

## **Many Roads Lead to Rome: Researching Antecedents and Outcomes of Contemporary School-To-Work Transitions**

### **Introduction**

The school-to-work transition is the first significant career transition for many individuals and represents a critical developmental task in adolescence and early adulthood (Dietrich et al., 2012). Thus, it is not surprising that over the past twenty-five years, the transition from school to work has received considerable attention in the fields of career development and vocational psychology (e.g., Akkermans, Blokker et al., 2021; Blustein et al., 1997). This research illustrates that a successful school-to-work transition has important implications for long-term career and personal development. For example, success in this transition relates positively to later work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Pinquart et al., 2003), and well-being outcomes, such as life satisfaction (Litalien et al., 2013). Today, the topic is highly relevant, especially as the transition itself has been fundamentally changing over the past years (Akkermans, Blokker et al., 2021; de Vos et al., 2019), and moving from education into the labor market has become far from being a trivial and automatic transition (e.g., Krahn et al., 2015). For example, in the context of the rapidly changing business and labor markets accelerated by the fourth industrial revolution (Hirschi, 2018), adolescents and young adults have to increasingly cope with unpredictable career trajectories (Akkermans et al., 2015). There is also greater variability in the definitions of what comprises a "successful" school-to-work transition. For example, beyond finding employment, also well-being and meaningfulness have become essential hallmarks of a "successful or "adaptable" (Akkermans, Blokker et al., 2021) school-to-work transition.

This special issue intends to take account of this increased complexity and variability in current school-to-work transitions. It provides a basis and inspiration for future innovative school-to-work transition research and practical attempts to support adolescents and young adults in this critical career transition. Specifically, we combine papers from different

disciplines (e.g., psychology, educational science) that focus on various phases of the school-to-work transition (e.g., pre-transition, post-transition). The special issue also features different samples (e.g., compulsory school students, university students) in different countries (e.g., US, Indonesia) and applies different methodologies (e.g., quantitative, literature review). In all, the special issue provides a multifaceted and comprehensive picture of current trends in empirical research on school-to-work transitions. This editorial is organized as follows: We first summarize and critically reflect on the contributions of the included papers. We then use these reflections to synthesize existing knowledge on current school-to-work transitions and formulate a guide for future research and applications into praxis. Table 1 gives an overview of all included papers in this special issue.

**Table 1**

## Overview of the Special Issue Articles

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Method/ Study Design</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Theoretical framework</b>	<b>Transition phase</b>	<b>Predictors</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Processes and boundary conditions</b>
Marciniak, Johnston, Steiner, & Hirschi	Literature review	-	New integrative framework	Pre- and post- transition	Individual and contextual factors	Career- and educational- related outcomes; well-being outcomes	<i>Process:</i> Career preparedness
Sawitri & Creed	Empirical, based on cross- sectional data	Indonesian students from a vocational education school	Social-cognitive career theory	Pre-transition	Congruence with parents regarding a career	Job search preparatory behaviors	<i>Processes:</i> job search self-efficacy; outcome expectations <i>Boundary condition:</i> proactivity
Kim & Lee	Empirical, based on three-wave data	Korean college students who are seeking a job for the first time	Motivational systems theory	Pre-transition	Positive and negative emotions	Engagement in job search behaviors; the number of submitted resumes	
Lo Presti, Capone, Aversano, & Akkermans	Empirical, based on two-wave data	Italian University graduates		Pre- and post- transition	Career competencies	Subjective career success	<i>Process:</i> Employability activities <i>Boundary condition:</i> Academic satisfaction
Neuenschwander & Hofmann	Empirical, based on three-wave data	Swiss students going through the transition from compulsory school to vocational education and training	Social-cognitive career theory	Pre-and post- transition	Parental support; self-efficacy; company support	Person-job fit	<i>Processes:</i> Anticipated person-job fit; expectations of work conditions <i>Boundary condition:</i> Parental support

Ruschoff, Kowalewski, & Salmela-Aro	Empirical, based on two-wave data	Finnish students from a vocational school, before and three years after graduation	Social-cognitive career theory	Pre- and post-transition	Individual and peer goal appraisals	Having reached a vocational or educational state with which one is currently satisfied and which one intends to maintain; life satisfaction	
Okay-Somerville & Scholarios	Empirical, based on two-wave data	Scottish AHSS and STEM students before and after University graduation	Goal-setting theory	Pre and post-transition	Labor market ambiguity	Perceived skills use; job quality; qualifications match	<i>Process and boundary condition:</i> Goal-directed job search strategies
Masdonati, Massoudi, Blustein, & Duffy	Conceptual	-	Psychology of working theory	Pre- and post-transition	Socioeconomic constraints; marginalization	Decent work; meaningful work	<i>Processes:</i> Psychosocial resources; vocational and work role identity <i>Boundary conditions:</i> Education system; labor market conditions; social support; critical consciousness

*Note.* AHSS = arts, humanities, and social sciences; STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

**Marciniak, Johnston, Steiner, and Hirschi<sup>1</sup>**

Marciniak and colleagues present a comprehensive review of the career preparedness literature. Becoming prepared for a career is necessary to master career transitions, such as the school-to-work transition. By reviewing the different conceptualizations and measurements of career preparedness (i.e., maturity, readiness, adaptability, preparedness, and preparation), they tackle the jingle-jangle fallacy (Kelley, 1927) in the career preparedness literature. The jingle fallacy (i.e., using the same term to refer to different aspects of career preparedness) and the jangle fallacy (i.e., using different terms to refer to the same aspect of career preparedness) are problematic for the field of school-to-work transition research: they cause fragmentation in the literature and suggest that there is a lack of consensus on how becoming prepared for a career should be defined, operationalized, and measured. Based on the reviewed articles, Marciniak et al. suggest that the term career preparedness is used as a higher-order umbrella term, which allows for the organization and integration of more specific perspectives and measurement approaches. This integration helps to provide conceptual clarity to the field, which is essential to facilitate communication among career preparedness researchers and serves as a reference point for future research. Also, Marciniak et al. summarize the investigated predictors and outcomes of career preparedness into an integrative framework. This framework highlights the relevance of both individual and contextual factors that can facilitate career preparedness. It also presents various outcomes at the pre-transition and post-transition stages, including career-related and education-related outcomes and well-being outcomes, such as life satisfaction. This perspective is in line with recent conceptualizations of the school-to-work transition from the perspective of sustainable careers (de Vos et al., 2020), suggesting that happiness, health, and productivity are essential indicators of an adaptive school-to-work transition.

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript underwent the standard external review process of the *Journal of Career Development*.

### **Sawitri and Creed**

Sawitri and Creed investigate, based on social-cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994), predictors of job search behaviors among adolescents of a vocational school in Indonesia. Job search behaviors represent important preparatory behaviors to start the school-to-work transition. They include preparatory career actions, such as identifying potentially attractive employment opportunities related to later post-transition success (Lent et al., 1999). In their study, Sawitri and Creed contribute to the ongoing agency-context debate in the school-to-work transition literature by examining the interaction between an indicator of individual agency (i.e., adolescents' proactivity) and a contextual factor (i.e., the degree of congruence between adolescents' and their parents' regarding career matters). They show how different combinations of proactivity and congruence predict job search behaviors before the school-to-work transition, transmitted through self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Their findings indicate that a favorable context in the form of high parent-adolescent agreement regarding career matters can buffer against limited agency in the form of low proactivity, which would otherwise prevent the building of self-efficacy beliefs and positive outcome expectations among adolescents. Self-efficacy, in turn, positively related to job search preparatory behaviors. This finding suggests that individuals who are lower in agency particularly benefit from favorable contexts during the school-to-work transition. Further, this study highlights that beyond support, as one of the most studied contextual factors in the school-to-work transition (cf. Marciniak et al., in this special issue), the alignment between adolescent's career aspirations with the family context can be an essential driver of adequate preparation for the school-to-work transition.

### **Kim and Lee**

Kim and Lee investigate – as did Sawitri and Creed – job search behaviors, which are important to understand because they represent an effective preparation for the school-to-work transition. They extend the range of predictors previously studied in school-to-work

transition research by considering the predictive value of emotions that adolescents experience during preparation for the school-to-work transition. The role of emotions has received relatively little attention in school-to-work transition research, while cognitive aspects, such as self-efficacy beliefs (cf. Sawitri & Creed; Neuenschwander & Hofmann, in this special issue), or outcome expectations (cf. Sawitri & Creed, in this special issue) have received far more research attention. Grounded in motivational systems theory, Kim and Lee examine within- and between-person relations of positive and negative emotions with subjective (i.e., subjective ratings of job search behaviors) and objective (i.e., number of resumes submitted) pre-transition behaviors among Korean college students. Multilevel analyses indicate a positive relationship between positive and negative emotions to job search behaviors at the within- and between-person levels. However, positive and negative emotions are unrelated to the number of resumes submitted. These findings indicate that emotions can play a significant role in the school-to-work transition preparation, at least regarding self-reported job search behavior. The results also suggest that a moderate level of stress, here in the form of negative emotions, may not always be harmful in the school-to-work transition. Instead, they can operate as a motivating force that allows students to stay alert and focused as they prepare to transition from school to work.

### **Lo Presti, Capone, Aversano, and Akkermans<sup>2</sup>**

Lo Presti and colleagues investigate students' career competencies, including cognitive competencies (i.e., career self-efficacy, career insight) and behavioral competencies (i.e., career planning), as predictors of subjective career success after graduation. Among a sample of Italian University graduates, they find that career competencies at graduation lead graduates to more actively developing their employability (e.g., through work-related knowledge and experiences), which positively predicts subjective career success six months

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<sup>2</sup> This manuscript underwent the standard external review process of the *Journal of Career Development*.

after graduation. Further, similar to other special issue articles (Neuenschwander & Hofmann; Somerville & Scholarios; Sawitri & Creed), Lo Presti et al. investigate how the effects of individual agency (i.e., career competencies and employability activities) are contingent upon contextual factors (i.e., graduates' satisfaction with the resources provided by the educational context). Findings indicate that the direct and indirect links between career competencies and subjective career success are especially pronounced for graduates who are strongly satisfied with the choice of their academic program. However, unexpectedly, the direct positive effect of career competencies on subjective career success is particularly pronounced when graduates are *unsatisfied* with other aspects of their academic education. In other words, when graduates are unsatisfied with the level of achievement of their career goals during the program, or when they are unsatisfied with the occupational prospects that the program offered, they feel less successful. This result indicates that graduates may feel a deficit in their employability when unsatisfied with some aspects of their educational program because of the unsatisfactory academic experiences. This reduced satisfaction may motivate them to actively turn their career competencies into activities that enhance their employability. These findings are in line with Kim and Lee in this special issue, who find that more negative emotions are related to more job search behaviors: The findings from Lo Presti and colleagues indicate that if graduates perceive a mismatch between their desired and actual career progress (i.e., a deficit), this is not univocally harmful, but can also motivate them to craft their careers by actively increasing their employability, at least those graduates who possess well-developed career competencies. In all, the study contributes to the school-to-work transition literature by unraveling a behavioral mechanism (i.e., employability activities) that graduates can use to craft their careers and feel successful.

### **Neuenschwander and Hofmann**

Neuenschwander and Hofmann present a social cognitive model of work adjustment through the school-to-work transition. Similar to Sawitri and Creed, they use social-cognitive

career theory (Lent et al., 1994) to investigate how individual agency (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs ) interact with environmental factors (i.e., parental support during career decision-making) to affect person-job (P-J) fit in the first year of vocational education and training (VET) as a post-transition outcome. Based on Swiss adolescents, their findings indicate that adolescents with higher self-efficacy beliefs in the seventh grade of compulsory school gain more accurate knowledge about the world of work and anticipate higher P-J fit in ninth grade. Subsequently, this relates to better adjustment after the transition in the first year of VET in a higher P-J fit. Further, in line with the findings of Sawitri and Creed, the results from Neuenschwander and Hofmann's study illustrate that supportive contextual factors, such as parental career support, are particularly relevant for adolescents who have not (yet) developed strong agentic skills (i.e., low self-efficacy beliefs). In addition, Neuenschwander and Hofman investigate the role of supportive company strategies during VET for facilitating the adjustment of newcomers as a contextual factor. This approach is in line with recent calls to integrate factors at different levels in school-to-work transition research (e.g., individual-level, family-level, and organizational-level) to better represent the complex school-to-work transition process (Akkermans, Blokker et al., 2021). Further, high levels of fit during VET and the subsequent transition into work can be a good starting point for a sustainable career. Indeed, a good fit of personal needs and abilities with the supplies and requirements of the job or career (i.e., person-career fit) are key drivers of a sustainable career in terms of long-term productivity, well-being, and health (de Vos et al., 2020).

### **Ruschoff, Kowalewski, and Salmela-Aro**

Ruschoff and colleagues investigate a thus far largely overlooked but highly relevant contextual factor in the school-to-work transition: the role of peers (e.g., Duriez et al., 2013). Peers may function as important role models of how to transition from school to work. Specifically, based on social-cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994), Ruschoff et al. investigate how peers' appraisals of their career goals relate to adolescent's early post-

transition outcomes. Results based on a Finnish sample show that having peers who positively appraise their goals as attainable at age 17 is associated with more positive transition outcomes at age 20 regarding having reached a (temporarily) satisfactory transition outcome, which adolescents intended to maintain. Conversely, negative peer appraisals show no associations with this transition outcome. Further, in line with a sustainable perspective on the school-to-work transition, Ruschoff and colleagues investigate life satisfaction at age 20 as an additional post-transition outcome but did not find any significant effects of peer goal appraisals. The finding that peers' goal appraisals predict some post-outcomes but not others illustrates that idiosyncratic relations exist between the manifold predictors and outcomes of the school-to-work transitions and further highlights the importance of carefully selecting predictors and outcomes on theoretical consideration.

### **Okay-Somerville and Scholarios**

Okay-Somerville and Scholarios also contribute to the agency and context debate in school-to-work transition research (cf. Sawitri & Creed; Neuenschwander & Hofmann; Masdonati et al., in this special issue). Based on goal setting theory, they examine the extent to which individual agency, in the form of job search strategies, can explain successful outcomes of the university-to-work transition (i.e., employment in jobs with high skill use; qualification-job match). They also examine whether individual agency can help overcome potential contextual constraints imposed by labor market ambiguity during the transition. Okay-Somerville and Scholarios conceptualize job search strategies as self-regulatory activities with different degrees of goal-directedness (i.e., focused, exploratory, haphazard). They contextualize their study within two contrasting graduate labor markets (arts, humanities, and social sciences, AHSS vs. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, STEM) with typically high or low labor market ambiguity. Based on two-wave survey data of Scottish university graduates, their findings indicate that pre-transition job search strategies do not explain (i.e., not mediate), yet differently impact (i.e., moderate) successful transition

outcomes one year after graduation. Specifically, although AHSS graduates report a significantly lower perceived qualifications match one year after graduation, there is no support for the role of job search strategies in explaining the link between degree subject and successful transition for any of the outcomes. However, significant interaction effects between degree subject and job search strategies indicate that fully exploring opportunities is particularly beneficial for STEM graduates (i.e., low ambiguity context). Yet, a more focused job search is helpful for AHSS graduates (i.e., high ambiguity context). Thereby, these findings highlight that a successful school-to-work transition is an interplay between individual agency and structural constraints. Similar job search strategies may have different impacts contingent upon the structure of opportunities in graduate labor markets. In addition, Okay-Somerville and Scholarios investigate post-transition outcomes that represent the *quality* of employment, such as perceived skill use at work or perceived job quality in terms of autonomy or job control. In doing so, their study positions the school-to-work transition as a first attempt to access decent work (see also Masdonati et al., in this special issue) that may provide a sound basis for lifelong career sustainability.

### **Masdonati, Massoudi, Blustein, and Duffy**

The last article of this special issue is a conceptual contribution by Masdonati et al., who adopt a multidisciplinary lens and adapt and apply the psychology of working theory (Duffy et al., 2016) to the specificities of the school-to-work transition. Under this perspective, they conceptualize the school-to-work transition as a first attempt to access decent work. Specifically, they highlight how distal contextual factors in terms of socioeconomic constraints (e.g., socioeconomic status) and marginalization (e.g., low educational attainment) relate to school-to-work transition success (e.g., education-employment fit). In turn, this fosters favorable post-transition outcomes in terms of decent work and meaningful work. Further, they specify how the effects of distal predictors of school-to-work transition success are transmitted through more proximal personal factors in

terms of psychosocial resources (e.g., career adaptability) and identity (e.g., vocational identity). Finally, they also highlight the role of contextual (e.g., social support) and personal (e.g., critical contentions) boundary conditions within these processes. As such, this conceptual paper brings together several findings from the other special issue studies, such as the role of contextual boundary conditions on school-to-work transitions in the form of supportive personal relations (parents: Neuenschwander & Hofmann; Sawitri & Creed; peers: Ruschoff et al.), educational background (Lo Presti et al.) or labor market conditions (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios), as well as mediating variables in the school-to-work transition process in terms of psychosocial resources (career adaptability: Marciniak et al.; self-efficacy: Sawitri & Creed; Neuenschwander & Hofmann). Further, in line with Neuenschwander and Hofman, Masdonati et al. stress that fit is an important indicator of school-to-work transition success, which relates to contemporary ideas of person-career fit as a core driver of career sustainability (de Vos et al., 2020). In line with this, Masdonati et al. say that there is more to the school-to-work transition than merely finding a job after school, a perspective that is also taken by other articles in this special issue (Ruschoff et al.; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios).

### **Current School-to-Work Transitions: Core Contributions of the Special Issue Articles**

#### ***Individual Agency Unfolds Within Contexts***

The articles in this special issue illustrate the relevance of different manifestations of individual agency in the school-to-work transition process. To illustrate, they show the relevance of adolescents' self-efficacy beliefs (Lo Presti et al.; Marciniak et al.; Masdonati et al.; Neuenschwander & Hofmann; Sawitri & Creed), proactivity (Sawitri & Creed), job search strategies (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios), career insights and career planning (Lo Presti et al.), career adaptability (Marciniak et al.; Masdonati et al.), employability activities (Lo Presti et al.), and preparatory behaviors (Sawitri & Creed; Kim & Lee). Overall, these studies highlight that individual agency is an important driver of school-to-work transition success. These findings are in line with influential theoretical models used in the school-to-work

transition (e.g., the social-cognitive career theory), according to which a career – from the very beginning on – is primarily shaped by the individual. However, also in line with the social-cognitive career theory, which served as the theoretical background for several articles in this special issue (Sawitri & Creed; Neuenschwander & Hofmann; Ruschoff et al.), the included articles also stress the relevance of contextual factors. Specifically, the articles in this special issue highlight that family context, for example, in terms of parental support (Marciniak et al.; Neuenschwander & Hofmann), fit between the adolescent's career aspiration and their parents' aspirations for them (Sawitri & Creed), supportive peer networks (Ruschoff et al.), organizational support (Neuenschwander & Hofmann), satisfaction with one's career preparation during education (Lo Presti et al.), and macro-level factors such as the characteristics of the educational system (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios; Masdonati et al.) are essential contextual factors that can provide more or less ideal surroundings for school-to-work transitions. In addition, the studies were conducted in various national contexts, such as Finland, Indonesia, Italy, Korea, Scotland, or Switzerland, taking into account different macro-contexts in which school-to-work transitions unfold.

Notably, several studies highlight that individual agency and context factors should not be considered in isolation but work conjointly: Agency and contextual factors interactively can provide more or less favorable constellations for school-to-work transitions. For example, supportive parents can compensate for the otherwise detrimental effects of a lack of individual agency in terms of proactivity (Sawitri & Creed) or self-efficacy (Neuenschwander & Hofmann) on pre-transition and post-transition outcomes (Sawitri & Creed; Neuenschwander & Hofmann, respectively). These findings support recent theorizing on sustainable careers, which advocates a dynamic and system perspective on career development in which individual and contextual factors interact (De Vos et al., 2020).

Future research may contribute to the agency-context debate by investigating *fit* or *ideal constellations* of individual agency and context and how this affects the school-to-work

transition process and its outcomes. Specifically, individuals who have not (yet) developed strong agency need, and might especially benefit from, a highly supportive context during the school-to-work transition. This idea is in line with Masdonati et al. and Okay-Somerville and Scholarios in this special issue, who actively question the pre-eminence of individual agency explanations for school-to-work transition development. On the other hand, individual agency – if already well-developed – is especially relevant and comes to its full expression in low supportive contexts. Hence, adolescents who already possess well-developed agentic skills should not be "over-supported" such that their agency is not undermined and can further develop and serve as an important resource through lifelong sustainable career development. This may mean that until young adults develop a certain level of agency, they significantly benefit from supportive contexts. Later on, support may become more important for some than for others during the school-to-work transition.

Importantly, future empirical studies and practical efforts should also consider that agency and context interact in complex temporal sequences (cf. Masdonati et al.). For example, more favorable contexts (e.g., more parental and peer support) provide more opportunities to develop individual agency (e.g., more self-efficacy). This perspective implies that individuals who grow up in more favorable contexts may also be the ones that develop more agency. Such an assumption is in line with the resources caravan principle (Hobfoll et al., 2018), indicating that resources tend to come together and that individuals who already have more resources also more easily build further resources. Such unequal starting points may also contribute to potential Matthew effects, where young adults in advantaged positions may develop their employability relatively quickly. In contrast, those who start from a disadvantaged position may find it more challenging to develop their employability (Forrier et al., 2018). Yet, individual agency may also shape contexts into more favorable support mechanisms, for example, through carefully selecting the right job search strategies (cf. Okay-

Somerville & Scholarios). We encourage scholars to conduct longitudinal qualitative and quantitative studies to unravel these complex relationships.

### ***Individual Agency: Beyond Cognition and Behavior***

Individual agency is a key determinant of a successful school-to-work transition, as highlighted above. Many studies, including those in this special issue, primarily investigated cognition-based manifestations of agency. For example, they examined self-efficacy beliefs (Sawitri & Creed; Neuenschwander & Hofmann), outcome expectations (Swariti & Creed), and job search strategies (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios). Further, goals, as another cognition-based manifestation of individual agency, have been at the center of school-to-work transition research (e.g., Marciniak et al., in this special issue). Also, agentic behaviors have received attention in this special issue, such as job search behaviors (Sawitri & Creed; Kim & Lee), job search strategies (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios), and employability activities (Lo Presti et al.). There is no doubt that cognitions are important determinants of school-to-work transition success. Yet, human behavior in general and agentic behavior in the school-to-work transition is also determined by other factors than cognition. The study by Kim and Lee in this special issue points to one such aspect: Based on motivational systems theory (Ford, 1992), they investigate emotions as motivators of job search behaviors and find a positive relationship between positive emotions and job search behaviors at the between- and within-person level. This finding highlights the relevance of non-cognitive factors, such as emotions, in the school-to-work transition process.

One reason for the predominant focus on cognitive indicators of agency in the school-to-work transition likely stems from its most influential theories. For example, social-cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) and career construction theory (Savickas, 2002) predominantly focus on cognitive aspects of career agency, such as agentic attitudes or goals. Future research on the school-to-work transition may incorporate models that also include non-cognitive factors in the school-to-work transition process, such as the motivational

systems theory (Ford, 1992) or the theory of proactive motivation (Parker et al., 2010) (for such an example, see Valero & Hirschi, 2016). Further, theoretical perspectives that have received less attention so far, such as the career inaction model (Verbruggen & de Vos, 2020), might provide a fruitful theoretical basis for this attempt. This career inaction model highlights why negative emotions such as anxiety or fear can induce individuals to postpone decision-making or postpone making the desired change. This idea might also apply to predict and explain postponing of decision-making and inaction in the school-to-work transition. Considering emotions in the school-to-work transition process may become even more relevant in the future as the contexts within school-to-work transitions unfold are characterized by increasing uncertainty, complexity, and less predictability.

This lack of predictability during school-to-work transitions also emphasizes the crucial role of unpredictable events during this period. As mentioned before, research has heavily emphasized individual agency and the "plannable" nature of the transition into work. Yet, studies have demonstrated the critical role of chance in this process. For example, Hirschi (2010) showed that chance events happen to most young adults and can profoundly impact their future careers. Similarly, Blokker et al. (2019) showed that career shocks – defined as disruptive and extraordinary external events that trigger deliberate career thoughts (Akkermans et al., 2018) – impact the role of career competencies and career success in young workers' employability development. In their conceptual work on career shocks, Akkermans, Collings et al. (2021) argued that many job search processes likely start with a career shock. Indeed, Rummel et al. (2019) showed that career shocks could trigger transitions between education, paid employment, and entrepreneurship. Therefore, given the critical role of job search in school-to-work transitions, we argue that scholars need to include career shocks in their studies on the transition from education to work. Moreover, examining career shocks and career inaction together may be a valuable direction to pursue, as unexpected events may suddenly shock young adults into or out of career inaction.

### ***Sustainable and Protean School-to-Work Transitions***

Another important insight that the current special issue provides is that the school-to-work transition is more than simply finding a job after school. The articles highlight that a successful school-to-work transition can also mean that one finds a position in correspondence with one's education (Ruschoff et al.; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios), and, in the mid-term and long-term, attain decent and meaningful work and sustained career prospects (Masdonati et al.). Further, several articles include well-being, such as life satisfaction, as a relevant school-to-work transition outcome (Ruschoff et al.; Marciniak et al., for a review). This idea is in line with a recent trend to focus on the long-term sustainability of careers (De Vos et al., 2020), also specifically among young adults (Akkermans, Blokker et al., 2021; de Vos et al., 2019). The focus on subjective indicators of a successful school-to-work transition (e.g., Lo Presti et al.) is also in line with the concept of protean careers (e.g., Hall, 2004; Hall et al., 2018), according to which subjective or "psychological" career success, is equally or even more important than traditional indicators of career success (e.g., in terms of salary or promotions). The sustainable and protean career perspectives imply looking at a broader range of essential transition outcomes, including happiness, health, and productivity. Also, the focus of Kim and Lee on emotions is in line with such a sustainable career perspective, highlighting that happiness in the form of positive emotions during the school-to-work transition can be a good starting point for a sustainable career. We also see similarities between the sustainable career perspective and Masdonati et al.'s ideas about decent work and the psychology of work theory (PWT) (Duffy et al., 2016) during school-to-work transitions. These theoretical lenses supplement each other in their focus on inclusive career paths and their emphasis on an active interplay between individual and contextual factors. They also complement each other, as PWT focuses on overcoming challenges regarding labor market entry and the sustainable career perspective highlights the subsequent long-term sustainable career development. As such, we invite scholars to explore this

potential mutual enrichment of PWT and sustainable careers in future research on school-to-work transitions and, more generally speaking, career development and success.

Further, by including outcomes before and after the school-to-work transition, the articles in this special issue reflect that the school-to-work transition is a dynamic process that evolves over time. This finding is also in line with the sustainability perspective on careers, according to which career sustainability evolves in a cyclical and self-regulatory process of resource development and protection (de Vos et al., 2019; de Vos et al., 2020). From this perspective, the school-to-work transition is an essential initial sequence within an individual's career sustainability (Akkermans, Blokker et al., 2021), also referred to as having a "sustainable start." Therefore, future theoretical models and empirical work on the school-to-work transition may benefit from more explicitly integrating theoretical models and empirical findings of protean or sustainable careers (cf. Steiner et al., 2019), for which the school-to-work transition can be considered an initial step.

### ***Conceptualizations and Operationalizations of School-to-work Transitions***

Another key takeaway from this special issue is that there seems to be no "*one and only*" way that leads to a successful school-to-work transition. Rather, it appears that "many roads lead to Rome", illustrated by the articles in this special issue. For example, Sawitri and Creed find that more congruence between parents and adolescents regarding career matters predicts more job search behaviors. Kim and Lee find that more positive emotions predict this same outcome. This emphasis on equifinality (Kruglanski et al., 2011), defined as when the same end state can be reached by different means, seems especially relevant in the current context: Major changes in the labor markets (e.g., digitization, globalization) have made the school-to-work transition more complex and less linear (cf. Akkermans, Blokker et al., 2021), thereby also increasing the manifoldness of possible school-to-work transition paths.

Although equifinality seems to be a reality in the context in which current school-to-work transitions unfold, it is also important to stress that not *all* roads may lead to Rome. For

example, Kim and Lee find that positive and negative emotions impact subjective ratings of job search behaviors, but not the number of resumes submitted. Ruschoff and colleagues find that having peers who positively appraise their own goals as attainable is related to reaching a vocational state with which one is satisfied, but not life satisfaction. These findings illustrate the importance of school-to-work transition researchers paying close attention to carefully elaborating on the idiosyncratic relations between predictors, processes, and outcomes based on theoretical models. Further, it is also crucial to choose an appropriate study design (e.g., panel study, dyadic diary study), depending on the theoretical assumptions concerning time spans of the effects of predictors on outcomes or changes in the outcomes.

Another relevant aspect about school-to-work transitions highlighted in this special issue is that there is also heterogeneity in what is considered a successful school-to-work transition. As such, the articles in this special issue investigate various indicators of a successful school-to-work transition. Examples are person-job fit (Neuenschwander & Hofmann), reaching a vocational or educational state with which one is satisfied and which one intends to remain (Ruschoff et al.), job quality and qualifications match (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios), and decent and meaningful work (Masdonati et al.). In line with the assertion that there are many indicators of a successful school-to-work transition, Akkermans and colleagues (2021) recently suggested using the term "adaptive" school-to-work transitions. This term has less of a normative tone and considers that "successful" school-to-work transitions may not mean the same for all adolescents. It is also in line with the principle of multifinality, defined as when the same means can lead to different outcomes, in this case, different adaptable school-to-work transition outcomes.

This emphasis on multifinality seems to match the reality that adolescents and young adults today face. Thus, it can be seen as an advantage of the current school-to-work transition research. However, researchers may also pay close attention to avoid jingle-jangle fallacies (Kahn, 1927) that would bear the risk of a fragmentation of the school-to-work transition

literature (cf. Marciniak et al., in this special issue). As such, one way to advance the school-to-work transition literature could be the development of a multidimensional conceptualization and measure of a "successful" or "adaptive" school-to-work transition. Such a multifaceted measure allows considering the different facets that constitute a successful or adaptive school-to-work transition. It also provides a better accumulation and comparison of research findings and advances theoretical knowledge about school-to-work transitions. Based on this, recommendations could be made for practice.

### **Conclusion**

This special issue aims to point out and reflect upon current trends in the school-to-work transition research as a basis and inspiration for future innovative school-to-work transition research. We learn from the studies included in the special issue that current school-to-work transition researchers are interested in adequately depicting the complex interplay between individual agency and supportive context factors and how different constellations relate to school-to-work transition outcomes. Further, school-to-work transition researchers start to enlarge the predominant focus on cognition- and behavior-based aspects of agency as determinants of school-to-work transition success and include other aspects, such as emotions. Also, we observe that school-to-work transition researchers start incorporating into their conceptualizations of (successful) school-to-work transitions insights and concepts from current trends in the careers literature, such as about sustainable careers. Finally, we note that current school-to-work transitions researchers acknowledge the significant variability in our understanding of what it means to complete the school-to-work transition successfully. While such an approach is highly desirable, it also bears some pitfalls that researchers might consider in future research. We hope that this special issue will serve as a map that young people and their key others can use along the exciting journey of their transition from school to work, which hopefully guides them into a safe harbor, also when times may be sometimes turbulent.

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