

Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Training: A Case Study of an Italian University Student

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AUTHOR NOTE

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Abstract

This chapter presents a case study which describes the application of the Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Training with a final-year postgraduate female biology student, Erica. The chapter presents an overview of theory that is relevant to the world of work and the conceptual dimensions of intrapreneurial self capital (ISC). Training for ISC aims to assist young people to identify their personal strengths in terms of intrapreneurship and career adaptability. A qualitative instrument, the Life Adaptability Qualitative Assessment (LAQuA) was administered before and after the training to detect meaningful changes in the participant's narratives about career adaptability and enhanced reflexivity. The LAQuA coding system revealed enhancements to the participant's awareness about her personal intrapreneurial resources and career adaptability. The relevance of ISC to employability and career services in education contexts is discussed along with recommendations for research into ISC training.

Keywords: intrapreneurship, intrapreneurial self capital; Life Adaptability Qualitative Assessment, LAQuA, career adaptability

Introduction

The 21st century is characterized by instability and unpredictability in the world of work. The pace of change (Rosa, 2015) requires people to respond more effectively and efficiently to societal demands, all the while adapting to change as an opportunity to grow and to learn knowledge and skills to deal with inherent challenges in contemporary society (Di Fabio, 2014a, 2014b). People are required to use flexibility, creativity, innovation, and to express their talents and potentiality to reach a satisfying and productive life (Guichard, 2013; Savickas, 2011). Yet, young people feel often uncertain about myriad paths they could follow to a positive future for themselves and to contribute fruitfully to society (Di Fabio, Kenny, & Claudius, 2016). They are unsure, for example, about their university degree qualifications providing for career opportunities after graduation (Peiró, Sora, & Caballer, 2012). In this paper, we argue that it is important to assist young people to manage increasingly numerous challenges in transitions in the world of work. It seems important, therefore, that scholars, particularly in the psychological fields, develop new constructs, measures, and interventions to enhance the capacity of people to adapt to the contemporary world of work. To that end, we articulate the construct Intrapreneurial Self-Capital (ISC, Di Fabio, 2014c) as a tool for scholars and practitioners to address the complex world of work.

Conceptual Foundations of Intrapreneurial Self-Capital

ISC represents a *core* of individual intrapreneurial attributes that allow people to deal with career and life construction changes through the creation of innovative solutions to critical situations, and to turn constraints into resources (Di Fabio, 2014c, p. 100). ISC is based upon the notion *intrapreneur*—those individuals who develop and make efforts to implement innovative ideas within the organization in which they work, knowing both its limitation and possibilities (Honig, 2001). In summary, ISC can be described as self-perceptions with regard to: a positive self-evaluation; commitment, control and challenge in one's own life; abilities to creatively solve problems; abilities to cope with adversity in an adaptive way; a pursuit to develop one's skills;

ability to use decision-making skills in every context, and to make decisions accurately and adaptively (Di Fabio, 2014c). Thus, ISC refers to individuals as *intrapreneurs* of their lives. This perspective is conceptually useful with respect to their creating new chapters of their life stories that are meaningful for confronting perceived discrepancies in their life amidst their contextual constraints (Di Fabio & Van Esbroeck, 2016).

ISC is a higher order construct composed by seven constructs: core self-evaluation, hardiness, creative self-efficacy, resilience, goal mastery, decisiveness, vigilance (Di Fabio, 2014c). Core Self-Evaluation (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003) represents a positive self-concept in terms of self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and the absence of pessimism. Hardiness denotes an individual combination of beliefs about the self and the world and how to interact with this world; it includes three dimensions: commitment, control and challenge (Maddi, 1990). Creative Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perception of the ability to deal with and creatively solve problems. It involves the perception to have problem solving skills and to be able to produce new ideas (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Resilience regards the perceived ability to cope adaptively with difficulties and to apply adaptive strategies to face discomfort and troubles (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Goal Mastery is related to constantly evolving skills and achieving the best level of performance in activities that are conducive to this result (Midgley et al., 2000). Decisiveness denotes the perceived ability to timely make decisions in any life environment. Vigilance can be considered as an adaptive decision-making style described as an accurate and adaptive search for significant information and the careful examination of each option before making a choice (Mann, Burnett, Radford, & Ford, 1997). The Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Scale (ISCS, Di Fabio, 2014c) was developed to measure ISC.

These constructs selected to reflect ISC are associated with career outcomes, such as performance, employability, career decision-making self-efficacy and the lack of career decision-making difficulties (Di Fabio, 2014c). Thus, ISC is a key protective factor important for reducing risks of career and self decision-making troubles, distress, and failures, rather than focusing on

explicit problems (Di Fabio, 2014c). ISC can promote adaptations particularly for exploring future challenges, and changing schemas towards more flexibility (Di Fabio & Van Esbroeck, 2016) in order to achieve successful results, meaningful objectives (Di Fabio, 2014c) and well-being (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, & Bucci, 2017). ISC is conceptually situated in a preventive perspective (Hage et al., 2007; Kenny & Di Fabio, 2009; Kenny & Hage, 2009; Kenny, Horne, Orpinas, & Reese, 2009) and a lifelong development perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016). Having summarized the conceptual foundations of ISC and its potential utility for career self-management, we now turn to the challenge of enhancing individuals' ISC by a specific training regime.

Training for ISC

According to a positive preventive perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015; Di Fabio et al., 2016; Hage et al., 2007; Kenny & Hage, 2009) it is important to emphasize and enhance personal strengths (Di Fabio, 2014c, 2015a; Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2012a, 2012b, 2016; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009, 2012, 2016; Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, ISC Training should be administered early and before transitions, especially to young people in uncertain conditions, such as students who are dealing with an important transition from the university to the world of work (Di Fabio, 2014c).

ISC training involves individuals reflecting on their career and life (Di Fabio & Van Esbroeck, 2016). ISC Training begins with a first session focused on the exercise "The Book of My Life Story" to encourage reflection on one's whole life. This exercise also comprises reflection on "The Future Chapter of My Life Story". The next three sessions regard the elements of ISC. The second session addresses positive self-concept and hardiness, the third session is about creative self-efficacy and resilience, the fourth session is related to goal mastery, decisiveness and vigilance. The exercises within each session are prepared in three levels: a first level to inspire reflection for the self-evaluation of each ISC element, a second level to encourage the detection of specific positive aspects in relation to each ISC element, and a third level to recognize aspects within past, present and future chapter/s in the individual's life story, in order to positively explicit

the elements of ISC. The chapter/s has/have to be graphically highlighted and subsequently used to deeply analyse motivations and dimensions that can be exploited to define accurately ISC elements. Furthermore, specific exercises to enhance each particular element are administered to the participants. The fifth session addresses thought validation to reach new authorship in constructing the next chapter in individual's life-story. Attention is paid to personal strategies to reach clear expression and enhancement of intrapreneurial resources. At one level, the process of ISC training (e.g., reflective story) resembles other narrative career counseling approaches focused on the creation of new perspectives and stories that foster career adaptations in response to conflicts and challenges (e.g., My Career Chapter; McIlveen, 2015, 2017). The feature that distinguishes ISC training from these other approaches is its focus on enhancing qualities of intrapreneurship.

In this chapter, we describe the case study of a female student, Erica, who was concerned about her job placement and work possibilities. The case study describes how Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Training was applied and how it helped the participant to increase her awareness of personal intrapreneurial resources.

The Case of Erica

Erica (a pseudonym) was 24 years old and is close to master's degree in biology at the University of Florence in Italy. Erica was very worried about her job placement and unsure about her career resources, so she attended the career service of the School of Psychology at the University of Florence. Erica felt unsure about how to leverage the knowledge and skills acquired during her university education. Erica participated in Intrapreneurial Self-Capital (ISC) Training to resolve her concerns and confusion, and to discover her personal intrapreneurial attributes and resources, and facilitate self-awareness (Di Fabio, 2014c; Di Fabio & Van Esbroeck, 2016).

Evaluation Instrument

Life Adaptability Qualitative Assessment (LAQuA). The LAQuA (Di Fabio, 2015b) is a new qualitative instrument that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of career counseling and

education interventions. LAQuA qualitatively assesses career adaptability by using 12 written questions about *Concern*, *Control*, *Curiosity*, *Confidence*, which are the dimensions of the Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory - International Version (CAAS, Savickas & Porfeldt, 2012). There are three questions for each career adaptability dimension. The 12 written questions of the LAQuA are the following.

- Concern: 1a) What does it mean to you to be oriented toward your future? 1b) Do you think you are oriented toward your future? 1c) Why?
- Control: 2a) What does it mean to you to take responsibility for your future? 2b) Do you think you do take responsibility for your future? 2c) Why?
- Curiosity: 3a) What does it mean to you to be curious about your own future? 3b) Do you think you are curious about your future? 3c) Why?
- Confidence: 4a) What does it mean to you to have confidence in your own ability to build your future? 4b) Do you think you have confidence in your ability to build your future? 4c) Why?

Responses to the LAQuA questions given before and after training are compared. The method of comparison for evaluation uses 24 qualitative indicators related to each of the four dimensions of career adaptability. These indicators reflect the 24 items of the the CAAS.

- Concern: Anticipating, Predicting, Equipping, Involved, Strategic, Aware (of choices and transitions to be made).
- Control: Positive attitude, Autonomous, Conscientious, Assertive, Responsible, and Honest.
- Curiosity: Investigative, Developing, Inquisitive, Recognizing/Discovering, Inquiring, and Searching.
- Confidence: Productive, Mindful, Innovative, Capable, Resilient, Able to work out answers.

These 24 qualitative descriptors are used for the LAQuA Coding System, organized in five qualitative analysis change categories that allow detection of any changes or lack of change for each dimension of career adaptability at different levels of reflexivity (Increased Reflexivity, Revised Reflexivity, Open Reflexivity, Enhanced Reflexivity, and No change).

1. Increased reflexivity: it appears in two different forms (Type I and Type II). Type I: within the narratives produced post-intervention, there are the identical descriptor/s present within the narratives produced pre-intervention but with more in-depth reflexivity. Type II: within the narratives produced pre-intervention there is a lack of descriptors, whereas a descriptor of reflexivity appears within narratives produced post-intervention. Thus, there is a depth increase in reflexivity in the same descriptor/s (Type I) or an increase in reflexivity with the appearance of a descriptor/s (Type II). □
2. Revised reflexivity: descriptor/s present in narratives produced pre- intervention are no longer present at post-intervention; however, there are new or different descriptor/s. Thus, now there is a new focus on different facets of Career Adaptability.
3. Open reflexivity: in narratives produced post-intervention, there is identical descriptor/s present in narratives produced pre-intervention and with the same level of reflexivity, but there is/are new descriptor/s in addition. Thus, the previous focus is preserved and new awareness of a different facet/s of the specific Career Adaptability dimension rises.
4. Enhanced reflexivity: in narratives produced post-intervention, there is the identical descriptor/s present in narratives produced pre-intervention but with more in-depth reflexivity, and there is/are a new descriptor/s in addition. Thus, there is an expansion in the complexity regarding the dimension because there are both a depth increase in reflexivity in the same descriptor/s and also a diversification of a different facet/s of the specific Career Adaptability dimension. □
5. No change: there are two forms of no change (Type I and Type II). Type I: within the narratives produced post-intervention, there is the same identical descriptor/s present as in

the narratives produced pre-intervention and with the same level of reflexivity related to the descriptor/s. Type II: within the narratives produced pre-intervention, there is a lack of a descriptor/s, and in the narratives produced post-intervention there is still a lack of descriptors relating to the specific Career Adaptability dimension.

The LAQuA is, therefore, an instrument that may detect change (or lack of change) within narratives pre- and post-interventions specifically for the four Career Adaptability dimensions (Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence). Moreover, change is indicated by levels of reflexivity. □

Procedure

The aim of the ISC Training is to facilitate the reflection of individual for self-evaluation in relation to each component of the intervention; to encourage te recognition of positive personal aspects regarding each dimension of the intervention; and to sustain the analysis of the past through the present toward the future for identifying in individual life story the chapter/s in which the components of the ISC are expressed in an favourable manner.

Erica participated in the ISC Training (Di Fabio, 2014c; Di Fabio & Van Esbroeck, 2016) which was delivered as five sessions, of eight hours per session, over a period of five weeks. Training occurred in a group setting to deploy social cognitive influence of an audience (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012). The members were arranged in a circle, communicated in turn with the psychologist facilitator one at a time, deepening the individual's training outcomes. Thus the group participants were treated as individuals in a one-to-one intervention session but, at the same time, they could reflect on themselves and the stimuli from observing other participants in the intervention.

The LAQuA was administered before and after the ISC Training by a psychologist trained in the administration of this assessment tool. Three independent, trained expert reviewers (raters) compared the participant's responses to the 12 written questions of the LAQuA produced by the

client before and after the intervention. An interrater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was carried out to establish the level of consistency among the raters.

The study adhered to the requirements of privacy and informed consent in Italian law (Law Decree DL-196/2003) and the ethical standards for research of the Declaration of Helsinki revised in Fortaleza (World Medical Association [WMA], 2013), followed and approved by the Department of Education and Psychology of the University of Florence (Italy).

Results

The analysis of the narratives produced by Erica before and after the ISC Training were carried out by examining the LAQuA 24 qualitative indicators corresponding to Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence. The change or lack of change in the narratives before and after the intervention relying on the identified qualitative descriptors were examined using the levels of reflexivity (Increased Reflexivity, Revised Reflexivity, Open Reflexivity, Enhanced Reflexivity, and No Change).

Erica's response to the first LAQuA question before the ISC Training was: *"To me, to be oriented toward my future means being aware of what I want to do in my life, both personal and professional, and by aware of the personal and professional choices I have to made* (qualitative descriptor: Involved); and after the ISC Training it was: *"To me be oriented toward my future means to having shaped a precise project both personal and professional. After the intervention, I'm more looking positively to the future, I think to have useful tools and resources to construct my life and career project according to my values and ideals. I think that I could use my skills to search for different job opportunities and, also for a specialized internship in Italy or outside Italy. I understand that I want to improve my knowledge and competences in biology"* (identical qualitative descriptor but more in-depth reflexivity: Involved; Increased reflexivity: in the narratives produced after the ISC Training, there were identical descriptors, but they were described with more in-depth reflexivity).

Erica's response to the second LAQuA question before the ISC Training was: *"To me, to take responsibility for my future means being ready to perform autonomously the tasks and the duties that I will encounter during my path"* (qualitative descriptor: Responsible); and after the ISC Training it was: *"To me, to take responsibility for my future now means counting on myself to fulfil the activities in which I'm involved that I consider as challenge for my growth"* (identical qualitative descriptor but more in-depth reflexivity: Responsible). *"It is important for me to do different tasks and activities to test myself and to make decisions autonomously without accepting passively the advices by others"* (new, different qualitative descriptor: Autonomous). *"For me it is important to make choices carefully, being aware of the consequences for me and others"* [new, different qualitative descriptor: Conscientious; Enhanced reflexivity (E): in the narratives produced after the ISC Training, there is an identical descriptor/s but described with more in-depth reflexivity plus a new, different descriptor/s].

Erica's response to the third LAQuA question before the ISC Training was: *"To me, to be curious about my future means 'leaving open the door' to many different career possibilities and gathering many information about post-graduate courses or internships"* (qualitative descriptor: Searching); and after the ISC Training it was: *"Now I think to be very curious about my future, and I want to know more in-depth post-graduate courses or internships for opening career opportunities"* (identical qualitative descriptor: Searching); *"I would like to examine different career fields where I could express my talents, for example doing internships in specific organization to observe the context and the ways in which people do their work"* [new, different qualitative descriptor: Recognizing/Discovering; Open reflexivity (O): in the narratives produced after the ISC Training, there is an identical descriptor/s – with the same level of reflexivity in presenting the descriptor – plus a new, different descriptor/s].

Erica's response to the fourth LAQuA question before the ISC Training was: *"To me, to have confidence in my own abilities to build my future means to be aware of my skills and the ways in which they can be used to construct my life"* (qualitative descriptor: Capable); and after

the ISC Training it was: *“I think that to have confidence in my own abilities to build my future means to deal successfully with the daily activities and to accept the challenges in my personal and professional life. I think that learning new skills and updating my knowledge is important to identify more career opportunities”* [new, different qualitative descriptor: Productive; Revised reflexivity R: in the narratives produced after the ISC Training, the previous descriptor/s has disappeared, and a new, different descriptor/s has appeared].

Discussion

The value of this case study regards the importance of enhancing personal resources of young people who deal with uncertain and unsecure context within a positive preventive perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015; Di Fabio et al., 2017; Hage et al., 2007; Kenny & Hage, 2009). Students who are close to graduation have to overcome a relevant transition from the university to the world of work. They need thereby to become more aware of their personal strengths and the possibility to improve them (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016; Di Fabio et al., 2016). The ISC Training is an intervention to help young people to enhance their individual resources in order to timely answers to the demands of the 21st century (Di Fabio, 2014c; Di Fabio & Van Esbroeck, 2016).

In this case study, the analysis of the narratives produced by Erica before and after the intervention, through the LAQuA coding system (Di Fabio, 2015b), denoted the evolution of her beliefs about herself and her career. The increase in the level of reflexivity is evident in all the four dimensions of adaptability (Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence). With respect to Concern, Erica understood that she is engaged in identifying and realizing her personal and professional project. As for Control, for Erica is important to being able to accomplish her tasks and activities, to make decision independently and to take the responsibility for the possible consequences. In her Curiosity, Erica stressed the importance of open different career opportunities, collecting much information on post-graduate courses and internships in order to learn new knowledge and skills through particular training and direct experiences in specialized

organizations. As for her Confidence, Erica understood that she could use her knowledge and skills to deal successfully with her tasks and to accept changes and challenges; she realized also that she could improve her competences after her master's graduations through different ways. After the training, Erica's narratives of awareness and the potential of her intrapreneurial resources useful for a successful career and life management. Overall the changes in the narratives before and after the ISC Training indicated the effectiveness of the intervention for Erica.

Limitations

This case study revealed changes in the narratives produced by the participant after her ISC Training. An $N = 1$ case study is informative with respect to the intervention's effects for the participant's self-perceptions reflective of career adaptability; however, the generalizable effectiveness of the intervention for others needs to be confirmed by research with larger samples. Furthermore, future research should implement both qualitative and quantitative indicators of change so as to explore the evolution of narrative content and reflexivity, changes in scores for common measures of career constructs (e.g., career adaptability, self-efficacy), and, apposite to ISC, the Intrapreneurial Self-Capital Scale (ISCS, Di Fabio, 2014c). In the case of Erica, it may be informative to conduct a follow-up LAQuA evaluation 12 months after the ISC training to ascertain further evolution in her narratives.

Implications for Practice

Erica's engagement with and personal benefits from ISC suggest that being near to graduation does not limit the personal effectiveness of the program. Nonetheless, in an ideal situation, ISC should be completed in the early years of a student's studies so as to provide them more opportunities to explore and test their narratives in an educational context that is focused on their career. Career counseling interventions effectively assist clients to identify and develop their talents by enhancing key career self-management factors such as self-awareness and self-efficacy (Whiston, Li, Goodrich Mitts, & Wright, 2017). Higher education scholars argue that enhanced self-awareness about human capital (Clarke, 2017) a sense of career ownership, and good career

advice may have positive effects for students' perceptions of employability (Clarke, 2017; Donald, Baruch, & Ashleigh, 2017). Thus, career counseling practitioners working in educational settings may deliver ISC as a career education program, either independent of curricula and integrated within curricula. Case studies, such as the present one, can be useful training resources for practitioners wish to learn about ISC and its training.

Conclusion

The world of work demands higher order cognitive and behavioral competencies, particularly in knowledge intensive industries and organizations in which intrapreneurship is valued. Employers, universities and colleges, trainers and educators are interested in novel perspectives and tools to meet those demands. Training for these higher order competencies may enhance a person's employability and career sustainability. In this regard, ISC is a useful construct for conceptualizing, designing, and delivering career counseling and education that aims to develop intrapreneurship within students and workers.

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