



Validation of the German version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale and its relation to orientations to happiness and work stress[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Career adapt-ability has recently gained momentum as a psychosocial construct that not only has much to offer the field of career development, but also contributes to positive coping, adjustment and self-regulation through the four dimensions of concern, control, curiosity and confidence. The positive psychology movement, with concepts such as the orientations to happiness, explores the factors that contribute to human flourishing and optimum functioning. This research has two main contributions; 1) to validate a German version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS), and 2) to extend the contribution of adapt-abilities to the field of work stress and explore its mediating capacity in the relation between orientations to happiness and work stress. We used a representative sample of the German-speaking Swiss working population including 1204 participants (49.8% women), aged between 26 and 56 ($M_{age} = 42.04$). Results indicated that the German version of the CAAS is valid, with overall high levels of model fit suggesting that the conceptual structure of career adapt-ability replicates well in this cultural context. Adapt-abilities showed a negative relationship to work stress, and a positive one with orientations to happiness. The engagement and pleasure scales of orientations to happiness also correlated negatively with work stress. Moreover, career adapt-ability mediates the relationship between orientations to happiness and work stress. In depth analysis of the mediating effect revealed that control is the only significant mediator. Thus control may be acting as a mechanism through which individuals attain their desired life at work subsequently contributing to reduced stress levels.

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1. Introduction

Career adapt-ability has recently gained momentum as a psychosocial construct that not only has much to offer the field of career development, but also contributes to positive coping, adjustment and self-regulation through the four dimensions of concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Savickas, 2005). Orientations to happiness are part of the positive psychology movement that has shifted attention from all that is “wrong” to all that is “right” aiming to capture the aspects that add meaning to life and promote optimal

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functioning (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). We test the capacity of adapt-abilities and orientations to happiness to contribute to lower levels of stress at work and thus furnish the literature on individual characteristics implicated in the stress response (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress is expensive with the economic and social costs associated with strain-related consequences prompting an interest in the study of work stress (Bakker, van Veldhoven, & Xanthopoulos, 2010). We expect that both adapt-abilities and orientations to happiness function as personal resources and contribute to the reduction of work stress. An individual's endorsement of an orientation to happiness does not guarantee the enactment of a particular orientation (Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007) and thus an intervening variable may be required. Adapt-abilities are involved in the translation of individual dispositions into behavior (Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori, & Dauwalder, 2012) and may act as the mechanism variable that explains the relationship between orientations to happiness and work stress. This research proceeds in two parts with each making a unique contribution. First, we add to the growing body of international work on adapt-abilities by validating the German version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS). A team of international researchers jointly developed the CAAS (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). A necessary subsequent step is the validation of this measure in different countries with this laying a solid foundation for the continued utility of the CAAS. To date, the German version of the CAAS international form 2.0 is not yet available. Second, we test the capacity of adapt-abilities to function as a mediator in the relationship between orientations to happiness and work stress.

Adapt-abilities, as a part of career construction theory, are involved in the construction of a career reality and assist individuals in imposing meaning on their career related experiences (Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009). The adapt-ability dimensions of concern, control, curiosity and confidence assist individuals in preparing for and participating in the work role (Savickas, 1997). The application of adapt-abilities is not limited to career construction and career development. Career adapt-ability can be seen as a much broader concept consisting of one's readiness and resources to respond to the world of work through problem solving, coping and self-regulation (Savickas, 2005). Indeed, when faced with potentially stressful situations such as unemployment and career transitions, individuals respond with displays of adapt-abilities (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prosser, 2004).

The adapt-ability dimensions of concern, control, curiosity and confidence are comprised of attitudes, beliefs and competencies (Savickas, 2005) that allow conceptual links between adapt-abilities and work related outcomes, such as work stress. Career concern, with the associated attitude of and competence in planning, fosters coping behaviors of awareness and preparation, assisting individuals to respond to the demands of the work environment. Control fosters personal responsibility for one's career and work experiences. A decisive attitude, engaging in decision-making and behaving in an assertive manner may assist individuals to create the desired work experience. Career curiosity facilitates a good fit between the self and the world of work, and through exploration and risk-taking suggests that individuals gain new knowledge and competences. Confidence has been likened to self-esteem and self-efficacy (Savickas, 2005) with this belief in the self to master challenges and solve problems suggesting a capacity to respond to stressful situations. Through preparation, action, exploration, and problem solving individuals should perceive their work environment, and their capacity to respond adequately, more favorably and subsequently experience less work stress.

The term "stress" has been theorized differently in stimulus based models (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Holmes & Rahe, 1967), response based models (Selye, 1982), and transactional models (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this study, we focus on stress produced by the life domain of work, which is defined as "an uncomfortable state of psychological tensions that results from an appraisal that the perceived demands of the workplace exceeds the individual's perceived resources to successfully meet the demands" (De Bruin, 2006, p. 68). We focus on the psychological nature of the stress response (rather than the behavioral or physical) as a potential threat to well-being and consider that individual characteristics or resources may offer some protection against stress (Cooper et al., 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Rather than only focusing on negative traits such as neuroticism (Schneider, 2004), some approaches to well-being have considered positive characteristics, such as optimism (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The main focus of positive psychology is what makes our lives most worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and the aspects that enable human flourishing and optimal functioning (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Giannopoulos & Vella-Brodrick, 2011). Three topics are at the center of positive psychology: a) positive subjective experiences, b) positive traits, and c) positive institutions (Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Happiness is one aspect of well-being (Diener, 2000) and consequentially the positive characteristic of orientations to happiness that proposes different pathways to happiness may contribute to work-related well-being (Peterson, 2006; Seligman, 2002). Seligman (2002) first developed the concept of orientations to happiness, with Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005) later developing the Orientations to Happiness questionnaire. First, the pleasure orientation suggests that the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain are the chief route to happiness. Engagement, or the experience of flow enabled by a good match between demands and competences at work, is another route to happiness. A third option suggests that true happiness entails identifying one's virtues, cultivating them, and living in accordance with them. There is first empirical evidence that orientations to happiness are pertinent at work and in the career context showing relations to subjective and objective career success (Proyer, Annen, Eggimann, Schneider, & Ruch, 2012). Further, the three orientations to happiness are related to vocational identity achievement (Hirschi, 2011). Vocational identity achievement together with career adapt-ability are defined as the major meta-competencies in career construction theory (Savickas, 2011; Stauffer, Maggiori, Froidevaux, & Rossier, in press) and are empirically related to each other (Porfeli & Savickas, 2012). These relationships suggest that orientations to happiness and career adapt-abilities may be related to each other and simultaneously implicated in the stress response.

In this study, we propose that adapt-abilities will mediate the relationship between orientations to happiness and work stress. As individual use adapt-abilities to achieve their desired life, as framed by their orientations to happiness, we expect that they will experience reduced work stress. Orientations to happiness alone may not be enough to realize behavioral adjustments or changes to one's work environment. Adapt-ability, a behaviorally oriented individual characteristic, provides an important link between one's dispositions and experience of the work context (Rossier, in press). Previous research indicates the mediating effect of adapt-abilities

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