



Career Adapt-Abilities Scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries

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ABSTRACT

Researchers from 13 countries collaborated in constructing a psychometric scale to measure career adaptability. Based on four pilot tests, a research version of the proposed scale consisting of 55 items was field tested in 13 countries. The resulting Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) consists of four scales, each with six items. The four scales measure concern, control, curiosity, and confidence as psychosocial resources for managing occupational transitions, developmental tasks, and work traumas. The CAAS demonstrated metric invariance across all the countries, but did not exhibit residual/strict invariance or scalar invariance. The reliabilities of the CAAS subscales and the combined adaptability scale range from acceptable to excellent when computed with the combined data. As expected, the reliability estimates varied across countries. Nevertheless, the internal consistency estimates for the four subscales of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence were generally acceptable to excellent. The internal consistency estimates for the CAAS total score were excellent across all countries. Separate articles in this special issue report the psychometric characteristics of the CAAS, including initial validity evidence, for each of the 13 countries that collaborated in constructing the Scale.

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Career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) conceptualizes human development as driven by adaptation to a social environment with the goal of person–environment integration. The theory takes a contextual and cultural perspective on social adaptation and niche-making. For human beings, adaptation to social life implicates all core and peripheral roles. As they design their lives (Savickas et al., 2009), people must adapt to expectations that they work, play, and develop relationships. The career construction model of adaptation concentrates on only the work role in that it addresses social expectations that individuals prepare for, enter, and participate in the work role and subsequently deal with career transitions between occupational positions. From this perspective, an occupation is a mechanism of social integration or connection, one that offers a strategy for sustaining oneself in society.

1. Adapt

To adapt comes from the Latin meaning *to fit* or *to join*. Over time, subtle distinctions have been made using the root word *adapt* – including adaptivity, adaptability, adapting, and adaptation. In career construction theory (2005), these words denote a sequence ranging across adaptive *readiness*, adaptability *resources*, adapting *responses*, and adaptation *results*. People are more or less prepared to change, differ in their resources to manage change, demonstrate more or less change when change is

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needed, and as a result become more or less integrated into life roles over time. Given the ever-changing nature of individuals and their contexts, a person's adaptivity, adaptability, adapting, and adaptation are in varying states of activation with relative changes in person–environment harmony being the cause and consequence of activation.

1.1. Adaptation

Viewing career construction as a series of attempts to implement a self-concept in work roles concentrates attention on adaptation to a series of transitions from school to work, from job to job, and from occupation to occupation. People construct careers by using adaptive strategies that implement their personalities in work roles. This adaptation is motivated and guided by the goal of bringing inner needs and outer opportunities into harmony, with the harmonics of a good fit amplifying in present activity the individual's past preoccupations and current aspirations. Adaptation, or goodness of fit, is indicated by success, satisfaction, and development.

1.2. Adapting

Adaptation is the consequence of adapting, that is, performing adaptive behaviors that address changing conditions (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Career adapting involves mastering vocational development tasks, coping with occupational transitions, and adjusting to work traumas and contingencies. Career construction theory views adapting to these tasks, transitions, and traumas as fostered principally by five sets of behaviors, each named for their adaptive functions: orientation, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. These constructive activities form a cycle of adaptive performance that is periodically repeated as the individual must fit into a changing context. As each call for adaptation approaches, individuals can adapt more effectively if they meet changing conditions with growing awareness and information-seeking followed by informed decision making, trial behaviors leading to a stable commitment projected forward for a certain time period, active role management, and eventually forward-looking disengagement. For example, an employee begins a new job with the challenge of adapting to the new work role, including tackling tasks like exploration of the requirements, routines, and rewards of that role. Then she becomes established in the role, manages the role for a certain time period, and eventually disengages from it either voluntarily when further growth readies her to change jobs or involuntarily when organizational changes displace her.

1.3. Adaptivity

In career construction theory, adaptivity is the personality trait of flexibility or willingness to change. The willingness to meet career disequilibrium or transition with fitting responses denotes adaptiveness. The threshold to initiate the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes that guide goal-directed activity is reached when a person can no longer assimilate the changes and persevere in routine activities. At that point, the individual needs to accommodate to the disequilibrium by changing self, context, or both. The required accommodations typically prompt feelings of distress fueling motivation and bolstering the willingness to adapt.

Individuals differ in their willingness or readiness to affect change. Career construction theory views adaptivity or willingness to adapt as an increasingly stable and durable trait or basic tendency that becomes situated at the core of the individual. Adaptiveness is indicated by celerity in the Theory of Work Adjustment, meaning the quickness with which a person responds to disequilibrium (Cheung, 1975; Dawis, 1996). In testing the career construction model of adaptation, this individual-difference variable or trait may be defined with multiple operational indicators, including the *California Psychological Inventory*, the *Proactive Personality Scale*, the *Cognitive Flexibility Inventory*, and Big Five personality items. The *California Psychological Inventory* (Gough, 1996) flexibility scale measures the degree of adaptivity of a person's thinking and social behavior. The *Proactive Personality Scale* (Bateman & Crant, 1993) measures propensity to take action to improve the work environment or find a new one. The *Cognitive Flexibility Inventory* (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010) measures the tendency to see difficult situations as controllable and to perceive alternatives. From the perspective of the Five-Factor Model of personality, adaptiveness appears to be a compound trait composed of facets from four of the five dimensions. We hypothesize that career adaptivity may be indicated by openness and extroversion (positive) and conscientiousness and agreeableness (negative). We plan to use the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg, 1999) to construct a measure of career adaptivity. Regardless of how it is operationally defined, the psychological trait of adaptiveness by itself is insufficient to support adaptive behaviors. The individual who is willing to engage in adapting behaviors must bring some resources to bear on changing the situation. Given the goal of adapting to some task, transition, or trauma, there is a need for self-regulation resources.

1.4. Adaptability

Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, traumas in their occupational roles that, to some degree large or small, alter their social integration (Savickas, 1997). Career adaptability resources are the self-regulation strengths or capacities that a person may draw upon to solve the unfamiliar, complex, and ill-defined problems presented by developmental vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas. These resources are not at the core of the individual, they reside as the intersection of person-in-environment. Thus adapt-abilities are psycho-social constructs. We agree with Ford's (1994) living systems model in considering adapt-abilities as

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