

# Career adaptability among border guard officers: Group differences and psychological correlates

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**Abstract-** Career adaptability is an important psychological resource that enables individuals to effectively manage career-related challenges and transitions. The present study aimed to examine the level and selected characteristics of career adaptability among officers serving in the Mongolian border protection organization using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS). A total of 520 officers participated in the study, representing different ranks, regions, and demographic groups.

The results indicated that officers demonstrated a relatively high level of career adaptability ( $M = 85.91$ ,  $SD = 20.99$ ). Among the four dimensions, confidence showed the highest mean score, whereas concern demonstrated comparatively lower levels. Independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant gender differences. Similarly, one-way ANOVA results indicated no significant differences across rank and regional categories. However, exploratory post hoc comparisons may suggest potential differences in concern and confidence across certain groups, although these findings should be interpreted with caution.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of career adaptability as a key psychological resource in military contexts and provide practical implications for personnel development and organizational support strategies.

**Keywords-** Career adaptability, Border guard officers, Military psychology, Career development, Career Adapt-Abilities Scale

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary labor markets, career trajectories are increasingly characterized by frequent transitions, uncertainty, and rapidly changing job demands. Under such dynamic conditions, career adaptability has emerged as a key psychological resource that enables individuals to effectively manage career-related changes, transitions, and challenges [1; 2; 4]. As modern careers become less linear and more flexible, individuals are required to continuously adjust their skills, expectations, and career plans in response to evolving organizational and environmental conditions.

Career adaptability has been widely recognized as a critical factor influencing career development, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being across various occupational contexts [4; 6]. Individuals with higher levels of adaptability tend to demonstrate greater resilience, proactive behavior, and more effective coping strategies when facing uncertainty and career-related stressors [7]. These characteristics are particularly important in structured and high-demand professions. Despite the growing body of international research, studies examining career adaptability in Mongolia remain limited, particularly within military and law enforcement contexts. Military service represents a unique occupational environment characterized by strict hierarchical structures, high levels of discipline, and exposure to demanding operational conditions [8]. In such contexts, individuals are required to adapt to frequent relocations, role changes, and unpredictable work environments.

Accordingly, the present study aims to evaluate the level and characteristics of career adaptability among officers of the Mongolian border protection organization and to examine whether significant differences exist across selected demographic and professional variables.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the overall level of career adaptability among border guard officers?
2. Are there significant differences in career adaptability across demographic variables such as gender, rank, and family status?
3. Are there differences across operational and contextual conditions such as regional assignment?

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Career adaptability is a central construct in career construction theory, reflecting an individual's readiness and psychosocial resources to cope with current and anticipated career-related tasks, transitions, and challenges [1,2,3]. Within this theoretical framework, individuals are viewed as active agents who continuously construct their careers through adaptive responses to changing personal and environmental conditions [1]. As modern careers become increasingly non-linear and unpredictable, the ability to adapt has emerged as a crucial psychological resource supporting career development.

According to Savickas, career adaptability consists of four core dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence [2]. Concern refers to an individual's future orientation and awareness of career-related tasks, while control reflects self-discipline and responsibility in shaping one's career path. Curiosity involves the exploration of possible selves and alternative occupational opportunities, whereas confidence represents beliefs in one's ability to overcome obstacles and achieve career goals [2]. Together, these dimensions form a system of self-regulatory competencies that enable individuals to manage career-related challenges effectively.

Career adaptability is considered a dynamic and developmental resource that evolves over time and is influenced by both individual and contextual factors [3; 5]. The life design paradigm further emphasizes that individuals actively construct their careers through meaning-making processes, integrating personal experiences with social and environmental influences [5]. This perspective highlights the importance of adaptability not only as an individual trait but also as a process shaped by interaction with broader socio-cultural contexts.

Empirical research has demonstrated that career adaptability is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes. A meta-analysis by Rudolph et al. showed that adaptability is significantly related to adaptivity traits, adaptive behaviors, and career outcomes across diverse occupational contexts [4]. Furthermore, studies have indicated that individuals with higher levels of adaptability tend to experience greater life satisfaction, career success, and psychological well-being [6]. These findings suggest that adaptability plays a critical role in facilitating both objective and subjective aspects of career development.

In addition to career-related outcomes, career adaptability is closely linked to broader psychological constructs such as resilience, coping, and self-regulation. Individuals with higher adaptability tend to demonstrate greater flexibility, proactive behavior, and more effective coping strategies when facing uncertainty and stress [7]. This relationship highlights the integrative nature of adaptability as a psychological resource that supports both performance and well-being.

Military and law enforcement contexts represent unique occupational environments characterized by hierarchical structures, strict discipline, and high levels of responsibility [8]. In such settings, individuals are often exposed to challenging and unpredictable conditions, including geographic relocation, operational uncertainty, and demanding work environments. These conditions may increase the importance of adaptability as a key factor in maintaining both effectiveness and psychological stability.

In the context of border protection services, officers frequently operate in diverse and demanding environments, including remote areas and extreme climatic conditions. These contextual factors may intensify the need for adaptive competencies such as planning, problem-solving, and confidence in managing professional challenges. At the same time, organizational structures may both constrain and facilitate adaptability through formalized career systems and institutional expectations.

Despite increasing international attention, research on career adaptability in Mongolia remains limited, particularly within military populations [8]. Therefore, examining career adaptability among border guard officers contributes to addressing this gap in the literature. Such research not only extends existing theoretical frameworks to underrepresented contexts but also provides practical insights for personnel development, training, and organizational support strategies aimed at enhancing adaptive capacity.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Participants

The study was conducted among officers serving in the Mongolian border protection organization. A total of 520 participants were included in the sample. The participants represented different demographic and professional characteristics, including gender, rank, and regional assignment. The sampling approach can be considered purposive, as it targeted active-duty officers within the organization.

#### 3.2. Instrument

Career adaptability was assessed using the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS), originally developed by Savickas and Porfeli [2]. The instrument measures four dimensions of career adaptability: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Participants responded to items using a Likert-type scale. The internal consistency of the instrument was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which indicated a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = .977$ ).

#### 3.3. Procedure

Data were collected during the first half of 2024 using an online survey administered via Google Forms. Participation was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. This study was conducted in collaboration with the Psychological Support Division, General Authority for Border Protection of Mongolia. Participants were informed of their right to decline participation at any time. The confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were strictly maintained, and the data were used solely for research purposes.

#### 3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the overall level of career adaptability. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze differences across rank, regional assignment, and family status.

### 4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Reliability and distribution

The reliability and distribution indicators of career adaptability scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability and distribution of career adaptability scores

Indicator	Value
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.977
Cronbach's $\alpha$ if item deleted	.975 – .978
Shapiro–Wilk (W)	.965
p-value	< .001
Skewness	–0.14
Kurtosis	–0.91

The Mongolian version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .977$ ). Item-level analyses indicated that Cronbach's alpha ranged between .975 and .978 if any item was deleted, suggesting high internal consistency across scale items.

Normality testing using the Shapiro–Wilk test indicated a statistically significant deviation from normality,  $W = .965$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, skewness (–0.14) and kurtosis (–0.91) values were within acceptable ranges ( $\pm 2$ ), indicating that

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the data were approximately normally distributed and suitable for parametric analyses. The extremely high Cronbach's alpha may indicate potential item redundancy, suggesting that some items may be measuring highly similar constructs.

### 4.2. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics for total and subscale scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of career adaptability scores (n = 520)

Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Concern	6	30	20.22	5.33
Control	6	30	22.18	5.69
Curiosity	6	30	21.26	5.73
Confidence	6	30	22.24	5.79
Total score	24	120	85.91	20.99

The mean total career adaptability score was  $M = 85.91$  ( $SD = 20.99$ ), corresponding to approximately 71.6% of the maximum possible score.

Across the four dimensions, mean scores ranged from 20.22 to 22.24. The highest mean score was observed for the confidence dimension ( $M = 22.24$ ,  $SD = 5.79$ ), whereas the concern dimension demonstrated the lowest mean score ( $M = 20.22$ ,  $SD = 5.33$ ).

### 4.3. Gender differences

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in career adaptability (Table 3).

Table 3. Gender differences in career adaptability (independent samples t-test)

Dimension	Male (M)	Female (M)	t	p
Concern	20.13	20.39	0.50	.618
Control	22.11	22.34	0.57	.569
Curiosity	21.18	21.41	0.48	.631
Confidence	22.12	22.47	0.68	.498
Total	85.54	86.62	0.39	.697

The results indicated no statistically significant differences between male and female officers in total career adaptability scores or any of the four subdimensions (all  $p > .05$ ).

The effect sizes were negligible (Cohen's  $d < 0.10$ ), suggesting that gender differences in career adaptability were practically insignificant.

### 4.4. Rank differences

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences across rank categories. The results indicated no statistically significant differences in total career adaptability,  $F(4, 514) = 0.32$ ,  $p = .862$ ,  $\eta^2 = .003$  (small effect).

Similarly, no significant differences were observed in the concern dimension,  $F(4, 514) = 1.36$ ,  $p = .245$ ,  $\eta^2 = .010$ .

Although the overall ANOVA results were not statistically significant, exploratory post hoc LSD comparisons suggested that lieutenants reported slightly higher concern scores than majors (Table 4).

Table 4. Post hoc comparisons for concern by rank

Rank Comparison	Mean Difference	p
Lieutenant – Major	1.43	.041

These findings should be interpreted with caution.

Additional ANOVA results (Table 5) indicated no statistically significant differences across rank in control, curiosity, confidence, or total scores (all  $p > .05$ ,  $\eta^2 < .01$ ).

**Table 5. ANOVA results for rank differences in career adaptability**

Dimension	F	p
Control	0.282	.890
Curiosity	0.387	.818
Confidence	0.097	.984
Total	0.323	.862

**4.5. Regional differences**

Regional differences in career adaptability are summarized in Table 6. One-way ANOVA indicated no statistically significant differences in total career adaptability,  $F(4, 515) = 1.23, p = .298, \eta^2 = .009$ .

**Table 6. ANOVA results for regional differences in career adaptability**

Dimension	F	p
Concern	.84	.503
Control	.99	.410
Curiosity	1.07	.371
Confidence	1.84	.120
Total	1.23	.298

Similarly, no statistically significant differences were observed across regions in concern, control, curiosity, or confidence (all  $p > .05$ ).

Nevertheless, exploratory post hoc comparisons (Table 7) may suggest that officers serving in mountainous regions reported higher confidence scores compared to those in desert regions. This finding should be interpreted cautiously due to the non-significant overall ANOVA.

**Table 7. Post hoc comparisons for regional differences in confidence**

Comparison	Mean Difference	p
Mountain – Desert	2.28	.013

**4.6. Educational background differences**

Independent samples t-tests comparing officers who graduated from military academies and those from civilian universities (Table 8) indicated no statistically significant differences in total career adaptability or any subscale scores (all  $p > .05$ ).

**Table 8. Educational background differences in career adaptability (t-test)**

Dimension	t	p
Concern	.53	.595
Control	-.27	.787
Curiosity	1.08	.283
Confidence	.01	.996
Total	.36	.721

Effect sizes were minimal (Cohen's  $d < 0.10$ ), suggesting negligible practical differences between groups.

**4.7. Occupational differences**

One-way ANOVA analyses examining differences across occupational specialization categories (Table 9) indicated no statistically significant differences in total career adaptability,  $F(10, 475) = 0.31, p = .979, \eta^2 = .006$ , or in any of the adaptability dimensions (all  $p > .05$ ).

Table 9. ANOVA results for occupational differences in career adaptability

Dimension	F	p
Concern	0.27	.988
Control	0.41	.944
Curiosity	0.51	.885
Confidence	0.47	.907
Total	0.31	.979

#### 4.8. Family status differences

Differences across family status groups are presented in Table 10. One-way ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences in concern,  $F(4, 515) = 4.18, p = .002, \eta^2 = .031$ , curiosity,  $F(4, 515) = 3.43, p = .009, \eta^2 = .026$ , and total career adaptability score,  $F(4, 515) = 3.20, p = .013, \eta^2 = .024$ .

Table 10. ANOVA results for family status differences in career adaptability

Dimension	F	p
Concern	4.18	.002
Curiosity	3.43	.009
Confidence	2.28	.059
Control	2.13	.077
Total	3.20	.013

No statistically significant differences were observed in confidence,  $F(4, 515) = 2.28, p = .059$ , or control,  $F(4, 515) = 2.13, p = .077$ .

These results suggest that family status may be associated with certain aspects of career adaptability, although the observed effect sizes were small.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the level and characteristics of career adaptability among officers of the Mongolian border protection organization. The findings indicated that the overall level of career adaptability was relatively high, suggesting that officers possess well-developed psychological resources for managing career-related challenges and transitions.

Across the four dimensions of career adaptability, confidence demonstrated the highest mean score, while concern showed comparatively lower levels. These findings may reflect differences in future orientation and perceived readiness for career planning among officers.

The results of group comparisons indicated that most demographic and professional variables, including gender, rank, region, educational background, and occupational specialization, were not statistically significantly associated with career adaptability. These findings suggest that career adaptability may be relatively stable across different groups within the organization.

However, statistically significant differences were observed in relation to family status, particularly in the dimensions of concern and curiosity, as well as in the overall adaptability score. These results may suggest that family-related factors could play a role in shaping certain aspects of career adaptability, although the observed effect sizes were small.

The findings directly address the research questions of the study. First, the overall level of career adaptability among border guard officers was found to be relatively high. Second, no statistically significant differences were observed across most demographic variables, including gender and rank, whereas family status showed significant differences in certain dimensions. Third, no significant regional differences were identified, although exploratory comparisons may suggest potential variations.


Overall, the findings highlight the importance of career adaptability as a key psychological resource in military contexts. The results may provide useful insights for personnel development, career guidance, and organizational support strategies aimed at enhancing adaptive capacity among officers.

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