



# Career adaptability and academic satisfaction: Examining work volition and self efficacy as mediators



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## ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relation between the four components of career adaptability – concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) – and academic satisfaction. Drawing from a diverse sample of 412 undergraduate students, all four components moderately correlated with academic satisfaction. In an effort to explain these relations, work volition and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) were examined as potential mediator variables. Using structural equation modeling, work volition significantly mediated the control to satisfaction relation and CDSE significantly mediated the concern, control, and confidence to satisfaction relations. After including all variables in the model, none of the career adaptability components significantly related with academic satisfaction. These results suggest that for undergraduate students, feeling adaptable in one's career may link to greater levels of academic satisfaction due, in part, to greater feelings of control and confidence in one's career decision making.

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## 1. Introduction

Grounded in Career Construction Theory (CCT; Savickas, 1997, 2002, 2005), the career adaptability construct has seen increased empirical attention over the last five years, particularly after the development of cross-culturally valid instruments (c.f. Savickas & Porfeli, 2012 for a detailed review). Evidence is clear that feeling adaptable in one's career is linked with a host of positive vocational and well-being outcomes. Among college student populations, career adaptability has been linked with variables such as job search self-efficacy, career optimism, proactive personality, career decision self-efficacy, career calling, self-esteem, strengths use, and meaning in life (Cai et al., 2015; Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Praskova, Hood, & Creed, 2014; Tolentino et al., 2014) and has been found to promote job search self-efficacy over time (Guan et al., 2013). Among adult populations, career adaptability has been related to job performance ratings, career satisfaction, life satisfaction, hope, and general well-being (Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013; Ohme & Zacher, 2015; Santilli, Nota, Ginevra, & Soresi, 2014; Tolentino, Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2013; Zacher, 2014) and longitudinal research has found that those who are adaptable are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Zacher & Griffin, in press).

However, no known research to date has examined how adaptability is related to satisfaction within the academic domain. This represents a critical gap in the literature considering the well-documented links between aspects of career maturity and academic performance, persistence, and satisfaction (e.g., Crook, Healy, & Oshea, 1984; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Luzzo, 1993). In the current study, we address this gap by examining how the four components of career adaptability relate to academic satisfaction and explore two empirically and theoretically supported mediators to this relation – work volition and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE).

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## 2. Career construction

### 2.1. Theoretical framework

Career Construction Theory (CCT; Savickas, 1997, 2002, 2005) is a lens on vocational development that is concerned with a contextualistic worldview of vocational development across the life-span. Proponents of CCT are largely interested in studying how people use their self-regulatory strengths to deal with current and future vocational tasks (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In CCT, career adaptability – defined as a person's resources for coping with current and anticipated vocational tasks (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) – is emphasized as a central variable, representing a set of strengths that individuals can acquire which theoretically affect how they make their way through the world of work. Career adaptability is broken down into four components: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 1997). Concern addresses how able a person is to prepare for the vocational future. Control refers to the degree of responsibility people feel they possess in shaping their future careers. Curiosity is concerned with the self-exploration people engage in regarding future occupational choices. Finally, confidence identifies the degree to which people feel able to overcome potential vocational barriers (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

### 2.2. Career adaptability among undergraduate students

Given the vocational context of CCT (Savickas, 1997, 2002, 2005), a majority of studies on career adaptability among undergraduates have examined the relation between career adaptability and vocational outcomes. One study followed a sample of Chinese students pre and post-graduation and found career adaptability was positively related to job search self-efficacy pre-graduation and to employment status post-graduation (Guan et al., 2013). In other words, students who felt highly adaptable in their careers not only felt more confident while searching for jobs, but were also more likely to be employed post-graduation. Another study among Chinese undergraduates found all four components of career adaptability to have moderate positive relations with professional competence (Guo et al., 2014). Among a sample of U.S. undergraduates, Douglass and Duffy (2015) found career adaptability was positively related to career decision self-efficacy, such that students higher in career adaptability felt more efficacious in making career decisions. Other studies have found similar positive relations between career adaptability and vocational outcomes such as job search self-efficacy, career optimism, career planning, skill development, and work effort (Cai et al., 2015; Praskova et al., 2014; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015; Tolentino et al., 2014). In sum, undergraduates with high levels of career adaptability are more likely to be employed post-graduation, feel more able to search for jobs, are more efficacious in making career decisions, and overall tend to be more competent and optimistic regarding their careers.

Although the construct of career adaptability largely references vocational contexts, Savickas (2005) highlighted the relevance of career adaptability outside the workplace by suggesting that career adaptability can help with the struggles of daily life. Savickas (2002) provided a case example demonstrating the applicability of CCT (Savickas, 1997) to a student struggling with academic underachievement. Although the example was more broadly related to CCT as a whole, it took into consideration the client's sense of career control – one component of career adaptability – when informing the counselor's future directions for counseling. In another example, the client's levels of confidence, control, and concern help the counselor to identify the client's academic and vocational ambitions (Savickas, 2002). These narratives highlight the potential role of adaptability in promoting non-career outcomes. Although no known studies have examined the relation of career adaptability to academic satisfaction, one study found career adaptability to have a positive link with GPA (Öncel, 2014) and another study, framed in CCT, found the adapt-ability resource of optimism predicted academic adaptation among undergraduates over time (Perera & McIlveen, 2014).

Building from the theoretical links presented above, along with quantitative evidence that positions adaptability as a predictor variable of outcomes among undergraduates, we suggest that career adaptability may predict a student's level of satisfaction within the academic domain. Specifically, we hypothesize that the four components of adaptability – concern, control, curiosity, confidence – will each positively relate with academic satisfaction (*Hypotheses 1–4*).

## 3. Mediator variables

Along with hypothesizing direct relations between career adaptability and academic satisfaction, we also explore mediators that may explain why feeling adaptable links with satisfaction. Specifically, we hypothesize that career adaptability promotes a sense of control and confidence around one's career decision making (the key task in college student career development) that in turn promotes satisfaction within the academic domain.

### 3.1. Work volition

Work volition is defined as one's perceived freedom of future work choice despite constraints (Duffy, Diemer, & Jadidian, 2012; Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012). The construct is distinct from the related adaptability construct of control because it explicitly measures the perception of control in career decision making, versus overall career development. Previous studies among undergraduate students have been linked work volition to a host of positive vocational outcomes. For example, in the instrument development study, Duffy, Diemer, & Jadidian (2012) found student work volition scores positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) and negatively correlated with career barriers. Other studies have found work volition to correlate with social cognitive constructs (domain self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interests, and goals; Duffy, Bott, Allan, & Autin, 2014), a

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