

## Education and Career Navigation: Confirmatory Evidence for Components Important to Transition Success

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Education and Career Navigation is a process that requires developing 1) self-knowledge of one's abilities, skills, interests, and values, 2) knowledge about education and work, 3) skills related to educational and career exploration, planning, and decision making, and 4) skills to implement and manage education and career paths. Research shows that individuals equipped with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors (components) in these four broad areas (dimensions) are likely to have positive education and work outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Empirical and theoretical perspectives are essential to understanding which navigation-related components contribute to these outcomes. This study sought confirmatory evidence from subject matter experts (SMEs) supporting the importance of navigation components to education and career success.

We examined the importance of navigation components during ten critical time periods, or transitions, during one's education and career development. SMEs were recruited from K–12, postsecondary, and workforce groups (n = 256). More than three-quarters (77%) of the SMEs (e.g., school counselor, career advisor, career coach)

had a master's degree or higher, and over half had worked in their current positions for more than five years. Using survey methods, SMEs rated the importance of twenty research-based components for individuals to successfully navigate a particular transition (success criterion was established for each transition). SMEs assigned ratings using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Not Important to Very Important. Mean ratings for components across transitions ranged from 3.24–4.86 with 90% of the ratings above 4.0.

While the full study focused on transitions throughout the K–Career continuum, the following highlights findings for three of these transitions. Figure 1 shows the rank order results (based on mean ratings) of the top ten education and career navigation components considered important for successfully navigating the middle school to high school, high school to college/work, and college to work transitions. For complete definitions of dimensions and components, refer to ACT Research Report *Beyond Academics: A Holistic Framework for Enhancing Education and Workplace Success* (2015-4).

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Across these transitions, most of the components in the Self-Knowledge dimension (perceptions of one's attributes and beliefs that allow for understanding the self) were ranked higher in importance than components in other dimensions. This is not surprising given the critical role that this type of information plays in helping individuals make informed educational and career decisions, contributing to stronger person-environment fit.<sup>2</sup> Such decisions occur when students are making education plans for high school, college major choices after high school, and occupation decisions in the transition to work.

Another finding is the increasing importance of experience, a component of the Environmental Factors dimension (education- and work-related information, conditions, and experiences acquired from external sources). While Experience is ranked in the top ten for navigating the middle school to high school transition successfully, its importance progressively and dramatically increases for the other two transitions. Experiential activities can help students moving into high school explore career options and clarify aspirations.<sup>3</sup> As students gain volunteer and work experience during high school and college, they are able to acquire knowledge and skills that can be leveraged on college and work applications and that provide a path to future work opportunities.

In the Integration dimension (process of combining self-knowledge and environmental factors to develop personally relevant structures that inform decisions and actions), the Goals and Action Planning components are each relatively similar in their ranked importance for the respective transitions that they cross. All three transitions include Exploration as an important component, but Exploration is ranked higher for the middle school to high school transition than the other transitions. This is a critical time period



Figure 1. Rank order results of navigation components (color coded by dimension) for middle school to high school, high school to college/work, and college to work transitions

when exploration can expose students to a wider range of education and occupation options, facilitate the process of developing career goals and realistic career plans, and encourage postsecondary planning.<sup>4</sup>

The Managing Career and Education Actions dimension (process of implementing plans that facilitate education and occupation progress) is represented in the college to work transition with two components ranked in the top ten. Search Behaviors and Implementation are essential for actively and successfully pursuing future goals.

The SME rankings highlight the need for all individuals to be knowledgeable about their skills and interests, to recognize education and work opportunities, and to develop skills that promote more informed education and career decisions and achievable plans. Moreover, these results lead to a better understanding of the navigation components that support education and career success at different levels of development, which can guide more targeted approaches to helping individuals build the knowledge and skills needed to navigate their journey successfully. ■

## Notes

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