

Chapter 4

FROM CAREER ADAPTABILITY TO SUBJECTIVE IDENTITY FORMS

*Jérôme Rossier^{1,2}, Christian Maggiori^{1,2}
and Grégoire Zimmermann¹*

¹Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

²Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES,
University of Lausanne, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

The life-design paradigm is among those rooted in Guichard's (2009) life self-construction model that describes the identity processes underlying the development of multiple social selves. In this chapter, which is a tribute to the major contribution of Jean Guichard to the field of educational and vocational guidance and counseling, we will try to explicate the links between career adaptability and subjective identity forms. Both highlight two different and important processes that are interdependent and which should be simultaneously considered in the life design paradigm. These processes allow people to behave as active agents in their environment and are of high importance in the contemporary socioeconomic context, characterized by globalization, an increase in employment insecurity, the destructuralization of one's life course, and individualization. This chapter argues that both career adapt-abilities and identity processes rely on reflexivity and self-awareness abilities. For this reason the system of subjective identity forms, as defined by Guichard, can be considered as a meta-competency allowing adaptation, meaning making, but also the allocation of process resources.

INTRODUCTION

The life-design paradigm is among those rooted in Savickas' (2005) career construction theory, which considers career adaptability as a set of crucial personal resources for designing career pathways, and in Guichard's (2005) life self-construction model, which describes the identity processes underlying the development of multiple social selves (Savickas et al.,

2009). In this chapter, which is a tribute to Jean Guichard's major contribution to the field of educational and vocational guidance and counseling, we will try to explicate the links between career adaptability and subjective identity forms. According to our understanding, both highlight two different and important processes that are interdependent and that are to be simultaneously considered in the life design paradigm (Guichard, in press a).

FROM CAREER TRAJECTORIES TO CAREER PATHS

The work domain –and professional paths– represent essential aspects of adult-life and everyday functioning (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). However, the individual life course involves several interlocking trajectories (composed of several normative and non-normative transitions and periods of stability), such as family, work, health, and identity trajectories, each affecting the functioning and the qualities of the others (Settersten, 1999). Guichard (2009) stressed the need to adopt a broad perspective able to consider individuals' "life trajectories" and not simply specific life domains (such as work, family, or school) trajectories and transitions. Considering life pathways over long stretches of time, "the life-course [perspective] provides a framework for studying phenomena at the nexus of social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change" (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003, p. 10). Studying people's pathways and adopting a life course perspective offers several advantages, such as considering, amongst others: (1) the impact of prior personal history (e.g., negative events or transitions) on later trajectories across life domains (Mayer, 2009); (2) the intersection of personal biography and specific social contexts and historical periods (Elder et al., 2003); (3) development as a result of individuals' characteristics and actions, cultural contexts and both institutional and structural conditions (Settersten, 1999). Overall, the life-course perspective focuses on individuals' development "all along the life," considering the societal contexts and events affecting individuals' development and life trajectories.

Career Trajectories and Career Paths

Due to factors like new economical policy and globalizing markets, the professional landscape has dramatically changed over the last three decades (Baruch & Bozionelos, 2011). In today's labor market, jobs are unstable and employment insecure, and professional trajectories and paths are severely challenged, becoming less predictable (Guichard, 2009). The traditional description of careers essentially as a linear progression in the hierarchy, frequently bound to a single organization (or a specific profession) and modeled as a trajectory, is not adapted to the current socio-economic situation. According to the traditional definition, a person's career was viewed as managed by the organization (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Due to the current evolution of the world of work, however, several authors suggested that individuals have to become active agents of the management and construction of their careers that have to be considered as paths (e.g. Guichard, 2005; Settersten, 1999). New forms of work organizations and of personal and professional pathways have emerged and have deeply affected career patterns. Currently, careers are frequently described as protean (Hall, 2004) or as boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

Regarding the current disruption of professional paths, a series of studies conducted in Switzerland reported that men and women showed different professional paths (e.g., Levy, Gauthier, & Widmer, 2006). For example, for 66% of men, the professional path is characterized by a full-time occupation, while this proportion falls to 21% for women. Furthermore, during their careers, men and women work full-time for 21 and 6 years, respectively. Alternatively, concerning part-time occupations or short-term engagement, women exert a part-time activity during more than 6 years on average and men for 2 years. With reference to domestic activity, women spent about 10 years taking care of children or others, while men only several months (Sapin, Spini, & Widmer, 2007). Moreover, career pathways vary more for women. For instance, 34% of women's paths are characterized by a full-time professional activity for 25 years, on average, with a relatively short period of time centered on family between the ages of 30 to 35 years. Another professional path (portraying about 30% of women) is characterized by an initial and relatively short period of full-time professional activity, followed by a period centered on family and children, and then a professional reinsertion, with mainly part-time or short-term contract jobs. Overall, all these studies illustrate that career paths are nowadays characterized by a lack of linearity and an increased number of transitions.

Taking into Account the Context to Understand Career Paths

Both personal and career development are strongly related to individuals' societal context and conditions (e.g., Guichard, 2005). However, due to societal factors, such as the evolution of schooling and changes in work organization and distribution –amongst others– individuals currently face different and changing personal and career development issues (emerging form social contexts, roles, and demands; Guichard, 2009). Furthermore, the increasing centrality of the professional activities (i.e., work centrality) and a lack of certainty about the future also influence work pathways (Guichard, in press a). Thus, professionally active individuals face less predefined and clear career paths in a specific organization. Subsequently, they are required to more often (re)consider their current situation and future scenarios/opportunities and to make decisions to foster their career or take new directions (Baruch & Bozionelos, 2011). This evolution has prompted a redefinition of workers as active and responsible agents who construct and design their own careers (Hall, 2002; Savickas et al., 2009). In the present societal context, personal self-regulation and adapt-abilities represent fundamental resources allowing people to cope with a continuously changing professional environment (Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013). Moreover, different adverse situations from different life domains can accumulate and may interact in a complex manner (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005). Uncertain work conditions or professional transitions (such as job loss or re-entering the workforce) have an impact on individuals' general functioning and well-being. For example, involuntary job loss is associated positively with the divorce rate (Charles & Stephens, 2004) and negatively with the decision to have a child (del Bono, Weber, & Winter-Ebmer, 2012), illustrating that career paths and personal paths as a spouse or a parent are interrelated.

CAREER ADAPTABILITY

Super and Knaser (1981) were the first to propose the concept of career adaptability in place of career maturity. They argued that this concept might be more adequate for understanding and describing how adults adjust to work constraints. Super and Knaser (1981) explained that focusing on individual adaptive resources implies conceiving “the individual as behaving proactively” (p. 198) “as a responsible agent acting within a dynamic environmental setting” (p. 199). However, the adaptive response is not only the individual’s responsibility. In fact, there is a constant dynamic interaction between the agent and his or her environment. According to Piaget’s model, “an individual may assimilate some aspects of his environment into his already existing schemata (and hence make an impact on his environment) but must also modify his schemata to accommodate certain other aspects of his environment (the environment making an impact on him)” (Super & Knaser, 1981, p. 199). The career adaptability construct was further defined 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 changes in work and working conditions” (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). Career adaptability is thus a psychosocial construct that includes a set of career adapt-abilities that allow people to adjust their behavioral expression and influence their environment in order to optimize their adaptation.

Career Adaptability As a Regulation Process

Recently, Rossier (in press a) suggested that career adaptability might be conceptualized as a regulation process (such as, emotional regulation, learning processes, career-decision skills, or self-efficacy) that is especially important for the regulation of the actualization of career-related behaviors, such as work satisfaction or engagement. This regulation process mediates and moderates the expression of personal dispositions, such as personality traits or general abilities (Rossier, in press b). Notably, moderation might be understood as non-linear regulation. Regulation is more important when particular levels on precise personal dispositions favor a non-adaptive response. For example, compared to a calm and collected person, an emotionally unstable or quick-tempered person might more frequently and more intensely activate emotional regulation competences. This regulation might account for a relatively important part of the outcome variable. Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori, and Dauwalder (2012) found that career adaptability partially mediated the relationship between personality and work engagement, and that this mediation accounted for up to 14% of the variance of work engagement. Career adaptability also mediates the relationship between personal dispositions and negative career-related outcomes, such as work stress (Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013) or burnout (Browning, Ryan, Greenberg, & Rolniak, 2006). Regulation processes, such as career adapt-abilities, consequently, are at the interplay between personal dispositions and behavioral expression and allow people to take the environment into account in their behavioral expression (Rossier, in press b).

Career Adaptability As a Resilience Factor

Studies that have shown that career adaptability relates positively to positive career-related outcomes, such as work engagement, and negatively to negative career-related outcomes, such as work stress or burnout, suggest that it constitutes a resource for people facing adverse professional conditions. For example, people with higher career adaptability have, for example, more stable jobs and/or express higher levels of job satisfaction (Maggiori et al., 2013). This resource is not a stable attribute and might be activated in certain, usually challenging, circumstances and might also be strengthened by specific career counseling interventions. Several studies have shown that unemployed people tend to have higher career adaptability levels (e.g., Duarte et al., 2012). This might be the result of an adaptation that increases the chance for unemployed individuals to find a new job. Career adaptability is indeed known for having a positive impact on job-search behaviors (Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, 2010). Interestingly, career adaptability seems not to be immediately activated when people lose their jobs, but more so after an unemployment period of 3 to 6 months (Maggiori et al., 2013). Thus, career adaptability seems to be a resource protecting people from the negative impacts of adverse work conditions that might be activated when facing adverse professional situations.

Recently, Koen, Klehe, and Van Vianen (2012) found that a one-day group career counseling intervention had a significant and long-lasting increase in participants' career adaptability. Several activities may contribute to this increase in career adaptability. Career counselors can use "orientation exercises to increase career concern, decisional training to increase career control, information-seeking activities to increase career curiosity, and self-esteem building techniques, such as role play or social modeling, to increase career confidence" (Rossier, in press a). Life-design career interventions, which try to stimulate the de-co-construction of people's career intentions plans and identities, are also intended to increase people's resources, to overcome their difficulties, to cope with their vulnerabilities, and to design their own career pathways, as autonomous agents or subjects (Savickas et al., 2009). Moreover, career adaptability might also maximize the use of contextual resources, such as social support. However, career adaptabilities do not necessarily imply reflexivity and might be automatically activated. When losing his job, a person does not explore his or her environment to intentionally increase his career adaptability, but rather to find a new job. Nevertheless, reflexivity might contribute to more parsimoniously using these resources. The question of how people intentionally mobilize their personal resources remains to be described and explained.

FROM ADAPTABILITY TO REFLEXIVITY

Need for Coherence and Continuity

A key consequence associated with the recent transition from an industrial to a technological economy, is the decline of social markers helping people to move between life stages (Côté, 2000). As a result of this phenomenon, the *destructuralization* of the life's course, people are increasingly expected to guide their own lives (process of

individualization). This has amplified the importance of adaptability and individual identity explorations and reflections for adult commitments that one will endorse (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, & Zamboanga, 2012). In his seminal work, Erikson (1968) noted that vocational identity (i.e., the ability to find a meaningful vocation) is a key element of identity, and that identity construction depends upon matching one's personal values, goals, and skills with those required by the occupational context (Christiansen, 1999; Kroger, 2007). In modern societies, with ongoing changes in the world of work, individuals are then often challenged in their identity and forced to reevaluate their vocational commitments leading to an identity crisis (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

In his classic theory, Erikson (1968) posited that identity formation is a key developmental task during the adolescent years that fades into the background for most emerging adults who have attained an achieved sense of identity. However, Erikson also underlined that identity development is a dynamic life-long process, and that the identity, inherited from the adolescent years, is not fixed but, rather, flexible depending on various life experiences (Kroger, 2007). In our late modern Western societies characterized by the loss of traditional social markers and continuous social change, several authors have emphasized that the task of developing identity is actually a life-long "reflexive project of self" (e.g., Giddens, 1991, pp. 32-33). Today, more than ever, individuals' identities and options are no longer definite or stable and "their futures can take a number of directions, the end point is not always clear" (Wallace, 1995, cited in Côté, 2000, p. 31). Despite its flexibility, a subjective sense of personal identity is based on two fundamental pillars: "the perception of the *selfsameness* and [the] *continuity* of one's existence in time and space" (Erikson, 1968, p. 50), and that its "most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, [and] a sense of *knowing where one is going*" (Erikson, 1956/1980, p. 127). Thus, the identity quest is fundamentally concerned with the development of a subjective sense of life's meaning (e.g., Adams & Marshall, 1996; Côté & Levine, 2002).

Guichard's Perspective on Subjective Identity Forms

The self-construction model (Guichard, 2005, 2009), integrated three major approaches (i.e., sociological, cognitive, and dynamic), and proposed a general theoretical framework to describe and understand the factors and processes that influence life-long identity and self-construction. The sociological perspective underscores that self-construction occurs within specific and structured social contexts (such as, work, school, family and relatives, sport, etc.). The society offers different social categories (concerning gender, ethnic origin, occupation or age group, amongst others) used by individuals to identify and define themselves and others (Dubar, 1992). This identity is actively elaborated on a cognitive level and evolves over time, notably via the interaction between both individuals and communities. This approach emphasized the role of a system of cognitive identity frames for the individuals' self-construction, and cognitive representations of himself/herself and others, in specific identity forms (Guichard, 2009). Some of these identity forms are more important than others for personal self-construction over time and across life domains.

According to Guichard (2009), these subjective identity forms (SIFs) represent a "set of ways of being, acting and interacting in relation to a certain view of oneself in a given context" (p. 253). Thus, individuals see and construct themselves in different and distinctive

SIFs (e.g., employee, father, partner, and student) related to the contexts in which they act and communicate and representing the individuals' subjective identity forms system (SIFS). Within the SIFS, some subjective forms may reflect individuals' priorities and so have a more central role in structuring the whole system. Guichard (in press a), stressed the central role of professional pathways in the self-construction process of most adults. Furthermore, the SIFS consist of several SIFs (related to the current settings and activity, to the past central experiences, and to personal expectation in different life settings) mutually influencing each other. Finally, self-construction of the SIFS involves two main types of reflexivity underlying individuals' dynamism. The first, "I-me" reflexivity, based on an identification process, represents a structuring and stabilizing factor in the identity construction. The second, "I-you-s/he" reflexivity, allows a continuous process of (re)interpretation of personal life meaning, integrating past and present experiences, and future expectations. The tension underlying these two types of reflexivity allows the emergence of the self (Guichard, 2005).

Identity Stability in the Current Professional Context

Guichard (2005, 2009) described self-construction as a dynamic system of SIFs (past, present, and future/anticipated) supported by the tension between two forms of reflexivity. The structure of the SIFS is not static but can change over time according to events, personal experiences and interactions, and in relation to activities (Guichard, in press a). These aspects highlight the pluralistic and evolving nature of self-identity and the central role played by the social context for self-construction. Thus, considering today's insecure and changing professional landscape, characterized by an increased number of potential transitions and work reorganization, individuals face the necessity to continuously (re)adjust and (re)adapt the representation of themselves, notably on a occupational level. Of course, such SIFs adjustment involves some changes in the ways people act and relating both to themselves and to others. For instance, the perception of oneself as a competent and appreciated employee in the company may be disrupted by the risk of being fired or by an imposed period of partial-unemployment. Similarly, the difficulty to find a new and adequate job or a relatively long period of short-term employment can affect the stability of the work-related SIF and its role in the whole system structure. Incidentally, with regard to the current societal context, we can assume a more frequent change to the social identity offering. This "new" offering can be, in some cases, inconsistent (or contradictory) with the past or present SIFs structure and the organization of the SIFS, implying a self-re-construction.

Furthermore, considering the interconnection between the different SIFs composing the whole identity system, the changes and difficulties faced in a specific setting can influence current functioning in other settings. Thus, negative events or transitions regarding the professional domain (such as involuntarily job loss) may represent an obstacle (or a lack of resources) that induces an alteration and re-elaboration of the SIFs related to family or partnership, for example. However, some positive changes may result from negative experiences. For instance, partial unemployment may induce a state of crisis, but it may also create a situation for potential growth, such as developing new skills during the job search process (Aldwin, 1994), or finding a new balance by prioritizing other settings, and thus other SIFs. Regarding future SIFs, Guichard (2009; in press a) stressed the importance of personal expectation and future planning in directing and organizing –almost in the short-term–

individuals' lives. However, changes in the job situation (such as involuntarily job loss) can influence and modify individuals' future perspectives, not only in the professional domain but also in other domains (e.g., getting married or having a child). Thus, it is important to adopt a longitudinal (or life course) perspective to better understand and follow the evolution of the SIFs and the dynamic identity self-construction.

Reflexivity, Career Adaptability, and Subjective Identity Forms

Rationalism defines all acts of self-reference as reflexive, permitting the acquisition of knowledge about the self as an agent. This activity allows the agent to define his or her position within a social structure and to modify it. Moreover, according to Hegel (1807), this reflexivity or self-consciousness can only emerge within social interactions and needs social recognition to acquire the status of Cooley's (1902) *social self* (see also, Mead, 1934). Piaget (1936) distinguished the reflexive abstraction and the empirical abstraction, the first emerging from the action of the subject on the object whereas the second emerges from the properties of the object. Reflexivity is a process of meaning making and of constructing a subjective reality underlying the development of the self, amongst other things. According to Baumeister (1987), reflexivity implies that individuals can and must address four fundamental challenges: to acquire *self-knowledge*, to develop a personal identity (*self-definition*), to make sense of their lives (*self-fulfillment*), and to interact with their social environment (*self-in-relation*; Hartung & Subich, 2011). These challenges imply that people have to position themselves in their contexts according to their subjective representations of themselves in space and time. This reflexive capacity "allows the I to create a story about the Me, in order to integrate the personal past, present, and future" (McAdams, 2013, p. 274). This ability to construct an autobiographical story allows the actor not only to be an agent, but also to be an author. This activity allows constructing self-continuity that is necessary for people not to lose themselves during their development or adaptation. Moreover, the co-existence of different possible selves sustains individual proactivity.

Reflexivity and Career Adaptability

Reflexivity is a necessary ability for self-understanding, being involved in what we could call reflexive self-consciousness. This self-consciousness is necessary to be able to plan ahead and to behave proactively. For this reason, we might consider that reflexivity allows for intentionality. The awareness of multiple possibilities permits one to become an active agent. This ability of becoming an agent makes it possible for people to consciously and intentionally adapt to a variety of social situations. Peoples' reflexivity allows them to monitor their emotional and behavioral expression and also the action of their regulation processes. This reflexive ability in relation to life narratives may act as personal norms, and can be considered as a meta-competency that allows people to manage their own adaptive resources, taking into consideration themselves and their environment. This allows people to calibrate how they are in the world, that is an inter-subjective experience implying intentionality. "Research and theory on self-regulation, self-esteem, and self-continuity... suggest a developmental logic for these three problems of selfhood that roughly parallels the

development of the self as actor, agent, and author” (McAdams, 2013, p. 281). Reflexivity can thus drive and manage the allocation of adaptability resources. This ability to manage the activation of these resources might explain why people searching for new employment have higher levels of career adapt-abilities (Maggiori et al., 2013). Thus, self-consciousness is an important property allowing self-directedness in managing our own career pathways.

Reflexivity and Subjective Identity Forms

Contemporary social evolution tends to promote and stimulate individualism that increases the relative importance of reflexivity and individual differences that grounds social differentiation and self-concept development. In such a context, a structured and differentiated self-concept is important for people to master their career pathways. “The self in an age of anxiety must be both autonomous and mature” (Savickas, 2011, p. 23). The reflexivity of human beings requires that they should define their personal and narrative identity to hold SIFs. The SIFs system (Guichard, 2005) allows them to know who and where they are in space and time, and to define the meaning of life at a certain time (McAdams, 2013). The cognitive identity frames constitute the nomenclature for describing these identity forms and our social environment. “This system of cognitive identity frames constitutes the cognitive basis of the representation of oneself and of others, as well as of self-construction, in some identity forms” (Guichard, 2009, p. 253). What is especially interesting in Guichard’s (2005) conceptualization is that the I-me reflexivity and the I-you-s/he reflexivity underlying the development of this SIFS, both contribute to the personal dynamic allowing people to become agents, actors, and authors. Motivational processes are thus rooted in these internal dynamic dialogs.

Reflexivity also implies awareness of our *self* as a distinct entity and promotes the development and growth of the self-concept. This self-concept can change when a person encounters new social situations, social roles, and faces life transitions. The self-concept is characterized both by stability in a stable environment and by adaptability in a changing environment. This self may be conceptualized as including many possible social selves. Guichard’s (2009) self-construction model is especially useful for understanding the evolution of this self-concept. The plurality of social selves or SIFs contributes to people’s flexibility and their ability to adjust to specific social situations. To adjust to school as a social situation, it is important to be able to construct and adequate SIF of “schoolchildren” (Collin & Guichard, 2011). These SIFs and the system that holds these identities can be rigid, structured, or diffuse. The properties of these forms, and of the whole system, partially explains people’s adaptive resources. These SIFs could be considered as vicarious processes, considering Reuchlin’s (1978) definition of vicariant processes, and thus have an important role to play in people’s ability to adjust to a diverse range of social situations.

CONCLUSION

Career adaptability and identity processes are linked. Both imply reflexivity and self-awareness that allow identity processes to act as meta-competencies for managing the

allocation of career adaptability resources. Career adaptability contributes to how a person designs a system of SIFs and inversely, illustrates the inter-relations between processes underlying adaptation and identity development. Guichard's (2005, 2009) model is especially important to understanding these inter-relations because it "recognizes the self as dynamic and plural, an evolving system of SIFs through which individuals construct themselves" (Collin & Guichard, 2011, p. 97). The complex system described in the self-construction model emphasizes the plasticity of the self, which explains personal adaptation and the dynamic underlying life and career pathways (Guichard, in press b). Furthermore, this system describes how identity evolves and changes across space and time and how people design their lives.

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