

## The Construction of Postgraduate Career Capital Improvement based on the Theory of Career Adaptability

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### Abstract

With the growing number of postgraduates, developmental problems of graduate students exposed gradually for lack of life experience, social experience, and education guidance under the background of fierce employment competition. In light of the latest theoretical research results of career psychology, the study focused on the application research of graduate students' career education in order to construct a career capital improvement system. By innovatively combining the four-dimension career adaptability theory (career attention, career control, career curiosity, career confidence) and three-indicator career capital theory (human capital, social capital, psychological capital), a comprehensive improvement system for engineering graduate students was built with wide applicability, strong feasibility and high effectiveness.

### Keywords

Graduate students; Career capital improvement; Career adaptability.

### 1. Introduction

With the rapid expanding of postgraduate enrollment in recent years, graduate students faced increasingly severe situation of employment which has aroused widely concern. Scholars at home attempted to explore this social issue from different fields, including psychology, education, sociology and so on, to find out the reasons and countermeasures in depth. With the aid of SWOT analysis model, two dimensions of it, namely weaknesses and threats, provided two observation ways on the graduate students' employment research findings thus far [1]. In terms of weaknesses, two internal reasons of employment difficulties deserved more concerns. Primarily, under the depression of the social environment and employment situation, many undergraduates chose to take the postgraduate entrance examination to relieve employment pressure by getting more academic capital. The students made career decision irrationally without any vocational development sense and ability of independent thinking. Next, lack of exploration in the external environment led to a mismatch between students' personal needs and social needs. Modern society requires compound talents with a wide range of specialties, while graduate students tend to focus on a specific field research rather than the interaction with the social environment. The overall development of personal abilities was neglected eventually. Then, due to the survival and psychological pressure caused by age and role changes, graduate students would face greater pressure to start a family than undergraduates, which is more likely to bring psychological anxiety. In terms of threats, three external reasons were listed. Firstly, the global employment situation became continually undermined, a large number of returnees led to intensified employment competition at home therefore. Secondly, a series of problems caused by the expansion of postgraduate enrollment resulted in doubt about the quality of postgraduate training quality from public. Eventually, the brain drain problem changed consumption view of talents held by employers. In addition, after

entering the workplace, the performance of graduate students is far from satisfying, such as the inability to handle interpersonal relationships, inability to quickly adapt to the working environment, and inability to show higher capability than undergraduates.

Generally, all above problems would trace back to the incompleteness of career development and career adaptability in postgraduate education. The “career maturity” of most students is not sufficient to support them in effective career decision-making and role balance, which lead to the difficulties in employment and social adaptation [2]. In this background, improving the career development ability of graduate students became more significant and necessary.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theory of Career Adaptability

In 1909, Parsons proposed the concept of “career” firstly, whereas most studies and applications at that time tended to narrow down the definition of “career” to “vocation” [3,4]. After continuous expansion and extension, until 1976, Super combined the differential psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, and phenomenology to put forward a broader new concept “career development”, which covered the breadth of life and living space. Career maturity, as the core concept of Super’s career development theory, emphasizes making preparations that are consistent with attitudes and understandings at different ages, and being able to deal with a series of career development tasks. In other words, the level of preparation and the speed of development determine the maturity of an individual’s career. As researches moved along, a growing number of scholars believed that the concept of career maturity had obvious limitations. With the rise of constructivism, Super actively adapted to the changing external environments and replaced “career maturity” with “career adaptability” [5,6].

In 1997, Savickas redefined career adaptability on the base of Super’s career development stage theory, and regarded it as the core ability to integrate all career roles of individuals, that is, individuals can make mental and behavioral preparation or adjustment in response to career changes or career conflicts [7]. As a representative of the career adaptability researchers, Savickas put forward three dimensions of career adaptability in 1997, including planful attitudes, self and environmental exploration and adaptive decision. In 2002, Savickas revised the original three-dimensional model by adding the dimension of career self-confidence, which is similar to the concept of career self-efficacy in career development theory [8]. In later studies, Savickas made further improvement in the theory of career adaptability, until 2005, he proposed a four-dimension construction model of career adaptability, namely career concern, career control, and career curiosity and career confidence [9]. It is noteworthy that the four-dimension model of career adaptability provided a theoretical reference for later career adaptability researches, thus be widely adopted in recent years.

**Table 1.** Development Route of Career Adaptability

Dimension	Career Issues	Attitudes and Beliefs	Performance	Response Behavior
Career Concern	Do I have a future?	Planful	Planning ability	Perceive, invest, prepare
Career Control	Who owns my future?	Determinate	Decision-making capacity	Confident, organize, consistent
Career Curiosity	What do I want to do in the future?	Curious	Exploration ability	Attempt, adventure, question
Career Confidence	Can I do it?	Effective	Problem solving skills	Persist, hardworking, diligent

Compared with career adaptability studies abroad, domestic researches started late relatively, and preferred to carry out localized researches based on foreign theories by taking undergraduates as main research target. In light of Savickas's views, Zhao Xiaoyun, a scholar at home, hold that career adaptability is the ability to maintain balance of changing career roles [10]. It implied three more obvious characteristics: the first is the educable ability which would be manifested by career difficulties or crises; the second is the ability to making progress; the third is the result of the interaction between the individual and environment. What's more, Zhao Xiaoyun validated the four-dimension construction model on the basis of career adaptability theory, and found that the four dimensions can effectively reflect the level of college students' career adaptability. Furthermore, he verified the applicability of model on Chinese college students, and added two new dimensions, career relationship and career adjustment [11].

## 2.2. Theory of Career Capital

In 2004, Luthans and Youssef proposed that career capital mainly came from three aspects, human capital, social capital and psychological capital, which represented the functions, relationships and motivations of a person's career capital respectively [12]. Human capital is the personal and professional experience that can enhance one's career ability, and also the transferable skills, abilities and knowledge that can improve and apply in different working environments. Meta-analysis researches show that different human capital factors such as experience, education, political skills, and knowledge directly contribute to career success. Therefore, human capital represents a level of resources that can promote individual's success in different occupations, and the functional characteristics of career capital. Social capital is the integration of resources brought by individual's interpersonal relationship network. For careers, it refers to the range and diversity of the social network that can be used to promote career growth. Social capital not only includes the various relationships at work, but also the connections given by families, professional groups, and mentors. The meta-analysis results show that social capital has positive impacts on career development and career success. Therefore, social capital is a resource that is conducive to promoting career growth. It reflects the ability and relationship capital to establish and develop personal networks, and the characteristics of career capital in terms of relationships. Psychological capital is the positive mental state, which includes coping with challenging tasks confidently; attributing current and future success positively; pursuing goals persistently and adjusting goals if necessary; persevering in adversity to achieve success. For careers, psychological capital represents the cognitive and motivational factors of career capital, and is related to career motivation, meaning of life and personal identity, which helps to form career ideals, career identity and career meaning. Many researchers believe that psychological capital is the source of motivation to understand constantly changes and adapt to diversification of environment. Having great value on individual success, it represents the motivation characteristics of career capital [13].

About domestic researches, Yu Haibo interpreted career capital of individual employment competitiveness from the view of resources [14]. Through empirical researches, he constructed the 3C model with 8 factors, that is human capital (interpersonal relationship, team-work ability, learning ability, problem-solving ability), social capital (social support, network differences), psychological capital (optimistic character, professional identity). All three kinds of capital contact and promote each other, having a comprehensive and profoundly effects on the employability of college students.

## 2.3. Research on Graduate Career

In recent years, with the substantial enrollment expansion, increased employment competition, intensified public opinion incidents of the postgraduates in our country, domestic scholars have

started the exploration and research on graduate career planning in accordance with the age and psychological characteristics of graduate students.

Wang Xun pointed out that there were several outstanding problems in the career planning of domestic graduate students [15]. First of all, the more students changed their research topic as the non-understanding of research direction and self-characteristics. And then, the phenomenon of following the trend to research blindly was noticeable. Afterwards, majority of graduate students asked for career counseling before graduation in essence. At last, serious breaches of contract happened cause the comparing and following without thinking reasonably when choosing a career. The above problems indicated that career planning education was urgently needed for the current graduate students who're lack of it. In detail, the objectives of career education for the postgraduates could be achieved by carrying out the following stages, such as the adaptation stage, the development stage and the maturity stage. The analysis of research was performed that the staged intentions and managements should be formulated accordingly. Thus career education for graduate students could be conducted methodically in stages by combining with multiple platforms such as schools, employers, and postgraduate groups.

By adopting literature research, questionnaire survey and other research methods, Hua Dan [16] conducted empirical researches on the relationship between graduate students' career adaptability, mental locus of control and life satisfaction, and revised the career adaptability questionnaire which is suitable for Chinese graduate students. Liang Xiaoyan [17] analyzed the status quo of graduate student career education and the influence of the self-media environment on it, and proposed a new model for constructing graduate career guidance under the background of self-media. In summary, prior domestic researches on career development of graduate student mostly paid attention to the theoretical research, rarely touching upon the construction of effective improvement platform in practice. Therefore, the study will focus on the application research of graduate student career development thus provide practical references for following scholars.

### **3. Creative System of Career Capital Improvement**

Based on the four-dimensional model of career adaptability theory, the career capital improvement can be explored and constructed systematically in this paper to reply for the difficulties of the postgraduate career development. The enhancement of career adaptability in four dimensions is examined overall under relying on the three factors of career capital as variable observation points. Then it is carried out dynamic tracking and feedback correction in time. In addition, it is committed to solving a series of problems about career indifference, career indecision, career unrealism, career inhibition. Consequently, the goal of enhancing graduate students' career concern, career decision, career exploration and career self-confidence should be realized. Eventually, the career capital improvement is builded for the postgraduates with wide applicability, strong feasibility and high effectiveness.

In light of the previous researches, the study status and theories of graduate students' career has been mastered. Based on the social facilitation of psychology, this paper uses the solution-focused therapy on a 12-person group to intervene in growth, which registers the training camp according to different factors. After each period of training is completed, it is important to use individual interview method for long-term tracking to observe the growth trajectory dynamically. Refer to individual feedback information, the previous implementation links will be corrected and consummated to build an integral and systematic improvement system of career capital. This paper sets up a training camp of career capital increasing with combining four dimensions of career adaptability, involving career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. Each dimension covers the process paths of human capital,

social capital, and psychological capital to make up for career shortcomings of graduate students targetedly. It will be more meaningful to help graduate students plan career comprehensively and effectively.

### **3.1. Thematic Training**

Cause the postgraduates have the characteristics of heavy research tasks, less learning time, and mature thinking, the special training camp is chosen independently in the light of individual needs, which has been set up according to the four dimensions of career adaptability. For establishing relationships between members better in the short term, it will team up twelve students as members of the training camp to enhance the positive effects of training. Each period is divided into four courses and each course is 45 minutes. In order to strengthen the training effects and follow up the feedback timely, there are 5-10 minutes for students sharing and discussing after each class to adjust the course content efficiently. It is notable that reduce the proportion of teachers' participation can take advantage of the postgraduates' subjective motivation and behavior sufficiently. The role of population effect can't be underemphasized. Therefore, it is significant for the postgraduates to review, summarize, think, and supervise consciously in the last class.

#### **3.1.1. Career Concern**

It is normally regarded as the most noticeable and considerable dimension in the theory of career adaptability. It is evident that career concern is essentially future-oriented, which is similar to the concept of "future time perspective" in psychology. To make the future become reality by planning is picked up and emphasized in core position. By comparison, it is called career indifference as the lack of career concern, which reflects the object's negative and pessimism for the future.

This paper suggests that promoting action and planning capability is beneficial to accumulate human capital, such as SMART target setting method, role pie chart, and time pie chart. To accumulate social capital, it is utilizable for the postgraduates to clarify possible future social roles and relationships by future-oriented autobiography and career fantasy. In the improvement of psychological capital, the sense of hope for the future career can be inspired powerfully through the outstanding postgraduates' growth deeds sharing session. In practice, since the academic development and professional growth of graduate students is acknowledged clearly, it is suitable for inviting outstanding talents in related fields to share the experience. In addition, it is worth noting that the maintenance of social equilibrium, such as diversified roles, needs to be guided scientifically with the age growth of graduate students.

#### **3.1.2. Career Control**

Commonly, it means that individuals believe that they have ability of self-determine and can take responsibility for constructing their own careers. The ability of career decision-making and responsible attitude towards the future can also upgrade their self-regulation capability. Alternatively, it is universally called career indecision by the cause of lack of career control, which individuals cannot make career choices appropriately.

During the accumulation of human capital, it is mainly based on the CIP cognitive information processing theory to improve decision-making ability. Postgraduates can be encouraged to actively serve as the main student cadres to cultivate the sense of responsibility, leading to the accumulation of social capital. Furthermore, with the educational activity of lifelines, the positive energy in the growth experience can be tapped into approving to self-affirmation as the accumulation of psychological capital. With the postgraduates taking no leader group discussion, it will be more measurable to strengthen self-suggestion positively. Honestly, it is notable that the contents of academic ethics and academic integrity should be introduced to strengthen the concept of subject consciousness and social responsibility of graduate students.

### 3.1.3. Career Curiosity

Actually, it is usually considered that the significance of career curiosity is consistent with the self-exploration and career exploration of the career development theory. It implies the level of people's willingness to explore the internal and the external initiatives. If the postgraduates try to gain the information regarding career development, it is measurable to recognize the fitness between oneself and the environment. By contrast, it is named career unrealism that people lack of career curiosity. It may lead to the result of unrealistic imaginations happened about oneself and the world, even bringing about the unreasonable beliefs about career development.

Based on the trait-factor theory and Holland vocational interest theory, human capital can be accumulated through the features of occupational classification cards or interest island test to improve self-exploration skills. By the development of social capital, taking social practice and professional internships to obtain information about the actual working environment is considered as more efficient way to achieve maximum productivity on messages. In view of Johari window theory and psychological projection effect, it is obviously to enhance the individual's self-cognition and desire for exploration with the improvement of psychological capital. In fact, since the interests and values of graduate students have been stable, it is significant to lead the postgraduate pay attention on changing plans practically when they discover the theory does not match reality. To keep on balance about time spending, adapt to the challenge faced, and develop side jobs for life are all the meaningful cases in point.

### 3.1.4. Career Confidence

Ordinarily, it is defined as the confidence of the ability to solve their own career problem and the belief in self-efficacy. Those with more career self-efficacy can be more favorable to get rid of difficulties and realize the future. With the help of the career confidence, there is more widely range about career choices. Moreover, to switch the occupation and obtain more chances on new field can be achieved feasibly. Conversely, lack of career confidence may result in career inhibition, which hinders the practice and goal achievement of individual roles.

For improving human capital, writing on personal achievement story can be taken priority to obtain successful experience and skills. It is overlooked that the self-efficacy can be enhanced based on the feedback appraisal of the society or enterprises on individual practice or internships. Then social capital should be aroused under the effect of positive languages. Due to the application of group counseling, psychological capital can be acquired with the boost of confidence and trustworthiness. In practice, graduate students can be guided to strengthen scientific research interaction and academic exchanges. Nowadays, research topics in various fields are interdisciplinary, and teamwork is the only way to carry out scientific research. What is more, it is suggested that focus on building kindly teacher-student relationship can be helpful to establish confidence in the academic field.

**Table 2.** Paths of Career Capital Improvement for Postgraduates

Dimension	Human Capital	Social Capital	Psychological Capital
Career Concern	SMART Goal Setting	Career Fantasy	Excellent Deeds Sharing
Career Control	Decision Balance Sheet	Lifeline, Student Work	No Leader Group Discussion
Career Curiosity	Interests, Values, Skills Exploration	Career Interviews, Internship Practice	Projection Technology
Career Confidence	Achievement Story Interview	Social Enterprise Feedback	Group Counseling

### 3.2. Feedback and Correction

After each special training camp is over, individual consultation channels will be opened for training members. Through interviews to understand the subjective mastery and individual needs of members, it is in order to provide one-on-one guidance and help. Meanwhile, common issues previously collected are integrated into the special training program. The career capital improvement system will be continuously revised, so as to conduct a new round of cyclic verification experiments. After the improvement implements for one year, it is necessary to use questionnaire surveys on the postgraduates for understanding the career status currently. By determining the improvement effect of career capital in four dimensions of career adaptability, the effectiveness of operation can be grasp in time. At the same time, it is available to examine the interaction between the four dimensions and the structure-effect relationship with career adaptability.

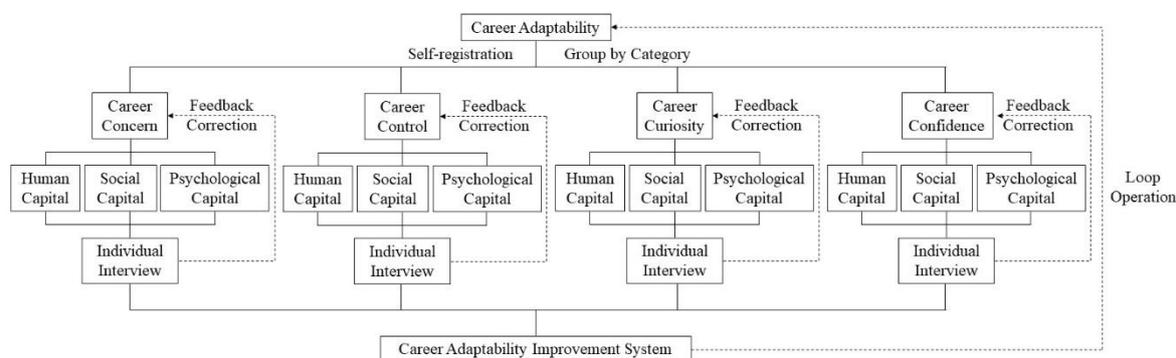


Fig 1. Research Project of Career Capital Improvement for Postgraduates

## 4. Conclusion

By analyzing domestic researches on career development of college students, it can be obviously found that most of widely accepted career theories adopted in studies are put forward by foreign scholars with the characteristics of western culture. For lack of professional teachers, research capital, and well-established system, the development of domestic career education is still under the unbalanced and inadequate stage. Scholars at home have been developing practical application through concept localization and applicability experiments without consideration on the applicability of theories. In fact, domestic career education has attracted more attention due to the increasing employment pressure of college students. Especially the postgraduate group with higher academic level is more necessary to be improved career education, cause the career maturity of most graduate students is far from enough to support themselves in career decision-making and balance of multi-role playing available. Aiming at the career characteristics of graduate students, this paper applies the theoretical model of career adaptability to explore the construction of career capital improvement. Generally, the improvement of the graduate career capital based on the career adaptability would provide theoretical significances and application values on following career development researches.

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