

The employability consequences of grit: examining the roles of job involvement and team member proactivity

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Abstract

Purpose – Responding to the call for more research on the consequences of grit, this study aims to examine the relationship between grit and employees' perceived employability. Drawing on the self-determination theory, the authors hypothesize that job involvement and team member proactivity sequentially mediate the relationship between grit and employability.

Design/methodology/approach – A time-lagged research design with a one-month interval was conducted to collect data from three public sector organizations in China ($N = 484$). The model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis, correlation analysis and the PROCESS bootstrapping program in SPSS25.0 and AMOS21.0 software.

Findings – The findings reveal that the positive effect of grit on employability is mediated by job involvement and team member proactivity sequentially.

Originality/value – The authors contribute to the literature on the employability outcomes of grit. It is also one of a few studies that use a job perspective on the grit–employability relationship.

Keywords Grit, Employability, Job involvement, Team member proactivity

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007), has attracted significant interest in the field of work and organizational psychology (Agrawal *et al.*, 2022; Kuruveettisery *et al.*, 2023). Characterized as an individual's ability to cope with challenging work, it encourages individuals to maintain effort and interest in success (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth *et al.*, 2007; Von Culin *et al.*, 2014) even if they are facing failures and difficulties. Duckworth (2016) notes that grit is one of the most accurate predictors of success, particularly for employees in the workplace.

Research has shown that grit is a crucial predictor of long-term achievement and success (Zhong *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, due to its essential role in coping with uncertainty and fostering sustainable personal development (Lee and Duckworth, 2018), grit significantly predicts individuals' success in some achievement-related domains, such as college grades (Strayhorn, 2014), academic performance (Lee, 2017) and business performance (Mueller *et al.*, 2017). However, relevant evidence of the positive effects of grit on employees' career outcomes remains in its infancy (Agrawal *et al.*, 2022).

Responding to recent calls for more research on the consequences of grit for career outcomes (Clark and Clark, 2019; Lee and Sohn, 2017; Southwick *et al.*, 2019), we posit that grit could significantly enhance employees' perceived employability, because gritty individuals use their strengths to complete tasks by investing sustained energy in promoting sustainable career development despite setbacks (De Vos *et al.*, 2021; Duckworth, 2016). Investigating this topic is particularly pertinent given the advent of the VUCA era (i.e. volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), where organizational hiring perceptions and practices are evolving, and the traditional concept of lifetime employment is being replaced by boundaryless careers (Sarkar, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2022). In this context, there is a growing demand for individuals to proactively manage or build their careers (Akkermans and Tims, 2017). Consequently, scholars and practitioners are calling for research endeavors to investigate the factors that help individuals become more employable toward career success (e.g. Kauffeld and Spurk, 2022) because positive personal traits can serve as valuable career resources that help individuals effectively navigate the opportunities and challenges of their environments (Presti *et al.*, 2022; Yu *et al.*, 2023). However, what remains unclear is how the relationship between grit and employability unfolds, and which factors explain the positive effects of grit on perceived employability. Therefore, this study aims to address this research question.

We propose that self-determination theory offers a valuable explanatory framework. The self-determination theory is a well-respected motivational theory that has gained recognition in the fields of psychology (Ryan and Deci, 2017) and organizational behavior (Kanfer and Chen, 2016). This theory suggests that individuals are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Intrinsic motivation refers to the engagement in activities driven by personal satisfaction, derived from inherent interest and enjoyment in the task itself (Grenier *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, extrinsic motivation pertains to undertaking actions with the anticipation of receiving rewards or avoiding punishment or failure (Ryan and Deci, 2020). These motivations arise from fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as posited by Deci and Ryan (2000).

Using this theoretical framework, we develop and test a sequential mediation model, suggesting that employees with grit tend to demonstrate a sense of self-determination and internal motivation in pursuing their careers and, therefore, will score higher on employability (Jin and Kim, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2017). Considering that grit captures characteristics such as perseverance and enduring interest (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007), we propose that employees will attain employability by engaging with their jobs through their job involvement and being more active in their teams through team member proactivity. These contexts allow them to self-verify

their employability status (Datu *et al.*, 2017a; Moore *et al.*, 2017). Figure A1 depicts the proposed sequential mediation model. We tested our model in three public sector organizations in China ($N = 484$) through a time-lagged research design with a one-month time interval. The rationale for selecting China as the location for data collection stems from the high regard for grit in Confucian culture, an essential trait required of Chinese civil servants (Ju *et al.*, 2023; Kim and Lee, 2022). Moreover, exploring the grit of Chinese public sector employees not only addresses the gap in studies on collectivistic culture (Datu *et al.*, 2017b), but also has the potential to advance public human resources practices and theories in China.

This study aims to make several contributions to the literature on the consequences of grit. First, this study answers the scholars' call to examine the association between individual grit trait and perceived employability. In this vein, we extend the empirical knowledge in the grit literature by exploring the career-related outcomes of grit (Gregor *et al.*, 2021). Second, our study is among the first to use self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2012) to explain mechanisms (via what mediators) of the relationship between grit and perceived employability (Datu, 2021). Finally, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting how job-related engagements such as job involvement and team member proactivity can enhance individual employability (Delva *et al.*, 2021).

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

2.1 Grit consequences for employability

Grit, defined as "working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over the years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress" (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007), is closely aligned with internal motivation (Credé *et al.*, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2022). According to Duckworth *et al.* (2007), grit encompasses two crucial dimensions. One is the perseverance of effort, which refers to an individual's tendency to persist in performing challenging tasks, even when faced with potential obstacles or risks of failure. The other is consistency of interest, which is the tendency to continually persist in a specific set of interests to achieve long-term goals (Datu *et al.*, 2017a). Grit is cultivated through mindset, skills and passion (Duckworth, 2016), often leading to a better understanding of future career goals and directions, as well as dedicating more time to persistently seeking employment (Kaufman and Duckworth, 2017), which is a key determinant of achieving career success, including employability (Lee and Duckworth, 2018; Mueller *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, grit has shown a significant positive impact across various environments, particularly in maintaining employment amidst challenges and setbacks (Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth, 2014).

Scholars have begun to use employability to replace traditional career success outcomes in the current world (Jawahar *et al.*, 2022; Lo Presti and Pluviano, 2016; Nimmi and Donald, 2023). Indeed, few organizations can promise lifelong employment today (Cavaliere *et al.*, 2022; Shoss, 2017). In this context, employees are expected to act as owners of their careers and strive to enhance their perceived employability (Arthur *et al.*, 2016; Hardy *et al.*, 2020; Philippaers *et al.*, 2019). Perceived employability refers to employees' perception of their ability to obtain and sustain employment, as well as secure new employment in the face of role shifts and changes in the environment (Vanhercke *et al.*, 2014). To date, less research has focused on job-related explanations of employability (Delva *et al.*, 2021; Harari *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, in the research on job-related factors, more emphasis has been placed on the influence of employers' role in employees' employability, while overlooking the influence of employees' job-related traits (Fugate *et al.*, 2021; Irfan *et al.*, 2023), such as grit.

Existing research has demonstrated the role of grit in maintaining employment (Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth, 2014) and staying focused on achieving long-term goals of employability despite adversity or obstacles (Ismail *et al.*, 2023; Salisu *et al.*, 2020). Drawing on the theoretical

principles of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2012), employability is regarded as an important autonomous internalized motivational goal for satisfying psychological needs (Coetzee and Engelbrecht, 2020). Grit, which encompasses enthusiasm and interest in career goals or activities, fosters higher levels of internal motivation (Yu *et al.*, 2022). This increased inner motivation, in turn, facilitates the achievement of employability as a key autonomous internalized goal. Specifically, individuals with high levels of grit focus on the attainment of long-term career goals and are better able to adapt to complex and challenging employment environments without being deterred by short-term setbacks (Kaufman and Duckworth, 2017). This persistence and strategic long-term focus enhance their employability (Jin and Kim, 2017). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Grit is positively related to employees' perceived employability.

2.2 Job involvement as a mediator

Job involvement refers to an individual's level of concentration, participation, and attention to their current work (Paullay *et al.*, 1994). It pertains to employees' positive feelings about work, as well as their motivations and efforts in their jobs (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Scholars have suggested that positive characteristics enable employees to be more involved in their jobs by fostering greater enthusiasm, energy, and the ability to effectively meet job requirements, leading to personal growth and benefits (Kahn, 1992; Sun *et al.*, 2018). According to motivation theory, individuals' positive personal characteristics can drive them to proactively engage in their work by increasing their concerns about the type of work they are engaged in. Consequently, they leverage their abilities to achieve more favorable work and career outcomes, such as competency development and psychological well-being. Moreover, positive characteristics enhance employees' adaptability to job demands, thereby increasing work motivation and job involvement (Zhao and Han, 2016).

As a positive psychological noncognitive trait, grit has the potential to enhance employees' job involvement (Kanfer, 1990). Recent findings by Widodo and Chandrawaty (2020) support this notion, indicating that individuals with high levels of grit are internally driven to engage in their work, viewing it as crucial for their self-esteem development. Given the inclination of gritty employees to pursue long-term goals, the setbacks and obstacles they encounter in the pursuit of these goals motivate them to contribute more actively (Widodo and Chandrawaty, 2020). Additional support for this link is provided by the research focusing on high motivation in the job context and job involvement (Brown, 1996; Knoop, 1986).

Moreover, following the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000, 2012), we propose that job involvement mediates the relationship between grit and perceived employability, in addition to the direct association between grit and job involvement. Specifically, according to self-determination theory, personal commitment to goals is crucial for optimal functioning and well-being (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Individuals with high levels of grit are characterized by sustained effort and consistent interest in long-term goals (Duckworth *et al.*, 2007); they thus naturally exhibit a strong sense of self-determination and inside motivation (Yu *et al.*, 2022). These individuals are more likely to experience a sense of competence and autonomy in their work, which in turn leads them to invest more energy and time into their tasks in the workplace (Singh and Chopra, 2018). This heightened job involvement fosters positive work and career outcomes (Huang *et al.*, 2019; Johari and Yahya, 2016; Jyoti *et al.*, 2020), such as enhanced employability because their proactive job involvement promotes continuous learning and skill development (Liu, 2018). Following the theoretical explanation presented above, we believe that job involvement mediates the relationship between grit and perceived employability:

- H2. Job involvement mediates the relationship between grit and employees' perceived employability.

2.3 Team member proactivity as a mediator

Griffin *et al.* (2007) defined team member proactivity as the degree of individual participation in self-starting, future-directed behaviors aimed at changing the team's situation or the way the team operates. Team member proactivity includes actions such as proactively solving collective problems and improving overall team functions (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2007). Previous research has demonstrated that individuals driven to pursue long-term goals and accomplishments are motivated to go beyond their job responsibilities, leading to positive actions that benefit the team (El Baroudi *et al.*, 2019).

The literature on team member proactivity consistently highlights its benefits for employability and career adaptability (Seibert *et al.*, 1999). Although direct research linking team member proactivity and employability is lacking, we can infer from extant research on related concepts that the relationship is positive. For example, studies on proactive personality have found a significant positive association with perceived employability (Guilbert *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, studies on proactive attitudes indicate that these attitudes can mediate the relationship between personality traits and employability due to their influence on the development of proactive behaviors, subsequently enhancing employability (Atitsogbe *et al.*, 2020; Spurk *et al.*, 2022).

Based on the self-determination theory, we expect that the satisfaction of psychological needs can mediate the relationship between grit and positive career outcomes (Chen *et al.*, 2018; Datu *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, individuals within a team who possess grit are driven by their commitment to long-term goals. In the context of collective culture in Asian countries (e.g. China), public sector employees with grit are driven to exceed their job duties (Kim and Lee, 2022). This internal driving force inspires their team member proactivity to solve collective challenges and cultivate a more positive work environment for their team (El Baroudi *et al.*, 2019; Twemlow *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, the team member proactivity satisfies essential psychological needs related to competence and relatedness, ultimately enhancing their employability (Jin and Kim, 2017):

- H3. Team member proactivity mediates the relationship between grit and employees' perceived employability.

2.4 Sequential mediating effects of job involvement and team member proactivity

Furthermore, according to the self-determination theory, we propose that job involvement and team member proactivity sequentially mediate the relationship between grit and perceived employability. According to self-determination theory, fulfilling psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is crucial for attaining internal motivation, personal development, and achievement (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Individuals with grit demonstrate self-determination and inner motivation in pursuing long-term goals (Datu *et al.*, 2017b). Their psychological needs are satisfied through job involvement and team member proactivity, which in turn enhances employability, a key internal motivational goal (Coetzee and Engelbrecht, 2020). Specifically, employees with high levels of grit are more inclined to feel in command of their job responsibilities (Southwick *et al.*, 2019; Vainio and Daukantaitė, 2016). That is, they not only demonstrate self-determination and internal motivation in pursuing long-term goals, but also maintain this motivation through self-verification behaviors (Datu *et al.*, 2017b; Swann *et al.*, 1992). Therefore, employees tend to verify their individual selves through increased job

involvement in the work environment to satisfy their needs for autonomy and competence (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Furthermore, self-determination theory posits that individuals naturally internalize the values and goals of their social group (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Influenced by Chinese collective culture that emphasizes group harmony, common interests, and teamwork (Chen *et al.*, 2021), public sector employees demonstrate a commitment not only to their individual selves but also to their relational and collective identities (Chen *et al.*, 2004; Zheng *et al.*, 2018). This motivates them to surpass their job duties and engage in proactive actions that benefit the whole team (El Baroudi *et al.*, 2019). This team member proactivity not only improves their capabilities, but also cultivates team cohesion through collaborative interaction and satisfies their psychological needs for competence and relatedness. According to self-determination theory, the satisfaction of these needs contributes to the achievement of employability, a key internal motivational goal (Coetzee and Engelbrecht, 2020):

H4. Job involvement and team member proactivity sequentially mediate the relationship between grit and employees' perceived employability.

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and procedure

A time-lagged survey research design was conducted in the current study. We invited employees working in public sector organizations in China to join the current study. Specifically, before collecting data, we asked three part-time students who were taking an Master of Public Administration course (i.e. human resource management in public sectors) organized by one of the authors to assist with the data collection. These three part-time students have been working in three different public sector organizations in China. They distributed the questionnaires to their colleagues. All participants were invited to complete surveys voluntarily and were informed that their responses would be treated with confidentiality. The Time 1 questionnaires were sent to 734 participants who were asked to rate their grit and job involvement. They also provided their demographic information. We have deleted three types of samples: first, samples with obvious similarities; second, samples with obvious regularity of answers; and third, samples with contradictory answers obtained from reverse entries. After deleting responses with missing values, we received 568 usable responses (77.4% response rate). One month later, a Time 2 survey was sent to the same participants. In the second survey, participants were asked to rate their team member proactivity and employability. To capture team member proactivity, participants were informed that this question primarily evaluates the extent to which they perceive themselves as parts of the team, or directly collaborate with colleagues to enhance collective performance. We retained the data based on matching the data twice on the basis of deleting the above three samples, and finally obtained 484 usable responses (85.2% response rate). The final sample consisted of responses from 64.7% of men and participants with a bachelor's degree (53.1%). The average age was 30.27 years old ($SD = 6.81$). A total of 50.0% of the participants had been working in the current organizations for 1–5 years.

3.2 Measures

We used validated English scales from previous research, which were back-translated to develop measurement instruments for data collection in China (Brislin, 1986). Seven-point Likert scales (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) were used:

- *Grit (Time 1).* An eight-item scale from Duckworth and Quinn (2009) was used to measure employees' grit, which refers to employees' persistence and passion for long-term goals. One sample item is "Setbacks don't discourage me" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$).

- *Job involvement (Time 1)*. We adopted the three-item scale from [Schaubroeck and Jones \(2000\)](#) to measure job involvement. One sample item is “I am very much involved personally in my job” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.91$).
- *Team member proactivity (Time 2)*. We used the three-item scale from Griffin and coauthors ([Griffin et al., 2007](#)) to evaluate team member proactivity, that is, the extent to which individuals participate in self-priming and future-oriented behaviors to change the situation of the team or the way the team works. One sample item is “I suggested ways to make my work team more effective” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.77$).
- *Perceived employability (Time 2)*. We used three items from the Employment Outlook Scale of the Career Exploration Survey ([Stumpf et al., 1983](#)) to evaluate the employability of employees, that is, the participants’ views on the current job market possibilities. One sample item is “In the current job market situation, I think it is possible to find a job that I am prepared for or have experience in” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.85$).
- *Control variables*. We controlled the following variables: gender (1 = male; 2 = female), age (in years), educational level (1 = high school/technical school and below; 2 = bachelor’s degree; 3 = master’s degree and above) and working tenure (1 = less than 1 year; 2 = from 1 to 5 years; 3 = from 6 to 10 years; 4 = more than 10 years).

3.3 Analytical strategy

Before testing hypotheses, we first used the SPSS software version 25 to analyze the data. Specifically, we calculated the descriptive statistics to characterize all the variables in the current study – computing Pearson’s product-moment correlation to test the directions and correlations among all the variables. To test our hypothesis that job involvement and team member proactivity act as serial mediators of the relationship between grit and employability, we used the SPSS PROCESS macro, Model 6, to test the stability and significance of the mediation effects. Particularly, we calculated 95% confidence intervals (CIs) of the indirect effects derived from bias-corrected bootstrap estimates with 5,000 iterations, which are significant at $p = 0.05$ if the 95% CI does not include zero. We used PROCESS to test our hypotheses because it is widely used in the social, business, and health sciences to estimate direct and indirect effects in single and multiple mediation models (e.g. [Hayes and Scharkow, 2013](#); [Solove et al., 2015](#)). PROCESS generates all of the statistical calculations and implements bootstrapping in a way that facilitates inference about moderated and mediated effects ([Hayes et al., 2017](#); [Hayes and Scharkow, 2013](#)). In the current study, specifically, we used the Model 6 to perform a sequential mediation analysis which explicitly tests how the independent variable (i.e. grit) can influence the dependent variable (i.e. employability) through influencing two distinguished mediators in a sequential way (i.e. influencing job involvement and then team member proactivity).

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary analyses

Before testing hypotheses, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish the discriminant validity of all the factors by using AMOS 21.0. As shown in [Table A1](#), our hypothesized model indicated a good fit: $\chi^2 = 307.55$, $df = 107$, $\chi^2/df = 2.87$, RMSEA = 0.06, GFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95.

Since the data were collected from a single source (i.e. employees), we used a single test to conduct an exploratory factor analysis to identify the potential for common method bias

(CMB) (Harman, 1976). The result – that one factor accounted for 27.22%, which is below the accepted threshold of 40% – suggests that CMB was unlikely to be a problem in the current study. Furthermore, we assessed the common method variance bias using the unmeasured latent method factor technique (Williams and McGonagle, 2016). The latent common method factor explained only 11.82% of the variance, well below the 25% threshold suggested by Williams *et al.* (1989).

Table A2 shows the means, standard deviation, and correlations of all the measures.

4.2 Hypothesis testing

To test the hypothesis of whether job involvement and team member proactivity sequentially mediate the impact of grit on employability, we performed a sequential mediation analysis (Model 6, as described in PROCESS) with bootstrap methods (Hayes, 2013). Figure A2 describes all the paths for the full process model. Table A3 shows the coefficients. As can be seen from Table A2 and Figure A2, grit was positively related to employability, thereby providing support for *H1*. The results in Table A3 show that the total indirect effect (i.e. the sum of the specific indirect effects) was significant, with a total indirect effect ($\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.04$) and a 95% CI between 0.04 and 0.20.

Moreover, the specific indirect effect resulting from job involvement only was significant ($a1b1 = 0.06$; 95% CI = 0.00 and 0.11), and the specific indirect effect resulting from team member proactivity only was significant ($a2b2 = 0.06$; 95% CI = 0.01 and 0.11). The results indicated that both *H2* and *H3* are supported.

To test the sequential multiple mediation effect (i.e. *H4*), the results showed that the specific indirect effect of grit on employability through both job involvement and team member proactivity ($a1a3b2$) was significant, with a point estimate of 0.01 and a 95% CI between 0.00 and 0.01, providing full support for *H4*. That is, job involvement and team member proactivity sequentially mediate the grit–employability relationship.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview of findings

This study aims to examine the impact of grit on employability. Grounded in the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2012), we formulated hypotheses and tested them using a sample of public service employees in China. The findings indicate positive effects of grit on employability among these employees. Furthermore, the grit–employability relationship is significantly mediated by job involvement and team member proactivity sequentially.

5.2 Theoretical implications

First, this study is among the few that explore the relationship between grit and employability, addressing the call for more research examining not only the performance outcomes of grit but also its positive implications for individual careers (Gregor *et al.*, 2021; Widodo and Chandrawaty, 2020). While recent studies have predominantly focused on the predictive role of grit in academic achievement and other educational outcomes (Christopoulou *et al.*, 2018; Credé, 2018), the components of grit – perseverance and passion – have been largely overlooked in career studies (Clark and Clark, 2019). From a strategic management perspective, emphasizing the gritty performance of employees is crucial for fostering innovation and securing a competitive advantage for organizations (Khan *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, research within the talent management literature on star performers suggests that gritty individuals are more likely to achieve career success and maintain employability (Morris *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, future research should focus on grit as a significant predictor of career outcomes,

with potential studies investigating its effects on career success, job performance, work-life balance, and overall work and life satisfaction.

Second, our study uses self-determination theory to examine the sequential mediating effects of job involvement and team member proactivity in the relationship between grit and perceived employability. In this vein, we respond to [Ting and Datu \(2020\)](#)'s call for research into the complex mechanisms linking grit to career-related outcomes. Consistent with self-determination theory, our findings suggest that fulfilling psychological needs for autonomy (e.g. job involvement), competence and relatedness (e.g. team member proactivity) mediates the relationship between internal motivation (e.g. grit) and positive career outcomes (e.g. employability) ([Chen et al., 2018](#); [Datu et al., 2018](#); [Deci and Ryan, 2000](#)). Specifically, employees with high levels of grit perceive themselves as integral team members and view their work as crucial for enhancing self-esteem. This inside motivation drives them to actively engage in their jobs ([Widodo and Chandrawaty, 2020](#)), encouraging them to proactively provide suggestions for the positive development of the team ([El Baroudi et al., 2019](#)). This proactive engagement satisfies their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which in turn fosters employability, a key intrinsic motivational goal ([Coetzee and Engelbrecht, 2020](#)).

Third, this study contributes to the existing literature by elucidating the role of job-related engagements, specifically job involvement and team member proactivity, in enhancing individual employability ([Delva et al., 2021](#)). As scholarly interest in the effects of job involvement and team member proactivity on career outcomes expands, we encourage career researchers to explore these topics further in future studies. First, with a shift to the career ownership debate in the career literature, little research has been conducted on individual preoccupation with one's job ([Hirschi and Koen, 2021](#)). In a sense, one's job has become replaced by individual concerns about one's career. While this has contributed to the development of the individual career management field, it has inaccurately implied that individuals are indifferent toward their current positions. Such a perception misrepresents the reality of work and employment, necessitating a more balanced approach. Future research should therefore investigate individual job involvement to promote happier, healthier, and more productive workers ([Yuspahrudin et al., 2020](#)). Next, we encourage researchers to examine teamwork within the public sector, particularly in the context of China's collectivistic culture, which emphasizes group harmony, collective interests and teamwork ([Chen et al., 2021](#)). This cultural atmosphere facilitates cooperation among employees and the implementation of common policy goals ([Hong et al., 2018](#)). To address the fragmentation in management tasks caused by bureaucracy in China's public sectors, effective cross-departmental, cross-level, and cross-regional collaboration is essential ([Liang et al., 2019](#); [Ma et al., 2023](#)). Effective teamwork in Chinese public sectors is emerging as a critical approach for optimizing resource integration, task collaboration, and achieving work objectives ([Schwarz et al., 2020](#)). Consequently, examining team member proactivity in Chinese public sectors is vital for both solving collective problems and enhancing individual capabilities. Additionally, given that some studies highlight the potential negative aspects of proactive behaviors at work ([Spychala and Sonnentag, 2011](#)), further research is needed to understand individual proactive behaviors in the Chinese public sector and their consequences for other team members.

5.3 Practical implications

The results from our empirical research provide some practical implications. First, enhancing the employability of public sector employees is crucial. A high level of employability is considered as the responsibility of both organizations and their employees ([Philippaers et al., 2019](#)). Improving workers' employability is an important issue for the public sector ([Vermeeren and Van der Heijden, 2022](#)), especially in the Chinese public sector, because the

new public management movement, characterized by a business-oriented approach, fosters civil servants to face new public service demands coming from an increasingly demanding society (e.g. putting more emphasis on creating public value) (Brown, 2021; Miao *et al.*, 2018). This means that public sector employees need to accept new roles and acquire new competencies (Scicchitano, 2017). Consequently, public sector employees should proactively engage in continuous skill and knowledge development, improve their employability, and thereby strengthen the sustainability and stability of their employment.

Second, considering the significant role of grit in enhancing the employability of public sector employees, it is essential to encourage the development of grit-related factors such as responsibility, self-efficacy and positivity. Additionally, it is encouraged for public sector organizations to cultivate grit and other related positive psychological concepts by providing employees with educational programs (such as hope, self-efficacy, and self-regulation). In this way, public sector employees can develop a stable self-belief in life and work and the ability to regulate their thoughts and behaviors, thereby significantly improving their employability.

Third, given that job involvement is also a key factor in enhancing the employability of employees, managers should strive to improve the fairness of organizational outcomes, such as work assignments and evaluations, to increase the job involvement of employees. A work environment characterized by fair transactions and equitable distribution fosters a sense of belonging among employees, thereby increasing their work commitment. Moreover, public sector organizations should pay close attention to the current status of their employees and provide timely support and encouragement to ensure employees feel valued and supported. Finally, employees are also encouraged to enhance team member proactivity, as it is a crucial mediator in transferring the benefits of grit to employability. For instance, during the recruitment and selection process, it is essential to allocate proactive individuals to teams with high levels of member proactivity to establish and maintain optimal team performance.

5.4 Limitations

The present study has some limitations. The first limitation regards the single-source data set; that is, employees' self-rating data were collected to test our hypotheses. While our analyses indicated that CMB was not a significant issue in this study, we encourage future research to incorporate measures from multiple sources (e.g. leaders' ratings of employees' employability) to enhance the robustness of findings. Second, the sample was confined to employees within Chinese public sector. Given the emphasis on collectivism and the group concept in the Chinese public sector (Lee *et al.*, 2020), it is more likely that these employees generate team member proactivity to improve teamwork. Thus, we advocate for future studies to replicate and extend the findings by including employees from diverse industries or work settings. For example, it would be worthwhile to study the effect of newcomers' value of person-related skills and abilities compatible with new working contexts on their perceived employability, especially for newcomers working in cross-cultural career settings where high degrees of expatriate failure have been observed in previous research (Makkonen, 2017). Finally, although we primarily explored the intervening mechanism of employees' grit in relation to employability, we did not consider other potential moderators. Therefore, future research should identify and examine other potential moderators, such as working environment, job insecurity, and career strategies.

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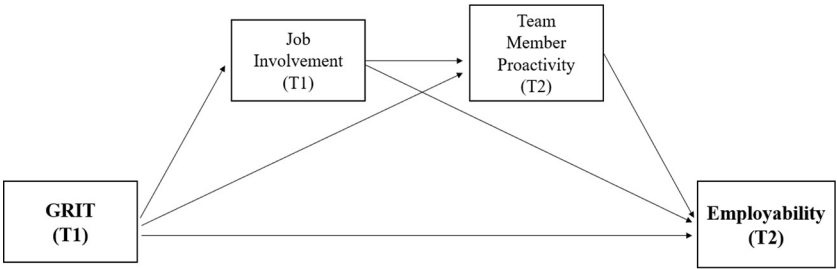
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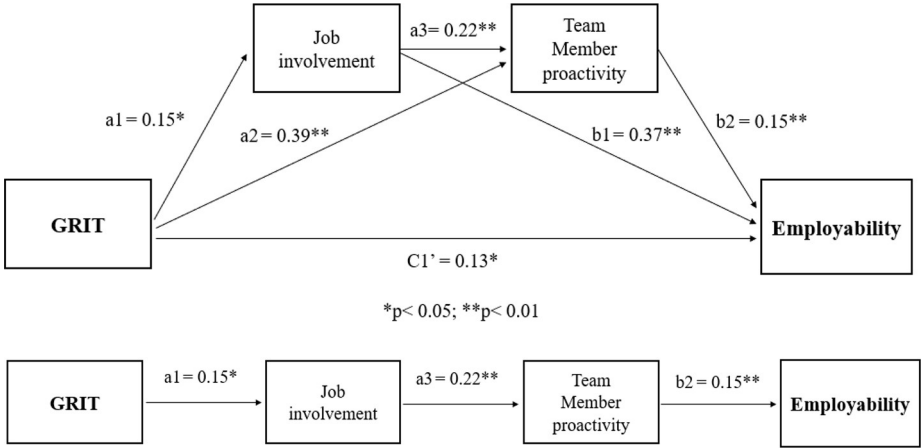
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Source: Created by the authors

Figure A1. Proposed sequential mediation model



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Figure A2. The results of the sequential model with path coefficients

Table A1. Comparison of measurement models

Model	χ^2 (df)	RMSEA	GFI	TLI	CFI
Four factors (baseline model): Grit, job involvement, team member proactivity and employability	307.55 (107)	0.06	0.93	0.94	0.95
Three factors: Grit and job involvement combined	1918.03 (116)	0.18	0.66	0.51	0.58
Three factors: Job involvement and team member proactivity combined	1376.42 (116)	0.15	0.71	0.66	0.71
Two factors: Grit, job involvement and team member proactivity combined	2112.24 (118)	0.19	0.63	0.47	0.54
One factor: All variables combined	2693.46 (119)	0.21	0.55	0.32	0.40

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Table A2. Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Grit	4.80	0.82	(0.77)			
2. Job involvement	4.95	1.19	0.11*	(0.91)		
3. Team member proactivity	5.24	0.93	0.39**	0.33**	(0.77)	
4. Employability	5.11	1.07	0.19**	0.46**	0.30**	(0.85)

Notes: $N = 484$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$. Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal in the parentheses
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Table A3. Results of the analysis based on bootstrap

Path	Effect	95% CI
Total indirect effect	0.12	[0.04, 0.20]
1. Grit → Job involvement → Employability	0.06	[0.00, 0.11]
2. Grit → Team member proactivity → Employability	0.06	[0.01, 0.11]
3. Grit → Job involvement → Team member proactivity → Employability	0.01	[0.00, 0.01]

Notes: Bootstrap samples for bias corrected bootstrap confidence intervals: 5,000; CI is the abbreviation of "confidence interval"
Source: Created by the authors

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