

Positive psychological resources of people with disabilities when facing challenges in work: career adaptability and resilience

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Introduction

The present study aims to investigate career adaptability and resilience of people with disabilities who are employed.

“**Career adaptability**” refers to an individual’s readiness to cope with changes and difficulties in his/her work life. According to Savickas (2019), it has the following dimensions: (a) concern (interest/concern about one’s career future), (b) control (sense of control over that future based on one’s own actions), (c) curiosity (exploratory behavior to gather information), and (d) confidence (one’s belief that difficulties can be overcome).

“**Career resilience**” refers to the individual’s quick recovery despite adverse situations and effective management of changes, difficulties, and stressful events. It can be described as one’s willingness and ability to successfully cope with adverse career situations and recover after changes and career shocks (Peeters et al., 2002).

Both career adaptability and career resilience are concepts developed to highlight the different ways in which individuals react when faced with such transitions, changes, and/or difficulties. Adaptability refers more to an individual’s readiness to cope with such situations, i.e., effective prevention, and resilience refers to the individual’s good functioning despite the stressful and challenging situations, i.e., effective response (Bimrose and Hearne, 2012).

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative methodology was used, which was considered the most suitable to address both the research questions and the characteristics of the particular population.

Tools and Data Collection

The semi-structured interview method was used to collect data. Keeping in mind that the interview questions should be linked to the main research questions of the study while allowing the participants to narrate their experience, the researchers created an interview guide which includes 10 questions. To form the questions, we made use of the items of the Career Adaptabilities Scale (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), which is widely used to assess career adaptability. We reviewed the items with the assistance of two people with disabilities to make sure that the phrasing of the interview questions was appropriate. Nonetheless, asking the participants regarding their attitudes and potential behaviors towards possible transitions, changes, and stressful events seemed to be confusing as they reported that it was difficult to visualize them in real-life situations. Therefore, we opted to ask the participants to describe the last time that they faced a disrupting change, transition, or event; we asked more questions regarding their attitudes, thoughts, emotions, and coping behaviors towards this particular event (bearing in mind the components of the aforementioned scale that we wanted to measure).

All questions were created to gather the necessary information in an open, non-directive way. Finally, some demographic questions and a consent form to participate in the survey were added to the guide. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and they were recorded.

Participants

There were 30 participants of the survey: 15 persons with mental health disorders, 8 with hearing impairment and 7 with visual impairment. All participants are currently employed. They were approached to participate in the research face-to-face, where the researchers described the study and its aims and obtained their consent.

Citations

- Bimrose, J.; Hearne, L. (2012). Resilience and career adaptability: Qualitative studies of adult career counseling. *J. Vocat. Behav.*, 81, 338–344.
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- Savickas, M.L. (2019). *Career Construction Theory: Life portraits of Attachment, Adaptability and Identity*; 48HrBooks.
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Results

Projecting Oneself into the Future (Career Concern)

- A prevalent theme was lack of future projection. This may be related to their own past frustrations due to the disability: “I don’t think about the future” (P., male, 47 years old, mental health disability)
- Another theme was lack of career advancement or the overcoming only practical difficulties when envisioning the future. This may also be related to their own past frustrations due to the illness: “I have thought about leaving education and getting a desk job. It is very tiring to communicate on a daily basis, especially for a deaf person like me” (E., female, 40 years old, hearing impairment)
- Another theme that was introduced by a few participants was finding a more suitable and fulfilling career.

Considering the Future Controllable (Career Control)

- Participants emphasized the need for sources of support and for gradual familiarization with the new challenges: “When there are changes at the beginning I feel that I cannot cope with them but then with a lot of effort and slowly I overcome whatever difficulty there is” (K., female, 47 years old, mental health disability)
- Many stressed that they believe that every difficulty can be overcome and mentioned the following as the main sources of support: (a) their social network, (b) their previous experiences, and (c) activation and taking action:

Propensity to Explore the Environment (Career Curiosity)

- There is a gradual reduction in the intensity of negative emotions through becoming familiar with the change or situation. Therefore, a main theme that emerged was seeking information as a way to manage the negative emotions and subsequently to explore possible solutions.
- A second theme that emerged was seeking support and help. When facing a setback or challenge, participants use their social network as a valuable source of information and as a way to get guidance on how to seek the necessary information.

Belief in One’s Own Ability to Overcome Challenges (Career Confidence) and Successful Ways of Coping (Career Resilience)

- Two different areas of response and management seemed to emerge from the individuals’ responses: (a) managing the emotions caused by the change and (b) managing the event itself so that the individual can continue to function satisfactorily.
- In relation to managing both the negative emotions and the stressful event, a key role is played by social support from the individual’s network of informal caregivers (family, friends, and so on) and from the career counsellor.
- Finally, several people reported that the most important thing when dealing with challenges and setbacks is to “not lose hope” and so they try to think more positively in order to visualize possible solutions (positive thinking).

Discussion/ Practical implications

- Our study has shown that many people with disabilities avoid making long-term plans for their work future and career advancement. This may be due to past disappointments and frustrations that have been caused by relapses of their illness. Although this behavior protects them from potential new disappointments, their lack of planning keeps them from moving up the career ladder and achieving a satisfying career.
- Participants feel rather confident that they will be able to overcome challenges and obstacles), and after the first shock, they begin to look for ways to manage it successfully.
- All participants placed particular emphasis on the support they receive (and need) from their social network. It appears that this support was essential both for successfully managing the negative emotions caused by the change and for successfully coping with the stressful event itself afterwards.
- The role of career counselling services was highlighted by all participants

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