



Within-person relationships between daily individual and job characteristics and daily manifestations of career adaptability

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ABSTRACT

Previous research showed that daily manifestations of career adaptability fluctuate within individuals over short periods of time, and predict important daily job and career outcomes. Using a quantitative daily diary study design ($N = 156$ employees; 591 daily entries), the author investigated daily job characteristics (i.e., daily job demands, daily job autonomy, and daily supervisory career mentoring) and daily individual characteristics (i.e., daily Big Five personality characteristics, daily core self-evaluations, and daily temporal focus) as within-person predictors of daily career adaptability and its four dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). Results showed that daily job demands, daily job autonomy, daily conscientiousness, daily openness to experience, as well as daily past and future temporal focus positively predicted daily career adaptability. Differential results emerged for the four career adaptability dimensions. Implications for future research on within-person variability in career adaptability are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Career adaptability, a core construct in the field of vocational psychology and in career construction theory (Brown & Lent, 2016; Super & Knasel, 1981), refers to “the readiness 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 conditions” (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). Career adaptability is a higher-order construct that is composed of four dimensions: concern (i.e., preparing for future career tasks), control (i.e., taking responsibility for development), curiosity (i.e., exploring possible future selves and opportunities), and confidence (i.e., believing in one's ability to solve problems and to succeed; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

While most empirical research so far has investigated inter-individual differences in career adaptability, result of two recent daily diary studies demonstrated that career adaptability and its dimensions can manifest behaviorally on a daily basis (as career adaptability “states”; cf. Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Roberts & Jackson, 2008), and that these manifestations of career adaptability fluctuate substantially within persons across one work week (Zacher, 2015). The studies further showed that daily career adaptability and some of its dimensions positively predicted daily job and career satisfaction, as well as daily task and career performance, thus confirming previous results at the between-person level (Chan & Mai, 2015; Ohme & Zacher, 2015; Zacher, 2014a; Zacher & Griffin, 2015). However, it remains unknown why behavioral manifestations of career adaptability fluctuate within individuals over time in the first place.

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The goal of the present study was to investigate within-person relationships between daily individual and job characteristics and daily career adaptability using a quantitative diary study design. Consistent with prior research at the between-person level (Li et al., 2015; van Vianen, Klehe, Koen, & Dries, 2012; Zacher, 2014b), I examined daily manifestations of the Big Five personality characteristics, daily core self-evaluations, and daily temporal focus as person-related predictors. Previous research showed that these individual characteristics fluctuate substantially within-persons over short periods of time (Debusscher, Hofmans, & De Fruyt, 2015b; Foo, Uy, & Baron, 2009; Judge, Simon, Hurst, & Kelley, 2014). Moreover, I examined daily job demands, daily job autonomy, and daily supervisory career mentoring as job-related predictors. Previous research showed that these job characteristics also vary considerably within persons across work days (Butler, Grzywacz, Bass, & Linney, 2005; Daniels & Harris, 2005; Garrick et al., 2014).

Importantly, both between- and within-person approaches to studying career adaptability are consistent with career construction theory, which suggests that stable and dynamic person and contextual factors influence employees' career adaptability, and that career adaptability itself is malleable over time (Savickas, 2013; see also Zacher, 2015). Within-person relationships may be similar to or differ from well-established between-person relationships; daily person states and daily job characteristics influence daily behavioral manifestations of career adaptability (and daily job and career outcomes) at the within-person level, whereas relatively stable individual differences ("traits") and job characteristics predict people's average level of career adaptability (and relevant long-term outcomes) at the between-person level (Dalal, Bhawe, & Fiset, 2014; Fleeson, 2004). Finally, it is important to study within-person variability in career adaptability because dynamic behavioral states and more stable inter-individual difference characteristics associated with career adaptability influence each other reciprocally over time (Roberts & Jackson, 2008).

2. Development of hypotheses

2.1. Daily job characteristics and daily manifestations of career adaptability

I first propose that on days on which employees face high job demands (i.e., having to work hard and fast; Spector & Jex, 1998), they will show more behavioral manifestations of career adaptability, and particularly higher confidence. Demonstrating high levels of career adaptability and confidence in the face of high job demands should generally constitute adaptive responses, as they allow employees to effectively cope with their job demands (Savickas, 1997). Specifically, daily confidence entails behaviors such as performing tasks efficiently, taking care to do things well, learning new skills, overcoming obstacles, and solving problems (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Thus, the presence of high job demands is likely to encourage employees to modify their behavior (i.e., show adaptability) to meet their job demands. In contrast, on days with low job demands it is neither necessary nor beneficial for employees to show high levels of career adaptability and confidence. In relevant research at the between-person level, Zikic and Klehe (2006) argued that involuntary job loss – a negative external demand – is "a blessing in disguise," as it can trigger career adaptability behaviors among unemployed individuals that are vital for adjustment to a stressful life situation and for gaining re-employment.

Hypothesis 1. Daily job demands relate positively to (a) daily career adaptability and (b) daily confidence.

Daily job autonomy, defined as the amount of freedom and independence employees have during their work day to make decisions regarding their work (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), should positively relate to daily career adaptability and its four dimensions. Employees require job autonomy on a daily basis to think about and plan for their future tasks and career while at work (daily concern), to make independent decisions and take responsibility for their actions (daily control), to explore their surroundings and look for opportunities for personal growth (daily curiosity), and to perform their tasks efficiently, learn new skills, and solve problems (daily confidence; cf. Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Overall, high compared to low levels of daily job autonomy should enable employees to take the time to prepare for and participate in their work role and to adjust to changes in their work (daily overall career adaptability; Savickas, 1997). Consistent with these assumptions, previous research at the between-person level found that a sense of personal control related positively to career adaptability (Duffy, 2010).

Hypothesis 2. Daily job autonomy relates positively to (a) daily career adaptability, (b) daily concern, (c) daily control, (d) daily curiosity, and (e) daily confidence.

I further expect that daily supervisory career mentoring relates positively to daily career adaptability, daily concern, and daily curiosity. Supervisory career mentoring is conceptually and empirically distinct from leadership behaviors such as leader-member exchange (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994; Scandura & Williams, 2004). It involves supervisors promoting their subordinates' careers by, for instance, taking a personal interest in subordinates' careers, devoting time and consideration to their careers, and by helping them to coordinate professional goals (Scandura & Ragins, 1993). These supervisory mentoring behaviors should be particularly relevant for daily employee behaviors associated with career concern, such as thinking about their future career, preparing for the future, and planning the achievement of career goals, as well as daily behaviors associated with career curiosity, such as engaging in exploration, observing different ways of doing things, and probing deeply into one's questions (cf. Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Consistently, previous conceptual work suggests that supervisory support should enhance employees' personal sense of adaptability at work (O'Connell, McNeely, & Hall, 2008).

Hypothesis 3. Daily supervisory career mentoring relates positively to (a) daily career adaptability, (b) daily concern, and (c) daily curiosity.

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