



The role of career adaptability in predicting entrepreneurial intentions: A moderated mediation model[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Guided by the Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013), we view entrepreneurship as an adaptive vocational behavior driven by an individual's self-regulatory capacity to thrive in a complex entrepreneurial career context. Our research model posited that individuals rely on their adaptive resources and entrepreneurial self-efficacy as they form entrepreneurial intentions. Career adaptability, as self-regulatory competencies, is further strengthened by prior exposure to family business. We collected data over three measurement periods from Serbian business students ($n = 380$) and validated the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS). The moderated mediation model was supported and as predicted: (a) career adaptability was positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions and (b) the mediated relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial intentions via entrepreneurial self-efficacy was stronger for individuals with prior exposure to family business. In addition, we provide evidence for the psychometric properties of CAAS by examining its internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and factor structure. Taken together, our study offers the groundwork for understanding successful adaptation in the entrepreneurial career context and supports the cross-national measurement equivalence and utility of CAAS in a developing economy.

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1. Introduction

An entrepreneurial career encompasses a self-directed process of navigating through novel situations, ambiguous career trajectories, and volatile business contexts. Indeed, entrepreneurial activities hinge on personal agency as its development and actualization depend on the individual's capability to recognize and pursue opportunities (Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003). It is therefore important to understand which personal factors facilitate or impede an individual's intention to become an entrepreneur. The role of personal factors in the development of an entrepreneurial career has been widely investigated (Rauch & Frese, 2007; Unger, Rauch, Frese, & Rosenbusch, 2011; Zacher, Biemann, Gielnik, & Frese, 2012). Despite the growing interest in individual differences associated with entrepreneurial proclivity and engagement, there are still gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. First, several prior studies that profiled entrepreneurs primarily relied on a trait-perspective and examined global dispositions (Kickul, Gundry, Barbosa, & Whitcanack, 2009; Leutner,

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Ahmetoglu, Akhtar, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014; Zhao, Seibert, & Lumpkin, 2010). Clearly, entrepreneurship is more than just an occupation to which individuals are predisposed; it is also a goal-directed behavior influenced by complex psychological and cognitive processes. Indeed, Shook, Priem, and McGee (2003) suggested that future studies examine the integration between psychological and cognitive characteristics of the enterprising individual because these factors could intervene in the process of business creation. Second, the literature on entrepreneurial intentions concentrates on testing for its direct determinants and ignores the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions through which personal variables influence intentions. Research on how and why personal and situational factors lead to entrepreneurial intentions could provide insight to theory development and practical interventions for up-and-coming entrepreneurs. To date, calls have been made for the use of alternative theories to account for the dynamic entrepreneurial process and to identify other antecedents that might explain the variance beyond that accounted for by predominant theories (Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014; Shane et al., 2003). While Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2013) has been employed predominantly to investigate adaptation in organizational careers, research examining career adaptability in the context of entrepreneurial careers is currently missing despite the vital role of adaptive competence in business creation. Finally, most of the existing studies on early entrepreneurial career development were derived from cross-sectional data using static designs and typically examined venture creation in the context of developed economies.

In view of these research gaps, we examined the role of career adaptability and the underlying mechanisms through which it facilitates proclivity towards starting a business venture. Drawing upon Career Construction Theory, we view entrepreneurial career development as geared towards person–environment integration and driven by adaptation to a series of transitions and periods in the entrepreneurial process of discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities. Along these lines, we argue that career adaptability acts as a self-regulatory resource that increases the likelihood to start a business. We further posit that entrepreneurial intentions are mediated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Moreover, prior exposure to family business will serve as a proximal contextual resource that strengthens the formation of entrepreneurial intentions among adaptable and efficacious individuals.

This study makes several contributions to the entrepreneurial career literature. First, we address the call to consider alternative theoretical perspectives and determinants of entrepreneurial intentions. Further insights into the individual-level antecedents of entrepreneurial intention could help us determine instrumental factors in transforming potential entrepreneurs into business founders (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). Developing intentions is mainly motivational, thus it is grounded on the agentic self's capacity for volition and direction (Bandura, 1989; Gollwitzer, 1999). By using the Career Construction Theory and examining agentic resources such as career adaptability and self-efficacy, we develop an enhanced understanding of how individuals are able to form entrepreneurial intentions and manage their career development amidst the impending risk and uncertainty of business venturing. The integration of career construction perspective also supports the broader use of robust theory-driven process models in entrepreneurship research (MacMillan & Katz, 1992). Unlike previously examined stable psychological traits, adaptive competence and self-efficacy pertains to a dynamic aspect of development. Because career adaptability and entrepreneurial self-efficacy are malleable psychosocial resources, it provides an opportunity for intervention and enhancement throughout the lifespan (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Savickas, 2013).

Second, our research model provides preliminary evidence for the applicability of Career Construction Theory in entrepreneurial careers and the integration of socio-cognitive and entrepreneurship variables contribute in the expansion of career adaptability's current nomological net. To our knowledge, this study was the first to examine the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurship over time among young people in a developing economy. Furthermore, we accounted for the socio-cognitive mechanism (i.e., entrepreneurial self-efficacy) and enabling contextual condition (i.e., family business) underlying the relation between career adaptability and entrepreneurial intentions. The examination of mechanisms and boundary conditions through which entrepreneurial intent develops sheds light to a more comprehensive representation of entrepreneurial career planning and the dynamic process of business creation. Further, we take into account the moderating role of family business, enriching the existing knowledge on the extent to which family background might influence an individual's entrepreneurial intentions (Altinay, Madanoglu, Daniele, & Lashley, 2012; Zellweger, Sieger, & Halter, 2011).

Finally, the present study addresses the methodological limitations of prior research by implementing a temporal design to account for the change process and time elements necessary to test antecedents of intention formation in a developing country (i.e., Serbia) with unique business contingencies. In the sections that follow, we elaborate on the theoretical linkages between the study variables and conclude with specific hypotheses.

1.1. Career adaptability and entrepreneurial intention

Career adaptability constitutes self-regulatory strengths that individuals rely on to manage vocational developmental tasks and to direct their career development. It is comprised of four adaptive behaviors that are used proactively (e.g., imminent developmental task or transition) or reactively (e.g., in response to unexpected challenges) to prepare for or cope with current and anticipated career-related changes and tasks associated with one's occupational role (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). *Career concern* pertains to a time perspective towards preparation for the future such as developing a career vision. *Career control* reflects a sense of ownership and responsibility to exert influence on one's career. *Career curiosity* refers to interest in exploring possible selves and opportunities in one's environment. Lastly, *career confidence* pertains to the persistent pursuit of aspirations and anticipation of success in the face of obstacles. These transactional and psychosocial resources are a set of career competencies individuals use to navigate successfully through unfamiliar and complex environments.

The ability to engage in self-regulation during a business development process is vital for entrepreneurial entrance (Patel & Thatcher, 2012). Unlike traditional career pathways, the entrepreneur's business is closely intertwined involving a higher degree of

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