



Career success criteria and locus of control as indicators of adaptive readiness in the career adaptation model



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ABSTRACT

The present research had two goals. The first goal was to identify additional individual characteristics that may contribute to adaptive readiness. The second goal was to test if these characteristics fit the career adaptation model of readiness to resources to responses. We examined whether career success criteria (measured at Time 1) and career locus of control (measured at Time 1) would contribute to adaptivity and predict university students' career decision-making self-efficacy (measured at Time 2) through the mediation of career adaptability (measured at Time 1). Results based on a two-wave survey among a sample of 437 Chinese university students showed that the criteria of intrinsic fulfillment and work-life balance, as well as internal career locus of control positively predicted Chinese university students' career adaptability, which in turn predicted career decision-making self-efficacy. These findings support the career adaption model and carry implications for career construction theory and university students' career development.

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Contemporary careers are becoming less structured and more boundaryless (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Many scholars have argued that individuals need to develop relevant psychological strengths to cope with the challenge of multiple career transitions (Morrison & Hall, 2002; Savickas, 1997). Savickas (2005, 2013) used career adaptability to represent these psychological strengths, and proposed four underlying dimensions: concern, control, curiosity and confidence. Previous research has demonstrated that career adaptability served as an important predictor for career-related outcomes such as professional competence (Guan, Yang, Zhou, Tian, & Eves, 2016; Guo et al., 2014), job search outcomes (Guan, Deng, et al., 2013; Guan et al., 2014), salary (Guan, Zhou, Ye, Jiang, & Zhou, 2015) and career satisfaction (Chan & Mai, 2015).

The theoretical model of career adaptation assumes that adaptability resources are essentially fostered by adaptivity, which denotes willingness to respond to changing vocational tasks and conditions (Savickas, 2013). The career construction model of adaptation suggests that individuals who demonstrate adaptive readiness are more likely to develop career resources in the form of adapt-abilities (i.e., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), which in turn lead to more effective adapting responses or coping behaviors. Adaptive readiness is conceptualized as a compound of personality traits such as proactivity and optimism. Previous research has examined several indicators of adaptivity, including big-five personality (van Vianen, Klehe, Koen, & Dries, 2012), behavioral inhibition system/behavioral activation system (BIS/BAS) traits (Li et al., 2015), proactive personality (Cai et al., 2015; Tolentino et al., 2014), and self-esteem (Öncel, 2014). The present research had two goals: The first goal was to identify additional individual attributes that may contribute to adaptivity; the second goal was to test if these attributes fit the adaptation

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model of readiness to resources to responses. To this aim, the current research examined the roles of career success criteria and career locus of control in predicting individuals' career adaptability.

1.1. Career success criteria

Career success criteria denote the ultimate career goals that individuals want to pursue (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Heslin, 2005). According to previous research (Zhou, Sun, Guan, Li, & Pan, 2013), there are three criteria of career success in the Chinese context: (a) fulfillment of intrinsic psychological needs such as achievement, autonomy and joy; (b) balance between work and non-work lives, and (c) extrinsic rewards such as monetary or material compensation. The first factor, intrinsic fulfillment, represents individuals' career goals of fully utilizing their talents and realizing their ideality in their careers (Zhou et al., 2013). From a self-determination perspective (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), individuals with this intrinsic form of motivation tend to regard their career development as interesting and joyful. Accordingly, these individuals may have a more proactive attitude toward career development activities, and be more persistent when facing difficulties, both of which are characteristics of adaptive readiness. We proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a. The intrinsic fulfillment factor of career success criteria relates positively to career adaptability.

The work-life balance criteria involve the goal of balancing work and non-work lives, and reducing the undue pressures from one undermining the satisfactory experiences of the other. As career is a process in which individuals impose life meanings on their vocational choices and occupational transitions (Savickas, 2013), the motivation to pursue work-life balance is also likely to motivate individuals to develop the relevant competences and skills to balance their work and non-work lives. Therefore, it is likely that individuals who aim to maintain a good work-life balance are motivated to develop their career adaptability in order to cope with the challenges in achieving this goal.

Hypothesis 1b. The work-life balance factor of career success criteria relates positively to career adaptability.

Extrinsic compensation refers to salary, bonuses, and other extrinsic rewards from work. From the perspective of learned industriousness theory (Eisenberger, 1992), the pursuing of extrinsic rewards can motivate proactive career behavior as individuals need to develop relevant skills to secure these rewards (Eisenberger & Aselage, 2009). However, from the self-determination perspective, pursuing extrinsic rewards can also decrease intrinsic motivation by imposing feelings of being externally controlled (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, it has been found that extrinsic motivation is related to higher level of anxiety, lower well-being, higher burnout and other negative outcomes (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998; Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). The above discussion suggests that the relationship between extrinsic compensation and career adaptability can either be positive or negative; therefore, we do not develop a specific hypothesis for this relationship.

1.2. Career locus of control

Career locus of control refers to one's beliefs about important factors that determine his/her career success, which include: (a) internal factors such as personal motives, capabilities or effort, (b) external factors such as social or organizational determinants, and (c) chance factor such as luck or chance events (Guan, Wang, et al., 2013). Rotter (1966) suggested that individuals with an internal locus of control attribute behavioral consequences to their personal characteristics such as ability and effort. Therefore, they are more likely to proactively develop relevant competencies and skills to achieve positive career outcomes. Previous research has shown that internal locus of control was associated with more positive career outcomes, e.g., salary, promotions, career decision-making self-efficacy, as well as career satisfaction (Guan, Deng, et al., 2013; Guan, Wang, et al., 2013; Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006; Taylor & Popma, 1990). In light of this, we propose that:

Hypothesis 2a. Internal career locus of control relates positively to career adaptability.

The chance factor of career locus of control represents the idea that one's career development cannot be fully controlled by themselves, but rather by luck or chance events. Individuals with this belief may reduce their efforts in building their competencies as their efforts may not pay-off in their career development (Levenson, 1974; Rotter, 1966). Consistently, Guan, Deng, et al. (2013), Guan, Wang, et al. (2013) found that the chance factor of career locus of control was negatively related to Chinese employees' career satisfaction. Therefore, it is expected that the chance factor will be negatively related to career adaptability.

Hypothesis 2b. The chance factor of career locus of control relates negatively to career adaptability.

The external factor of career locus of control refers to the belief that career success depends on social or organizational factors. This factor can manifest both positive and negative effects on career adaptability, as suggested by previous studies (Guan, Deng, et al., 2013; Guan, Wang, et al., 2013; Levenson, 1974). On the one hand, when individuals believe their career success is controlled by powerful others or other contextual factors, they may feel that little can be done to promote their career development, which may discourage them from developing their career adaptability (Rotter, 1966; Sunbul, 2003). On the other hand, when individuals attribute career success to these factors, they can also take proactive actions in developing relevant skills to gain social or organizational support (Guan, Deng, et al., 2013; Guan, Wang, et al., 2013). Therefore, the relationship between external factor of

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