

Aligning Perspectives on Health, Safety and Well-Being

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Chapter 5

Practice Makes Perfect? Antecedents and Consequences of an Adaptive School-to-Work Transition

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5.1 Introduction

A major work-related transition that individuals go through in the beginning of their career is the *school-to-work transition (STWT)*. During this transition young individuals face many challenges and changes in a relatively brief period of time, such as developing a professional identity (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005), finding suitable employment (e.g., Scherer 2004), and going through the organizational socialization process (Koivisto et al. 2007). The STWT is more relevant now than ever because of increasing demands for flexibility and career self-management (e.g., Akkermans et al. 2013c), and because the worldwide economic crisis of the past years has struck young employees hardest of all (European Commission 2012). Therefore, this chapter focuses specifically on this transition. First, we will discuss recent trends with regard to employment statistics of young workers in Europe. Second, we will focus on known antecedents and consequences of an adaptive STWT. Next, we will discuss the new career perspective, and examine two emerging topics; *career adaptability* and *career competencies*. Finally, we will present two cases in which the CareerSKILLS method in The Netherlands, and the School-to-Work Group Method in Finland will be detailed.

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5.2 Young Employees on the Labor Market

Transitions of young people into the labor markets differ across countries. Career trajectories of young people are influenced by contextual factors such as the national characteristics of the educational system, employment system, and the overall state of the economy. In many European countries such as the Netherlands and Finland, young adults are directed after primary school either to an academic track in secondary education that focuses on preparation for higher education, or to a vocational secondary education track where the emphasis lies on learning more practical and work-specific skills in certain occupational field. Many other countries offer mainly general secondary education, whereby vocational training is primarily obtained on the job. In some cases, the teaching of vocational skills is shared between vocational schools and the workplace, such as in the apprenticeship system in Germany (Müller and Gangl 2003; Wolbers 2007). The basic premise is that institutional settings, such as vocational specificity of the education system and the extent to which students are placed in different educational tracks, affect the STWT of young adults. However, there are many psychosocial factors that are similar across countries with regard to antecedents and consequences of an adaptive STWT. This implies that, although we take the European context as our starting point, we expect that many of the theoretical insights and practical implications are also applicable to a larger international context.

One of the main criteria for an adaptive transition to the labor market is attaining employment (i.e., job quantity). Therefore, unemployment ratings are an often used criterion for judging the current status of employees on the labor market. General unemployment in the European Union is 11 %, and has increased in 16 out of 28 member states (Eurostat 2013). This is a 4 % increase since 2008. Compared with the United States (7.2 %) and Japan (4.9 %), Europe has high unemployment rates. The economic crisis has struck young persons the hardest: since 2008, the unemployment rate of young individuals in Europe has increased by 12 % to a total of almost 28 % (Eurostat 2013). Moreover, newcomers graduating in bad economies are more likely to experience a job mismatch and to suffer from underemployment (Kahn 2010). Indeed, 17 %, or 1.6 million young persons, were underemployed in 2012, compared with a 12 % rate among older workers (Eurostat 2013). This is a worrying statistic, as the negative health effects of underemployment have been shown to be very similar to those of unemployment (McKee-Ryan and Harvey 2011). Table 5.1 shows an overview of unemployment statistics between 2008 and 2013.

We can conclude that young workers are currently facing difficult circumstances during the STWT. The statistics also show us that educational level is the best insurance against unemployment among young workers in all EU states (Eurostat 2013). This is further illustrated by the fact that in 2009 young workers with lower levels of education needed on average 10 months to find their first job, whereas those with high levels of education needed 5 months. Of those young workers who have entered the labor market in the past 5 years, 84 % with high educational levels have found a job, compared with 45 % of those with lower educational levels (Eurostat 2013). These differences are also reflected in earning rates: the lower the educational level, the higher the chance of being a low-wage earner.

Table 5.1 Unemployment statistics in the EU-28 between 2008 and 2012, both for the general working population and the young (<25 years) working population

Unemployment statistics	2008	2012	2013	Increase 2008–2013
<i>EU-28 general population</i>				
Unemployment numbers	16.924.000	25.520.000	26.872.000	9.948.000
Unemployment rate	7.1 %	10.5 %	11.0 %	3.9 %
<i>EU-28 young population</i>				
Unemployment numbers	4.253.000	5.617.000	5.580.000	1.327.000
Unemployment rate	15.8 %	23.0 %	27.8 %	12.0 %

If we combine the above statistics with the currently increasing certificate demands, little job security, and increasing differences between educational groups (Akermans 2013), it is safe to conclude that young workers with lower educational levels face a difficult challenge when going through the transition from their vocational schools to the labor market. At the same time, this is a group that has been understudied in the scientific literature both in Europe and the United States (Akermans et al. 2013b; Ling and O'Brien 2012). Therefore, it is important to analyze what we know about the STWT: what can adolescents do to prepare for an adaptive transition to the labor market, and what are the characteristics of an adaptive transfer? We will attempt to answer these questions next.

5.3 Realizing an Adaptive School-to-Work Transition

Research on the transition from school to work has a long tradition stemming from the 1940s. Although labor markets and careers have drastically changed since then, many of the early work on the STWT is still similar to contemporary studies. Common themes included the effects of high school behaviors and results on adaptation to the world of work, and lifespan perspectives of periods that individuals go through when building their careers. A lot of this early work is still relevant in today's much more dynamic labor markets. We will now shift our focus by looking at antecedents, characteristics, and consequences of a successful transition from school to work.

5.3.1 Preparing for an Adaptive School-to-Work Transition

In the past two decades a lot of research has been performed to examine antecedents of an adaptive transition from school to work. Those studies all seem to agree on one thing: a good preparation is a key ingredient to success in transitioning to the world of work (e.g., Koivisto et al. 2011). The question then becomes: what exactly is a good preparation, and which elements can be distinguished in the literature?

5.3.1.1 Developmental Issues and Family Influences

Up until the 1990s, research had spent little attention to developmental issues in examining the STWT (Pinquart et al. 2003; Savickas 1999). However, in recent years scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of early developmental processes. For example, Bynner (1997) demonstrated that children who experience problems in developing basic literacy and numerical skills by age 10 show reduced school achievements and development of work-related skills, which subsequently has a negative influence on the transition from school to work. Adolescents who experience depressive feelings and who indulge in substance use are also at risk for adaptive problems during the STW transition, for example by not being able to attain employment and experiencing feelings of disconnection (Ling and O'Brien 2012; Määttä et al. 2002). Family influences play a key role in buffering these risk factors and in stimulating an adaptive STWT. Parents provide adolescents with financial, emotional, and/or motivational support (Settersten 2005), and a positive parent-youth relationship can contribute to a better preparation for the STWT (Ling and O'Brien 2012). Moreover, parental educational and income level are directly related to the chances of an adolescent's adaptive STW transition (Blustein et al. 2002). Further underlining the importance of developmental issues and family influences is that empirical evidence suggests that work beliefs and attitudes are, at least in part, shaped by children's and adolescent's perceptions of their parental work attitudes, experiences, layoffs, and job satisfaction starting from the age of about 7 to 8 years (Barling et al. 1998; Loughlin and Barling 2001).

5.3.1.2 School Performance and Education

Adolescent's performance at school and educational experiences have often been shown to be an important predictor of a successful transition to working life. Not only is school performance one of the most important criteria of selecting applicants for a job (Coles 2000), but students with better performance at school have higher career-related motivation and aspirations, and are more likely to find a job that is congruent with their personal interests (Vinokur and Schul 2002). Moreover, worse performance at school can lead to unemployment and failure to obtain a fulltime job (Pinquart et al. 2003; Saks and Ashfort 1999). In the introduction section of this chapter we already argued that young individuals with lower educational levels face an even more difficult transition to the labor market than their highly educated counterparts, for example because of higher unemployment rates, longer job searches, and lower wages. These statistics are corroborated by various empirical studies, which have found that adolescents with low educational levels experience more problems during the STWT, and are less likely to hold stable and long-term employment (Ling and O'Brien 2012; Yates 2005).

5.3.1.3 Adolescent Work Experience

Research on the role of adolescent's work experiences in a successful transition to work shows that these experiences are generally positive and a necessary component of preparing for the labor market (e.g., Pinquart et al. 2003). Although some scholars have argued that work experiences can lead to substance use and increased delinquency (Greenberger and Steinberg 1986), and that the majority of teenage work is routine and alienating (Garson 1988), recent studies have all demonstrated the importance of early work experience in career, and skills and abilities development (Cohen-Scali 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer 2006), thereby facilitating the STWT. Indeed, internships help crystallize students' vocational interests and help them prepare for inevitable disappointments during their first jobs, as well as give them a realistic preview of actual jobs (Feldman et al. 1998). Furthermore, the number of hours worked and the number of jobs held in adolescence were strong predictors of an adaptive STWT (Ling and O'Brien 2012).

5.3.1.4 Self-Efficacy, Goal Setting, and Preparedness

Young people who have a higher sense of competence are more likely to find a job after graduating from school, and are less likely to drop out of an occupational field (Feather and O'Brien 1986; Saks 1995). Indeed, self-efficacy beliefs, characterized as peoples' judgments of their capacity to execute a designated performance, are a strong positive predictor of career interests, career-related values, goals, career-related behaviors, and career performance (Lent et al. 1994). Because individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy employ more active coping behaviors (Bandura 1997) and have a stronger belief in their ability to overcome obstacles (Saks 1995), self-efficacy can increase adolescents' preparation for the STWT. In addition, it has been suggested that the higher an individual's perceived efficacy to fulfill educational requirements and occupational roles, the better they prepare themselves for their career (Bandura et al. 2001). Perceptions of efficacy are even more important when combined with active personal goal setting (e.g., Nurmi et al. 2002). Young individuals are faced with many choices and challenges when preparing for the STWT and personal goals can help them focus their energy and resources, and develop strategies for dealing with this transition (Nurmi et al. 2002). Nurmi et al. argued that success during the STWT requires (1) a high level of interest in personal goals, (2) perceptions of efficacy to attain those goals, and (3) positive emotions that motivate behavior towards attainment of those goals. They showed that young individuals who appraised their personal goals as important were more likely to find a job congruent with their educational level and personal interests than those who did not rate their goals as important. In the more unpredictable current labor markets, even good self-efficacies and goal setting are not always enough. Lent (2013) has suggested that career-life preparedness as a resilience building dimension helps in difficult developmental career transitions. In addition to self-efficacies it comprises inoculation against setbacks. Preparedness is different from preparation, as young

people may prepare to enter work life without adequate preparedness (Lent 2013). The importance of preparedness in getting employment and its distinction from preparation has been demonstrated in earlier studies (Koivisto et al. 2011; Vuori and Vinokur 2006).

Summarizing the above, there are various ways promote preparation of young individuals making the STWT. Research has shown how this preparation can start during childhood, and continue by performing well at school and obtaining relevant work experience during adolescence. Finally, young people who are highly efficacious, set clear personal goals, and have a high level of preparedness, are likely to experience a successful transition to the labor market. Our next step is to examine the STWT itself, and the characteristics and consequences of an adaptive transition to working life.

5.3.2 Characteristics and Consequences of an Adaptive School-to-Work Transition

Even when young individuals prepare themselves well, the transition itself comes with its own challenges. A successful STWT has important implications on (1) an individual level, for example by attaining employment and career satisfaction, (2) an organizational level, such as the amount of training needed and the amount of turnover among newcomers, and (3) a societal level, for instance a long-term effect on employability and the degree of demand for government-subsidized vocational counseling (Feldman et al. 1998; Morrison 2002; Neumark 2006). However, young individuals who remain unemployed and experience prolonged job search efforts eventually diminish their efforts to find employment, which subsequently decreases their chance of finding a job (Aaronson et al. 2010). This implies that a negative spiral of discouragement and reduced career success may develop when young individuals are not well prepared for setbacks and barriers, and they do not experience an adaptive STWT. Therefore, it is crucial to examine characteristics and consequences of a successful transition to working life.

5.3.2.1 Quantity, Quality, and Stability

An adaptive transition from school to work may be divided into three main components: *job quantity*, *job quality*, and *job stability*. Job quantity, that is attaining employment, has often been used to define a smooth STWT (e.g., Taylor 2005). Finding employment has benefits on many different levels. Societal benefits of young individuals who find employment are reduced costs of unemployment and economic returns of a healthy labor market. For organizations, it is important to gain talented young workers to attain and maintain their competitive advantage. On an individual level, finding a job can lead to increased self-esteem and reduced depressive symptoms (Wald and Martinez 2003), increased work-related achievement

beliefs (Nurmi et al. 2002), and an increased likelihood of being employed in later years (Koivisto et al. 2007). Conversely, youth unemployment can lead to mental health problems (Wald and Martinez 2003), psychological distress and depression (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005), and reduced career success (Koivisto et al. 2007).

Job quality is a second important characteristic of an adaptive STWT. It is crucial for young people to find high-quality employment, as one's first job can determine future vocational outcomes and career success (Ng and Feldman 2007). Moreover, job quality is related to increased job satisfaction (Stone and Josian 2000), work socialization, career development, and increased mental health (Saks and Ashfort 2002). If young individuals do not find high-quality employment, this leads to an underutilization of human capital on the labor market, which can result in decreased work commitment and job involvement (Feldman and Turnley 1995). In addition, a lack of job quality can hinder the development of vocational skills, reduce well-being, and foster negative work-related attitudes among young individuals (Koivisto et al. 2007). It can also lead to increased cynicism and reduced work-related motivation (Stern et al. 1990), and to higher depressive affect and lower work values (Feather and O'Brien 1986). Dooley and Prause (1997) even argued that the correlates of poor job quality are more similar to unemployment than to adequate employment.

A third indicator of an adaptive STW transition is job stability. Although this indicator has not been studied as extensively as job quantity and job quality, early employment stability may have beneficial effects (Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer 2006). Indeed, not being able to settle in a stable employment relation may represent an unproductive STWT, as temporary jobs often lack adequate pay and learning opportunities (Yates 2005). However, findings on the effects of job stability during the STWT have been scarce and inconclusive (e.g., Ling and O'Brien 2012), and it may not be as relevant as job quantity and job quality because young individuals generally need at least 5 years before they attain stable employment (Yates 2005).

5.3.2.2 Vocational Congruence

Apart from job quantity, job quality, and job stability, another concept that has often been studied as indicator of a successful STWT is the so-called *person-job fit* and, by extension, the *person-organization fit*. A lot of scientific work regarding this fit has been based on the personality-job fit theory developed by Holland (1985). According to this theory, individuals need to match their personality characteristics with their jobs. When fit occurs between personality and employment, turnover is reduced and satisfaction is increased. In addition, the congruence between an individual's occupation and their career aspiration is an important source of vocational satisfaction, stability, and achievement (Holland 1985). A theory with a similar proposition is the theory of work adjustment (Dawis 2005). According to this theory, individuals strive to achieve a work environment that is congruent with their personal attributes. To the extent that individual needs are met and individual abilities are used in an occupation, job satisfaction and job performance will increase. In

essence, both the personality-job fit theory and the theory of work adjustment state that an adaptive STWT reflects a high level of congruence between personal attributes and the characteristics of a job. These assumptions are corroborated by empirical findings that the match between person and job environment is an important antecedent of job satisfaction and work-related wellbeing (Koivisto et al. 2007). Moreover, a bad person-job fit can have serious negative impacts on future vocational trajectories, and it can compromise building a career that matches a person's educational level (Scherer 2004).

5.3.2.3 Individual Attributes

Several scholars have suggested that an adaptive transition to working life is first and foremost a result of stable individual characteristics. Success during the STWT would depend upon differences in individual abilities, values, attachment styles, and personality traits (e.g., Bradley et al. 2002; Määttä et al. 2002). Two often mentioned individual characteristics in this regard are self-efficacy and locus of control. As argued earlier in this chapter, a high sense of self-efficacy is an important aspect of preparing for the STWT. In addition, individuals with higher self-efficacy also have higher career aspirations, set higher career goals for themselves, will exert more energy to achieve those goals, and experience the STWT as less stressful (Lent et al. 1999; Pinquart et al. 2003). Moreover, high self-efficacy is related to higher career-related motivation and to objective and subjective career success (Vinokur and Schul 2002). Combined with the individual attribute of preparedness, self-efficacy has been demonstrated to predict successful employment both among youth and adults (Lent 2013; Vuori and Vinokur 2006). Young individuals with an internal locus of control, that is, who believe that they control their own behaviors as opposed to being controlled by environmental influences, are more likely to find a job that fits their career aspirations (Luzzo and Ward 1995). However, an internal locus of control can also backfire as individuals who attribute failures to themselves rather than to external events are more likely to experience reduced psychological wellbeing during the STWT (Määttä et al. 2002). Generally speaking, those individual attributes that promote alertness, independence, perseverance and proactivity are assumed to be important in attaining success during the STWT (Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg 2003). In addition to these personality characteristics, Ng and Feldman (2007) argued that young individuals who go through the STWT have to switch between two salient role identities: student and worker. According to Ng and Feldman, success in the transition to working life requires individuals to change from a student role identity to a worker role identity as the core life role. Building on the personality-job fit theory (Holland 1985) and the theory of work adjustment (Dawis 2005), the work role identity perspective argues that an adaptive STWT requires (1) a good fit between organizational environments and individual's needs and abilities, and (2) a good fit between organizational environments and multiple role identities (Ng and Feldman 2007). Taken together, personal characteristics are an important aspect of a successful STWT, especially when matched with a fitting work environment.

5.3.2.4 Demands and Resources

Although the STW transition is full of turmoil and important changes, it also involves many positive experiences for young adults (Arnold 1997). That is, the transition to working life encompasses both positive and negative experiences, and some experiences can even be positive and negative at the same time (Elfering et al. 2007). For example, having to deal with new job requirements can be a positive experience of challenge, as well as a negative experience of overload. Elfering et al. (2007) found that an increase in responsibility and decision latitude, a changing of roles, and financial issues were the most prominent characteristics during the initial transition to the labor market. They also demonstrated that increasing demands at work were a prominent issue that stayed salient over a longer period of time, possibly because it takes young workers several years to develop an expertise. Another crucial factor in a smooth STWT is the amount of social support young adults receive, both in their work and outside of work (e.g., Bynner and Parsons 2002). Similar to the work of Elfering et al. (2007), Akkermans (2013) argued that the resources and demands that young individuals experience can have a profound impact on their wellbeing and career development. Akkermans et al. (2009, 2013b) found that autonomy, social support of colleagues and supervisors, and opportunities for development are important resources, whereas a high work pressure, emotional workload and physical workload were prominent demands that influence wellbeing, health, and performance of young workers. In addition, it seems that job characteristics may work in a unique way for young workers with vocational educational training. Task variation, generally assumed to be a resource, turned out to be a stressor for young workers, whereas mental demands, generally considered a stressor, turned out to be a resource. In other words: young adults with vocational education need challenging, but clearly defined tasks in their first jobs. Another finding was that young individuals with lower levels of education experience fewer job resources and more physical demands compared with their highly educated counterparts. However, these resources are especially important for them as they have a clear positive impact on their wellbeing and work engagement, and subsequently on their health and performance (Akkermans et al. 2009, 2013b). Akkermans (2013) therefore concluded that it is crucial to provide sufficient resources to vocationally educated young workers who are going through the STWT.

Taken together, we can conclude that attaining high-quality and stable employment are important characteristics of being able to adapt to working life. In addition, it is crucial that young adults match their individual characteristics to a fitting work environment, in order to attain congruence. Finally, the presence of certain demands and resources at work can either hinder or stimulate an adaptive transfer to work. The previous sections have dealt with antecedents, characteristics, and consequences of the STWT. However, one key part of the puzzle is still missing: the changing career. Therefore, in the next section we will examine the *new career* paradigm and two concepts that could prove to be valuable additions to research on the STW transition: career adaptability and career competencies.

5.4 The New Career and the School-to-Work Transition

5.4.1 *Characteristics of the New Career*

During the past few decades, many changes have become apparent on the labor markets. Employees need to become ever more flexible and self-managing, and they have to adjust to having more complex careers (Vuori et al. 2011). In line with these developments, the traditional career, which has been characterized as a linear path with vertical growth only within the hierarchical levels of a particular organization, is slowly being replaced by the so-called new career. In the new career, individuals need to proactively self-manage their careers, and they develop their career through horizontal and vertical shifts between different organizations (Akkermans et al. 2013a). Managing this new career may be especially difficult for young adults who are transitioning from school to work, as they already experience many challenges and changes in a relatively brief period of time. Preparation for and adaptation during this phase may therefore become even more important. In order to have a successful start of their working lives, they may need to master *career adaptability* and *career competencies*. We will analyze these concepts next.

5.4.2 *Career Adaptability and the School-to-Work Transition*

In the complex new career it is crucial that young individuals are equipped with the necessary resources to cope with the STWT in order to promote sustainable employability and career success. Young adults need to be ready to take advantage of opportunities and deal with barriers and setbacks, which are partly reflected in the concept of career adaptability (Savickas and Porfeli 2012). Savickas (1997) defined career adaptability as “the readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by the changes in work and work conditions” (p. 254). According to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), it consists of four psychosocial resources, or competencies, that help individuals manage career transitions: (1) looking ahead at one’s future and planning (*career concern*), (2) knowing what career path to pursue and making responsible decisions (*career control*), (3) looking at alternatives and seeking strategies (*career curiosity*), and (4) having the confidence to undertake activities and being able to overcome obstacles to pursue career goals (*career confidence*). An important assumption of career adaptability is that these four resources can be developed over time (Koen et al. 2012; Savickas and Porfeli 2012). Career adaptability may be especially useful for young adults who go through the STWT as it prepares them for inevitable changes and setbacks, and it equips them with the necessary tools to thrive during this turbulent phase in their lives.

Research has indeed demonstrated the positive effects of career adaptability. It is both related to job quantity (Zikic and Klehe 2006), job quality (Koen et al. 2010),

and wellbeing and career success (Hirschi 2010). In addition, adolescents high in career adaptability are more successful in attaining an adaptive STWT and have a lower chance of prolonged unemployment (e.g., Germeijs and Verschueren 2007). Finally, career adaptability can serve as an important preparatory mechanism for reemployment (Koen et al. 2010) and for finding a higher quality job (Koen et al. 2012). It is clear that young adults are better prepared and more adaptable during the STWT when they master the four career adaptability resources.

Closely related to career adaptability is preparedness, which we discussed above. Similar to the theory of Savickas (1997) on career adaptability, the suggestions of Lent (2013) with emphasis on preparedness and resilience are also very relevant in current unpredictable and challenging labor markets. Koivisto et al. (2007) demonstrated an increase in employment, its quality, and wellbeing after increasing preparedness among graduates of vocational schools (see the Cases section below).

5.4.3 Career Competencies and the School-to-Work Transition

Similar to the concept of career adaptability, research on *career competencies* has focused on preparing employees to proactively self-manage their careers in the changing world of work. However, whereas career adaptability is primarily about being able to adapt to constant changes, career competencies seem to me more in line with theories of congruence. That is, mastering career competencies can help individuals match their personal competencies with those necessary for a successful career, as well as develop the competencies needed to thrive in today's dynamic labor market. Akkermans et al. (2013a) recently reviewed the available literature on career competencies and developed a framework of competencies specifically for young individuals. They defined career competencies as "knowledge, skills, and abilities central to career development, which can be influenced and developed by the individual" (Akkermans et al. 2013c, p. 249). Furthermore, career competencies are considered different from personality (e.g., proactive personality) and contextual (e.g., mentoring) characteristics, and they are considered to be malleable. The career competencies that are most crucial for young individuals can be classified into three dimensions: reflective, communicative, and behavioral career competencies, which each consist of two competencies (Akkermans et al. 2013a, c). Reflective career competencies include *reflection on motivation*, which refers to reflection on values, passions, and motivations about one's career, and *reflection on qualities*, which relates to reflection on strengths, shortcomings, and skills. Communicative career competencies encompass *networking*, which pertains to the awareness of the presence and professional value of one's network, and the ability to expand it for career-related purposes, and *self-profiling*, which refers to presenting and communicating one's knowledge, abilities, and skills to the internal and external labor market. Finally, the behavioral career competencies are *work exploration*, which refers to actively exploring work-related and career-related opportunities, and *career control*, which relates to actively influencing learning and work processes related to

one's career by setting goals and planning how to fulfill them. In short, mastering career competencies enables young individuals to be prepared for the transition to working life, it equips them with necessary competencies to face the challenges they face, and it allows them to continuously learn during their early career.

The development of career competencies has been related to adaptive behaviors (Arthur et al. 1999), and to marketability and career success (e.g., Eby et al. 2003). Kuijpers et al. (2006) also demonstrated that mastering career competencies allows a higher degree of congruence between personal characteristics and values on the one hand, and career success on the other hand. Recent studies have also argued that career competencies may be related to employability and employee wellbeing. Indeed, Akkermans et al. (2013a, c) showed a positive relationship between career competencies and perceived employability, and between career competencies and work engagement. In addition, career competencies and job resources (e.g., social support, opportunities for development) seem to have a mutually enhancing effect (i.e., a gain cycle), which subsequently increases work engagement. Finally, Akkermans et al. (2014) demonstrated an increase in perceived employability and work engagement after young workers had participated in an intervention that increased their career competencies (see also the Cases section below). Taken together, career competencies may be crucial to better prepare for the STWT and to flourish during the start of one's career.

In summarizing the above, we conclude that career adaptability and career competencies are two concepts that may be crucial to support young adults before and during the STWT, especially given the dynamic and flexible nature of the new career. In order to provide that support, we would also need empirically tested, evidence-based interventions. Our next section focuses on two examples of such interventions: the CareerSKILLS intervention and the School to Work Group Method.

5.5 Cases: CareerSKILLS and the School-to-Work Group Method

5.5.1 Characteristics of CareerSKILLS and School to Work Method

As argued in this chapter, improving young people's preparation for employment involves, among other things, strengthening their resources for career adaptation and career competencies which enhance career management and wellbeing (Akkermans et al. 2013c; Koivisto et al. 2011). These resources and competencies include job-seeking and job-orientation skills, integration into organizations, positive attitudes towards life-long learning, and the career competencies mentioned above. To support young individuals who are going through the STWT, two interventions have been developed that specifically focus on these issues: CareerSKILLS and the School to Work (STW) Group Method.

Both CareerSKILLS and the STW Group Method were developed to stimulate employability, career development, and wellbeing of young employees. The interventions are based on the training principles developed at the Michigan Prevention Research Center (MPRC; Price et al. 1998), of which the applicability to and relevance for job-related and career-related interventions has been demonstrated (e.g., Vuori et al. 2011). The group interventions deal with the development of career competencies, with career management strategies related to job-searching and organizational socialization, and with effective ways to take care of one's work-related wellbeing. CareerSKILLS and STW Group Method are short, intensive group courses that apply theories of social learning and that focus on boosting preparedness (i.e., self-efficacy and inoculation against setbacks) during the STWT.

5.5.2 Methodology and Mechanisms of CareerSKILLS and School to Work Method

5.5.2.1 CareerSKILLS

The CareerSKILLS intervention consists of four sessions in 2 weeks, followed by a return day 6 weeks after starting the intervention. Sessions last 4 h, adding up to 20 h of total intervention time. Participants also receive homework assignments to increase transfer to their daily life situation. CareerSKILLS uses methods such as an active learning process, brainstorming in plenary sessions and in subgroup sessions, social modeling, a socially supportive environment, and role playing. Inoculation against setbacks exercises are built around all the core themes by brainstorming about potential obstacles and solutions for these obstacles (Akkermans et al. 2014). The composition of the exercises in the intervention was built around the development of the six career competencies as defined by Akkermans et al. (2013a).

5.5.2.2 STW Group Method

This program builds preparedness, attitudes, resilience, and mental health needed during the STWT. The intervention consists of structured 5 day intensive program (27 h in total), in which counseling techniques and group exercises are described in detail in manuals (Nykänen et al. 2014; web-site: www.ttl.fi/schooltowork). During group activity participants learn solution-focused attitudes and proactive behavioral strategies related to job seeking and the organizational socialization process. Participants are also trained for anticipatory skills that deal with possible setbacks or barriers. Teaching methods include group discussions, brainstorming, social modeling, and role playing. Participants also receive homework assignments related to social networks and employer contacts.

5.5.2.3 Mechanisms

As stated above, both interventions followed the five components for effective group interventions (Price et al. 1998). These guidelines constitute didactic techniques and delivery methods to maximize active learning processes, and to stimulate self-efficacy and resilience against setbacks. First, *career self-management skills* were developed through the incorporation of career competencies and career self-management strategies, for example by defining one's strengths and interests, and by finding means to achieve career goals. This component is important because most young individuals have insufficient knowledge and skills in this area (Vuori et al. 2005). Second, *active teaching and learning methods* were used. Instead of lecturing, trainers activate participants' own knowledge and skills, for instance in discussions and role plays. An advantage of active learning is that it takes place in the career context of the participants, which makes the content very specific and applicable to their real-life situation. Third, *certified trainers* who lead the sessions are well trained to build trust and facilitate group processes. Fourth, trainers attempt to create a *supportive training environment*, in which participants learn from and support each other. This occurs through modeling and rewarding supportive behaviors (Vuori et al. 2011). A supportive environment is crucial for learning and facing challenges (Vuori et al. 2005). This peer-group format seems to fit well with young people who spend a great amount of time socializing with their own age group. Group discussions and exercises are student-centered, and learning in a positive group atmosphere enhances participants' self-efficacy as they adopt new strategies to face their challenges from their peers. As participants gain courage to share their experiences, they gradually learn new skills for problem solving and finally more generally for their career management. Finally, *preparation against setbacks* is used to brainstorm about potential career-related obstacles and how to overcome these obstacles. This component is important in providing a buffer to potential risks because of fail experiences. It is particularly beneficial for high-risk participants to share experiences regarding possible barriers as this allows them to gain social support from the group and find solutions to overcome these barriers.

5.5.3 Effects of CareerSKILLS and School to Work Method

5.5.3.1 CareerSKILLS

Two quasi-randomized field trials among vocational students ($N_{intervention}=112$, $N_{control}=61$) and temporary workers of a multinational ($N_{intervention}=71$, $N_{control}=41$), demonstrated the short-term effectiveness of CareerSKILLS. Participants in both samples, contrary to the control group, showed stable increases after 6 weeks in the mastery of all six career competencies, in work-related self-efficacy and resilience against setbacks, and in the frequency of performing career-related behaviors and their perceived employability (Akkermans et al. 2014). Moreover, there was a

significant increase in the intervention group of work engagement, underlining that the CareerSKILLS intervention is beneficial both in enhancing career self-management and work-related wellbeing of young workers. Finally, evaluations of the intervention by trainers and participants were both highly positive.

5.5.3.2 STW Group Method

A randomized field experiment involving 416 graduates of vocational colleges demonstrated the beneficial effects of the STW program on initial employment, its quality, and mental health at the 10-month follow-up. The results showed that group participants were 1.7 times more likely to be employed and they had a 2.1-fold chance of being employed in a job that corresponded to their education and personal career plans compared to the controls. The intervention also significantly decreased psychological distress and depression among those initially at risk of depression compared to controls. Moreover, after the program goals related to personal work life and finances among group participants were 2.3–2.5 times more frequent than among those in the control group (Koivisto et al. 2007). The analyses on the mediating mechanisms of the intervention demonstrated that the intervention increased employment preparedness, which in turn increased employment after 10 months. Furthermore, employment predicted work-life-related goals and lower financial strain, which in turn was associated with lower depressive symptoms (Koivisto et al. 2010).

5.5.4 *Implementation of CareerSKILLS and School to Work Method*

Transforming research findings and interventions into practice is not an easy task. In organizations, teachers and counselors often face practical barriers that are not present in research settings. Studies may give promising research findings, but the key question is how these new practices reach the target group. In case of the CareerSKILLS and STW method, many efforts have been made to optimize effective implementation in practice.

In The Netherlands, the CareerSKILLS intervention was a new addition to the existing “SKILLS” program. These interventions are derived from the original JOBS program developed at the MPRC. Applied scientific organization TNO provides schools and companies with train-the-trainer sessions in which the participants learn the tricks of the trade regarding these interventions. Because CareerSKILLS is part of an existing nationwide program in The Netherlands, implementation was immediately achieved in several organizations. In 2012, participants from a large Dutch multinational and a Dutch vocational school with multiple locations had been trained to provide the CareerSKILLS method. Both

organizations have integrated the intervention into their standard material for career guidance.

During the year 2004 the Finnish Board of Education organized European Social Fund (ESF) seminars where project managers from different schools and developmental projects exchanged experiences regarding good practices. Positive experiences regarding the STW method spread quickly. Project managers country-wide wanted to participate in the STW train-the-trainer workshop offered by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH). Since 2002, over 500 teachers and school counselors have participated in training workshops organized by the FIOH and over 17.000 copies of student workbooks have been distributed. Several vocational schools have integrated the STW group method into their curriculum and courses, which has strengthened its institutionalization into organizational routines.

5.6 What's Next? Implications and Suggestions for an Adaptive STW Transition

In this chapter we have shown that young individuals face many challenges on today's labor market. Unemployment and underemployment rates are high in many parts of the world, and careers are becoming increasingly complex and dynamic. Whether young individuals have a vocational track, they learn on the job, or they combine learning and working, this implies that the STWT is becoming an ever bigger challenge for young adults around the world. For these reasons, it is more crucial than ever to understand how adolescents and young adults can prepare for, and successfully go through, the STWT. We have discussed antecedents and consequences of an adaptive transition, as well as the emerging topics of career adaptability and career competencies. In this final section we turn our attention to the future and provide suggestions with regard to fostering an adaptive STWT.

5.6.1 Career Orientation and Guidance

Career orientation and guidance programs, either during vocational tracks or on-the-job learning, have received increasing attention during the past few years. However, the existing career guidance programs are very diverse and most of them lack empirical evidence. These programs need to become more intertwined with the regular curricula of vocational schools, and with training programs and HR policies of organizations. To further increase the quality of these programs, researchers and practitioners should join forces in developing evidence-based career-related interventions, for example with career adaptability (Koen et al. 2012), preparedness (Lent 2013), and career competencies (Akkermans et al. 2013a) as building blocks. The CareerSKILLS and STW methods are examples of this. In creating rich career

orientation and –guidance programs during the entire vocational education process, adolescents will be better *prepared* for their eventual transition to working life.

5.6.2 *Smart Jobs*

In the new career, employees have to continually make career-related decisions and adopt a perspective of lifelong learning. To achieve a productive career and to become sustainably employable, it is crucial that young adults experience an adaptive STWT in which they find ways to effectively develop their competencies. One way of achieving this would be through *smart jobs*, that is, jobs that stimulate learning, growth, and employability of young workers (Hall and Las Heras 2010). This would require that employers take more responsibility in supporting young workers' careers. Career competencies could be a fruitful basis for creating these kinds of jobs because career competency development contributes both to employee wellbeing and employability (Akkermans et al. 2013b, c, 2014). This could also help to tailor smart jobs to the specific needs of young workers, for example that these jobs are challenging but also clearly defined (Akkermans et al. 2009). Researchers and practitioners alike could therefore focus on discerning critical factors that determine the learning potential of jobs, which could subsequently be implemented in their job design in order to create high quality employment for young workers. By creating “smarter jobs” it will be more manageable for young adults with lower vocational qualifications to *adapt* during the turbulent STWT and to experience high levels of wellbeing and performance during their early work career.

5.6.3 *Theory Development*

Although a number of theories regarding the STWT have been developed in the past few decades, research on this transition would benefit from more structural use of theories. The most prominent theory related to the STWT is Holland's person-job fit theory, which was developed in 1985. Although the idea of fit is still appealing and relevant in today's dynamic labor markets, the process of making career-related choices has changed drastically during the past few decades. Because the career environment has become more unpredictable, advance planning is not always enough. Young adults need to make important choices on a permanent basis and therefore need preparedness and competencies to become and remain sustainably employable. It is important that we develop new and/or additional theories regarding the STWT for the changing world of careers. In this chapter we have attempted to start the discussion on theory building endeavors by emphasizing, among other things, the need for (1) adaptability, (2) preparedness, and (3) competency development. In building stronger theories about an adaptive STWT we can also enhance

our career-related support for adolescents and young adults around the world by developing practically relevant programs that have a strong theoretical basis.

5.6.4 Final Conclusion and Integration

In this chapter we started from a European perspective on young adults who are going through the STWT, and we showed that unemployment and underemployment rates in the EU have been rising dramatically during the past few years. We also underlined that the European context holds some specific characteristics that may not be applicable across other continents, such as the vocational and academic tracks in countries like The Netherlands and Finland. All in all though, we sincerely believe that many of the insights and suggestions provided in this chapter also hold for other countries and educational systems. Notwithstanding the fact that the educational and cultural context clearly have an important impact on the STWT, we posit that antecedents such as positive family influences, relevant educational and work experiences, and high core self-evaluations (e.g., self-efficacy) are crucial predictors of an adaptive STWT for young adults regardless of their specific context. In addition, realizing a high level of congruence between personal characteristics and job characteristics (i.e., P-J fit) is crucial for every young adult, as well as receiving sufficient motivating resources at work during their early career. These careers are drastically changing, as is evident by scientific studies across the world on such issues as the boundaryless and the protean career (Akkermans et al. 2013a). So, although educational systems differs around the world, we believe that young adults across countries and educational and labor systems who are more adaptable, better prepared, and more competent with regard to their work and career, will have a better chance of experiencing an adaptive STWT. In this way, we hope this chapter provides useful knowledge and practical implications for all those around the world who want to support young adults to make an adaptive transition to their working lives.

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