

Shaping careers through the interplay of education, training and career-enhancing work design

Abstract:

Background: In combination with various opportunities for transitioning into tertiary education and professional career paths, the Swiss dual-track vocational education provides for a variety of careers which match different individual abilities and interests as well as different needs of the Swiss economy and employing organizations. However, technological, economic and societal changes speak to the necessity to generally increase the level of education, to develop even more agile educational systems, and to integrate education, training, and employment towards higher employability over the life course.

Research questions and hypotheses: The research project takes these developments as a starting point to ask the fundamental question of whether solely vocational careers will still be viable in the future and if so for which occupational domains and with what kind of support for individuals' sustained occupational commitment and employability. Research hypotheses concern the impact of automation potential, career opportunities, passages to tertiary education, career-enhancing work design, and further education and training on individual employability, occupational commitment, and occupational turnover.

Research design: The research project comprises three parts: (1) Statistical analyses of existing panel data will be conducted to identify occupations with high versus low occupational turnover, that is transitions into other occupations or into tertiary education, and specific characteristics of these occupations regarding automation potential, career opportunities, and available passages to tertiary education. (2) For 6-8 occupational domains with different levels of occupational turnover, statistical analyses of existing panel data, work observations, and interviews with employees and employer representatives will be carried out to assess differences regarding career-enhancing work characteristics, support for training and further education, individual employability, and employees' occupational commitment across these occupations. (3) Organizational and educational measures for supporting individuals' sustained commitment and employability in occupations with high occupational turnover will be developed and validated through a large-scale survey among employees in these occupations.

Scientific and practical contributions: By combining concepts from vocational and work psychology, a more complete picture can be obtained of what it takes to shape careers in view of more volatile job markets and the resulting requirements for more agile competence development. The measures developed and validated in part 3 of the project directly translate into recommendations regarding a carefully staged interplay of education, training, and career-enhancing work design in order to support life-long employability and career success.