

Does the Career Adaptation Process Change as a Function of an Employee's Age or Employment Gaps? A Longitudinal Investigation of Relationships Among Personal Resources, Contextual Factors, Coping Behaviors, and Career Success

Abstract

In the current research, I developed and tested a novel psychological framework that integrated three contemporary career theories (i.e., Protean, Boundaryless, and Social Cognitive Career theories) to understand the process of career adaptation by investigating antecedents and consequences of job-related coping behaviors. I tested differences in adaptation for younger employees (25 to 39) and, middle-aged or older employees (40 and older). I also tested differences in adaptation process for employees who had experienced different types and durations of employment gaps in the past. The model developed in this research depicts a process showing how personal resources (i.e., social and psychological capital) and contextual factors (i.e., organizational support for career management and labor market conditions) affect career outcomes (e.g., perceived career success) and employment quality (i.e., job satisfaction and commitment). Also, I predicted that the relationships of resources and contextual factors with employment quality would be mediated by frequencies of job-related coping behaviors (e.g., information seeking). I predicted that those who had greater personal resources and those who experienced favorable contextual factors would show better objective and subjective career outcomes and attitudes than those with fewer personal resources and unfavorable contextual factors. Half of the sample was younger and the other half was middle aged and older. The results showed that perceived organizational support for career development predicted employees' perceived and objective career success. Moreover, organizational career support and

protean mindset were the strongest predictors of frequencies of coping behaviors. Although age did not work as a moderator in most of the tested relationships, number of employment gaps that individuals experienced in the past played an important role as a moderator in the relationships between personal resources and coping behaviors. One of the main contributions of the study was developing and testing a new model which integrated contemporary career theories. The results provided support that variables investigated in the current study, especially protean mindset and organizational career support, predicted coping behaviors, perceived career success and employment quality. Another theoretical contribution is the finding that the process of adaptation was not different for older workers compared to younger ones as was stated by prior literature and theories. The results can be used to provide practical suggestions to help employees of different age and different employment history to achieve career and work satisfaction. The results also suggest that the path to career success is a function of personal and contextual factors; thus, it is the responsibility of the employee and the employer to create an environment that employees are satisfied with their work environment and career progress.