



# The influence of satisfaction and promotability on the relation between career adaptability and turnover intentions☆



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 23 September 2015

Received in revised form 2 December 2015

Accepted 10 December 2015

Available online 11 December 2015

### Keywords:

Career adaptability

Career satisfaction

Career outcomes

Career construction theory

Promotability

Turnover intentions

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the relation between career adaptability (CA), promotability, and career satisfaction (CS), and their impacts on turnover intentions (TI). Eight hypotheses were proposed. Based on data collected from a sample of 431 employees in Macau, career adaptability was significantly and positively related to both promotability and CS after controlling for the influences of demographic variables including age, gender, education and tenure. CA, promotability and CS were also significantly and negatively linked to TI. The results further revealed that promotability and CS mediated the effect of CA on TI. The study contributed new insights that may inform career development and retention of employees. Practical implications on how to retain employees were discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

One's ability to develop and to navigate career role transitions in the increasingly borderless global arena in the work and occupational context has attracted the attention of numerous scholars (e.g., Koen, Van Vianen, & Klehe, 2012; Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013; Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Zacher, Ambiel, & Noronha, 2015). One of the most relevant constructs for individuals to approach employment and reemployment in this postmodern chaotic society is career adaptability (Savickas et al., 2009). This psychosocial resource (Savickas, 1997), signifies one's resources and readiness for managing current and anticipated tasks, transitions, and traumas in one's occupational roles (Savickas, 2005).

Career adaptability (CA) is a useful concept to evaluate an individual's strength, which enables self-preparation for future occupational changes (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), helping employees fit into their work environment and effectively manage their career changes and challenges (Savickas, 1997; Zacher et al., 2015). It also facilitates their mobility (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005), and is related to many work and life outcomes including turnover, career satisfaction, success, job performance evaluations, promotability, work engagement, career commitment, self-esteem and well-being (e.g., Chan & Mai, 2015; Guan et al., 2013; Koen et al., 2012; Maggiori et al., 2013; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012; Tolentino, Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2013; Van Vianen, Klehe, Koen, & Dries, 2012). But research linking CA, career satisfaction (CS), and turnover intentions (TI) is not well integrated (Chan & Mai, 2015).

In recent research CA positively predicted CS and negatively predicted TI of low-ranking employees (Chan & Mai, 2015). It also appears that employees with low CA scores might quit their job (Ferreira, Coetzee, & Masenge, 2013; Omar & Noordien, 2013). In

☆ The completion of this work was supported in part by a research grant from the University of Macau (MYRG078(Y1-L2)-FBA11-CSH) awarded to Sow Chan.

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spite of the recent progress, questions on the roles of mediators in the career adaptability–turnover intentions (CA–TI) model remain. For instance, little is known about the influence of intraorganizational mobility and CS, which effects employees' decision to leave their workplace, when their decision to leave may be due to feelings and perceptions about their CS and chance to get ahead in their organization. First, few studies document the link between CA and career adaptation outcomes (Tolentino et al., 2013), or the mediating effects of promotability and CS on TI. Thus, the influence of CS and promotability on the association between CA and turnover remains unclear. Second, although Chan and Mai (2015) suggest that CS is negatively related to TI, and CS mediated the association between CA and TI, their findings based on low-ranking employees might not apply to the wider pool of employees filling different ranks in the organization. Thus, there is still a need to further corroborate the previous finding.

Moreover, the limited understanding of the predictors and processes of promotability in the context of managerial and organizational research deserves attention from scholars. Studies linking CA as antecedent to promotability are sparse. First, promotability, an important indicator of career success, manifests one's "projected performance at higher managerial levels" (London & Stumpf, 1983, p. 245). Promotability is also an outcome of career adaptation (Tolentino et al., 2013). Second, this antecedent to turnover may have great implications in employee retention and succession planning since promotability refers to resources that help individuals to achieve power and status in groups (Hogan, 1996). To date, however, little empirical research has investigated the antecedents of promotability (e.g., Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009). To our knowledge, only one study reports the linkage between CA and promotability (Tolentino et al., 2013). Thus, research addressing this void should prove valuable. More importantly, traditional attitudes towards careers no longer hold (Van Vianen et al., 2012). Given that theory development linking CA, promotability, CS, and TI has been relatively scarce, we used the career perspective and the career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) to gain further insights on the mediating effects in the CA–TI model.

We proposed and tested eight hypotheses relevant to employees in contemporary workplaces. This paper answers the call for (1) further validation of the Career Adaptability Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), (2) further studies on the influence of CA on other career outcomes (Guan, Zhou, Ye, Jiang, & Zhou, 2015), and (3) further studies to explore other mediators of the associations between CA and TI (Chan & Mai, 2015); it does so by reporting the findings on the hypotheses, namely testing the link between (a) CA and TI, (b) CA and promotability, (c) CA and CS, (d) promotability and TI, and (e) CS and TI. The study also determines (a) whether promotability mediates the link between CA and TI, (b) whether CS mediates the link between CA and TI, and (c) whether male employees have higher promotability score than female employees. The results contribute to the literature in two ways. First, we empirically demonstrate the usefulness of the Career Adaptability Scale (CAAS; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) and provide valuable empirical evidence of CS and promotability of employees in China. Second, the study adds to the broader career literature by identifying the impact of CS on the CA–TI relation, and the impact of promotability on the CA–TI relation. Based on the findings, practitioners could consider ways to establish positive organizational cultures (Ogbonna & Harris, 2002) that prevent employees' turnover.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Career adaptability, promotability, and turnover intentions

According to Savickas (1997), CA 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" (p. 254). The literature suggests that individuals can use their CA to navigate career role transitions, and match themselves to jobs that fit them (Tolentino et al., 2013). An individual's CA may influence their attraction to an organization and their intention to leave the organization. Although CA is an important skill which can facilitate future career development and help employees to adapt to employment requirements (e.g., Hou, Leung, Li, Li, & Xu, 2012), the relation between CA and TI is inconclusive. Some studies have reported that when an employee's CA (comprised of career development activities and career resilience factors) is high, the employee's TI is also high (e.g., Ito & Brotheridge, 2005), indicating that CA could encourage job-hopping (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005). On the other hand, recent studies using a broader conceptualization of CA (comprised of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence factors) reported a negative relation, suggesting that employees having high scores in CA have less intention to leave (Chan & Mai, 2015; Ferreira et al., 2013; Omar & Noordin, 2013).

According to Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation can influence a person's behavior. Contextual factors can also encourage proactive behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Unlike salary increments, the prospect of getting a promotion may promote various positive behaviors at the workplace. Promotability, defined as "the favorability of an employee's advancement prospects" (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990, p. 69), relates to the employee's perceptions of being rewarded by the organization for a deserved promotion (Shore, Barksdale, & Shore, 1995). Since adaptable employees are more capable of handling challenges at work, it is more likely for them to achieve a promotion. Consistently, employees with higher scores in CA perceive themselves to have a greater chance to get promoted (Tolentino et al., 2013).

Since judgments of promotability indicate an individual's competence to achieve at higher levels (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, & Klehe, 2009), promoted individuals may gain job satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment knowing that their superiors valued their contribution. Research has shown that employees who are the most likely to receive organizational rewards such as promotions would choose to remain in the organization (Shore et al., 1995). Further, perception of promotional opportunities or promotability is significantly and negatively correlated to turnover (Carson, Carson, Griffeth, & Steel, 1994; Porter & Steers, 1973) since promoted employees would choose to stay as it becomes more and more costly to leave an organization

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