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**Rising Scholars Conference  
Experience at Work Student Research Presentations**

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**ABSTRACT:**

What Does Not Kill You Makes You Stronger:  
How Do Past Experiences of Overcoming Adversity Lead to Better Performance at Work and Less Burnout?

Employees gain skills and "tool kits" that they use to navigate organizational life from their past experiences in life (Martin & Cote, 2019). However, not everyone has the same past experiences. Employees range in the extent to which they have experienced and overcome adversity in the past. How do these past experiences of overcoming adversity shape the ways employees effectively navigate organizations? The limited organizational scholarship on past adversity has characterized it as something to cope with, positing that how past adversity is perceived is key to employees' coping effectiveness (Stephens, Townsend, Hamedani, Destin, & Manzo, 2015; Vogel & Bolino, 2020). Yet popular press and lay theory have long professed German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche's aphorism that "what does not kill you makes you stronger." In this dissertation, I build on theories of work enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard, 2001) and post-traumatic growth (Vogel & Bolino, 2020) to empirically examine under what conditions this true: how overcoming adversity in the past can make employees stronger in organizations. I theorize that key to experiencing these benefits is strongly identifying as someone who has overcome adversity. I posit that having overcome adversity in the past makes employees "stronger" via three forms of work enrichment: affective enrichment, perspectives enrichment, and skills enrichment, thereby improving performance and reducing burnout. Additionally, I evaluate the organizational (e.g., organizational culture) and managerial (e.g., supervisor support) conditions that amplify of the positive relationship between having overcome adversity in the past and work enrichment. I test these ideas through a three-study longitudinal field investigation in a multinational corporation. Study collection is ongoing and the third study will have been completed and analyzed by the time of the conference. Practical implications include helping employees who have overcome adversity realize their full organizational potential via identifying and harnessing their unique psychological resources.

**References**

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Abisola Kúximo is a Stanford engineering PhD candidate studying occupational mobility within communities experiencing crisis. Using ethnographic techniques, she compares the process of how an organization on the U.S. West coast and one in West Africa, strive to get their local community members “better” jobs through novel training programs. Kúximo is also interested in cultural narratives of mobility, employer interpretations of micro-credentials, and the experiences of working learners.

**ABSTRACT:**

Translating the Value of Novel Credentials: A Case Study in Ghana

**MOTIVATION**

The growing need to be a continuous and lifelong learner to remain competitive has created a labor pool of students striving for new, illegitimate, and often ambiguous credentials (Laryea et al. 2021). This research is one step towards the decade-old call for "ethnographic research on credentialing processes" (Brown & Bills 2011). Building on Cottom's extensive (2017) work on for-profit colleges, micro-credentialing institutions (e.g. coding bootcamps, MOOCs) are an emerging academic form that more poignantly promises no-frill credentials for occupational mobility. Situating this research within a West African context, where formal employment is scarce and awarded largely to those collectors of many such micro-credentials, yields valuable insights into the motivations and roles of learners, employers, and educational institutions to combat the ubiquity of the region's chronic youth under- and unemployment.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

How do the relationships between micro-credentialing institutions, students, and employers evolve with the changing understanding of a novel credential? How is this understanding shaped and what are the implications for occupational mobility, credentialism, and employer hiring decisions?

**METHODS**

This project represents an ongoing data collection effort starting in July 2019, at the educational institution's founding, through Fall 2022 (severely disrupted due to the pandemic). An inductive ethnographic approach has yielded 30 interviews, 36/36 student surveys, archival data of the organizational structure, and 16 participant observation events representing over 100 hours in the field. A yearlong autoethnography, beginning in Fall 2021, enables first-hand access to the relationship between institutional administrators and employers on the value and validity of these novel micro-credentials. Earlier established connections and trust between myself and the institution's founder, has also afforded great access to classrooms, recruiting events, meetings, pitches, students, faculty, administrators, and employers.

**PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

Micro-credentialing institutions try to gain credibility (and reduce ambiguity) for their credentials through establishing personal contacts networking with hiring managers. Hiring professionals do not all agree on the value of micro-credentials or how they may address the current skills shortage. While some see it as a wonderful reskilling and training opportunity for current employees, most expressed similar concerns with the efficacy of these programs to meet skills shortages for new hires. Several hiring professionals mentioned being contacted by individual micro-credentialing programs asking them to interview their graduates, and it seems a growing number of personal contacts are being made to extend the link from micro-credentials to gainful employment. One of the most prevalent themes to come out of this conversation was the need to have job apprenticeships or work demonstrations (e.g. human capital signals) to be considered for hiring.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The looming potential for the future of work to render many humans obsolete has created a market vacuum for novel credentialing institutions to exploit. A nuanced approach to theorizing the experience of these diverse working learners is essential to understanding the trajectory of the future of work and the stubborn financialization of income inequality. Ghana, a culture with strong preference for formal credentials, represents an extreme case and apt site for observing how the emergence of a novel credential is adopted and interpreted by employers in their decision to hire.

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I am a Ph.D. Candidate in Organizational Behavior. My research interests center around two streams. The first one relates to innovation and how different organizational actions can lead to varying success of innovative outputs. The second one engages with the new world of work. In this stream of research, I seek to expand our understanding of how 21st century professionals can successfully navigate their careers as well as how technology is changing peoples' lives inside organizations. Before joining the Ph.D. program I worked as a management consultant at McKinsey & Company in New York and graduated from Harvard College with an A.B. in Economics.

**ABSTRACT:**

Employee Organization Relationships in Mobile Careers:  
Exploiting Explorers and Exploring Exploiters

This work theorizes employee-organization relationships in jobs that do not promise long-term employment security. An in-depth inductive case study of white-collar workers' experience in a professional services firm reveals two worker orientations compatible with such uncertain jobs. First, *explorers* are workers that found temporally-uncertain jobs appealing because they viewed them as avenues for personal development. High-skilled workers in this category intended to sample their employers' internal variety to discover their professional interests. Second, *exploiters* were attracted to jobs of this type, viewing them as avenues for fulfillment of clearly defined professional aspirations. They intended to use their employers' internal variety to advance along a path toward their career goals. I find that both types of workers conceptualized their professional selves in the context of their careers, rather than the currently preferred job. Their approach to work was better conceptualized as *career-crafting*, than the job-crafting theorized in prior research. My data reveal that both types of workers intended to use the job that did not promise life-long employment to acquire three types of portable capital: skills, social ties, and status. They hoped that these will improve their chances for life-long employability. Workers of the explorer and exploiter profile differed, however, in how they interacted with their organization. Analysis of their project choices reveals that the two types of professionals followed three distinctive paths while performing the same job. A *generalist* path, mostly pursued by explorers, was aimed at sampling organizational variety and developing broad knowledge across a spectrum of business practices. An *expert path*, pursued primarily by exploiters, was aimed at deepening knowledge in their area of interest. Finally, an *entrepreneur path*, also pursued primarily by exploiters, was aimed at getting experience and knowledge useful when starting a business. I find that employees pursuing each of the three paths supplied different levels of flexibility, generated different amounts of new organizational knowledge and capabilities, and displayed different propensity for risk taking. Consequently, when aggregated across individuals, their behaviors made different, but complementary, contributions to the advancement of ambidexterity on the organizational level. My data suggest, ironically, that employees of the explorer type contributed primarily to exploitation on the organizational level while those of exploiter type contributed primarily to organizational exploration.

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Laura Taylor-Kale is a fourth year PhD candidate at Stanford University in the Department of Management Science and Engineering. Her research explores how organizations, leaders and entrepreneurs build sustainable organizations and strategic partnerships to solve complex, deep-rooted societal problems. Her dissertation is an ethnography of a network designed to facilitate partnership that finance the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Prior to pursuing her doctoral studies, Laura spent nearly 20 years working in U.S. foreign economic policy and international development finance. As a senior executive in the administration of President Obama, Laura led a diverse team of trade policy professionals in facilitating the export of U.S. manufactured goods. She also worked at the World Bank, the U.S. Development Finance Corporation, and the U.S. Department of State as a career diplomat. She has lived and worked throughout Asia and Africa. Laura has numerous policy publications related to the changing nature of work and economic policy. She holds a BA from Smith College, an MPA from Princeton University, and an MBA from New York University's Stern School of Business.

## **ABSTRACT:**

### **Is This What We Should Be Doing?: Identity Formation and the Activation of Latent Identities in Meta-Organizing**

Whether designed to promote transparency and accountability in the oil and gas sector or to promote the fair trade of cocoa and coffee, meta-organizations (associations or networks comprised of organizations) increasingly navigate complex institutional environments. The extant literature on organizational identity holds that organizational conceptions of what is core, enduring and distinctive derive from an internally-driven process. Though the theory highlights the potential for environmental complexity to encourage multiple identity formation, empirical studies contend that multiple organizational identities confuse stakeholders and harm organizations. Moreover, the mechanisms for the formation of multiple organizational identities in complex contexts remain unclear. One prevailing view assumes that differences between external perceptions and internal claims lead to multiplicity. Another suggests that multiplicity forms due to internal tensions around desirable and salient attributes. I argue that both views are mistaken. Distinctions between external and internal views and between desirability and salience overlook another important factor in the formation of multiple organizational identities: latency—the unconscious and unexamined identity attributes that may be situationally triggered or context-driven. Latency, I argue, can be an important aspect of complex contexts like meta-organizing where audiences and stakeholders hold competing perceptions of what is deemed "core" about the organization. In this paper, I ask the research question: how do meta-organizations manage divergent perceptions of their identity within complex institutional contexts? Over a nine-month period, I conducted an ethnographic field study of DevNet, an organization founded to build a network of public, private, and philanthropic organizations to finance the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Through inductive, interpretive, grounded theory analysis, I uncover a process of identity activation, the strategic transformation and adoption of latent identity attributes and externally-imposed perceptions of DevNet. Once latent attributes become salient, DevNet engages in a process of identity work to reconcile and reframe conflicting identity attributes and meanings. Ultimately, DevNet transforms the meanings and simultaneously leverages multiple identities for strategic benefit. This study contributes to the nascent literature on meta-organizing and builds on the existing literature on organizational identity work where identity formation is a dynamic process. Additionally, it supports the extant literature on multiple organizational identity formation by examining the mechanisms for how latent identity attributes are activated, meanings are transformed, and multiple identities emerge. The findings challenge conventional organizational identity theory suppositions that identity formation is primarily an internally-driven process and that multiplicity harms organizations. This study may also have implications for how organizational scholars understand multi-stakeholder interactions and the identity choices facing organizations embedded in complex institutional environments.