



## Monograph

## Development of early vocational behavior: Parallel associations between career engagement and satisfaction☆



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## ABSTRACT

The present five-wave longitudinal study examined the parallel development of career engagement and satisfaction among young adults over an eight-year period starting from the last stages of their secondary education and ending after the transition to higher education or working life. The research questions were analyzed with parallel process latent growth curve (LGC) modeling and growth mixture modeling (GMM). The study is part of the ongoing longitudinal Finnish Educational Transitions (FinEdu) study, and followed 826 participants from ages 17 to 25. The developmental dynamics showed that career engagement and satisfaction developed parallel, each predicting the changes in the other. Towards the end of secondary education, career engagement increased and career satisfaction decreased on the mean level; however, later on, after the transition to higher education/work, both processes leveled off. The GMM results also revealed the existence of two latent trajectory groups, one representing a high transitional and the other a low increasing trajectory of career engagement and satisfaction.

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## 1. Introduction

Increasing interest in positive psychology and career development has inspired research on well-being in different contexts, such as satisfaction and engagement in studies and work (Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2003; Whitley, Huebner, Hills, & Valois, 2012). Engagement in studies/work is positively associated with learning (Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005), self-esteem (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2012) well-being (Li & Lerner, 2011), and personal initiatives and innovativeness (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008). Educational satisfaction, in turn, promotes psychosocial and academic functioning and adjustment to varying school environments (Huebner & Gilman, 2006), whereas work satisfaction promotes well-being (Rothmann, 2008) and reduces employee's intentions to quit their current job (Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne, & Rayton, 2013). Most studies in the field have examined study (Whitley et al., 2012) or work satisfaction (Truxillo, Cadiz, Rineer, Zaniboni, & Fraccaroli, 2012) separately, and although it has been proposed that vocational development begins in the early school years (Hartung, Porfeli & Vondracek, 2005; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, Akos, & Rose, 2013), and that a successful study/work transition is a precursor of promising career development (Pinquart et al., 2003), research taking the aspect of vocational development into account is lacking. Moreover, previous studies have suggested that the underlying construct of engagement (e.g., experiences of energy, dedication, and absorption at studies/work) is the same for students and employees (Wefald & Downey, 2009). It has been shown that a continuum exists between study and work engagement, and that career engagement is reflected in one's subsequent wellbeing and educational outcomes (Upadyaya &

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Salmela-Aro, 2013b, 2015). It has been widely acknowledged that career engagement and satisfaction reflect important aspects of study/work context-specific well-being (Warr & Inceoglu, 2012), and that these are mutually positively associated (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). However, to the present authors' knowledge, no previous studies have examined the extent to which educational satisfaction transfers to work satisfaction and the extent to which the development of career engagement runs parallel to the development of career satisfaction over the transition from secondary education to higher education/work. Consequently, the present study aimed at investigating this.

### 1.1. Study and work engagement

Research drawing on the work engagement literature (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Salanova et al., 2005; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) has examined engagement as a phenomenon resembling flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), with reference to the dimensions of energy, dedication, and absorption during studies/work (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2012; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Flow refers to an experience which itself is so enjoyable that people tend to desire it, even at great cost, purely for the sake of the experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). However, the main difference between the concepts of engagement and flow is that flow refers to a short-term peak experience that is unlikely to occur in studies/work, whereas engagement is a more persistent state of mind. Of the three engagement dimensions, *energy* refers to high mental resilience and affects while studying/working, a willingness to invest effort in one's studies/work, and a positive approach. *Dedication*, in turn, is characterized by a cognitive sense of significance, enthusiasm, pride, and inspiration regarding school/work, and perceptions of studies/work as meaningful. *Absorption* is characterized by behavioral accomplishments, fully concentrating and being happily engrossed in one's studies/work, so that time passes quickly. These three dimensions are separate constructs of career engagement, although they correlate highly with each other (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2012; Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002).

During secondary education, in particular, developmental changes occur in engagement (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2012), whereas engagement in work remains relatively stable, even across job changes (Seppälä et al., 2014). These changes and stability may be explained by person–environment fit (Eccles & Roeser, 2009) and by the trait-like and occasion-dependent characteristics of engagement (Seppälä et al., 2014). For example, for most young adults their higher educational institution or workplace provides a good person–environment fit, often better than the fit in their previous, secondary educational institution (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013b). For a small proportion of young adults, the opposite is true (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013b). Further, work engagement seems to be rather a stable state of mind, with daily fluctuation explaining a smaller amount of the variance in work engagement (Seppälä et al., 2014). Thus, in particular when young adults enter working life and feel that their person–environment is good, it seems reasonable to assume that their stability in work engagement is also high.

### 1.2. Satisfaction with education and work

Satisfaction with education/work describes a subjective, cognitive appraisal of one's overall positive experiences (Huebner & Gilman, 2006). Career satisfaction reflects a pleasurable emotional state during education/work, fulfilled needs, and important study/job values (Wefald & Downey, 2009), and includes one's affective reactions to education/job in general or to different aspects of these (e.g., environment, peers/coworkers, teachers/supervisors) (Truxillo et al., 2012). In addition, several context-free experiences (e.g., overall life quality, life satisfaction) and other context-specific experiences (e.g., satisfaction in family life, relationships) (Huebner & Gilman, 2006; Whitley et al., 2012) are positively associated with career satisfaction. Some previous studies have reported declines in one's educational satisfaction (Elmore & Huebner, 2010), whereas work satisfaction research has shown that approximately 25% of the variation in job satisfaction reflects stable characteristics, and that the remainder can be attributed to changing factors in the environment (Dormann, Fay, Zapf, & Frese, 2006). No previous studies, however, have examined the continuum between educational and work satisfaction in a longitudinal design, and thus knowledge is lacking on the extent to which satisfaction in education is transmitted to satisfaction in work later on. The present study aimed at filling this research gap.

### 1.3. Career engagement and satisfaction

Career satisfaction and engagement are two distinctive positive dimensions of study/work-related well-being (Rothmann, 2008), with varying antecedents and outcomes (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011), and are important at all stages of one's education and working life (Truxillo et al., 2012). Career satisfaction focuses on the affective aspects and engagement on the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of education/work (Schaufeli, Martinez, et al., 2002; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002; Truxillo et al., 2012; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013a). According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), students who are satisfied with their education and life, and experience frequent positive emotions, will exhibit adaptive coping behaviors, feel more engaged, and gain more resources which, in turn, will promote positive upward spirals of success at studies/work. Similarly, the demands–resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) postulates that high engagement in studies (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014) and work protects against ill-being and burnout symptoms, and leads to well-being and higher life-, educational-, and work satisfaction (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, under review).

Career satisfaction has typically been investigated as an outcome of engagement (Alarcon & Edwards, 2011), with high engagement resulting in high satisfaction in education/work (Elmore & Huebner, 2010; Giallonardo, Wong, & Iwasiw, 2010). Some studies, however, have shown that frequent experiences of positive emotions and satisfaction in school (Reschly, Huebner, Appleton, &

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