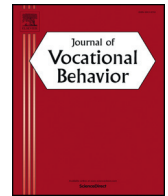




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Future orientation and attitudes mediate career adaptability and decidedness



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ABSTRACT

Based on Life Design approach, the study aimed at examining the relationship between some constructs relevant for adolescents to handle the current labor market and their role in affecting career decidedness: career adaptability, positive attitude toward the future, and future orientation. Specifically, the fully mediational role of positive attitude toward the future and future orientation on the relationship between career adaptability and career decidedness was tested. We involved 774 adolescents, of which 408 boys and 366 girls. Results showed that career adaptability predicted indirectly, through positive attitude toward the future and future orientation, career decidedness. As regards practical implication, the results carried out emphasize the importance to support career adaptability, hope, optimism, and future orientation in adolescence.

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1. Introduction

In adolescence, career choice and the resulting pursuit of a professional role is deeply related to the accomplishment of developmental tasks such as independence from family, the conquest of a professional role, and, eventually, the formation of one's own family (Santos & Coimbra, 2000). According to Erickson (1968), exploration and commitment are the core components of social identity: career decisional processes become crucial in adolescent years because they make possible future professional roles (e.g. Creed, Prideaux, & Patton, 2005). However, current studies have found that the time frames for accomplishing tasks have been expanded between adolescents and young adult period (Seiffge-Krenke & Gelhaar, 2008), and there is a slight longitudinal decrease in career concern, control, and confidence in middle-to-late adolescence (Negru-Subtirica, Pop, & Crocetti, 2015).

Meanwhile, in relation to the current socioeconomic contingencies, Italian adolescents find the process of making decisions regarding their career either especially difficult, or at worst, entirely useless. For example, Carr et al. (2014) found that Italian adolescents had higher indecisiveness scores than US adolescents; Laghi (2009) evidenced that most adolescents from 17 to 18 years had yet to decide about their professional future.

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In relation to this, Life Design approach suggests that the career counselors who work with adolescents should both confront these decision-making difficulties and inquire how to help adolescents to develop a decision-making process on their professional future, regardless of their bleak perspectives (Savickas et al., 2009). Specifically, while at the beginning of the 20th century vocational counselors emphasized the importance of finding a job suitable to one's own abilities, at present they should focus on improving the adolescent adaptation to the unpredictable environment, rather than the maturation of the inner structure. These days, the more significant ability that is worthwhile to develop in young people is the ability to adapt to the unpredictability and discontinuity of the labor market (Savickas et al., 2009), because adolescents are not as free as they once were to make self-determined choices about their career directions (Blustein, 2011).

Taking this into account, the present study aims to examine the relationship between some constructs relevant for adolescents to cope with the current labor market and their role in affecting career decidedness: career adaptability, future orientation, and positive attitude toward the future.

Career adaptability. According to the Life Design approach, career adaptability as the infrastructure that allows for the process of decision-making. This construct is conceptualized as “the self-regulation strengths or capacities that a person may draw upon to solve the unfamiliar, complex and ill-defined problems presented by developmental vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas” (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662). Career adaptability involves a set of individual resources for coping with developmental tasks, participating in working life, and adapting to changes of both the job market and job conditions (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). It refers to work tasks and role transitions that people face, and the resources needed to handle them. In other words, it is the process by which people actively construct their life careers, through coping with continuously changing situations, which they experience in their social contexts (Karaevli & Hall, 2006; Savickas, 2013). According to Life Design approach, four resources constitute career adaptability: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. *Concern* involves awareness and preparation to respond to the demands of the future work environment; it is a sense of that is important to think about one's own future. *Control* is the tendency to think of the future as manageable; it implies the use of self-regulation strategies to adjust to the needs of different settings and exert influence on the context. *Curiosity* regards the exploration of possible selves and social opportunities. Finally, *Confidence* allows for standing by one's own aspirations and objectives despite difficulties (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Research among adolescents in several countries both European and extra-European evidenced the impact of career adaptability on career-related outcomes, such as vocational identity, career interests, career decidedness (Rossier, 2015). Adolescents with high levels of career adaptability show lower career indecision levels, more effective problem-solving skills, decreased decisional difficulties, and a more adaptive career decision-making profile than peers with lower levels of career adaptability (Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Hirschi, Herrmann, & Keller, 2015). Regarding career indecision, Nota, Ginevra, and Soresi (2012) showed that adolescents that considered themselves undecided about their future after the completion of high school, scored lower on career adaptability, suggesting that high career adaptability enables vocational choice and vocational planning. Longitudinal studies evidence also that adolescents' career adaptability increase the chance to find a job in later age. de Guzman and Choi (2013) among New Guinea adolescents, found significant relations between career adaptability and employability skills, whereas Koen, Klehe, and Van Vianen (2012) found that Dutch young adults who received career adaptability training reported half a year later higher employment quality than did members of the control group.

Career Decidedness. Adolescents starting to think about their futures can feel undecided about how to proceed. The context of globalization, the greater number of career and academic opportunities available and the uncertainty and job insecurity characterizing the labor market, are all factors that can make young people's school and career choices very difficult (Gati & Asher, 2001; Savickas et al., 2009).

The international literature distinguishes between developmental indecision and indecisiveness. The first corresponds to a normal phase in developmental terms, and is generally operationalized as the inability to make a career choice or uncertainty about one's decision in a situation that needs decision-making; the latter is defined as a chronic problem with making choices in several situations (Ferrari, Nota, & Soresi, 2010; Santos, Ferreira, & Goncalves, 2014; Vignoli, 2015).

Research findings highlight that indecision about one's own future is related to a consistent number of other constructs, including internal traits (e.g., self-esteem, trait anxiety) and states (e.g., choice and social anxiety), and contextual factors associated with external barriers (e.g., discrimination) and interpersonal conflicts (Carr et al., 2014). Moreover, it is linked to unstable career goals, immature career attitudes, and lack of motivation to make or engage in an occupational decision (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002).

Future Orientation. When employment is a risk, the future is uncertain and menacing; therefore, the possibility for adolescents to think about the future is undermined. This problem increases the frequent tendency of adolescents to look for immediate gratification rather than commit to reaching a future professional goal, and to be more focused on their personal development and leisure time than on their school/career choices (Ferrari et al., 2010; Hesketh, 2000; Pallini, Bove, & Laghi, 2011; Peetsma, Hascher, Veen, & Roede, 2005). Future orientation regards the individuals' ideas, thoughts, and feelings about their future, and the ability to envisage multiple possible future scenarios (Atance & O'Neill, 2001; Stoddard, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2011). It can be defined as an individual' subjective view of future (Di Maggio, Ginevra, Nota, & Soresi, 2016; Seginer, 2009).

Adolescents' process of decision implies the ability to relate their present to future career goals (McInerney, 2004): through future orientation, adolescents pursue their goals, anticipate the consequences of their actions and become aware that their present constitutes the basis for the construction of their future (Ferrari et al., 2010; Laghi, D'Alessio, Pallini, & Baiocco, 2009).

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