behavior an important career approach. In addition, most of people find successful job opportunities while networking online through different portals, so employment possibilities can also be associated with online behavior (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Promoting advanced training and networking behavior was found to be positively linked with perceived employability (Clements & Kamau, 2018). Having apparent sincerity leads to individuals gaining the same from others too, A study by Azeem and Ahmad (2019) proved that apparent sincerity and the overall political skill set are essential to dealing with difficult situations and unpleasant circumstances within the workplace because their trust in others and the trust people have in them results in job satisfaction and proper conflict resolution.

H2: There is a mediating effect of career self-efficacy on the relationship between social astuteness and perceived employability.
H3: There is a mediating effect of career self-efficacy on the relationship between interpersonal influence and perceived employability.
H4: There is a mediating effect of career self-efficacy on the relationship between networking ability and perceived employability.
H5: There is a mediating effect of career self-efficacy on the relationship between apparent sincerity and perceived employability

3.   Research Framework
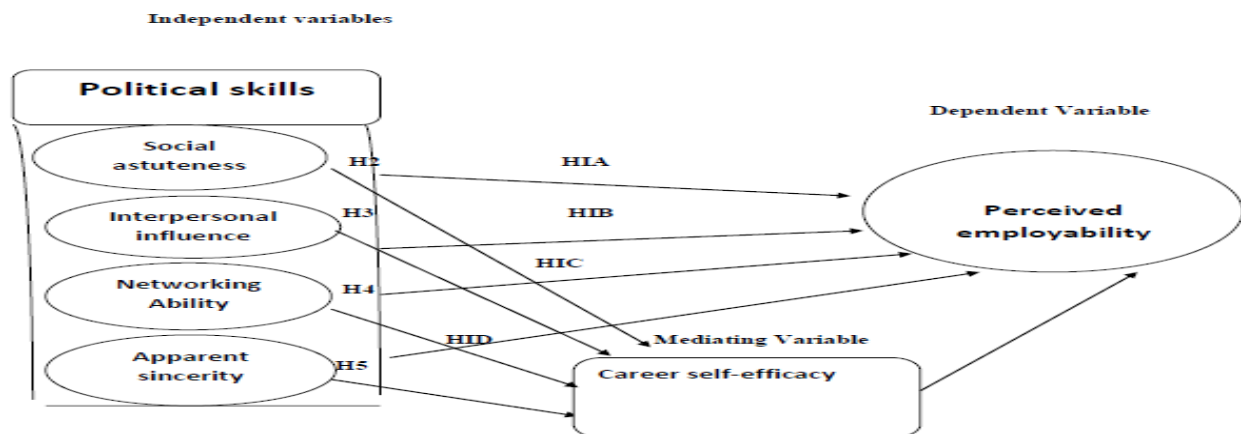
4.   Research Methodology
The respondents of this study were faculty members of private universities in Karachi, Pakistan. Data was collected from respondents through online Google forms. The survey questionnaire was distributed via email to a cohort of 500 faculty members, yielding a total of 340 valid responses. The online survey achieved a response rate of 68%. Convenience sampling technique was used for data collection. Rao soft sample size calculator has been adopted to calculate the sample size, which is near to around 340 with a margin of error of 5% and a confidence interval of 95%. Researcher did data collection and analysis with basic frequency

charts and subsequent Pearson correlation and regression analysis was done via SPSS version 20.

4.1. Measurement Tools
4.1.1. Perceived employability
Perceived employability was assessed with a five-item scale developed by (Berntson & Marklund, 2007). A sample item includes: "My competence is sought after in the labor market." The α-reliability for this scale was 0.88. So it had high reliability. The scale has been validated in countries such as Sweden Berntson and Marklund (2007), Finland Kinnunen, Feldt, Siltaloppi, and Sonnentag (2011), Italy (Caricati, Chiesa, Guglielmi, & Mariani, 2016), and in many European countries (Berglund & Wallinder, 2015).

4.1.2. Career Self-efficacy
Career self-efficacy was evaluated with the five-item scale established by (Higgins, 2008). A sample item consists of: "When I make career decisions, I am confident they are good ones". The α-reliability for this scale was 0.80. The scale has been validated in countries such as Singapore (Zhao, 2012), the USA (Shoji et al., 2016), and Pakistan (Chughtai, 2018).

4.1.3. Political Skills
Political skills were evaluated with the fifteen-item scale developed by (Chen & Lin, 2014). A sample item consists of: "I have always prided myself in having good confidence and political skill at work". The α-reliability for this scale was 0.80. The scale has been validated in countries such as China (Li, 2018), Taiwan (Chen & Lin, 2014). A five-point Likert scale was used, with item responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

5. Results and Findings
5.1. Demographic Profile
The sample size was 340 faculty members of higher education institutes. A significant proportion of the survey participants identified as female. Moreover, most of respondents held the position of Lecturer and possessed over five years of experience within their current organizational roles. The detailed profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Features of the Sample

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	144	42
	Female	196	58
Age Group	18 to 29 Years	57	16.8
	30 to 39 Years	165	48.5
	40-49 Years	80	23.5
	50-59 Years	38	11.2
Marital status	Single	107	31.5
	Married	221	65
	Divorced	5	1.5
	Separated	7	2
Level of education	Graduation	39	11.5
	Masters	77	22.6
	M.Phil	148	43.5
	Ph.D	76	22.4
Designation	Lecturer	211	62.1
	Assistant Professor	84	24.7
	Associate Professor	31	9.1
	Professor	14	4.1
Duration of Work	Less than 12 months	49	14.4
	1-3 years	85	25
	4-6 years	84	24.7
	7-10 years	122	35.9

5.2. Common Method Bias
We evaluated common method bias by examining VIF values. The findings, as illustrated in Table 2, show that all VIF values are below 3.3, characteristic the absence of concerns related to multicollinearity and common method bias within the dataset (Tehseen, Ramayah, & Sajilan, 2017).

Table 2: Multicollinearity Test based on Tolerance and VIF Values

Constructs	Tolerance	VIF
Social astuteness	0.590	1.696
Interpersonal influence	0.182	0.180
Networking ability	0.523	1.911
Apparent sincerity	0.304	3.286
Career self-efficacy	0.404	2.447
Perceived employability	0.252	0.247

5.3. Descriptive Analysis

In this study, researchers have examined the univariate normality of data by analyzing the shapes of Skewness and Kurtosis. Since all the values are between the ranges of ± *3.5,* therefore, it suggests that the constructs fulfill the requirement of univariate normality. The results presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis (Skewness and Kurtosis Analysis)

	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Networking Ability	0.89	3.707	.8424	-.622	.313
Apparent Sincerity	0.89	4.165	.7687	-1.562	3.094
Interpersonal Influence	0.80	4.080	.7989	-.1.42	2.487
Social Astuteness	0.74	3.722	.8235	-.738	0.548
Career Self-efficacy	0.91	4.079	.7564	-1.199	1.799
Perceived Employability	0.84	3.767	.7644	-.549	0.281

5.4. Hypothesis Analysis
5.4.1. Direct Hypothesis

The study has empirically tested four direct hypotheses presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Direct Hypotheses

Hypothesis	B	T Stat.	P Values	Results
Social astuteness-> Perceived employability(H1A)	.422	9.391	0.000	Accepted
Interpersonal influence-> perceived employability(H1B)	.409	8.680	0.000	Accepted
Networking ability -> perceived employability(H1C)	.356	7.832	0.000	Accepted
Apparent sincerity -> perceived employability (H1D)	.418	8.523	0.000	Accepted
R2 .251 F 112.763				

Note: p<0.05. Our results support Hypothesis 1A (β=0.422, t=9.391<0.05), Hypothesis 1B (β=0.409., t=8.680<0.05), Hypothesis 1C (β=0.356., t=7.832<0.05) and Hypothesis 1D (β=0.418., t=8.523<0.05).

5.4.2. Mediating Hypothesis

The study has articulated and tested four mediating hypotheses and has presented their results in Table 5

Table 5: Mediating Hypothesis

	B	T Stat.	P Values	Results
Social astuteness -> career-self-efficacy ->perceived employability (H2)	0.208	4.258	0.000	Accepted
Interpersonal influence-> career-self-efficacy ->perceived employability (H3)	0.028	.418	0.676	Accepted
Networking ability-> career-self-efficacy ->perceived employability (H4)	0.086	1.667	0.000	Accepted
Apparent sincerity-> career-self-efficacy ->perceived employability (H5)	.057	.891	.373	Accepted
R2 .251 F 78.451				

Note: p<0.05. Our results support Hypothesis 2 (β=0.208, t=4.258<0.05), Hypothesis 3 (β=0.028., t=418<0.05), Hypothesis 4 (β=0.086., t=1.667<0.05) and Hypothesis 5 (β=0.57., t=.891<0.05).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Academicians associate the significance of perceived employability in a manner that demonstrates their cognition of those skill sets for proceeding up the career ladder over time. Despite the widespread recognition of perceived employability within the context of job insecurity and the growing demand for increased flexibility, there has been a scarcity of empirical research exploring the factors contributing to individuals' experience of "perceived employability

enrichment". The present study aimed to design a model that describes the perceived employability among faculty of universities in Karachi.

Hypothesis 1A postulates the relationship between social astuteness and perceived employability, and the findings indicated a significant relationship between the two (H1A) is supported. These findings align with previous research, which stated their high level of social astuteness gives them a much-improved knowledge of the work, which again supports their experience of master and sense of control that political skills keep greater self-confidence that they can cope with work stressors and low burnout.

Hypothesis 1B articulates that interpersonal influence plays a very crucial role in enhancing perceived employability. The results of hypothesis H1B findings support the notion, and results confirmed that there is a substantial and constructive relationship between perceived employability and interpersonal influence. Prior research has highlighted that individuals who rely on interpersonal tactics may be perceived as engaging in political behaviors, which can strengthen their credibility and trustworthiness (Riggio, 2015). Consequently, such behaviors may result in an increase in perceived employability among individuals in the higher education sector.

Hypothesis 1C the present study explored the relationship between networking ability and perceived employability, and the results demonstrated a significant association between these two constructs. This study's finding aligns with previous research suggesting that networking plays a vital role in individuals' employability perceptions (Tan, Mwagwabi, Lim, & Lim, 2023). Recent studies have highlighted the importance of networking in today's modern era. According to the research study conducted by Ferris et al. (2005), individuals must investigate situations that encourage network behavior when employees look for work.

Hypothesis 1D articulates the relationship between apparent sincerity and perceived employability, and the results demonstrated a significant association between these two constructs. Recent research has consistently shown that individuals perceived as more sincere and authentic tend to possess higher perceived employability. Individuals with the dimension of apparent sincerity have a high accuracy, honesty, reliability, sincerity, and fairness. They are trusted as they are seen as sincere and fair by others (Atay, 2010; Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007; Gallagher, 2007; Meurs, 2008; Moss & Barbuto Jr, 2010; Perrewe & Nelson, 2004; Treadway et al., 2010).

In conclusion, Regression analysis confirmed that perceived employability had statistically significant relationship with political skills and its four components. The results of our study support the conception that individual factors like networking ability, social astuteness, and building relationships with colleagues at the workplace are related to employability perceived by the individual. The study has formulated four mediating relationships. The results show that career self-efficacy mediates the relationship between four components of political skills: social astuteness and perceived employability (H2), interpersonal influence and perceived employability (H3), networking ability and perceived employability (H4), and apparent sincerity and perceived employability (H5). So, the results demonstrated a significant association between the constructs and it increases the perception of employability among faculty of higher education institutes. The study's result found that career self-efficacy plays a substantial mediating role in the relationship between the four components of political skills and perceived employability. The findings suggest that those with higher political skills exhibit greater career self-efficacy, which, in turn, enhances their perceived employability. These results are consistent with prior research emphasizing the positive impact of career self-efficacy on employability (Stajkovic, Bandura, Locke, Lee, & Sergent, 2018).

6.1. Theoretical Implications
As found, this study does have many theoretical implications. One of the aims of this study was to find the driving force that defines an employee as highly or lowly employable. Despite the existing popularity of the concept in discussions of employability, safety, and flexible working, this study was conducted to understand the factors that may influence workers' observations of their own employability. The strength of this study lies primarily in its sample size, scope, and generalizability. Such a large and heterogeneous sample made it possible to

identify interpreters of perceived employability, which were based on two different theories: the human capital theory and the resource-based theory. It is also believed that the labor market and its conditions are important in shaping the phenomenon of employability.

6.2. Practical Implications

This research offers some actionable suggestions for the employees, as well as the management of an organization. Firstly, the management of any organization needs to recognize the importance of political skills and perceived employability in improving career outcomes. Organizational members, who excel in their work, but are unable to tangibly demonstrate their contributions, owing to a lack of political capacity, need to be identified and trained to increase their social effectiveness. The management should execute formal training programs, and reassure informal training programs to improve an employee's sense of accomplishment and their perception of employability within the organization. Individuals need to recognize the need for political competence and must act aggressively on it. As a result, universities may help academicians feel more employable by offering and designing faculty development programs that help in their career progression. Therefore, as a distinctive aspect of their job, higher education institutions are urged by our study to give attention to developing soft skills, particularly networking and interpersonal ones. Second, the research results are crucial for supporting and motivating professors at institutions of higher learning to adopt self-managed career behavior while working at universities. Improved self-managed professional behaviors, such as setting career goals and putting career strategies into practice, are crucial for increasing faculty at higher education institutions' employability. For employees to advance in their careers and ensure their employability, employers must offer them the necessary tools and support at this time.

6.3. Limitations of Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Like any other research study in management sciences, this study has limitations. Several study limitations ought to be considered in future research.

- First, this study used cross-sectional nature of the data. It limits the ability to establish causality between variables. Future research should consider longitudinal designs and diverse samples to enhance the generalizability and robustness of the findings.
- Second, the data was collected from the universities of Karachi, which may not fully represent the diversity and dynamics of the entire higher education sector in Pakistan. The sample may be skewed towards specific disciplines or academic levels, potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should also take the organizational setting into account. Future studies should utilize a diverse sample from other regions or sectors as well to improve the broader context.
- Third, this study focused on self-reported questionnaires; it should be biased. To address potential bias arising from the use of self-reported questionnaires. Using multiple data sources, such as peer or supervisor ratings, could enhance the reliability and validity of the study's findings.
- Fourth, this study is quantitative in nature. The mixed-method research approach should be used in the future.

7. Conclusion

By investigating the influence of political skills on perceived employability and considering the mediating role of career self-efficacy, this study proposes to contribute to the existing literature on employability in the higher education sector. The results will provide valuable insights for higher education institutes and policymakers in promoting faculty member's professional development and improving their employability perceptions. However, individuals who have good political skills will be able to enhance perceived employability and will be able to make the right decisions regarding their careers. Higher education institutions could strengthen and encourage academicians' political skills and learn how to organize themselves for the opportunities/threats and opportunities existing in the workplace. So, they become more attentive to their strengths and weaknesses to development their perceived employability in the future.

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