

Personal and Situational Variables, and Career Concerns: Predicting Career Adaptability in Young Adults

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This study examined relationships among career adaptability and career concerns, social support and goal orientation. We surveyed 304 university students using measures of career concerns, adaptability (career planning, career exploration, self-exploration, decision-making, self-regulation), goal-orientation (learning, performance-prove, performance-avoid) and social support (family, friends, significant others). Multiple regression analysis revealed career concerns, learning and performance-prove goal orientations emerged relatively as the most important contributors. Other variables did not contribute significantly.

Keywords: career adaptability, personal and situational variables, career concern.

En este trabajo se examinaron las relaciones entre adaptabilidad profesional e intereses profesionales, respaldo social y orientación hacia una meta. Se registraron las respuestas de 304 estudiantes en términos de interés profesional, adaptabilidad (carrera profesional, exploración profesional, autoexploración, toma de decisiones y autorregulación), orientación hacia una meta (aprendizaje, pruebas de rendimiento, evitación del rendimiento) y respaldo social (familia, amigos y otras personas significativas). Un análisis de regresión múltiple indicó que el interés profesional, aprendizaje, pruebas de rendimiento y orientación hacia una meta despuntaban con respecto a otras variables que no contribuían significativamente.

Palabras clave: adaptabilidad profesional, variables personales y situacionales, interés profesional.

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Adaptability has become an essential characteristic of workers in the modern world. Serial careers are becoming the norm in today's rapidly changing workforce, necessitating ongoing career transitions across the life span (Porfeli & Vondracek, 2008). Career adaptability is a psychological construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions and personal traumas. Adaptability shapes self-extension in to the social environment (Savickas, 2005).

Despite the importance of career adaptability as construct, there have no research about it in Iran. Creed, Fallon and Hood (2009) investigated the relationships between career adaptability, person and situation variables and career concerns in young adults. The study showed that the career adaptability (career planning, career exploration, self-exploration, decision-making, and self-regulation) were inter-related and could be represented by a higher-order factor. Decision-making and self-exploration were negatively associated with career concerns, and decision-making mediated the relationship between goal-orientation and career concerns. Having more of a learning orientation was associated with more decision-making and fewer career concerns, whereas holding a performance-prove orientation was associated with poorer decision-making and more career concerns. As regard to the results, we repeated the study among students in Isafahan University. We tested whether social support, career concerns and goal orientation can explain career adaptability.

To days, changing society is unable to prompt orderly development, thus forcing individuals to respond to a wide range of external influences that can push development in various directions (Collin, 1997). About a decade ago, the specific issues related to the impact of information and communication, technologies, globalization and large-scale mergers. Recent concepts related with security, terrorism and public health have highlighted as causes of disruption and changes (Grrifin & Hesketh, 2005). Career adaptability was first suggested by Super and Knasel (1981) as the basic construct in adult career development (Savickas, 1994) has provided attitudes, competencies and behaviors that individuals need to fit themselves to their works and changing workplace (Savickas, 2005). Savickas (1997) believed career adaptability is being ready to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working stats.

Career adaptability has been operationalized by many researchers. Duffy and Blustein (2005) operationalized it, as career decision self-efficacy, career choice commitment. Kenny and Bledsoe (2005) suggested, career outcome expectations, career planning, school identification and perceptions of educational barriers as components of career adaptability. Zikic and Klehe (2006) believed career adaptability has two components career exploration, and

career planning. Savickas (1997) suggested it could be operationalized by using the developmental dimensions of self and environmental exploration, career planning and decision-making, all of which also could be conceptualized as self-regulatory strategies. In this context, self development and career adaptability includes, gathering, evaluating information about potential job, (exploring) (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Philips, 1994), being intentional and planful (planning), accepting responsible for constructing careers (deciding) (Savickas, 2005) and managing all of the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental factors that impinge on achieving one's goals; or self-regulating (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Creed et al., (2009), believed, Self-regulatory mechanisms are relevant to career adaptability as they are activated in times of stress, change, or when confronted with novel challenges. They tested whether the four career adaptability strategies recommended by Savickas (self and environmental exploration, career planning, and decision-making) and a measure of general self-regulation could be represented by a second-order factor of career adaptability (they included a general measure of self-regulation to validate that Savickas' four career adaptability strategies could be operationalized as self-regulation).

Career concerns are individual concerns about vocational future. The most important function of career concerns is shaping careers. It showed by the prime place given to it by prominent theories of vocational development, such as Ginzberg's time perspective, Super's planfulness (having and regulating programs for career future), Crites orientation, Haaren's awareness and Tideman' anticipation (Savickas, Silling & Schwartz, 1984). Career concerns are worries about recent task failure, anxiety about a current tasks and excitement or stress of planning for a future task (Cairo, Kritis & Myers, 1996). Code and Berners (2006) summarized career concerns as represent apprehension about managing what a person considers to be personally important and essential to his or her career development. Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) suggested, university students are confronted with many career-related tasks. The stress associated with managing these career-related tasks can be considered as career concerns. Creed et al., (2009), believed that university students have to adjust to a much less structured educational experience than high school, monitor and resolve issues regarding their career direction, and manage educational and life demands as they develop as young adults. Further, they have to manage these career-related tasks in the context of family, peer, and educational institution expectations.

In this way, environmental exploration, gathering information relevant to career development (Super et al., 1996; Arbona, 2005; Blustein, 1997), and self-exploration focuses on exploring personal interests, experiences and values, to better understand and seek careers that are congruent with self-concepts in the career world (Rounds,

& Armestrang, 2005; Whiston & Keller, 2004; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Career planning involves a future orientation and knowledge of what actions are required in order to pursue one's goals (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). Career and self-exploration and career planning are lifelong activity and competences especially salient for career transitions (Backer & Gerler, 2007) and can be characterized as adaptive processes (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Career decision-making shows career control. It means that individuals feel and believe that they are responsible for constructing their careers (Savickas, 2005). According to Zimmerman (2000), self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adopted to the attainment of individuals goals. Moreover, self-regulated learning is an active and constructive process whereby learners attempt to plan, monitor, control and reflect on their cognition, motivation, and behavior in their learning to achieve their goals (Pintrich, 2000), and self-regulated students are behaviorally, motivationally, and metacognitively active participants in their own learning process (Zimmerman, 2000).

Goal orientation represents a personal disposition to pursue either learning or performance goal orientations in achievement situations (Dweck, 1999). Goal orientation, which refers to the mental framework for how individuals respond to and interpret goal attainment situations (Yeo & Neal, 2004). A learning goal orientation is associated with the belief that ability can be developed. In contrast, a performance goal orientation is associated with the belief that ability is fixed, and difficult to develop. A learning goal orientation motivates individuals to increase their competence and to master challenging situations. On the other hand, a performance goal orientation motivates individuals to establish the adequacy of their ability in the eyes of others and to avoid situations where they may appear inadequate. More recently performance goal orientation was further divided into two distinct constructs: proving and avoidance (VandeWalle, Brown, Cron & Slocum, 2001). Proving goal orientation focuses on demonstrating one's competence, and gaining favorable judgments from others. Avoiding goal orientation focuses on ways of avoiding negation of one's competence as well as unfavorable judgments by others. In the context of complex tasks, a learning goal orientation lead to higher performance level than a performance goal orientation, mainly by influencing the mediating variables of goal level, effort, and self-efficacy, and by feedback seeking. Goal orientation can also be examined as a state. Research demonstrates that setting a learning goal is more effective than setting a performance goal in complex rather than simple tasks and in situations where primarily the acquisition of ability rather than an increase in motivation is required (Erez, 2005).

Cobb (1976) defined social support as the individual belief that one is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and belongs to a network of communication and mutual

obligations. Social support is the potential of the network to provide help in situations when needed. In this context many researchers showed, social support can decrease career stress, work overload and family-work conflicts and increase work satisfaction (for example, Parasurman, Greenhaus & Granrose; 1992; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). Moreover, a potential resource for career specific information and advice is Social support (Kracke, 2002; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Weisenberg and Aghakhani (2007) found, social supports resources among young adult include the educational institution, the workplace, family and friends. Several studies have shown that social support predicts job search behavior and employment status (Wanberg, Watt, Rumsy, 1996).

The questions were extracted from Creed et al., (2009):

1. Greater career adaptability should be associated with more social support.
2. Greater career adaptability should be associated with fewer career concerns.
3. Learning and performance-prove goal-orientation should be associated with fewer career concerns, whereas performance avoid goal-orientation will be associated with more career concerns.
4. Greater social support should be associated with fewer career concerns.
5. What are the portion of different person and situation variables, and career concerns in Career?

Methods

Participants

Participants were 307 full-time students (50.2 male) from medium-sized public university in Isfahan (25.4 % statistical and engineering sciences, 31.3 medicine sciences, 43.3 humanistic sciences). The mean age was 21 years (Range = 19–38; *SD* = 7.18).

Person variables of goal-orientation Scale

Goal-orientation scale from VandeWalle (1997) is 13-item scale. This scale measures three types of goal orientation, learning (5-items), performance prove (4-items), and performance-avoid orientations (4-items). Creed, Fallon and Hood changed nine items to remove reference to the workplace and make them more suitable for a student sample. For example, the learning goal-orientation item, "For me, development of my work ability is important enough to take risks", was reworded to, "For me, development of my skills is important enough to take risks". A sample item for performance-prove was, "I enjoy it when others are aware of how well I am doing"; a sample item for performance-avoid was, "I prefer to avoid situations where I might perform poorly". Each of the goal orientation subscale is scored on a on a 5-point Likert response format with endpoints of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores indicated a stronger

orientation to that type. In original sample, VandeWalle reported internal reliability coefficients of .89 (learning), .85 (performance-prove), and .88 (performance-avoid), and test-retest reliability coefficients of $>.40$ for a 3-month period, and demonstrated validity by using factor analysis and relationships with other scales. The internal reliability coefficients for the present sample were .75 (learning), .78 (performance-prove), and .71 (performance-avoid).

Environmental variables of social support

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support is a 12-item scale (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), which measures support from three domains of family, friends, and significant others (4 items per subscale).

Sample items were, “My family really tries to help me” (family), “I can talk about my problems with my friends” (friends), and “There is a special person who is around when I am in need” (significant others). Each of subscale is scored on a 5-point Likert response format with endpoints of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores showed greater support. Internal reliability coefficients have been reported as .91 (family), .89 (friends), and .91 (significant others; Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000), and a test-retest reliability of .85 was reported for the whole scale for a 2- to 3-month period (Zimet et al., 1999). Using factor analysis and examining correlations with other scales demonstrated validity in community and university samples (Dahlem, Zimet, & Walker, 1991). The internal reliability coefficients in the present study were .75 (family), .79 (friends), and .73 (significant others).

Variables of career adaptability

Creed, Fallon and Hood (2009) operationalized career adaptability as planfulness, exploration, and decision-making, as they “characterize the critical developmental dimensions of career adaptability” (Savickas, 1997, p. 256), and as self-regulation, which influences in times of change or when goals are being met (Karoly, 1993). As regard to Creed, Fallon and Hood and their results, when measuring career adaptability these domains need to be considered. Therefore, we utilized to measure the career adaptability construct with sum score of 56-items in different every scale which measured career planning, career exploration, self-exploration, decision-making, self-regulation as total score for career adaptability. Internal consistency reliability of career adaptability scale was examined using Cronbach’s alpha. Good internal consistency was found ratings ($\alpha = .79$). Validity was examined using a confirmatory factor analysis which showed the scale was composed of six factors accounting for 45.2 percent of variance career adaptability. Career adaptability scale consisted of subscales:

Career planning. This was measured using the 8-item career thinking and planning dimension of Greenhaus’s (1971) Career Salience Scale, which was designed to assess an individual’s degree of vocationally relevant planning. A sample item was, “Deciding on a career is just about the most important decision a young person makes”. Items are answered on a 5-point Likert scales ranging strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores represent more planning. Reported internal reliability for the career thinking and planning dimension was .72 (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). The internal reliability for the present study was .70.

Exploration of career and exploration of self. To measure these two dimensions were using two subscales of Stumpf, Colarelli, and Hartman’s (1983) Career Exploration Survey. A sample item from the 6-item career exploration subscale was, “In the last three months, investigated career possibilities”, and a sample item from the 5-item self-exploration subscale was, “In the last three months, I focused my thoughts on me as a person”. Respondents were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated more career and self-exploration. Internal reliability coefficients have been reported previously as .88 (career exploration) and .84 (self-exploration; Stumpf et al., 1984; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). The two subscales have been shown to have independent factor structures (Werbel, 2000). Internal reliabilities in the present study were .71 (career exploration) and .73 (self-exploration).

Decision-making. Indecision subscale of the Career Decision Scale (Osipow, 1987) was used to measure Decision-making. It has 16-item. This is a widely used measure of the reasons, nature, and extent of career indecision (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). A sample item was, “several careers have equal appeal to me. I’m having a difficult time deciding among them”. Respondents were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*does not describe me*) to 5 (*describes me well*). Higher scores show less career related indecision. Reliability coefficients around .80 have been consistently reported (Hartman, Fuqua & Hartman, 1983). Hartman et al., (1983) and Hartman and Hartman (1982) have been adequately provided predictive, construct and concurrent validities. The internal reliability coefficient for this study was .73.

Self-regulation. Creed, Fallon and Hood used the 21-item Self-regulation Questionnaire (Neal & Carey, 2005), which was chosen as it was designed to assess a generalized capacity to regulate behavior to achieve a desired future result. Neal and Carey demonstrated two distinct factors, which they named as goal setting and impulse control. Sample items were, “I usually keep track of my progress towards my goal”, and “I often put off making decisions”. Respondents were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly*

disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater self-regulatory capacity. Reliability for the scale has been reported as .92 (Carey, Neal, & Collins, 2004), and Neal and Carey reported evidence for convergent and discriminate validity. The internal reliability coefficient in the present study was .75.

Career concerns. Career Concerns Scale (Westbrook et al., 1985) used to measure career concerns. It consists of 20-item which was designed to assess the severity of perceived concerns, including financial, self-capacity, achievement capacity, and opportunities associated with resolving a career choice. Sample items were, “I am not sure whether I am headed in the right direction”, and, “I am not sure that I can afford to get the education required for my career”. Respondents were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores showed greater career concerns. (Westbrook et al., 1985) demonstrated an internal reliability for the scale of .81, and provided evidence for construct and predictive validity.

The internal reliability coefficient for the present student sample was .73.

Procedure

A cross-sectional survey design was utilized. Students were recruited through cluster sampling among every college. All of the recruited students completed the questionnaires. The required time taken to complete research instruments was about 30 minutes. No time limitation was given Privacy and anonymity of participants were carefully protected. The students filled out the questionnaires during a class period. The questionnaires were handed out to the students by trained co-researchers in the presence of a teacher, or by a teacher who was instructed on how to handle clarifications asked for by subjects. Subjects’ questions, if any, were answered. The purpose of the research and its importance for improving career guidance and counseling were explained to the students, to increase their motivation and attention in filling out the questionnaire.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations for career adaptability, career concerns, social support (parents support, friends support, other important), and good orientation (prove, learning, avoided)

Variable	M	D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Career adaptability	202.38	56.82	-	-.274**	.089	.066	.099	.221**	.212**	-.047
career concerns	56.82	13.20	-	-	.123**	-.180**	-.110*	.282**	-.019	.144**
Parents support	14.87	3.41	-	-	-	.661**	.536**	.034	.050	-.020
friends support	13.8	3.17	-	-	-	-	.722**	.069	-.037	-.138**
others support	14.87	3.41	-	-	-	-	-	-.012	-.047	.094
Learning- goad orientation	17.95	3.47	-	-	-	-	-	-	.207**	-.132*
Prove – goal orientation	15.25	3.54	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.246**
Avoided- goal orientation	13.56	3.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 2

Results of stepwise regression and analysis for variables predicting career adaptability, N=307

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	Semi - partial
1- Constant	182.54	5.36		33.84	
career concerns	-.33	.09	.274	3.8	-.274
2- Constant	147.08	9.37		15.69**	
Career Concerns	-.455	.089	-.363	5.09**	.358
Learning- goal orientation	1.65	.366	.321	4.5**	.321
3- Constant	139.8	9.99		13.98**	
Career Concerns	-.44	.89	-.351	4.94**	.349
Learning- goal orientation	1.46	.37	.285	3.9**	.282
Performance – prove goal orientation	.743	.376	.139	1.976**	.147

*p < .05 ** p < .001

Results

Career Adaptability Correlations

Summary data for career adaptability are reported in Table 1. In relation to goal-orientation (learning, performance-prove, performance-avoid) and social support (family, friends, significant others) and career concerns. As can be seen in correlational matrix, career adaptability was related to the career concerns ($r = -.274, p < .01$), learning goal orientation ($r = .221, p < .01$) and performance-prove orientation ($r = .212, p < .01$). There were no significant correlations between career adaptability, social subscales and performance-avoid goal orientation. Also career concerns was related to learning goal-orientation ($r = -.282, P < .01$), avoided goal-orientation ($r = -.144, P < .01$), parent support ($r = -.123, P < .05$), friends support ($r = -.180, P < .01$), significant others ($r = -.110, p < .05$).

Predicting Career Adaptability

Stepwise Regression Analysis was used to investigate the degree to which career adaptability could explain by dependent variables. Summary data for this analysis are reported in Table 2. The semi-partial regression coefficient was accounted. It is the contribution of a predictor variable to the dependent variable after other variables have been statistically controlled.

Table 2 shows, in step 1 career concerns could predict 7.5% of the variance in career adaptability ($F(df) = 14.43, p < .001$), in step 2, career concerns and learning goal-orientation could predict 17% of the variance in career adaptability ($F(df) = 18.17, p < .001$) and in step 3, career concerns, learning and performance-prove goal-orientation could predict 18.8% of the variance in career adaptability ($F(df) = 18.17, p < .001$). Career concerns was the most important predictor of career adaptability making a significant unique contribution of significantly and negatively related career adaptability ($\beta = -.351, t = 4.94, p < .001$). Learning goal-orientation was the second most important predictor making a significant unique contribution of significantly and positively related career adaptability ($\beta = .285, t = 3.91, p < .001$). Performance-prove orientation was the third important predictor making a significant unique contribution of significantly and positively related career adaptability ($\beta = .139, t = 1.97, p < .05$). Other variables, although contributing to the overall variance, were not significant predictors in career adaptability.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationships between career adaptability and social support, career concerns and

goal orientations. We repeated the work of Creed, Fallon and Hood among Iranian students in Isfahan University. They examined a self-regulatory model of career adaptability. They suggested, career adaptability was seen as the self-regulation of future career concerns in young adults and utilized a general measure of self-regulation, which was included to assist in validating Savickas' (1997) four dimensions of career adaptability (exploration of environment, exploration of self, career planning and decision-making) as self-regulation. Their results showed when measuring career adaptability, planning, exploration, decision-making and self regulation should be considered. As regard to their results, we measured the career adaptability with their scale. It has 56-items. This scale dose not measure impulse control capacities and goal setting. Creed et al., believed, other aspects of self-regulation may be important to career adaptability such as emotional control (Porath & Bateman, 2006), social skills (Baron & Markman, 2003) and feed back-seeking (Callister, Kramer & Turban, 1999).

We investigated their findings, before testing their model we wanted to know, which their dependent variables could predict career adaptability. Our results were consistent with their findings, career concerns, learning and performance-prove goal-orientations could predict career adaptability. There were significant and negative relationships among career concerns and parents support, friends support, others support, learning, performance-prove goal-orientations, but between career concerns and performance-avoid goal-orientation was significant and positive relationships. The results was congruent with Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) and Porath and Bateman (2006) in learning goal-orientation. Elliot and McGregor (1999, 2001) identified some advantages associated with a performance-prove orientation, which are specified by presenting competence and gain desirable judgments from others. In our study higher performance-prove and learning orientations were related more career adaptability and less career concerns. Researchers have found consistently positive relationships between proving goal orientation and task performance in both student (e.g., Elliot, McGregor & Gable, 1999) and field samples (e.g., VandeWalle, Cron, & Slocum, 2001; Elliot et al., 1999). Elliot and McGregor has suggested that a performance-prove orientation may be more congruent to situations where the goals are short-term and Davis, Carson, Ammeter, and Treadway (2005) believed when the tasks are routine and can be mastered by rehearsal, performance-prove orientation may be more effective. These findings are consistent with the results of Creed et al., (2009). VandeWall et al., (2001) proposed a learning goal orientation motivates individuals to increase their competence and to master challenging situations. On the other hand, a performance goal orientation motivates individuals to establish the adequacy of their ability in the eyes of others and to avoid situations where they may appear inadequate. Maata, Nurmi and Mjava (2002) revealed that avoidant strategies limit

career behaviors such as employment. Savickas (2005) pointed out, for having career adaptability; people should have confidence, control, concern and curiosity. Related competences of curiosity and confidences are exploring and problem solving that both of them need to learn goal orientations. In the context of complex tasks, a learning goal orientation lead to higher performance level than a performance goal orientation (Erez, 2005). Our findings about more correlation between learning goal orientation with career adaptability are consistent with Savickas' idea. This finding shows goal orientations could play important role to form career adaptability and solve its challenges.

In our results, social support subscales did not show any relationships with career adaptability but showed significant and negative relationships among career concerns and social support subscales, these results consistent with the results' Creed et al., (2009) about relationships among subscales of career adaptability and social support subscales. As regard to, social support includes real or perceived resources provided by others that enable a person to feel cared for, valued, and part of a network of communication and mutual obligation, it may be best viewed as an antecedent to perceived stressors (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999), these results were unexpected, one possible explanation is social supports subscales significantly and negatively correlated with career concerns and these results suggest that social supports subscales have indirect effect on career adaptability.

Our results contributed to the career adaptability by examining and presenting some similar results such as Creed et al., (2009) findings. As regard to motivating character of the learning and performance-prove goal-orientations, or a combination of both, potential implications of our findings center on the plans of instructions to increase career adaptability by development of learning goal orientation. As regard to Creed Fallon and Hoods' idea about the role of self – regulation, we can plan of interventions to decrease impulsivity and promote self-regulation.

The results, although statistically significant, however are clearly weak. The total variance accounted by the variables of career concerns and learning and performance-prove orientations was a merger 18.8%, therefore in future research, we should include other important person and situation variables such as personality or available opportunity or various types of social support possible (emotional support, appraisal support, informational support and instrumental support). Creed et al., believed “other self-regulatory strategies, such as feedback-seeking, social competence and effort also need to be incorporated” (p.227).

The results of this study were limited by the self-report nature of the instruments. Although similar results can present that some variables are global to determine career adaptability however we suggest that future research examine the model of career adaptability with different variables, which may be, determine variance of career adaptability among Iranian students.

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