**Improving the bridge between university and work for management students**

**Abstract**

The transition from university to work is a challenging time for students, impacting their future careers and success. Experiential learning, especially simulations of work environments, can prepare students for this transition. However, educators are still looking for a better bridge between university and work. In this roundtable discussion, we will review Career Construction Theory and the concept of Career Adaptability and engage in a discussion about ways to improve the career adaptability of management students during the time of transition from university to work.

**Keywords:** University to Work Transition; Career Construction Theory; Career Adaptability

**Introduction**

The transition from university to work is a difficult process for young people (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Many young adults remain unemployed or do not acquire the skills that would make them successful in the labor market (International Labour Organization, 2020). Part of the problem lies in economic changes that have made jobs less secure, stable, and linear, thus putting more pressure on those making entry-level career-decisions (Hall, 1996; Savickas, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009). Young people’s integration in the workforce has been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021). These trends are especially concerning, given the fact that the transition from university to work can impact young people’s occupational direction (Richards, 1984), the likelihood for future employment (Koivisto et al., 2007), and career success (Giraud et al., 2019; Ng & Feldman, 2007; Steffy et al., 1989).

Scholars have found that career interventions can improve undergraduate students’ career-decision making and transition from university to work (Behrens & Nauta, 2014; Essig & Kelly, 2013; Z. A. Green et al., 2020; Luzzo & Day, 1999; Ozlem, 2019). Some of the most effective interventions improve young people’s career adaptability (Z. A. Green et al., 2020; Monteiro et al., 2019; van der Horst et al., 2021). While there is still debate about what constitutes an effective career intervention (Langher et al., 2018; Whiston & Rose, 2013), of particular importance are experiential education experiences, for example those in which students get to be part of work-like settings (Fan & Antoine, 1999; Jackson, 2017). Work experiences or work-like settings help students learn about possible career and occupational options, while helping them understand how workplaces function (A. Green & Smith, 2003). Skills and knowledge acquired in settings that are similar to workplaces are also more likely to endure (Brown et al., 1989). Yet students have few opportunities to take part in learning experiences that resemble workplaces (Fuller et al., 2021), which made Fuller and Lipson (2021) conclude that “America needs a better bridge between school and career.” The focus of our roundtable is an exploration of options management educators may have to design and implement experiential learning opportunities meant to help students transition successfully from university to work.

**Theoretical Foundation: Career Construction Theory and Career Adaptability**

We will frame our discussion about improving the bridge between university and early careers using the Career Construction Theory and the concept of career adaptability. Savickas (1997) developed Career Construction Theory (CCT) and defined career adaptability as part of as “an individual’s readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas." (Savickas, 2005, p. 51). Four concepts are key for the CCT framework: adaptive readiness, adaptability resources, adapting responses, and adaptation results (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Adaptive readiness (or adaptivity) is viewed by CCT scholars as a stable set of personal traits or psychological characteristics that make an individual more flexible or willing to change during career transitions (Savickas, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, 2012). Tolentino and colleagues (2014) conceptualized adaptivity as a set of self-regulative tendencies, such as learning goal orientation, career optimism, and proactive personality, while Hirschi and colleagues (2015) operationalized adaptivity as proactive personality.

Meanwhile, Savickas and Porfeli (2012) defined adaptability resources as “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.” (p. 662). Savickas (2005) and later Savickas and Porfeli (2012) identified and defined four main career *adapt-abilities*: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. *Concern* corresponds to the career question "Do I have a future?” Concern helps individuals to have a future orientation and prepare for any tasks or challenges that they might face. *Control* corresponds to the career question “Who owns my future?” Control enables individuals to feel responsible of their career path, and is seen in the effort, persistence, and self-discipline they use to shape themselves and the environment during a career transition. *Curiosity* corresponds to career question "What do I want to do with my future?” Curiosity enables individuals to think of how they may fit in different situations, scenarios or roles that might occur in the future. Lastly, *confidence* corresponds to career question “Can I do it?” Confidence, in this context, means that an individual anticipates success in the face of challenges and obstacles, such as solving complex problems during career transition.

Career adapting responses are the actual behaviors individuals take in response to career changes (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). As Savickas and Porfeli (2012) explained, while CCT views being “willing and able” as “readiness and resources,” the process of adapting is the “doing” in the adaptation process. Career planning is an example of career adapting responses that involves actively thinking about the future and taking steps to achieve one’s career goals (May, 2005). Career exploration, is another adapting response, and it involves gaining knowledge about one’s own interests, values and preferences, and about opportunities for education, training, employment and occupations (Jiang et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Hirschi and colleagues (2015) argued that we can also regard certain beliefs and psychological barriers as adapting responses to career transitions. For example, some individuals may gain career decision-making self-efficac*y,* which is how successful people believe they will be when making decisions about their career goals, opportunities, and goals (Taylor & Betz, 1983). Career decidednesscan also be seen as another career adapting response (van der Horst et al., 2021), just as occupational self-efficacy, which refers to the competence one feels in accomplishing the tasks of their occupation (Rigotti et al., 2008). Savickas (2013) theorized that the dimensions of the career adaptability construct would lead to several positive outcomes during career transitions. As he put it, “better outcomes (adaptation results) are achieved by individuals who are willing (adaptive readiness) and able (adaptability resources) to perform coping behaviors that address changing conditions (adapting responses)” (Savickas, 2013, p. 162).

**Session Description**

1. **Introduction on the University to Work Transitions (10 minutes)**

We will present a summary of the challenges students face when transitioning from university to work

1. **Theoretical framework (10 minutes)**

We will present a summary of the theoretical framework used to guide our discussion: Career Construction Theory and Career Adaptability

1. **Break-out room brainstorming (10 minutes)**

Participants in the round table will participate in small group discussions about how to improve the career adaptability of management students during their transition from university to work

1. **Roundtable discussion (30 minutes)**

Roundtable participants will share their thoughts about how educators can improve the career adaptability of management students.

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