

New job market entrants' future work self, career adaptability and job search outcomes: Examining mediating and moderating models[☆]



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 April 2014

Available online 10 May 2014

Keywords:

Future work self
Career adaptability
Job search

ABSTRACT

Based on career construction theory and the model of proactive motivation, the current research examined the mediating and moderating models for the relations among future work self, career adaptability, job search self-efficacy and employment status. A survey study was conducted among Chinese university graduates ($N = 270$). The results showed that future work self (measured at wave 1) had positive effect on employment status (measured at wave 3), with this relationship partially mediated by career adaptability (measured at wave 1) and job search self-efficacy (measured at wave 2). In addition, the results further revealed that the positive effect of future work self on job search self-efficacy was stronger among the graduates who had a higher level of career adaptability. In support of the hypothesized moderated mediation model, for individuals with a higher level of career adaptability, the indirect effect of future work self on employment status through job search self-efficacy was stronger. These findings carry implications for research on job search behavior, career education and career counseling.

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1. Introduction

Due to the fast changing employment patterns, nowadays individuals play an increasingly active role in ensuring employability and achieving career success (Arthur, 1994). A growing research literature has revealed that proactive career behaviors (e.g., exploring options, setting goals, developing skills and abilities) serve as crucial antecedents for important career-related outcomes, such as employment status (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 1999), salary growth and promotions (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). In order to identify the motivational basis of proactive career behaviors, Strauss, Griffin, and Parker (2012) developed the concept of “future work self”, which refers to one's hopes and aspirations in relation to work. The concept includes individuals' reasons to engage in proactive career management (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). Research indicates that future work self significantly predicts individuals' proactive career planning, skill development, career consultation and network building (Strauss et al., 2012). From the perspective of career construction theory (Savickas, 1997, 2005), this willingness to engage in proactive career behavior as depicted by future work self is followed by individuals'

[☆] This research was supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC, Project ID: 71102107).

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ability to manage the tasks in their career transitions as reflected by the concept of career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Together willingness and ability play a critical role in helping individuals achieve career success. Consistently, the model of proactive motivation (Parker et al., 2010) also posits that the “can do” factor serves as another important basis for proactive goal generation and goal striving.

The current research aimed to simultaneously examine how the psychological antecedents of being “willing” (operationalized as future work self) and “able” (operationalized as career adaptability) affect new job market entrants' school-to-work transition by testing their relations with job search outcomes. Theoretically, research into new entrants' job search success (e.g., getting employed) carries important implications for understanding individuals' career transitions and long-term career success (Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012; DiPrete & Eirich, 2006; Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Practically, as the supply of Chinese university graduates to job market has exceeded 5 million per year since 2004 with an unemployment rate of over 27%, the current research also carries important implications for understanding the adaptive ways for school-to-work transition in the Chinese context (Su & Meng, 2011). In light of the career construction theory (Savickas, 1997, 2005) and the model of proactive motivation (Parker et al., 2010), we first tested a mediating model in which future work self positively predicts career adaptability, which in turn relates positively to job search self-efficacy and then employment status (Oncel, 2014; Perera & McIlveen, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). As showed in Fig. 1, the mediating model suggests that a salient future work self motivates individuals to develop a higher level of career adaptability, which then improves individuals' job search success by enhancing their job search self-efficacy (Guan et al., 2013; Wanberg, Zhang, & Diehn, 2010).

In addition to the mediating model discussed above, career construction theory further suggests that the “willing” and “able” factors may play distinct roles and interplay with each other in predicting individuals' career outcomes (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). That is, adaptive outcomes are more likely to be attained when individuals are both “willing” and “able” to perform behaviors that address transition challenges. In light of the above, we argue that new job market entrants who simultaneously have a salient future work self and a high level of career adaptability are better equipped to accomplish the job search tasks and therefore will demonstrate a higher level of job search self-efficacy, which in turn will lead to a higher probability of getting employed. The above discussion suggests that the indirect effect of future work self on job search outcomes through job search self-efficacy will only exist among those who have a high level of career adaptability (see Fig. 2).

The current research contributes to research literature in several ways. By simultaneously examining the roles of future work self and career adaptability in new entrants' job search process, the current research will improve our understanding of how these two distinctive psychological antecedents affect job search outcomes. Second, by contrasting the mediating and moderating models in job search process, we enrich research on career construction theory and the model of proactive motivation by showing the different paths the “can do” factor influences job search outcomes—via their mediating and moderating influences on the relations between future work self and job search self-efficacy, which advances our understanding of job search dynamics.

1.1. The mediating model

According to the model of proactive motivation (Parker et al., 2010; Strauss et al., 2012), as future work self represents an individual's hoped for future working life, it is likely to create a discrepancy between the current self and the ideal future self. This discrepancy motivates anticipatory behavior and drives people to work toward an imagined future. From the perspective of career construction theory (Savickas, 1997, 2005), future work self captures individuals' “career adaptivity”, which refers to the willingness to change themselves to meet career disequilibrium or transition with fitting responses. In addition to adaptivity, career construction theory also emphasizes the role of career adaptability, which refers to the psychological resources individuals possess to resolve critical problems in their career development. The concept of career adaptability also reflects the “can do” factor proposed by the model of proactive motivation (Parker et al., 2010; Strauss et al., 2012).

Savickas (1997) proposed a four-dimension framework of career adaptability: career concern (one's capability to consider future possibilities and prepare for what might come next), career control (one's strength in making deliberate decisions and taking conscientious action), career curiosity (one's strength in exploring various situations and roles) and career confidence (one's positive perceptions of their problem-solving skills across different situations). These four dimensions can be combined into a global indicator to collectively represent individuals' adaptive resources in career transitions (Savickas, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The positive effects of career adaptability on stress management, career satisfaction, and promotability have been reported in previous research (e.g., Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013).

According to career construction theory (Oncel, 2014; Perera & McIlveen, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), the willingness to meet career transition with fitting responses will motivate individuals to initiate the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes that accommodate to the challenges. Accordingly, previous research has shown that a clear and accessible future work self promoted individuals' self-directed behaviors that aim at self-development (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Strauss et al., 2012).

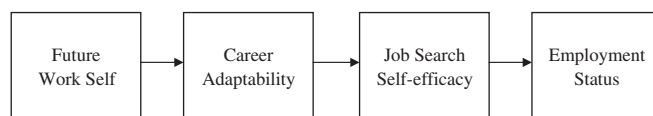


Fig. 1. The mediating model.

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