



Career adaptability profiles and their relationship to adaptivity and adapting



Andreas Hirschi*, Domingo Valero

University of Bern, Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Research on career adaptability predominantly uses variable-centered approaches that focus on the average effects in terms of the predictors and outcomes within a given sample. Extending this research, the present paper used a person-centered approach to determine whether subgroups with distinct adaptability profiles in terms of concern, control, curiosity and confidence can be identified. We also explored the relationship between the various adaptability profiles and adapting (career planning, career decision-making difficulties, career exploration, and occupational self-efficacy beliefs) and adaptivity (core self-evaluations and proactivity). Using latent profile analysis, we found distinct adaptability profiles among 350 German university students. Students with different profiles differed significantly in their levels of adapting. This finding was confirmed in a second study of 1226 students selected from the same population. In both samples, the adaptability profiles differed mainly in terms of their adaptability levels but not their shape. Moreover, in both samples, the students whose profiles indicated generally higher adaptability showed more adapting compared with the students whose profiles indicated generally lower adaptability. Study 2 also showed that students with higher-adaptability profiles showed significantly higher adaptivity. The results suggest that level effects dominate adaptability profiles, implying the existence of a general adaptability factor within university students that is meaningfully related to adapting and adaptivity.

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Vocational psychology has a long-standing interest in exploring the personal characteristics that allow people to successfully manage their careers and integrate their self-concept into their working role. Emerging from the earlier concepts of career maturity (Savickas, 1984; Super, 1955), the concept of career adaptability (Savickas, 1997; Super & Knasel, 1981) has gained increased attention as a critical construct in this regard. In its most recent conceptualization, career adaptability refers to “a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, traumas in their occupational roles” (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662). Empirical studies across cultures have confirmed that individuals with higher career adaptability show higher career satisfaction (Zacher, 2014), less work stress (Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013), and higher person–environment fit perception (Guan et al., 2013), among other positive outcomes.

Career adaptability is a multidimensional construct that, according to Savickas' (2013) model, consists of four aspects: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. In the existing research, studies have used a variable-centered approach to explore the relationship between career adaptability dimensions and a range of antecedents, correlates, and outcomes. A variable-centered approach allows an examination of the extent to which each adaptability dimension is related *on average* to other variables within a given sample. However, this approach does not take into account that within a population, several distinct subpopulations might exist that show

* Corresponding author at: University of Bern, Institute for Psychology, Fabrikstrasse 8, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland. Fax: +41 31 631 82 12.
E-mail address: andreas.hirschi@psy.unibe.ch (A. Hirschi).

different profiles of career adaptability. Moreover, exploring such subgroups can provide insights into the extent to which different adaptability profiles are related to antecedent and outcome variables (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2002).

The aim of the present paper is to explore career adaptability from a person-centered approach. First, we used a latent profile analysis to examine whether different subgroups with distinct adaptability profiles could be identified; we established the existence of different adaptability profiles in a German university student sample (Study 1); and we confirmed these profiles in a second sample from the same population (Study 2). This examination allowed us to establish how different subgroups show different combinations of the four adaptability resources. Second, we investigated how different adaptability profiles were related to adapting outcomes in terms of career planning, career decision-making difficulties, career exploration, and occupational self-efficacy beliefs. We again provided support for these relationships in Study 1 and then replicated the results in Study 2. These results showed the extent to which individuals with different combinations of the four adaptability resources differ in the adaptive behaviors and attitudes that are instrumental for addressing changing conditions and tasks in working life. Finally, in Study 2 we explored the extent to which different adaptability profiles were related to adaptivity antecedents in terms of core self-evaluations (CSE) and a proactive personality. In doing so, we provided insight into how individuals with different adaptability profiles differed in their basic adaptive readiness and the extent to which the different adaptability profiles could be explained by differences in adaptivity.

1. Career adaptability as a multidimensional construct

Career adaptability can be empirically represented as a higher-order latent factor that is indicated by its more specific subdimensions of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). This factor has been found across different language versions of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), which is the most prominent measure of career adaptability. These findings suggest that the four adaptability dimensions share significant variance. However, from a conceptual standpoint, career adaptability should be seen as a formative, aggregate construct, and each of its subdimensions contributes to the overall level of adaptability alone and in combination (Savickas, 2013). The empirical validity of the notion that concern, control, curiosity, and confidence are not interchangeable representations of career adaptability stems from studies that show that different dimensions of career adaptability can be differentially related to potential predictors and outcomes (Guan et al., 2013; Hirschi, Herrmann, & Keller, 2015; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012; Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori, & Dauwalder, 2012).

The theoretical and empirical notion that the four career adaptability dimensions are not just redundant representations of the higher-order career adaptability construct implies that individuals with different adaptability profiles as indicated by concern, control, curiosity, and confidence might exist. This paper contributes to the career adaptability research literature by applying a person-centered approach to detecting such differing adaptability profiles.

2. A person-centered approach to investigating career adaptability

The variable-centered approaches used in existing studies of career adaptability examine the unique and independent relationships of the four adaptability dimensions (and/or their sum score) with antecedents, correlates, and outcomes. Consequently, these studies provide information about how these constructs are related on average within a given sample. However, such an approach ignores the possibility that within a given population, several subpopulations might exist that show different combinations of the four adaptability dimensions. Such a person-centered approach seems particularly appropriate in light of the increasing individualization of career development (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2002) and the person-focused approach used in career counseling, in which career adaptability can play a major role (Savickas, 2013; van Vianen, De Pater, & Preenen, 2009).

Career adaptability profiles can differ quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative profile differences refer to the absolute level of the profile indicators (i.e., the adaptability dimensions) across groups of individuals. Conversely, qualitative differences refer to the shape of the profile or the relative level of the indicators within a group (Wang & Hanges, 2011). The identification of subgroups of individuals with distinct combinations of the four adaptability dimensions could enhance our understanding of the career adaptability construct and its relationship with predictors and outcomes because several important questions can be addressed using a person-centered approach: for example, what types of subgroups with distinct combinations of career adaptability profiles can be identified in a given population? What is the prevalence of these different profiles? How are these profiles related to the antecedents and outcomes of career adaptability?

3. Study 1: Establishing career adaptability profiles

The first goal of this study was to apply a person-centered approach to career adaptability and explore whether individuals with distinct career adaptability profiles can be identified. Hence, this study was guided by the following general research question:

Research Question 1. *Are there quantitatively and qualitatively distinct profiles of career adaptability?*

A second goal of this study was to explore the relationships between different adaptability profiles and the theoretical outcomes of adaptability. An important outcome that could be related to different adaptability profiles is adapting. Adapting, or adapting responses, refers to performing adaptive behaviors and possessing adaptive attitudes that help when addressing changing career conditions and dealing with career development tasks (Savickas, 2013). Adapting should be considered an outcome of career adaptability; it is increased when an individual possesses career adaptability resources in terms of concern, control, curiosity, and

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