



# The relation of career adaptability to work experience, extracurricular activities, and work transition in Portuguese graduate students



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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the psychometric properties and the factor structure of the Career Adaptabilities Scale (CAAS)—Portugal HE Form with 406 graduate students and explored the relationship between career adaptability, work experience, extracurricular activities and work transition. The analysis allows us to conclude that CAAS can be a valid and useful measurement for assessing career adaptability in Portuguese graduates. The differential analysis evidenced that participants with student worker status and with work experiences reported displayed higher scores on the subscales of control and curiosity, respectively. No statistical differences emerged regarding experience of extracurricular activities. Also, participants who referred to anticipating difficulties in work transition scored significantly lower on the subscales of control than did their peers who do not anticipate difficulties in such transitions. The obtained results support the importance of considering practical experiences and fostering career adaptability during higher education studies as a way to help graduates manage the transition to professional contexts.

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## 1. Introduction

Newcomers to the labor market who graduate during challenging economic times are less likely to find a suitable job when compared to graduates who enter the labor market in times of economic growth or prosperity. Also, these newcomers are more likely to experience job mismatch and underemployment (International Labour Office, 2011; Kahn, 2010). Therefore, and especially for young professionals, perspectives become less and less defined and predictable with time, whilst the transitions between jobs tend to be more frequent and difficult (Savickas et al., 2009). Such circumstances have triggered the interest of researchers to study work transitions and to understand the psychological resources that can help to deal with these difficulties. According to Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, and Prosser (2004), adaptive individuals have more positive attitudes concerning transitions, think about and plan for their future, anticipate and react to change and know how to achieve realistic goals. Career adaptability has been referred to as a central construct to cope with the predictable and unpredictable tasks and adjustments prompted by the changes in the work world (Savickas, 1997).

Given the importance of understanding the process of work transition among graduates, the present research explored the psychometric properties and the factor structure of the CAAS—Portugal-HE Form, a version of the CAAS—Portugal Form (Duarte et al., 2012) with a sample of Portuguese graduates. Also a relevant aspect is the understanding of what type of experiences can differentiate new graduates in terms of their ability to cope with the university-to-work transition. For this purpose, this study analyzed differences in career adaptability between graduates who reported (1) having a student worker status and regular students; (2) having work

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experience and graduates who reported not having work experience; and (3) having extracurricular experiences and graduates who referred to not having extracurricular experiences (4) anticipating difficulties in work transition and graduates who reported not anticipating difficulties in work transition.

### 1.1. Career adaptability

The concept of career adaptability is conceived as helpful for individuals in managing career transitions. Career adaptability comprises four psychosocial resources (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012): concern, which enables individuals to be aware of and plan for a vocational future; control, which regards the self-discipline that allows individuals to become responsible for shaping themselves and their environment to deal with what comes next; curiosity, related to the tendency to explore possible selves and alternative scenarios; and confidence, which reflects self-efficacy managing career decisions.

Research data has provided evidence that higher levels of career-adaptability resources among adolescents are related to more successful vocational transitions (Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Creed, Muller, & Patton, 2003; Hirschi, Niles, & Akos, 2011; Vladimir Skorikov, 2007), a sense of power and experience of life satisfaction (Hirschi, 2009) and career decidedness and choice congruence (Hirschi et al., 2011). Concerning young adults and adults, empirical research has presented career adaptability as a predictor for subjective career success (Hirschi, 2010; Zacher, 2014), satisfaction with transition processes (Hirschi, 2010), career satisfaction (Tolentino, Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2013), subjective well-being (Hartung & Taber, 2008), self-efficacy in job searches (Guan et al., 2013), employment quality (Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012) and reemployment quality (Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, 2010; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Hence, theoretical and empirical research conducted up to the present suggest that career adaptability is an important construct with regards to work transitions, particularly among graduates who face the challenge of moving from higher education to professional contexts.

### 1.2. Work experience

Work experience during higher education has been referred as a significant factor in graduates' transition to the labor market. Although its impact seems to depend on several aspects, such as the professional activity in question being related or not related to the course taken, the duration of that work experience, or even the ability to learn and reflect on those experiences (Allen & van der Velden, 2009; Allen & van der Velden, 2011; Blackwell, Bowes, Harvey, Hesketh, & Knight, 2001; Blasko, Brennan, Little, & Shah, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Knight & Yorke, 2003), there is a general consensus concerning the positive influence of work experience during higher education on preparation for the labor transition. Reported effects include stronger chances of further employment, higher income, and greater satisfaction (Blasko et al., 2002; Staff & Mortimer, 2007; Smith & Green, 2005), as well as the development of mobilization competencies (i.e., the ability to mobilize personal or others' human resources) (Allen & van der Velden, 2011). Several studies have also described work experience as an aspect valued by employers (Association of Graduate Recruiters, 1998; Blasko et al., 2002; Pierce, 2002; Yorke, 2004), hence that promote graduates' employability.

Concerning a career development perspective, students engaged in part-time work seem to be able to develop a clearer understanding of the world of work (Beavis, Curtis, & Curtis, 2005). The active orientation toward the adult world that occurs with work role identification is associated with greater work-related skills and planning during the transition to the labor market (Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & White, 2002). In the case of adolescents or young adults, the work environment appears as an opportunity to explore their identities and social roles, to develop vocational skills and to confirm skills and interests (Billett & Ovens, 2007; Mortimer & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Smith & Green, 2005). Also, Creed and collaborators' works have evidenced several differences between students with and without experiences of part-time work, with more positive results for the former group, namely in terms of career maturity, career decision-making, and self-efficacy (Creed & Patton, 2003; Creed, Patton, & Prideaux, 2007; Creed, Prideaux, & Patton, 2005). Despite these general indicators of the positive impact of work experience on the transition to the labor market, empirical research is still scarce concerning the relationship between work experiences and career adaptability resources in higher education students.

### 1.3. Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities are claimed to be of great value, with a positive impact on personal and educational development, promoting the development of life skills and a sense of civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998). For example, participation in academic or student unions is related to higher levels of institutional adaptation, autonomy, facilitating peer relationships and career development (Almeida, Guisande, & Paisana, 2012). Sports have also been presented as a facilitator of psychological development (Cornelius, 1995) in the fostering self-discipline, teamwork skills, co-operation, self-confidence, and dealing with failure (Lapchick, 1987). Although different effects can be found in the literature among particular leisure activities, Tinsley, Hinson, Tinsley, and Holt (1993) suggested that the benefits related to extracurricular involvement are a result of an individual's experience in leisure rather than the activity itself. This includes cognitive (concentration, challenge, and control) and affective (feelings of freedom, pleasure and competence) effects, which can be transferred to other contexts or experiences. As argued by Allen (1980), perceptions of leisure competence can inform possibilities for work-related competence; in turn, the feeling of competence may have synergistic effects that will influence self-efficacy and empowerment in relation to the career decision-making process. Similar to what has been described for work experience, extracurricular activities provide opportunities for adolescents and young adults to explore, test and receive feedback on possible selves and career directions and to experiment with an adult work role (Konstam & Lehmann, 2011; Munson,

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