

Explaining Professional Career Growth in Occupational Safety and Health: A Career Development Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives of young safety practitioners and health officers (SHOs) regarding the progression of their professional careers. Career development theory and learning perspectives serve as the foundation for the conceptual framework. Through the self-determination theory, employees are able to self-acknowledge the career path they have selected and the tasks they have to do for their development. The framework places a significant emphasis on individual antecedents, such as career knowledge and career decision-making, as the ability to make decisions regarding one's career. Career maturity and continuous professional development (CPD) programs act as a mediating and mediator between these two characteristics at the same time. According to the concept, the perception of one's own professional advancement is the result of professional development. Occupational safety and health practice is progressively being influenced by regulatory changes, technological breakthroughs, and complex workplace dangers. It is essential for members of the occupational safety and health (OSH) community to be able to maintain their relevance in the workplace because OSH is a profession that is quickly undergoing change. For the purpose of aiding the translation of job preparation into perceptions of career advancement, continuous professional development (CPD) programs are introduced as an important component of development. The purpose of this study is to make a substantial contribution to the field of occupational safety and health literature by highlighting the vocational duties and career development obstacles that young occupational safety and health practitioners in Malaysia confront. Organisations, professional organisations, and policymakers who are looking to develop career pathways, CPD frameworks, and long-term competence sustainability in the occupational safety and health workforce can benefit from the study's theoretical and practical insights into these topics.

Keywords: Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), Career Development, Perceived Professional Career Growth, Career Knowledge, Career Decision-Making, Career Maturity, Continuous Professional Development Programme

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

With the rapid growth of technology, expanding industrial operations, and increasingly complicated work systems have amplified structured occupational safety and health (OSH) governance, which demands a continual safe working environment in the workplace. Malaysian occupational safety and health legislation, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 1994, mandates that industries such as manufacturing, construction, shipbuilding, gas and petroleum processing, and cement production employ full-time, registered Safety and Health Officers (SHOs). This requirement emphasises the crucial role of SHOs in hazard identification, risk assessment, incident investigation, and the implementation of preventive measures. Safety officers are responsible for identifying hazards, analysing risks, investigating events, and creating risk-control methods. To build a safe and healthy working environment, a safety officer plays a critical role in managing occupational risks. In addition, SHOs are necessary to control industrial safety issues and enhance efficiency. Non-compliance indicates a statutory breach under Section 29 of OSHA 1994, with penalties of up to an RM50,000 fine or imprisonment (Order, 1997). The requirement for knowledgeable and compliant safety officers is substantial across Malaysia's industries to avoid or reduce the number of incidents (Jaafar et al., 2023;

Sarah Gideon, 2024). A safety officer must be appropriately educated and qualified to advise on identifying, establishing, and maintaining a safe and healthy environment (Industrial Safety Division Malaysia, 2016).

Thus, the necessity for qualified, certified, experienced, trained, and adaptable safety officers is critical across Malaysia's industries. These regulations state that a safety and health officer (SHO) must be registered with the Director General of the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), possess relevant qualifications (e.g., a diploma in occupational safety and health or equivalent experience), have completed specialised continuing education programmes (CEPs) that focus on safety and health officer competency courses, and have passed the required examinations. Qualified safety and health specialists are critical for improving safety standards and compliance requirements (Bernama, 2021, 2023, 2025; Dexter, 2021; Jabatan Keselamatan Dan Kesihatan Pekerjaan, 2025). According to the Malaysian government strategy, professional-body regulations such as the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and DOSH verification guidelines, the safety officer must meet specific examination and interview criteria, as well as have a work experience portfolio and a specialised Occupational Safety and Health programme (Mohd Esa Baruji & Ts Majahar Abd Rahman, 2021). Despite the formal structures guiding SHO registration and practice, young SHO practitioners often encounter career barriers in their early years (Ramli, 2014). Many are being assigned primarily with administrative roles such as document management, permit issuance, site compliance verification, and inspection execution, rather than being granted competency-based responsibilities (Ramli, 2014). The lack of structured career guidance, inconsistent job titles, and unclear competency benchmarks further contribute to confusion and hinder the formation of a coherent professional trajectory. Thus, the first five to ten years of a young OSH practitioner's career are critical for implementing the tactics outlined.

Inadequate managerial emphasis, cultural challenges, and financial and human resource limitations prevent the effective implementation of occupational safety and health in various businesses (Ho & Teh Athira, 2024; Marzuki et al., 2022). Senior safety and health officers have a clearer understanding of their competence, unlike younger OSH practitioners, who remain uncertain about which skills and capabilities they need to improve. Additionally, the increasing number of continuous and professional certification pathways adds to their confusion, resulting in a limited understanding of career progression opportunities (Mohd Esa Baruji & Ts Majahar Abd Rahman, 2021). Consequently, establishing a young OSH practitioner career trajectory presents a hurdle (Industrial Safety Division Malaysia, 2016).

As Malaysia mandates a continuous safe and healthy working environment, young OSH practitioners are successors to senior competent individuals; therefore, they must view their career growth as crucial. This study examines perceived professional career growth through the lens of self-determination theory, career maturity, career knowledge, and career decision-making, while also considering the moderating role of continuous professional development (CPD). The framework aims to explain how internal motivation, preparedness, and structured learning influence the ability of young SHO practitioners to progress confidently in their careers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career Knowledge

When designing a career path, individuals must understand the world of work. Employees need to review occupations, industries, required certificates, and in-demand skills for their chosen field. With this knowledge and awareness, individuals can make effective decisions. We must develop and emphasise two key components: self-knowledge and occupational or world-of-work knowledge. Individuals must achieve person-job and person-organisation fit to remain relevant, competent, and vital in the market (Afsar et al., 2015).

On self-knowledge, understanding, and determining one's own characteristics to align with career paths: an individual should understand their interests, know the areas in which they excel, recognise the circumstances in which they feel most comfortable, and clearly understand their own personality. By understanding their personality, they become aware of their values, know what they should strive for and what they want to achieve, and can manage the most essential aspects of themselves and their work environment. Self-knowledge also refers to a person's ability to recognise their skills and abilities, both soft and concrete skills. Initially, by understanding which skills are essential for their profession, individuals can plan how to improve in areas where they are

lacking. Once self-knowledge is established, the individual will be able to set short-term and long-term personal objectives.

Occupational or world of work knowledge involves obtaining factual information about the job market and the career structure of the chosen profession (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). This includes understanding the tasks and responsibilities associated with the career goal, as well as the roles, potential career pathways, and the profession's stability within the industry. In addition to this information, work knowledge also involves gathering details about compensation and potential benefits, possible working conditions and culture, and the industry market. All this information is necessary for individuals to plan for the formal certification process and ensure they are prepared to secure the position they are aiming for.

The appointment of Safety and Health Officers in Malaysia is regulated under the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 1994. Safety and Health Officers must possess formal technical competencies through accredited training programmes, pass qualifying examinations, and be registered with the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH). OSH officers operate under strict legal and ethical obligations, including compliance, hazard control, and regulatory enforcement responsibilities. In the OSH field, career growth is organised, allowing individuals to advance from Safety and Health Officer to Senior Officer, OSH Manager, auditor, or consultant, showing how professionals can grow and build their careers over time. Furthermore, the continuous professional development (CPD) programme is compulsory and promoted through seminars, competency upgrades, and evolving regulatory requirements. Participation in the CPD programme further emphasises professionalisation, aligning with contemporary models of ongoing learning in professional careers. Therefore, the OSH Officer role in Malaysia exhibits all essential attributes of a professional career, as supported by established academic theories.

Career Decision-Making

An individual with high self-determination has a clear career view and is capable of making decisions about their professional involvement. Career decision-making is a systematic process of evaluating multiple career options and selecting the path that best aligns with individual skills, interests, values, and life goals. Additionally, it is an ongoing process of exploration, discovery, and re-evaluation through one's life.

In making career decisions, a systematic process is required to determine an individual's vision, values, interests, personality, skills, and abilities (Parola & Marcionetti, 2021). The capabilities of individuals to know their own strengths, to plan their self-journey, and to achieve the meaning of the activities involved in fulfilling their professional career paths. In the meantime, the individual also did their own reviewing, gaining a clear understanding of the opportunities to achieve career success by recognizing that they need specific certifications and qualifications, and preparing themselves to take advantage of professional opportunities, trends, and discussions in their field.

Thus, moving forward, these individuals will evaluate opportunities and strategise by analysing the benefits and consequences of their potential decisions. By analysing the potential choices, individuals will combine all the alternatives and make the best career decisions that align with their personal objectives. The analysis will lead to action and transition, whether over a long-term or short-term period. All the strategies chosen are readily prepared for any circumstances. A specific position and area will be selected, and the individual will take the final decision to ensure the position's objectives are met. However, if an unpredictable situation arises that makes the desired position difficult to achieve or impossible, an individual will be able to remain resilient by making necessary adjustments until the goal is successfully achieved.

The decision to pursue a career as a safety and health officer in Malaysia depends on several factors. The profession is impactful and rewarding, as it involves ensuring the safety and health of the workplace environment (Jaafar et al., 2023). Safety officers find their work meaningful by eliminating the risks of accidents, and the positive outcomes of their efforts provide a sense of personal fulfilment. In addition to meeting the government's requirements for workplace safety, the profession offers favourable opportunities and stability. Since continuous CPD attendance is compulsory, ongoing skills enhancement is a legitimate requirement for professionals, who must regularly update and strengthen their skills. Furthermore, the profession offers a clear career path that can lead to management roles. Job opportunities are available across all industries, providing greater prospects for

young OSH practitioners. Therefore, when deciding on a future career, internal motivation and self-determination play the most significant roles in guiding individuals to achieve their personal goals. Extrinsic factors also serve as push factors, helping individuals overcome hardships and obstacles and reach their desired goals.

Career Maturity

Career maturity is the ability to make informed career choices, be aware of career decisions, maintain a realistic perspective on one's career, and continually develop plans and strategies over time to achieve career success. Having a clear sense of their ultimate career goal influences a professional's ability to succeed in their career trajectory.

The individual's capacity for career choice, understanding of the requirements in decision-making, and consistency and realism regarding career choices indicate successful attainment of career maturity. By referring to Crites (1973), career maturity dimensions hypothesized that individuals are applicable to orientation to vocational choices, information and planning, consistency of vocational preferences, crystallization of traits, and wisdom of vocational preferences. The individual capable of making career decisions possesses occupational choices, psychological attributes, awareness of preferences across different occupations, and requisite abilities for their preferred occupation. It can be distinguished into cognitive and affective dimensions (Prideaux & Creed, 2001), the abilities and interest of individuals to interpret their career events and to accomplish career development tasks (Edward et al., 1998). Employees with career maturity exhibit positive attitudes towards career decision-making and possess an awareness of career prospects (Prideaux & Creed, 2001). Furthermore, employees with career maturity are able to plan and adapt to various circumstances after making career decisions (Qonitatin & Kustanti, 2021).

Career maturity encompasses the realisation of career success, which is characterised by an individual's stability and confidence in their abilities at the pinnacle of their career, demonstrating expertise in their field, and effectively navigating challenges and changes throughout their career development. Furthermore, career maturity is represented by an individual's ability to adapt to various situations in the development of their career, as well as by career stability, recognition, and satisfaction (Ali et al., 2023). The ability to adapt to diverse conditions enables individuals to make suitable professional choices by considering their own education, knowledge, and intelligence to guide their career interests and achieve their career development. Accordingly, individuals demonstrate sufficient maturity in selecting job paths that align with their psychological characteristics.

Therefore, the decision to become a safety officer must be fully understood by young OSH practitioners. They should examine employment obligations, government safety standards, and organisational demands. Whenever they decide to become a safety-competent person, they should consider the wide range of abilities in the safety area. A comprehensive grasp of future expectations and demands should assist them in staying on track with their career planning. A mentor can assist young OSH practitioners with communicating, strategising, and focusing on gaining the necessary abilities.

Perceived Professional Career Growth

A professional career is characterised as a prolonged occupational trajectory demanding specific knowledge, formal qualifications, compliance with ethical norms, and ongoing development, underpinned by a systematic progression framework (Abadi et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2023). Professional career progression encompasses a sequence of career experiences that signify a certain life stage, marking a move from one career phase to another, or vice versa. It is professional experience shaped by various facets of life. In addition, employees view professional career advancement by recognising the reality of career success, which offers stability. The employee is assured of their own growth in long-term professional advancement. Consequently, by comprehending the career objective, the employee autonomously addresses their personal needs, prioritises goal attainment, and experiences pride and psychological fulfilment.

Self-directed learning, which is dynamic and influenced by a variety of factors, drives perceived professional career advancement. When employees feel they are fulfilling significant aspects of their profession, they

demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours on the job, leading to growth results. The perceived professional career progress is an individual commitment, a drive for personal growth, and the satisfaction acquired through the implementation of the decision (Khan et al., 2025). The scenario that required adaptation led to the growth of the career, which became a commitment. An employee is said to have perceived professional career advancement when they can anticipate the future outcomes of their career, specifically what they will achieve in the next five to ten years of continued employment. Furthermore, employees who perceive professional growth are able to strategise to meet their careers' requirements. Conversely, employees who perceive limited opportunities for professional growth tend to exhibit passive behaviour by waiting for others to suggest ideas for their careers. This often leads to blaming the environment, surroundings, and coworkers, as they feel trapped in their chosen job due to poor decision-making resulting from a lack of proactivity in exploring their prospects.

In the occupational safety and health profession, young OSH practitioners must possess strong self-determination, remain alert and vigilant, and understand the workplace and its environment. They are subject to safety laws and ethics, which foster broad thinking and the ability to anticipate risks in their surroundings. Because the occupational safety and health field is broad, young OSH practitioners need to identify their capabilities to focus on areas of competence while also developing expertise in every fundamental concept of the field. Their job scope requires them to be legally compliant, ethical, detail-orientated, predictive, and broad thinkers. The field must be fully understood to enable practitioners to be well-versed and prepared for professional career advancement. In terms of self-determination, young OSH practitioners must assess their capabilities, interests, and judgements when strategising future career outcomes.

Continuous Professional Development

To become a professional and registered Safety and Health Officer (SHO), there are mandatory requirements set by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), Malaysia, that need to be fulfilled. The fundamental rule for a SHO's CPD is that they shall attend any continuous education programme at least once a year for the purpose of renewing their registration ("Green Book") (Regulation 8 of the Occupational Safety and Health (Safety and Health Officer) Regulations 1997). The tracking of Continuing Education Points (CEP) or CPD hours is essential for competent individuals to continually update their skills and knowledge and remain professionally competent.

In addition, SHOs typically fulfil their continuous education requirements by attending programmes offered by recognised entities, such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) or DOSH-approved training providers. These activities are generally structured around three primary types of OSH development: i) Formal Training: Attending courses, workshops, seminars, and conferences related to Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). Examples: Advanced courses on Chemical Health Risk Assessment (CHRA), OSH-Management Systems (OSH-MS), Incident Investigation, or specific industry hazards (e.g., Construction Safety). ii) Professional Activities: Participating in OSH-related projects, serving on safety and health committees, or undertaking internal OSH audits. iii) Self-Study/Informal Learning: Reading OSH journals and research papers or engaging in documented online learning related to new OSH legislation or best practices.

DOSH tracks attendance and CPD points for safety and health officers through a registration and renewal process, as required by regulations mandating annual attendance, often facilitated by recognised training centres. However, failure to attend the CPD programme has an impact on the SHO's registration; licences will not be renewed, and the individual will no longer be legally permitted to function as a Safety and Health Officer in any workplace. Non-attendance at CPD results in the expiration of professional licensure and serious legal penalties.

Self-Determination Theory

Strategising the career trajectory and making decisions for the action plan requires employees to examine themselves and their surroundings and predict future career outcomes. Self-determination refers to an individual's autonomous motivation and personal agency in controlling their activities, learning, and career choices. Established in self-determination theory, it represents the extent to which individuals feel autonomous, competent, and supported in achieving their professional goals (Ryan & Deci, 1985). In occupational settings, self-determined employees actively engage in career development activities, show greater tenacity, and demonstrate higher career maturity, which contributes to perceived professional advancement. They are

effectively engaged with three basic psychological concepts: autonomy, the ability to control decisions and actions; competence, by recognising their skills and capabilities in fulfilling their duties; and relatedness, by having connections with others and shared values in the community. Initially, self-determination allows employees to acknowledge its importance when setting professional goals and enables them to define their career aims.

In accordance with Ryan & Deci, (1985), self-determination theory covered the macro-theory of human motivation, development, and well-being. The notion of theory proposed that people should focus on the degree of self-determination and self-motivation in controlling their own psychological demands. The fundamental psychological desire and inherent inclination towards growth, mastery, and integration with the social environment encourage individual autonomous motivation and develop personal well-being. This innates the psychological requirements in fulfilling psychological growth by obtaining optimal control of the surroundings. Notably, the individual with self-determination possesses a sense of choice, volition, and self-endorsement, which would reflect their self-autonomy in every action and activity taken. Thus allowing them to make their own choice.

Additionally, in self-determination, the essential psychological demands for a sense of belonging and connection with others are high. The basic psychological forces employees to effectively cope with their surroundings. Feeling accepted by others will improve self-motivation by caring for others and, in return, obtaining care from others. Mainly, the employee with self-determination keeps challenging themselves to reach the desired goals. Therefore, basic self-determination theory relates to the principles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This is significant in helping people attain individual ambitions. Intrinsic motivation, contentment, and interest contribute to the quality of an individual's performance. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation allows individuals to actively engage in achieving a specific purpose by regulating their own behaviour.

Subsequently, the OSH profession possesses the autonomy to make decisions over the rules of safety and health in the workplace. They are expected to have a high level of skill and competence in their field by recognising their own strengths and capabilities. At the same time, they can relate themselves to workplace safety, as the safety and health of the workplace become their primary responsibilities. Past studies have shown that OSH practitioners independently enhance safety participation and safety citizenship behaviours (Nahrgang et al., 2011). Notably, they can predict safety advocacy rather than relying solely on minimum rule compliance. In terms of competence, self-determination leads young OSH practitioners to begin self-learning and to participate in earning various certificates, understanding the requirements of the specific field for the future. Even though there are structured safety officer requirements, the broad competencies certificate may become vague and confusing. Therefore, individuals must possess strong self-determination, which drives them to make the progress needed in their careers (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020). Consequently, in the safety profession, on-the-job initiatives and compliance with legal and ethical standards. The career outcome overview is vital, along with self-determination concepts; the young OSH practitioners will find it easy to plan their career journey once they are aware of their strengths, can control themselves, and interact with the work environment, which requires them to think critically to plan for uncertain safety risks.

Hypothesis Development

Career Knowledge and Perceived Professional Career Growth

Career knowledge provides a foundation for effective career planning and goal setting. The young safety practitioners assimilate information regarding their professions by understanding on-the-job requirements, industry expectations, and career development pathways. They are more likely to recognise meaningful intermediate activities, identify appropriate developmental activities, articulate career objectives, and avoid unrealistic expectations. Having the knowledge on themselves, the occupational choices and the industries joined, the young safety practitioners emphasise career growth, make progress at certain points internally, and even inter-organisational mobility (Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022). Gaining resources and competencies, they will successfully manage their career (Akkermans et al., 2015). They will improve their professional level, enhancing their work involvement, which can reflect on their career trajectory (Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022).

In addition, possessing career knowledge, they are able to project and self-evaluate their potential, progress and prepare for any future uncertainty. Hence, perceiving their life, they know their vocation and skills development

and anticipate career advancement. Thus, having comprehended career knowledge enables the young safety practitioner to perceive professional career growth. Targeted career advancement enhances their professional ability development, and by attaining challenging tasks, it will promote career growth and provide a platform for them to share experiences and insights (Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022). Aligned with Akkermans et al. (2015) on the 'smart job' concept, which included both employee well-being and career development intervention, concentrated on the effect of career competencies. The knowledge of career competencies stimulated in the career-related intervention becomes career knowledge for the youth safety practitioner to be well prepared in professional career growth. Thus, the paper's hypothesis, H1: There is a relationship between career knowledge and perceived professional career growth.

career decision-making and professional career growth

The status of career decision-making depends on two factors: career certainty and career indecision. Career certainty occurs when an employee is confident in their own emotions regarding their career choice, while career indecision prevents employees from deciding on their future career (Jemini-Gashi et al., 2021). Indecision also includes the incapacity of people to choose an occupation because of focal problems such as lack of information, lack of social support, low psychological level (i.e. emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, or family upbringing) (Baltacı et al., 2020; Boo & Kim, 2020; Citarella et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2020; Jemini-Gashi et al., 2021; Prideaux & Creed, 2001; Reenen, 2010; Xu, 2020; Zhu et al., 2021). Meanwhile, gaining career certainty from social support is one of the factors in the process of career decision-making (Jemini-Gashi et al., 2021). The career certainty demonstrates that individuals know the best of their career decisions; they have a full view of the occupation and profession that leads them to enhance themselves to be successful in their career choice.

However, the changing work environment, along with the evolution of knowledge, skills, and capabilities, requires individuals to navigate multiple jobs and careers (Alexander et al., 2025). The employees are required to have objectives that include tasks to perform and how their roles and responsibilities alter over time, which will lead to professional career growth. The subjective aspect involves an individual's thoughts, feelings, and sense of purpose regarding their work life, which serve as the foundation for their success in choosing a career path. The career comprises education and structured planning that are unique to each individual (Jordan, 2018). The vocational concept entails education, work, and leisure activities across the lifespan. Subsequently, when making career choices, all considerations related to oneself, tasks, work environment, specialisation, and expertise contribute to professional career growth. Once an individual decides to pursue that career, they dive into the scenario of analysing and preparing for the future. Thus, the paper proposed the hypothesis, H2: The relationship between career decision-making and professional career growth

Career Maturity Mediates Career Knowledge and Career Decision-Making in Relation to Perceived Professional Career Growth.

Career maturity refers to an individual's capabilities, knowledge, efficiency, skillfulness, adaptability, and motivation, which can change accordingly (Ismail et al., 2018). The surroundings of social networking, the work environment, life experience, and self-information about relevant career information are factors that help individuals become realistic in making career choices and continually motivate themselves to achieve career success (Ali et al., 2023; Lyu et al., 2022; Patton & Creed, 2001). Mainly, those who are informed, aware of what is required in choosing a profession, are realistic; they are consistent over time in keeping their affective and cognitive aspects (Patton & Creed, 2001). They are driven to achieve the very best in their professional career, which will definitely lead to professional success. In addition, individuals who possess career maturity are ready to cope with the development tasks (Mubiana, 2010) by forming a self-professional identity (Zhang & Tu, 2023), enhancing self-value (Nor Syazila et al., 2021), high self-esteem, and strong decision-making (DURU, 2022).

Since career knowledge refers to an individual's ability to understand the demands of their profession through research on the job market, technological changes, and occupational interests, individuals will automatically strategise to position themselves in roles of power and authority within their careers (Hirschi, 2009). Personal maturity is developed through the chosen career, for which individuals will prepare thoroughly for their future by meeting realistic work demands and consistently practicing for career advancement (Lyu et al., 2022). Thus, career knowledge among young safety practitioners helps them gain a clear understanding of their career path,

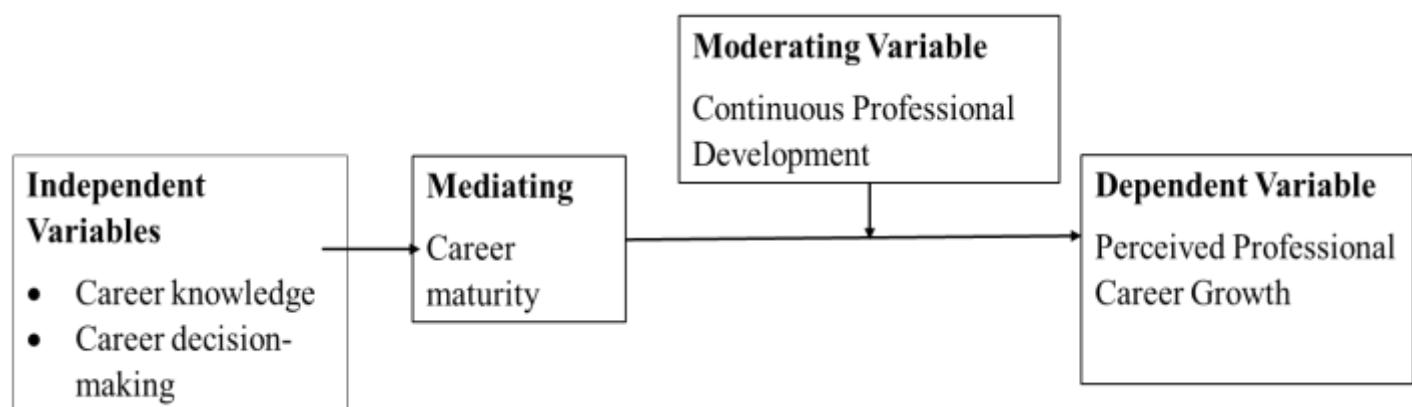
prepares them for success by enabling them to secure jobs through exercising autonomy in their roles, and directly contributes to their professional growth. In addition to the years of working experience in the safety and health field are extensive; therefore, possessing career maturity is essential for young safety practitioners to grow professionally in their careers. Consequently, the role of career maturity urges the individuals to fully comprehend the vocation they want to succeed in and believe in their ability to grow professionally in the field chosen. Considering on young safety practitioners in preparing career success they should know the best on the safety vocation field. To become a competent, expert, and certified safety practitioner requires years of preparation (Mohd Esa Baruji & Ts Majahar Abd Rahman, 2021; Occupational Safety and Health Master Plan, 2021-2025, 2020). Therefore, young safety practitioners need to be mindful of the concept of vocational maturity along with mental and psychological readiness. Devotion and sacrifice must be linked to maturity and self-actualisation in order to propel them in their careers. Thus, this paper's hypotheses are H3: Career maturity mediates the relationship between career knowledge and perceived professional career growth, and H4: Career maturity mediates the relationship between career decision-making and perceived professional career growth.

Continuous Professional Development as A Moderator

The safety field cannot be stopped by the continuous learning program because of changes in the law, world-standard safety criteria, and how people work and think about their bodies and minds, which can lead to accidents and other undesirable events at work. In addition to the organisation's need to keep the workplace safe, the safety officer is also under pressure to be concerned about the organisation's health and safety status. The safety officer must not only meet the criteria but also be a qualified person with a license. To protect these rights, the safety officer is compelled to attend a continuous learning programme.

In the career trajectory idea, long-term trends indicate the overall direction and sustained advancement of individual careers through ongoing skill enhancement (Yang et al., 2019). Continuous professional development (CPD) is the systematic, continued development of lifelong learning of knowledge and skills of work (Collin et al., 2012). The purpose of CPD is to acquire professional competence as well as professional experience in preserving the knowledge and skills connected to professional lives (Aparicio, 2015; Harvard Business Review, 2019; Neimeyer et al., 2012). The characters being created, the quality of service being enhanced, and the pros held adequate high-level skills. CPD is crucial in the safety industry because it ensures the delivery of services related to public safety. A highly professional competency officer in the organisation might decrease the risk of events in order to accomplish any duty successfully and handle the duty's tasks and activities appropriately (Akkermans et al., 2013; National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021). The growth of individuals' knowledge and skills through CPD is crucial for maintaining the benefits of the organisation (Weng & Zhu, 2020). Even though the overall notion of CPD is voluntary, in the safety and health area, the professionals are compelled to attend the interest CPD to preserve their license (Occupational Safety and Health Master Plan, 2021-2025, 2020). Consequently, CPD is not merely a learning programme designed to secure a job; it represents a commitment to continuous learning that must be regularly updated to align with the evolving trends and demands of the profession (Cable & Judge, 1996; Feng et al., 2025). Since career maturity involves ongoing preparation for long-term career trajectory planning, engaging in CPD throughout one's career enhances the achievement of career success. Thus, this paper hypothesises H5: Continuous professional development is a moderator between career maturity and perceived professional career growth.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To test the stated hypotheses, the proposed study will use a quantitative research design and probability sampling method. The population will include young OSH practitioners with less than five years of work experience. They will be reached through the date provided by the Malaysian Society for Occupational Safety and Health (MSOSH) or the Malaysian Occupational Safety and Health Practitioners' Association (MOSHPA). Following recommendations by (Bougie & Uma Sekaran, 2020; Hair et al., 2020), a sample of 30 young occupational safety and health practitioners was used. The primary data collection instrument will be a self-administered questionnaire, allowing respondents to complete the questions independently. The feedback from the pilot will be used to clarify any ambiguous items before full deployment. The reliable and validated questionnaire will be distributed electronically through mailing lists, professional networks, or any relevant social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram, or LinkedIn groups). The questionnaire will include an informed consent form explaining the study's objective, its voluntary nature, assurance of data confidentiality, and respondents' right to withdraw at any time without repercussions.

Data will be collected with a structured questionnaire, with demographic items and items measuring the core variables of interest. The proposed study will adapt ten questionnaires from past studies for each variable, the past studies related to the adaptation are from Edward et al., (1998) to access the career knowledge, career decision-making, and career maturity, continuous programme development will be adapted from Lugah V et al., (2010) and perceived professional career growth from (Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022). This study proposed the use of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine the direct relationship and simultaneously test the mediating and moderating effects.

Managerial Implications and Recommendations

Although there are structured career pathways in the OSH profession (Fathim, 2024; Industrial Safety Division Malaysia, 2016), the organisational readiness to define a clear career framework for this profession is vital. Outlining the career progression from Junior or Assistant Safety Health Officer to Safety Health Officer, advancing to Senior Safety Health Officer, and moving forward to becoming a Safety Manager, Consultant, or Auditor is crucial for professionals. Each stage requires specific competencies, certifications, and experience. Although professionals can plan and achieve their own career outcomes independently, collaborating with the organisation enhances career clarity. Additionally, joint career planning with professionals helps organisations maintain their safety and health requirements more effectively. When organisations collaborate with professionals to support career development, they are better able to maintain occupational safety and health standards. This collaboration also helps organisations manage job turnover among professionals. As demand for these professionals is very high, and government regulations require every industry to employ safety and health officers, professionals often lead to job hopping. Therefore, organisational involvement in career development is essential for ensuring professional job security and sustainability.

To reduce young OSH practitioners' overreliance on administrative tasks and roles, planned job rotation combined with coaching helps them gain experience as safety professionals. Job autonomy and project experience, guided by a coach, also support competency development. Through these practices, young OSH practitioners can identify their strengths and interests, enabling them to make informed decisions about focusing on becoming competent professionals. Encouraging participation in cross-functional teams and involvement in safety planning meetings helps build professional identity, allowing young OSH practitioners to recognise their strengths and capabilities. Reflective learning enables them to strategise for career growth and reduces early-career frustrations. Additionally, organisational mentoring programmes can enhance their perceived career growth and accelerate competence development through professional sharing and career awareness provided by mentors.

Meanwhile, professional bodies may further promote the demand for safety and health in the occupational field at the national level. The country's high demand for safety and health professionals necessitates a nationwide emphasis on their promotion. In addition, competency-based assessments should be introduced nationwide to support the country's STEM programme. With more individuals holding competency-based certificates, there will be more competent professionals. Even though tenure-based registration is compulsory to become registered safety personnel, the recognition can be reconsidered as a requirement in the career progression of professionals.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the present study applies self-determination theory to develop a research framework by integrating career decision-making and knowledge to examine the relationship between career maturity, a continuous professional development programme, and perceived professional career growth. The framework not only covers the perceived professional career growth but also provides practical insights for the young safety and health practitioners to develop self-capabilities to attain the career outcomes. Subsequently, perceived professional career progression is crucial for young OSH practitioners. As safety and health experts align with the regulations and legislation, the area necessitates trained and informed people. Competencies and abilities must be regularly updated to maintain pace with technological innovation, regulatory changes, and organisational expectations. As a result, occupational safety and health professionals need to have a sense of self-determination that enables them to improve and evolve. The dynamic career belief will motivate the young OSH practitioners to continue learning to develop occupational flexibility, thereby reinforcing their capacity to position themselves for professional advancement. With a structured, distinct path, self-determination assists the new OSH practitioners to succeed in their professional career trajectory. They have comprehended the field and understood the continuous learning programme by being able to determine their self-strength and interest to remain in their chosen profession. They self-initiate a continuous learning programme, which will help them understand their strengths and anticipate success in their chosen profession. As a result, involvement in continuous learning will become more engaging because the knowledge obtained will be pertinent to their employment and future expectations. Consequently, if new OSH practitioners do not take any initiative in their career trajectory, they may get caught and waste a year of work experience owing to poor decision-making. Deteriorating the problem, the young practitioner will lack current experience, be obsolete in technological improvements, and threaten the organisation's safety and healthy environment.

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