

Linking Career Adaptability to Entrepreneurial Burnout: A Moderated Mediation Model

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Abstract

Based on career construction theory and person-environment fit theory, this study developed a theoretical model linking career adaptability to entrepreneurial burnout. A three-wave data collected from 319 owner-manager entrepreneurs showed that career adaptability was positively associated with person-entrepreneurship fit, which negatively related to subsequent entrepreneurial burnout. Moreover, we found that the indirect effect of career adaptability on entrepreneurial burnout was stronger for entrepreneurs with higher (versus low) entrepreneurial role model exposure. By integrating entrepreneurship and career construction literature, this study shows whether, how, and when career adaptability leads to low subsequent entrepreneurial burnout.

Keywords

career adaptability, entrepreneurship, burnout, fit, role model

Entrepreneurship is a self-directed adaptive process (Tolentino et al., 2014), which could be regarded as a form of career (Burton et al., 2016). Burnout is a potential threat to any career, including entrepreneurship (Torres et al., 2021). Entrepreneurial burnout (Shepherd et al., 2010), which accompanies the whole entrepreneurship process (i.e., discovery, assessment, and decision process of entrepreneurial opportunities), has been a severe and universal concern for entrepreneurs (De Mol et al., 2018). Considerable evidence has indicated that experiencing burnout may lead to a host of negative outcomes, such as reduced satisfaction and poor performance (McDowell et al., 2019; Shepherd et al., 2010). Although great efforts have been made to identify the reasons and outcomes of suffering entrepreneurial burnout (Shepherd et al., 2010; Torres et al., 2021), except for Perry et al. (2008) and (Ross et al., 2020), very few studies have illustrated how to prevent entrepreneurs from undergoing entrepreneurial burnout. Given that burnout is one of

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the foremost psychosocial issues during career development (Maslach et al., 2001), understanding how and when entrepreneurs experience less entrepreneurial burnout is particularly important.

Prior studies demonstrate that entrepreneurs are especially susceptible to burnout relative to traditional employees (Boles et al., 2000; De Mol et al., 2018). Unlike traditional careers, the situations where entrepreneurs construct their entrepreneurial careers are highly uncertain and stressful (Shane et al., 2003). Thus, they need to make more effort to overcome considerable challenges (e.g., role identity, work-family imbalance, financial instability) embedded in the situations (De Mol et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2019). Although researchers have stated the critical role of personalities (e.g., conscientiousness) in dealing with entrepreneurial burnout (Perry et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2020), extant research largely overlooked the self-based psychological mechanism associated with burnout (Tong et al., 2015). Gaile et al. (2020) pointed out that entrepreneurs adopt a self-direction approach to survive in the ambiguous and volatile career environment. Hence, considering the nature of the entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial career (Tolentino et al., 2014), it is essential to advance the understanding of alleviating entrepreneurial burnout.

Career construction theory (CCT) posits that individuals develop adaptability resources to construct their careers and cope with work-related traumas (Savickas, 2005). This theoretical framework sheds new light on the investigation of preventing entrepreneurs from suffering burnout. We introduce career adaptability as a potential antecedent of entrepreneurial burnout, as it involves individuals' self-regulation capacities (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). As a core concept in CCT, career adaptability has been theorized as a vital psychological resource for dealing with unfamiliar, complicated, ill-defined career-related challenges and traumas, especially in uncertain conditions (Rudolph et al., 2017). Previous studies (e.g., Cotter & Fouad, 2013; Maggiori et al., 2013) have consistently reported career adaptability as an important antecedence of personal well-being outcomes (e.g., anxiety, stress, and satisfaction). The studies connecting career adaptability to entrepreneurial intention (Obschonka et al., 2018; Tolentino et al., 2014) further indicate the potential value of career adaptability in predicting entrepreneurial career construction outcomes. Therefore, according to CCT, we argue that entrepreneurs with high career adaptability have a greater capacity to psychologically manage entrepreneurial challenges and thus are less likely to experience entrepreneurial burnout.

Moreover, career construction is a continuum process that involves a sequence of adaption processes (Hirschi et al., 2015; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), and there might have a potential mechanism that links adaptability and adapting constructs (Jiang, 2016; Johnston, 2018; Ochoa & Ty, 2021; Zhu et al., 2019). For example, prior research found that the relations between career adaptability and well-being among employees and students were indirect rather than direct (Buyukgoze-Kavas et al., 2015; Fiori et al., 2015). However, although researchers call for further clarification on the underlying mechanism linking career adaptability to well-being outcomes (Urbanaviciute et al., 2019), we still lack an in-depth understanding of the potential process of how career adaptability functions to alleviate burnout among entrepreneurs. We offer a theoretical explanation of the adaption process by proposing that the link of career adaptability to entrepreneurial burnout is mediated by person-entrepreneurship fit. The core proposition of CCT demonstrates that individuals construct their careers through continually adapting to their working environment to fulfill positive person-environment congruence (Savickas, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Person-environment (P-E) fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998) suggests the congruence between individuals and their working environment results in less negative job/career-related experiences, such as burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Tong et al., 2015). Therefore, by integrating P-E fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998), we propose that career adaptability promotes entrepreneurs to better fit with their entrepreneurial environment and subsequently experience less entrepreneurial burnout.

Additionally, CCT emphasizes that specific environmental factors provide different opportunities to develop and express psychological resources (Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Indeed, studies have confirmed that career construct outcomes (e.g., job performance, career success) were shaped by the combined effect of career adaptability and contextual conditions (Johnston et al., 2016; Ohme & Zacher, 2015; Urbanaviciute et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial role model exposure has been regarded as a vital context influencing entrepreneurs' career construction (Capelleras et al., 2019). Specifically, it provides suitable contextual opportunities for entrepreneurs to express career adaptabilities, such as specific entrepreneurial knowledge learning and entrepreneurial role identity development (Austin & Nauta, 2016; Laviolette et al., 2012; Nowinski & Haddoud, 2019; Zozimo et al., 2017). Following these arguments, we contend that entrepreneurial role model exposure strengthens the likelihood of using career adaptability to deal with entrepreneurial burnout via person-entrepreneurship fit.

Taken together, we intend to examine how and when entrepreneurs experience less entrepreneurial burnout. Our study contributes to the literature in three aspects. First, we introduce career adaptability as a new antecedence of entrepreneurial burnout which responds to the recent call by Shepherd et al. (2010) and Torres et al. (2021). By providing preliminary evidence for the critical functions of career adaptability in coping with entrepreneurial career-related traumas (i.e., entrepreneurial burnout), we enrich prior research which only emphasizes the applicability of CCT in explaining how career adaptability promotes entrepreneurs to start an entrepreneurial career (Tolentino et al., 2014; Woo, 2018). Second, we establish an integrated framework explaining the mediating role of person-entrepreneurship fit in the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout, which supplements CCT's proposition about the transmitting mechanism of adaptability effectiveness (Hirschi et al., 2015; Johnston, 2018; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Specifically, we confirm that entrepreneurs construct their entrepreneurial careers in a sequential adaption process (Tolentino et al., 2014). Our examination of the mediating effect of person-entrepreneurship fit also adds new evidence to the indirect relations between career adaptability and personal well-being (Fiori et al., 2015; Maggiori et al., 2013; Ochoco & Ty, 2021). Third, by identifying entrepreneurial role model exposure as a specific context that facilitates the expression of entrepreneurs' career adaptability, we answer the question of when high career adaptability is more strongly connected to low entrepreneurial burnout. Our theoretical development expands CCT's statements about the boundary conditions of adaptability (Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Examining the moderating effect of entrepreneurial role model exposure also advances current knowledge on when career adaptability is more likely to be expressed (Urbanaviciute et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019), especially in the entrepreneurial environment.

Theory and Hypotheses

Career Adaptability and Entrepreneurial Burnout

CCT (Savickas, 2005) suggests that individuals continually adapt to their career roles and environment through self-regulation to construct their careers. In this process, one of the most critical psychological resources individuals develop is career adaptability, which is described as "psychological strengths that individuals draw upon to manage tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas" (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Traditionally, career adaptability is a four-element construct that consists of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, and they collectively impact individuals' coping strategies to manage the obstacles during their career construction (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Specifically, *Concern* refers to individuals' preparation for their future careers and upcoming work challenges. *Control* pertains to individuals' responsibility to shape themselves and their working environment. *Curiosity* reflects individuals' interest in exploring their

potential and further career development. *Confidence* describes individuals' belief in their capacity to address career-related challenges and achieve their career aspirations. These psychological resources are a set of self-regulation abilities vital for entrepreneurs to adapt to a series of entrepreneurial career adversities during business development (Gaile et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurial burnout, anchored on the widely accepted definition of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), is "a kind of syndrome, of which elements are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment." Prior research shows that individuals' perception of burnout results from unsuccessful adaptation to their working environment triggered by low self-regulation (Cotter & Fouad, 2013) and that psychological resources (e.g., resilience, efficacy, and hope) promote to reduce burnout (Ross et al., 2020; Tong et al., 2015). Correspondingly, individuals with a high adaptive capacity (e.g., high self-efficacy, high perception of control over their working environment) undergo less burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). According to CCT, career adaptability encompasses individuals' likelihood and willingness to effectively utilize various resources for career challenges (Savickas, 2013). Thus, it appears that high career adaptability entrepreneurs may tend to possess psychological resources that facilitate them to adopt proactive work behaviors to cope with entrepreneurial adversities that decrease entrepreneurial burnout. Though few studies directly examined the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout, in favor of our prediction, prior studies demonstrate that related characteristics (e.g., optimism, persistence, and confidence) are vital to cope with entrepreneurial obstacles (Markman & Baron, 2003; Perry et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2020). Hence, we argue that:

Hypothesis 1: Career adaptability is negatively related to entrepreneurial burnout.

The Mediating Role of Person-Entrepreneurship Fit

Person-entrepreneurship fit, which developed from P-E fit (i.e., a broad construct that is widely used to describe "the fit between individuals and environment" (Edwards et al., 1998), occurs when the characteristics of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship matched (Hsu et al., 2019; Markman & Baron, 2003). As discussed below, according to CCT (Savickas, 2005), we posit that a great extent of career adaptability leads to a high level of perceived integration with entrepreneurship; subsequently, based on P-E fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998), we argue that the greater extent of person-entrepreneurship fit reduces the likelihood of experiencing entrepreneurial burnout.

In light of CCT (Savickas, 2005), individuals construct their careers by continuously adapting to the environment to fulfill person-environment congruence. During the career construction process, individuals' career adaptability resources play a vital role in facilitating their perceptions at work (Savickas, 2013). Accordingly, individuals with high career adaptability are more adept in a series of entrepreneurial uncertainty and better fit into entrepreneurial circumstances (Tolentino et al., 2014). For instance, concern directs entrepreneurs to develop strategies to fit into their entrepreneurial working environment; control assists entrepreneurs in exerting influence on their entrepreneurial career and dealing with work challenges; curiosity facilitates entrepreneurs to explore possible themselves and their entrepreneurial working environment; confidence ensures entrepreneurs sustain their efforts to persistent pursue their career aspirations when face difficulties. Altogether, the four dimensions of career adaptability integratively promote a high congruence between individuals' attributes and their working environment characteristics (Jiang, 2016; Shabeer et al., 2019).

Burnout is generally regarded as a negative psychological state for individuals, commonly assumed to be linked to various forms of job withdrawal and mental illness (Maslach et al., 2001). For entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial burnout is especially an undesirable work experience that may lead to more costly consequences (e.g., entrepreneurial failure) (De Mol et al., 2018; Perry et al., 2008). P-E fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998) suggests that integration between individuals and their

working environment results in less negative job/career experiences. Previous studies demonstrate that P-E fit is negatively related to burnout (Tong et al., 2015). Similarly, under an entrepreneurial context, the fit between entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurship is a pivotal contributor to avoiding negative entrepreneurial experiences (Brigham et al., 2007). Specifically, entrepreneurs who highly fit with their entrepreneurship would experience less entrepreneurial burnout (De Mol et al., 2018). Taken together, high congruence between entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurship reduces the likelihood of them suffering entrepreneurial burnout.

Fit perceptions have been found to serve as an essential mediator between career adaptability and career-related issues (Jiang, 2016; Shabeer et al., 2019). According to the core propositions of CCT (Savickas, 2005) and P-E fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998), high career adaptability facilitates entrepreneurs to perceive fit with their entrepreneurship; subsequently, entrepreneurs with high person-entrepreneurship fit are less likely to suffer entrepreneurial burnout. The above theoretical discussions support the association between career adaptability, person-entrepreneurship fit, and entrepreneurial burnout. Thus, indicating that person-entrepreneurship fit may mediate the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout. We argued that:

Hypothesis 2: Person-entrepreneurship fit mediates the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout.

The Moderating Role of Entrepreneurial Role Model Exposure

Role model exposure has been studied for many years, primarily in the context of career choices or general business behavior, focusing on the unique effects of role models on specific careers and general motivation in pursuing career objectives (Gibson, 2004). Entrepreneurial role models are “entrepreneurs who act as a reference for others and may profoundly influence others’ entrepreneurial career decisions” (Bosma et al., 2011). Several studies have found that being exposed to entrepreneurial role models such as parents (Hoffmann et al., 2015; Laviolette et al., 2012), peer groups (Falck et al., 2012), and colleagues (Kacperczyk, 2013) could increase individuals’ entrepreneurial perceptions, and promote individuals regard entrepreneurship as a “credible” activity (Nowinski & Haddoud, 2019). Therefore, research widely demonstrates that individuals exposed to entrepreneurial role models (e.g., in terms of knowing and building interaction with them) differ meaningful ways from those not exposed to such entrepreneurial role models (Austin & Nauta, 2016; Capelleras et al., 2019). Given that Savickas and Porfeli (2012) point out that context place boundary conditions around adaptability, we propose that entrepreneurial role model exposure serves as a crucial moderator of the effectiveness of career adaptability. Specifically, following the statement that career adaptability is a processual resource that can be activated when needed (Rossier, 2015), we posit that entrepreneurial role model exposure provides corresponding opportunities for entrepreneurs to better utilize their career adaptability to construct their entrepreneurial careers and cope with entrepreneurial career obstacles.

First, a high extent of entrepreneurial role model exposure creates a specific entrepreneurial surrounding full of entrepreneurial role identity, facilitating entrepreneurs to express their career adaptability to improve person-entrepreneurship fit. Previous studies have found that individuals who are exposed to this environment are attracted by the characteristics of entrepreneurial role models and would devote themselves to putting efforts to construct similar entrepreneurial “tags” (e.g., adventurer, innovator, and optimists) with them (Laviolette et al., 2012; Nowinski & Haddoud, 2019). For example, exposing to entrepreneurial role models increases individuals’ sense of “if he/she can do it, I can, too” (Nowinski & Haddoud, 2019) and promotes them to use their career adaptability to internalize roles and behaviors pivotal to successful entrepreneurship (Tolentino et al., 2014).

Furthermore, given that entrepreneurial role model serves as vital sources of entrepreneurial learning, when entrepreneurial role model exposure is high, entrepreneurs could more easily activate the use of career adaptability complete entrepreneurial activities and increases their person-entrepreneurship fit. Specifically, entrepreneurs often acquire specialized skills, knowledge, and routines (e.g., negotiation, team management, risk management) from observing entrepreneurial role models. In the context of high entrepreneurial role model exposure, these specific entrepreneurial experiences allow entrepreneurs with high career adaptability to perform more confidently, overcome challenges, and fit well with entrepreneurship (Austin & Nauta, 2016; Bosma et al., 2011; Zozimo et al., 2017).

Therefore, based on the above theoretical elaboration, we posit that entrepreneurial role model exposure strengthens the association between career adaptability and person-entrepreneurship fit. Further, we argue that entrepreneurial role model exposure might ultimately reinforce the indirect association between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout via person-entrepreneurship fit. Specifically, when higher exposed to entrepreneurial role models, entrepreneurs would be more strongly motivated to utilize their career adaptability to increase person-entrepreneurship fit and further alleviate entrepreneurial burnout. Hence, we propose that:

Hypothesis 3: Entrepreneurial role model exposure moderates the relationship between career adaptability and person-entrepreneurship fit. When entrepreneurs have a higher degree rather than a lower degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure, the relationship between career adaptability and person-entrepreneurship fit is stronger.

Hypothesis 4: Entrepreneurial role model exposure moderates the indirect relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout through person-entrepreneurship fit. When entrepreneurs have a higher degree rather than a lower degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure, the indirect effect of career adaptability on entrepreneurial burnout through person-entrepreneurship fit is stronger.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

Previous research has confirmed that data collected from the online platform could provide valid and representative samples in management (Herman & Sola, 2012). Hence, we collected our data from a paid online research company, a professional research institution that provides online research services for governments, firms, and universities. We paid the research institution for every completed survey, and they, in turn, compensated participants for their time. Our target participants were entrepreneurs who owned a venture and actively participated in the venture's daily business operation at the research time. Two questions, "Are you currently self-employed or a business owner?" and "Do you involved in managerial decision making of the business?" were used to screen qualified participants before the beginning of the formal survey.

Finally, 798 targeted owner-managers were recruited and instructed to complete the survey in three different waves. We measured career adaptability, entrepreneurial role model exposure, and control variables at Time 1; 798 participants completed the survey, of which the average age was 29.29 ($SD = 5.73$), and 497 were males. After 3 months, we measured person-entrepreneurship fit at Time 2; 585 participants completed the questionnaire, and their average age was 29.84 ($SD = 5.77$), and 361 were males. Three months later, at Time 3, we measured entrepreneurial burnout; 346 participants completed the survey, of which the average age was 29.78 ($SD = 5.57$), and 210 were males. After eliminating the invalid questionnaires (e.g., participants failed to attention

check), 319 participants who provided data of all three-time points consisted of our final sample. Among them, 195 were males, and 124 were females, their average age was 31.71 ($SD = 4.95$), and 36% were single (17% had a partner, while 47% were married). Besides, 23% of participants had a senior degree or below, 61% had a bachelor's degree, 11% had a master's degree, and 5% had a doctoral degree. Furthermore, we conducted a dropout analysis to compare the differences between participants who provided the completed three-wave data and participants who dropout at Time 1. The results demonstrated non-significant differences in gender ($t = -.36, ns$), age ($t = .43, ns$), educational level ($t = .20, ns$), and marital status ($t = -.32, ns$) between the above two groups. Hence, we consider that the sample bias is not a concern for current research.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all measurements were initially developed in English. Then, two bilingual researchers with expertise in entrepreneurship in the light of the back-translation procedure translated them into Chinese (Brislin, 1986).

Career Adaptability (Time 1). We adopted Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-China (CAAS-China) (Hou et al., 2012) to assess career adaptability. We asked participants to rate their extent of career adaptability on a 24-item five-point Likert scale, in which one represents “strong” and five represents “strongest,” respectively. Sample items included: “Planning how to achieve my goals” (concern) (four-item), “Taking responsibility for my actions” (control) (four-item), “Exploring my surroundings” (curiosity) (four-item), and “Performing tasks efficiently” (confidence) (four-item). Hou et al. (2012) provided support for the reliability of this scale that the overall Cronbach's α was .95. Other studies also reported satisfactory reliability and validity of this scale in the Chinese sample (Guan et al., 2016; Jiang, 2016). The current study demonstrated that the overall scale's reliability was .93, higher than the four subscales ranging from .79 to .86. Furthermore, the scale scores were correlated as expected with other variables, thus providing support for the validity of this scale.

Entrepreneurial Role Model Exposure (Time 1). Following Hmieleski and Corbett (2006), we measured the extent of entrepreneurial role model exposure on a 5-item scale. Specifically, we asked participants whether they were acquainted with the person (e.g., family member, friend) who is an entrepreneur on five questions, respectively. Sample items were “Do you have an immediate family member who has started a business?” We used binary variables to record every item (“yes” = one, and “no” = zero), and we averaged the five items to calculate a total score. Although this measurement would not necessarily have greater internal consistency as an index scale, prior studies have reported a high internal consistency (i.e., .70 to .86) (Austin & Nauta, 2016; Hmieleski & Corbett, 2006). In the present study, our results show that the K-R 20 internal consistency estimate was .70. Besides, the validity of this scale is supported by its association with variables in this study and prior study (Austin & Nauta, 2016).

Person-Entrepreneurship Fit (Time 2). We adopted Cable and DeRue's (2002) six-item measurement in an entrepreneurial context. More particularly, we asked participants to evaluate the extent of perceived fit between themselves and their current entrepreneurship on a 5-point Likert scale, in which “strongly disagree” was represented by one and “strongly agree” was represented by five, respectively. Sample items were “The match is very good between the demands of the current entrepreneurship and my skills.” Cable and DeRue (2002) reported high reliability of this scale that the Cronbach's α ranged from .84 to .93 in different samples. The Cronbach's α was .80 in the current study. Moreover, the association of the scale scores with entrepreneurial burnout among an

owner-manager entrepreneur sample in China supported the validity of this scale (Zhao et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurial Burnout (Time 3). We measured entrepreneurial burnout using the 19-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Boles et al., 2000). Specifically, entrepreneurial burnout was overall measured via combining all items that a higher score represented a higher level of entrepreneurial burnout (De Mol et al., 2018). A 5-point Likert scale was used to score items, in which one to five ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Sample items were “I feel burned out from my work.” In the original study, Boles et al. (2000) provided adequate evidence for the reliability and validity of this scale that the correlations among factors ranged from .07 to .71, and the Cronbach’s α ranged from .77 to .87 in the samples of small business owners. Another study consistently reported high reliability and validity of this scale (Zhao et al., 2022). The Cronbach’s α was .84 in the present study.

Control Variables (Time 1). We controlled several variables that can affect critical relationships in the current study based on prior research (Perry et al., 2008; Torres et al., 2021). First, *Age* was accounted for in years, and *Gender* was measured by asking their gender directly (*males* = 1; *females* = 0). Second, we followed Donnellan et al. (2006) to adopt International Personality Item Pool (Mini-IPIP) to control entrepreneurs’ *Neuroticism* (four-item) and *Conscientiousness* (four-item) respectively. We requested participants to evaluate the degree to each item they agreed on a five-point Likert scale, in which one and five represent “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree,” respectively. Sample items were “Get upset easily” (Neuroticism), “Get chores done right away” (Conscientiousness). The Cronbach’s α s of these measurements ranged from .68 to .75 in a prior study (Donnellan et al., 2006). In the present study, the Cronbach’s α s of these measurements were .86 and .75, respectively. In addition, the validity of these measurements was supported by their association with other variables in the present study.

Analytical Strategies

We used linear regression analyses with Mplus 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2015) to examine our hypotheses. Meanwhile, we used bootstrapping procedures to compute the point estimate value and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (2000 replications). First, we examined the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout (Hypothesis 1). Then, we tested the mediator role of person-entrepreneurship fit between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout (Hypothesis 2). Next, we integrated the entrepreneurial role model exposure to test for moderating effect (Hypothesis 3) and further moderated mediation (Hypothesis 4) (Preacher et al., 2007). Besides, we initially conducted confirmatory factor analyses to examine the discriminant validity (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

First, in consideration of the massive items relative to the sample size and multidimensional measurement structure, we respectively parceled the career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout items to mitigate the potential parameter estimation bias (Little et al., 2002). Then, we estimated a one-factor model where all the items loaded onto one factor ($\chi^2/df = 10.099$, $TLI = 0.513$, $CFI = 0.594$, $RMSEA = 0.169$, $SRMR = 0.105$) and the hypothesized three-factor model where the items loaded into the intended three latent constructs ($\chi^2/df = 2.838$, $TLI = 0.902$, $CFI =$

0.922, $RMSEA = 0.076$, $SRMR = 0.048$). The results indicate that the proposed three-factor model has a superior fit to the one-factor model, suggesting that the current study has good discriminant validity.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations for the variables.

Hypotheses Testing

The regression results of indirect and conditional indirect effects are demonstrated in Table 2. First, Model 3 shows that career adaptability negatively related to entrepreneurial burnout ($b = -.13$, $p < .005$). Therefore, supporting Hypothesis 1. Then, as expected, career adaptability positively associated with person-entrepreneurship fit ($b = .50$, $p < 0.001$) in Model 1, in turn, person-entrepreneurship fit was negatively linked with entrepreneurial burnout ($b = -.27$, $p < 0.001$) in Model 3. Moreover, we analyzed the indirect relation between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout via person-entrepreneurship fit to further support the mediating effect via Mplus. The lower part of Table 2 suggests that career adaptability significantly indirectly relates to entrepreneurial burnout via person-entrepreneurship fit ($ab = -.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.13, -.06]$). Hence, person-entrepreneurship fit plays a mediator role in the association between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout, supporting Hypothesis 2.

Furthermore, the interaction between career adaptability and entrepreneurial role model exposure is positively linked to person-entrepreneurship fit ($b = .45$, $p < 0.001$) in Model 2. To have a close-up view of the nature of the interaction, we conducted simple slope analyses (Aiken et al., 1991). Results shown that career adaptability has a stronger relationship with person-entrepreneurship fit when entrepreneurs have a higher degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure ($b = 1.66$, $p < .001$; 1 *SD* above mean) than a lower degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure ($b = .76$, $p < .001$; 1 *SD* below mean) (see Figure 1). Moreover, the difference between the moderating effects of a higher and lower degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure on the above relation was .89, with a 95% confidence interval of .63–1.14; therefore, supporting Hypothesis 3.

To examine our moderated mediation model, we examined the indirect association between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout through person-entrepreneurship fit at different conditions of the entrepreneurial role model exposure via Mplus (Preacher et al., 2007). The lower part of Table 2

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among the variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender (T1)	0.61	0.49							
2. Age (T1)	31.71	4.95	.01						
3. Neuroticism (T1)	1.88	0.43	-.03	.11*					
4. Conscientiousness (T1)	4.37	0.39	.00	-.16**	-.31**				
5. Entrepreneurial role model exposure (T1)	0.62	0.26	.03	-.01	-.07	.12*			
6. Career adaptability (T1)	4.17	0.39	-.03	-.04	-.36**	.27**	-.01		
7. Person-entrepreneurship fit (T2)	4.18	0.40	.01	.01	-.30**	.32**	.36**	.57**	
8. Entrepreneurial burnout (T3)	1.76	0.26	-.01	-.01	.46**	-.29**	-.20**	-.41**	-.47**

Note. $N = 319$. The results are based on 2000 bootstrap samples. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Regression results of indirect and conditional indirect effects.

Predictor Variable	Person-Entrepreneurship Fit (T2)				Entrepreneurial Burnout (T3)	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Gender (T1)	.02	.05	.01	.03	.00	.05
Age (T1)	.07	.05	.03	.03	-.07	.04
Neuroticism (T1)	-.06	.05	.00	.02	.31***	.06
Conscientiousness (T1)	.20***	.05	.13***	.03	-.09†	.05
Career adaptability (T1)	.50***	.04	.14*	.06	-.13*	.06
Entrepreneurial role model exposure (T1)			.34***	.03		
Career adaptability (T1) × entrepreneurial role model exposure (T1)			.45***	.08		
Person-entrepreneurship fit (T2)					-.27***	.06
<i>R</i> ²	.37***		.80***		.35***	
<i>F</i>	45.32***		205.43***		33.71***	
Indirect and conditional indirect effects			<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>95% Boot CI</i>	
Indirect effect analyses						
Indirect effect of career adaptability			-.09***	.02	[-.13, -.06]	
Conditional indirect effect analyses						
High entrepreneurial role model exposure (+1 SD)			-.30***	.08	[-.45, -.18]	
Low entrepreneurial role model exposure (-1 SD)			-.14***	.04	[-.20, -.08]	
Difference			-.16**	.05	[-.25, -.09]	

Note. *N* = 319. The *b* values are standardized regression coefficients. The number of bootstrap samples for calculation of the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals is 2000. The conditional indirect effect tests are two-tailed. †*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

demonstrates that relation between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout through person-entrepreneurship fit is stronger when entrepreneurs have a higher degree (*estimate* = -.30, *p* < .001, 95% *CI* [-.45, -.18]) compared with a lower degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure (*estimate* = -.14, *p* < .001, 95% *CI* [-.20, -.08]). Besides, the difference between the moderating effects of a higher degree and lower degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure on the above indirect association was -.16, with a 95% confidence interval of -.25 to -.09, supporting Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

The current research introduced a moderated mediation model to explore how and when entrepreneurs experience less entrepreneurial burnout based on CCT (Savickas, 2005) and P-E fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998). In line with our hypothesis, our results demonstrated that career adaptability was negatively related to entrepreneurial burnout, and person-entrepreneurship fit mediated this relationship. Furthermore, we theorized and found that entrepreneurial role model exposure moderated the association between career adaptability and person-entrepreneurship fit and the indirect effect of career adaptability on entrepreneurial burnout.

Theoretical Implication

The current study makes several significant theoretical contributions to the growing body of research. First, this is the first study examining the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout. Past research on entrepreneurial burnout primarily focuses on the drivers of perceived burnout (De Mol et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2021), but they largely understudied to date how to reduce and prevent entrepreneurial burnout (Perry et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2020). Our work enriches the literature on entrepreneurial burnout. Specifically, we found that career adaptability was negatively associated with entrepreneurial burnout. Moreover, in line with the previous statement that entrepreneurial career construction is a self-directed process (Tolentino et al., 2014), our findings both extend the viewpoint rooted in CCT (Savickas, 2005) that individuals depend on their adaptability resources to construct their careers and cope with work-related traumas (Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas, 2013), and broaden the scopes of investigated relation between career adaptability and personal well-being outcomes (Fiori et al., 2015; Maggiori et al., 2013). Besides, since the critical role of career adaptability in driving individuals' intention on entrepreneurial career construction has been well acknowledged (Tolentino et al., 2014; Woo, 2018), the identification of the beneficial role of career adaptability in alleviating entrepreneurial burnout also provides strong evidence on the salience of career adaptability in understanding and addressing entrepreneurial career issues during entrepreneurial career construction.

Second, we make a meaningful contribution to the entrepreneurial career construction research and fit research by highlighting the important role of person-entrepreneurship fit in how career adaptability alleviates entrepreneurs' burnout perception. By integrating the P-E fit theory (Edwards et al., 1998), we reflect on prior theoretical arguments that highlight the relevance of P-E fit in individuals' career construction process (Jiang, 2016; Shabeer et al., 2019). Specifically, our findings suggest that career adaptability facilitates the goal of person-environment congruence (i.e., person-entrepreneurship fit) in entrepreneurial career construction, which subsequently reduces the possibility of suffering unfavorable entrepreneurial career experience (i.e., entrepreneurial burnout). In addition, consistent with prior studies which declared that career adaptability is indirectly rather than directly related to personal well-being (Buyukgoze-Kavas et al., 2015; Johnston et al., 2016; Urbanaviciute et al., 2019), this research adds to the literature by theorizing and testing the critical mediating role of person-entrepreneurship fit. These results not only confirm that entrepreneurial burnout is a function of both personal and environmental factors (De Mol et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2022) but also extends the past studies on fit in entrepreneurship, which mainly focus on the consequence of person-entrepreneurship fit/misfit (Brigham et al., 2007; Hsu et al., 2019; Markman & Baron, 2003; Zhao et al., 2022).

Third, the present research contributes to the CCT research in the field of entrepreneurship by advancing when the expression of career adaptability is more salient. In response to a recent call by Rudolph et al. (2017) to consider potential moderators in the association between career adaptability and career outcomes, we theorized that entrepreneurial role model exposure provides relevant situational opportunities to activate career adaptability expression. Our finding supports and expands CCT research (Johnston, 2018; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) that the role of career adaptability gets more prominent in the context of high levels of entrepreneurial role model exposure. Also, it adds to the previous evidence on the potential conditions under which the expression of career adaptability is more salient (Ohme & Zacher, 2015; Urbanaviciute et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019). Specifically, entrepreneurial role model exposure moderates the relationship between career adaptability and person-entrepreneurship fit and, consequently, moderates the indirect relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout via person-entrepreneurship fit. Importantly, these results shed new light on the importance of the

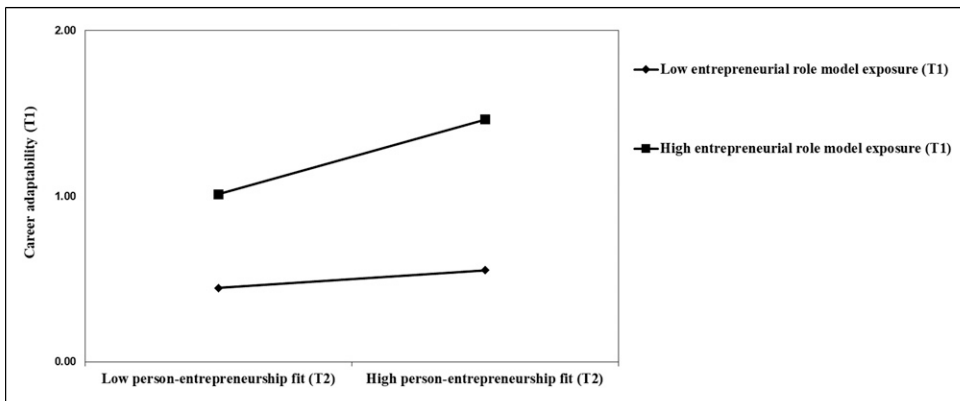


Figure 1. Moderating effect of entrepreneurial role model exposure on the relationship between career adaptability and person-entrepreneurship fit.

entrepreneurial role model exposure in explaining successful entrepreneurial career construction (Bosma et al., 2011; Laviolette et al., 2012).

Practical Implication

Our findings provide critical practical implications for entrepreneurial career management and counseling. First, the current study provides theoretical and empirical evidence of career adaptability as a valuable tool to construct an entrepreneurial career and deal with entrepreneurial career challenges among entrepreneurs. Due to the malleable nature of career adaptability (Savickas, 2013), specific interventions that aim to improve these abilities are effective for entrepreneurs. For instance, career counselors should design interventions, including but not limited to encouraging entrepreneurs to participate in entrepreneurial career problem-solving exercises (Obschonka et al., 2018; Tolentino et al., 2014). Second, the findings presented in this study offer vital knowledge of the role of person-entrepreneurship fit in connecting career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout. Therefore, entrepreneurial career counseling practices need to consider both entrepreneurs' internal factors (e.g., career adaptability) and environment factors (e.g., their entrepreneurial working environment) when coping with entrepreneurial career traumas and challenges (e.g., entrepreneurial burnout). For example, initiating and designing interventions (e.g., attending entrepreneurial training and education) strengthens entrepreneurs' person-entrepreneurship fit perception (Hsu et al., 2019; Markman & Baron, 2003). Lastly, the moderator role of entrepreneurial role model exposure found in the current study also indicates that it is vital for entrepreneurs to be exposed to entrepreneurial role models that provide opportunities to activate to maximize the expression of career adaptability. Hence, entrepreneurs and career counselors should design interventions to build effective connections with entrepreneurial role models, such as conducting shadowing exercises (Zozimo et al., 2017). Specifically, starting entrepreneurship in regions (e.g., China) where encouraging professional networks and unprofessional contacts may promote entrepreneurial role model exposure (Capelleras et al., 2019), which will help enhance entrepreneurs express their career adaptability.

Limitation and Future Research

We also acknowledge that several limitations exist in the current research. First, since we relied on self-reported and subjective measurement, the common method variance may be a potential limitation to this study. Following Podsakoff et al. (2003), we have adopted various methods to reduce the risk of common method variance, such as the time-lagged research design. Besides, the moderating effects cannot be inflated by common method variance (Siemsen et al., 2010); therefore, the moderating effects of the entrepreneurial role model exposure in this study were not affected. Nonetheless, future research could adopt strategies such as various data sources or objective measurement of variables to reduce common method variance further. Second, although we adopt the time-lagged research design, we are unable to make causal inferences about the observed relationships. However, we rely on the fact that previous longitudinal research found that career adaptability and personal perceptions (e.g., perceived fit) indeed influence well-being outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, stress, and burnout) (Alessandri et al., 2018; Marcionetti & Rossier, 2021; Urbanaviciute et al., 2019). In future research, researchers could adopt experimental or longitudinal research design to confirm our findings further. Third, we only conducted our research in China, limiting the generalization of our findings to other institutional contexts. Prior studies state that economic, societal, or institutional situations might markedly influence the impacts of career adaptability on outcomes (Savickas, 2013), and external environmental factors (e.g., economic risk) may also affect the risk of entrepreneurial burnout (Torres et al., 2021). Therefore, when future research tests our model across diverse macro-environments, the specific macro-environmental factors should be considered to gain a better understanding of coping with burnout during entrepreneurial career construction. Lastly, given that we collected our data from various industries, we have not distinguished entrepreneurial burnout across different entrepreneurial industries in the current study. Previous research declares that the levels of burnout may be dampened or magnified by industries' characteristics (Maslach et al., 2001; McDowell et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2021). Therefore, we recommend future research further examining the relationship between career adaptability and entrepreneurial burnout under distinct entrepreneurial industries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, current research illustrated a moderated mediation model to explain how and when entrepreneurs experience less entrepreneurial burnout. Drawing upon CCT and P-E fit theory, we identified that career adaptability contributes to alleviating entrepreneurial burnout, emphasizing the importance of person-entrepreneurship fit and entrepreneurial role model exposure. Specifically, the significant findings indicate that highly adaptable entrepreneurs are more likely to perceive person-entrepreneurship fit, which subsequently reduces their entrepreneurial burnout. Furthermore, we also found that the above association is stronger for entrepreneurs with a higher degree of entrepreneurial role model exposure. These findings align with our hypotheses and extend prior research to recognize the underlying self-regulation process of coping with unpleasant entrepreneurial career experiences (i.e., entrepreneurial burnout).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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