



Future work self and career adaptability in the prediction of proactive career behaviors



Brian J. Taber^{a,*}, Maureen Blankemeyer^b

^a Oakland University, USA

^b Kent State University, USA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the motivational resource of future work self salience and the additive effect of career adaptability dimensions in the prediction of career planning, proactive skill development, and proactive career networking in a sample of university students ($N = 113$). It was hypothesized that greater clarity of future work self would predict engagement in each of the proactive career behaviors and that specific dimensions of career adaptability would have an additive effect in predicting particular proactive career behavior in line with the theory of career construction. Results indicated that future work self predicted career planning and that career concern had an additive effect. Future work self also predicted proactive skill development and proactive career networking. However, career confidence and career curiosity mediated these relationships in the prediction of skill development and networking respectively. In sum, results suggest that future work self and career adaptability play an influential role in the engagement of proactive career behavior.

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1. Introduction

The uncertainty that has occurred in the wake of economic and technological changes in the world of work (Storey, 2000) dictates that people be self-directed in managing their career in order to adequately prepare for the school to work transition and increase chances for employability (Hall, 2002). Recent research has underscored the importance of a variety of proactive career behaviors linked to successful career management (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006). Herein, we consider career planning, skill development, and networking as fundamental proactive career behaviors that reflect the 'know why', 'know how', and 'know whom' competencies necessary in an age of boundaryless careers (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). Career planning, networking, and skill development have been linked to important career related outcomes such as employment and career success (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde, 2009; Eby et al., 2003; Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Accordingly, the current study examines the aforementioned proactive career behaviors as they relate to the theoretical constructs of future work self salience (Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012) and career adaptability (Savickas, 2013). Specifically, we examine the additive effects of concern, control, confidence, and curiosity that constitute career adaptability have over future work self salience in the prediction of career planning, skill development, and networking. Herein, we consider future work self as the motivational force behind engaging in proactive career behaviors and career adaptability as supplementary resources that increase the likelihood of engaging such behaviors.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Counseling, Oakland University, Rochester, MI 48309-4401, USA.
E-mail address: taber@oakland.edu (B.J. Taber).

2. Future work self

Future work self stems from the concept of possible selves that constitute the future-oriented aspects of the self-concept. These possible selves may be both positive and negative in terms of what one hopes to become and or hopes to avoid becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Theoretically, possible selves are a source of identity-based motivation that influences current behavior consistent with one's characteristics and aimed toward the attainment of a desired future (Oyserman & James, 2011). Within the context of possible selves, research has demonstrated its motivational influence on behavior related to career aspirations. For example, Destinn and Oyserman (2010) reported that middle-school students from a low-income background who envisioned a desired occupation that required higher education tended to earn higher grades than students who did not see their future occupation as education dependent. A longitudinal study by Beal and Crockett (2010) mirrored these results with a sample of low-income rural teens. In this study, 15-year olds that aspired to further their education and attain prestigious occupations did in fact attain more education 7 years later. Given the theoretical and empirical links between current behavior and a desired future, examining the motivational influence of the future self in the context of work may lend itself to understanding the engagement of proactive career behaviors that lead to successful attainment of a preferred occupation and subsequent career management.

Drawn from the possible selves literature, future work self represents an aspect of the self-concept relating to an individual's hopes and aspirations for future work life (Strauss et al., 2012). Further, future work self constitutes a motivational resource through self-generated goals and strategies to achieve them in relation to work. The motivational underpinnings of future work self draw from three explanatory processes (Strauss et al., 2012). The first of these processes concerns the discrepancy between one's current self and the imagined ideal future work self. This discrepancy prompts current goal setting and self-directed behavior to attain the desired future (Bandura, 2001). The second process involves identity construction through which people explore and redefine themselves and actively strive to attain a future consistent with their values (Dunkel, 2000; Dunkel & Anthis, 2001). Thirdly, through the simulation provided by mental images of the future (Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998), situational constraints such as the need to acquire skills necessary to perform a future role can be brought to awareness. This incongruence between current and requisite skill levels motivates skill development. Strauss et al. (2012) conducted two studies examining the motivational influence of future work self salience in the prediction of proactive career behavior. Results from the first study, indicated that future work self salience predicted proactive career behavior in general after controlling for age, job tenure, future time perspective, career aspirations, and career identity salience and commitment. The second study demonstrated that future work self predicted proactive career behavior in general 6 months later over and above career identity commitment and future time perspective. Given both the theoretical nature and empirical support for future work self salience in predicting proactive career behavior, we make the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Salience of future work self relates positively to career planning, proactive skill development, and career networking.

3. Career adaptability

Career adaptability is embedded in career construction theory (Savickas, 2013) and refers to the psychosocial resources that enable people to cope with career developmental tasks, transitions, and work traumas (Savickas, 1997). Career adaptability constitutes a self-regulatory construct consisting of four dimensions (concern, control, confidence, and curiosity) that aid in current and anticipated work-related transitions (Savickas, 2013). Concern refers to future time orientation and recognition that present actions are linked to career aspirations. Control indicates self-discipline and taking responsibility for one's career. Curiosity pertains to being open to new experiences, self and environmental exploration, and subsequent identification of career opportunities. Confidence refers to one's belief in the capacity to overcome challenges and obstacles that may be encountered while pursuing career aspirations. When faced with complex or unfamiliar problems associated with career development or adjustment, people draw from these self-regulatory resources in order to craft a solution (Porfeli & Savickas, 2012).

A number of recent studies have substantiated the usefulness of career adaptability dimensions in relation to a variety of vocational outcomes. For instance, a study by Tolentino et al. (2014) reported that proactive personality, learning goal orientation, and career optimism related significantly to the four career adaptability dimensions. Zacher (2014) reported that the career adaptability dimensions of concern and confidence predicted career satisfaction and self-reported career performance over the Big Five personality traits and core self-evaluations in a heterogeneous sample of Australian workers. Another study conducted by de Guzman and Choi (2013) reported that the four career adaptability dimensions predicted teamwork employability skills in a sample of technical school students. In a study of Chinese university graduates, concern and control were reported to predict job search self-efficacy directly and control had an indirect effect on person–organization fit, demands–ability fit, and needs–supply fit (Guan et al., 2013). Career adaptability has also been found to inversely relate to work stress and positively with happiness suggesting that career adaptability is a mechanism through which people find their ideal work (Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013). In a related vein, Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, and Rossier (2013) reported that career adaptability resources related positively to professional well-being and partially mediated the relation between job strain and job insecurity.

Taken altogether, research conducted to date demonstrates the influence career adaptability resources have on career development and adjustment in a number of different contexts. We propose that future work self provides the motivation to do what is needed to bring about a desired future and that career adaptability provides the psychosocial resources that increase the likelihood of engaging necessary behaviors to attain a desired occupational outcome. Accordingly, the current study seeks to

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