



The relationship between career decision status and important work outcomes

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Abstract

This paper describes a longitudinal study exploring the relationship between career decision status and work outcomes (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment and performance) in a group of newly appointed graduates. Graduates employed into similar roles in a large Multinational Consultancy were tracked over 12 months at three time intervals: on appointment; 6 months after appointment and 12 months after appointment. It was concluded that job satisfaction promotes career comfort, decidedness predicts organizational commitment and this relationship is moderated by met expectations, and that neither being decided or comfortable predicts performance. Some evidence was found to suggest that those employees claiming high self-clarity (that is knowledge of their abilities, skills, and personality) were rated as higher performers. It was concluded that career decidedness is still relevant to a contemporary work environment, but that comfort with career decisions and knowledge of self (i.e. self-clarity) has the potential for far greater impact.

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1. Introduction

An important, but rarely researched assumption is that being decided will result in more satisfying careers. It could be argued that in an age characterized by complexity, continual change and chance (Bright, Pryor, & Harpham, 2005) demanding constant adaptation and

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boundaryless careers (Littleton, Arthur, & Rousseau, 2000), that being too decided about a career may be more of an impediment than an asset. Little is known about the way that decidedness develops in the context of the workplace or about the relationship between career decidedness and work outcomes, yet the objective of career counselors is to still facilitate decision-making that will ultimately lead to more satisfying careers.

Savickas (1990) makes a direct link between career attitudes and performance when he says:

‘persons who possess mature career attitudes are likely to have more successful careers because the individuals display more awareness of the career decision-making process, think more about alternative careers and try to relate their present behavior to future goals. . .’.

This assumption, while intuitively appealing, has rarely been tested.

Healy, O’Shea, and Crook (1985) assumed that people with mature career attitudes had more successful careers because their expectations were more realistic and useful in advancing careers. Their study of 158 Psychology students found a significant and positive correlation between career attitudes and age, and also the number of months employed. They proposed a model suggesting that age influenced career attitudes which in turn determined the number of months employed. Research conducted by Earl and Bright (2003) confirmed a link between age and career indecision, career certainty and decisiveness. This study also confirmed a relationship between amount of work experience gained by a student and career decision status. Volume of work appeared to be a more reliable predictor than breadth of experience. Later research utilized a longitudinal design to further explore the role of work experience in career decision making and concluded that quality of work experience (i.e. as measured by satisfaction and met expectations) predicted decidedness (Earl & Bright, 2004a). It appears that sufficient work experience, when relevant, influences career decidedness.

The primary goal of this research was to determine whether a link existed between career decision status and important work outcomes (i.e. organizational commitment, job satisfaction and performance). A secondary goal of this research was to investigate the mediating effect of met expectations. What happened to performance when a graduate who was very decided about a career found him or herself in an Organization where their expectations were not being met? Did being decided in this instance impede performance or did decided individuals focus more on their longer-term objectives, thereby minimizing the effect of any unmet expectations.

1.1. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment (OC) has been defined as the relative strength of an individual’s identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Antecedents of organizational commitment that have been identified and investigated include biographical characteristics (e.g. age and education); structural features (e.g. Organization size and hierarchy); the extent to which pre-joining expectations have been met; type of job role; and human resources practices (Sturges & Guest, 2001; Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002). Some researchers have predicted that career stage may influence organizational commitment. Cohen (1991) explored the relationship between organization commitment and career stage, measuring career stage in

two different ways. The first method of measurement was age based and employees were divided into three time frame subgroups: (a) up to 29 years, (b) 30–39 years, (c) 40+ years. The second form of measurement was tenure based with employees divided again into three subgroups: (a) up to 2 years, (b) 3–8 years, (c) 9 years or more. Cohen (1991) hypothesized that employees at later career stages were more likely to be committed as these people have a vested interest (emotional and financial) in the organization. He proposed that “The earliest period of membership is, therefore, the most critical period for turnover, and employees’ attitudes towards the organization, especially commitment at this stage, will be important factors in their decisions to stay or leave” (p. 255).

Meyer, Irving, and Allen (1998) demonstrated a link between affective commitment and positive early work experiences, after earlier calling for more longitudinal research in the area (Meyer & Allen, 1988). Sturges et al. (2002) conducted longitudinal research based on a sample of 212 graduates who were within their first 10 years of employment. They found that organizational commitment significantly declined over the 12-month study period. Sturges and Guest (2001) recognized matched expectations as an important predictor of organizational commitment. The importance of realistic and accurate pre-employment information is emphasized, but so is a better understanding about how expectations form.

Arnold and Davey (1999) explored the relationship between organizational commitment, intention to leave and experiences at work. Their longitudinal study consisted of 474 employees in the early stage of their careers (i.e. mainly graduates). They identified seven different work-related experiences on organizational commitment and found career development amongst these. When new employees join an Organization they bring with them a set of expectations about the workplace and what benefits they will receive in exchange for their labor. ‘Met expectations’ have been identified (Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992) as weakening the link to organizational commitment. It seems logical to hypothesize a strong relationship between expectations and the career decision status measure of decidedness (Jones, 1999). Underlying the act of being decided about a career decision are a set of expectations about self and the fulfillment of certain career goals.

It is expected that those people who are decided about their career choices and have their expectations met are more likely to be committed to an Organization. Those graduates with high decidedness and unmet expectations will be less organizationally committed. It is our hypothesis that being career decided partly accounts for the development of expectations and therefore commitment.

1.2. Job satisfaction

Chartrand and Walsh (1999) touched on the relationship between work satisfaction and career decidedness in a review of research about interest congruence and satisfaction. Congruence is the term applied to matching of interests and environments. It seems logical that when a person joins an Organization to undertake a role consistent with their interests that this should lead to job satisfaction. Chartrand and Walsh (1999) questioned inconsistencies in the definition of job satisfaction and the merit of comparing interests congruence to global measures of job satisfaction. One alternative suggested was to use a multi-dimensional measurement of job satisfaction with an emphasis on the type of work that people do (Chartrand & Walsh, 1999). They suggested that there is substantial evidence “that preferences for environments effectively predict occupational membership, occupational tenure and occupational change” (p. 142). It is hypothesized that a significant relationship

exists between the outcome measures of job satisfaction and career decision status. To overcome limitations outlined by Chartrand and Walsh (1999) a multi-dimensional measure of job satisfaction will be utilized.

1.3. Performance

The link between career decidedness and performance is often assumed but rarely demonstrated, due in part to relatively few attempts to measure it. One relevant study that was identified dealt with career maturity rather than career decidedness. Crook, Healy, and O'Shea (1984) report a significant link between career maturity and work achievement. In their study of 174 undergraduate college students, Crook et al. (1984) utilized a correlational design with a measure of work achievement as the work outcome measure (i.e. the design was effectively a concurrent validity study). The work achievement scale consisted of self-ratings on (1) skill level of the students' job (2) months employed in the last 36 (3) equity of job changes and (4) satisfaction with working. The measure of work achievement utilized by Crook et al. (1984) was reported as a combination of biographical information and a measure of satisfaction. It is not a measure of performance at work. Crook et al. (1984) does not report the distribution of roles across the four skill levels (i.e. managerial, technical, semiskilled or unskilled) although this information was collected. This information is perhaps relevant if the majority of work experience gained is not connected to choice of occupation (i.e. is different to what has been decided).

These results are contradicted by a meta-analysis conducted by Cohen (1991) of 30 studies involving 41 samples that reported that commitment and turnover is stronger in early career stages than mid and late-career stages. The relationships between commitment and performance were strongest in late-career stages. Cohen's research supports stronger relationships between performance and age for younger employees (up to 29 years, $r = .62$) than for the older employees (40 years or older, $r = .28$). It is hypothesized that a significant relationship exists between performance and career decision status. This is because being decided and comfortable about career choice provides graduates with a source of motivation or as Savickas suggests an insulating effect so that they are "willing to acknowledge and concede to the demands of reality" (Savickas, 1990).

Several commentators have highlighted the relative paucity of longitudinal designs in career research (e.g. Chartrand & Walsh, 1999; Savickas, 2002). This study explores the changes that take place in career decision status during the first year of employment for a group of newly appointed graduates. Data is collected across three phases: on appointment, 6 months after appointment and 12 months after appointment. It also explores the relationship between career decision status and important work outcomes (e.g. job satisfaction, organizational commitment and performance). It is hypothesized that employees who are decided and comfortable with their career decisions will also be more satisfied (hypothesis 1), more organizationally committed (hypothesis 2) and better performers (hypothesis 3).

2. Method

2.1. Design

This study utilized a longitudinal design over three phases. Data was collected on appointment (referred to as Time I), 6 months after appointment (Time II) and 12 months

after appointment (Time III). The Organization was a large consulting company employing more than 100,000 employees worldwide. Participants were drawn from offices around Australia. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the Organization it is identified throughout this study as Consulting X.

2.2. Participants

2.2.1. Time I sample

At Time I questionnaires were sent out to all 228 new graduates employed during the mid-year intake of a large Consulting Company. Covering letters requested participation in a three-part study and the signing of consent forms. A response rate of 58% was achieved, with 132 questionnaires returned. The response rate obtained exceeds the average response rate (55.6%) identified and recommended as a minimum by Baruch (1999). The sample consisted of 74 females and 56 males, one subject failed to identify their gender. Females ranged in age from 21 to 44 years with a mean age of 23 years. Males ranged in age from 21 years to 30 years with an average age of 23 years. *t*-Tests revealed no significant gender differences in the results, so the two samples were combined.

2.2.2. Time II sample

Six months after appointment the original 228 participants were mailed the questionnaire again. This was to ensure that participation in the survey remained anonymous. Sending questionnaires only to those participating in Phase I would have alerted the Organization to the identity of the participating cohort. One hundred and twenty-two graduates returned questionnaires, resulting in a 54% response rate. Of these, 86 graduates had participated at Time I and Time II. The sample consisted of 50 females and 36 males. Females ranged in age from 21 years to 45 years with a mean age of 24 years. Males ranged in age from 22 years to 31 years with an average age of 24 years.

2.2.3. Time III sample

Twelve months after appointment 228 questionnaires were again sent out to the same graduates surveyed at Time I and Time II. On this occasion 74 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 56% response rate when compared to Time I, but only 32% when compared to Time I, II and III. Of these, 59 graduates had participated at Time I, II and III. The sample consisted of 39 females and 35 males. Females ranged in age from 22 to 45 years with a mean age of 25 years. Males ranged in age from 22 years to 31 years with an average age of 24 years.

2.3. Procedure

The purpose of Time I was to obtain a base-line measure and participation in the study coincided with Orientation training undertaken by Employees. Some measures were excluded at this time (e.g. job satisfaction, met expectations) since limited exposure to the Organization made it impossible for new employees to comment. Performance data did not become available until Time II of the study when graduates underwent their first bi-annual review.

The purpose of each questionnaire and a more detailed description follows:

2.4. Materials

2.4.1. Biographical questionnaire

In order to determine the relationship between the proposed antecedents and career decision-making biographical information was collected from participants regarding: age, gender, and depth/ breadth of work experience. Questions were presented relating to unpaid work experience and paid employment. Questions relating to paid employment in the 12 months prior to testing included number of hours worked, pattern of employment (none, casual/part-time, full-time), number of jobs held, and number of different employers. Questions relating to unpaid work experience included number of hours worked, pattern of employment, number of different employers and jobs held. Biographical information was collected at Times I, II and III.

2.4.2. The Career Decision Profile (Jones, 1999)

This measure was administered during all three phases of the study. The Career Decision Profile is a 16-item inventory designed to measure career decision status. Each item is answered on an 8 point Likert Scale from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 8 “Strongly agree”. The Decidedness Scale consists of 2 items aimed at measuring how decided an individual perceives him or herself to be in choosing an occupation. The Comfort Scale consists of 2 items designed to measure how comfortable he or she feels about progress in the process of making a choice. The Reason Scale is measured across four sub-scales: self-clarity; knowledge about occupations and training; decisiveness and career choice importance each consisting of 3 items each. Jones (1989) reported test–retest reliability ranged from 0.66 (decidedness) to 0.76 (comfort). Internal reliability was between 0.69 (reasons) and 0.85 (decidedness) (Jones, 1989). Highest and lowest internal reliability coefficients in our own sample across Times I, II and III were: Decidedness (0.79–0.82); Comfort (0.68–0.77); Self-Clarity (0.78–0.84); Occupational Training and Knowledge (0.59–0.73); Decisiveness (0.85–0.87) and Career Choice Importance (0.38–0.51).

Lower than optimal levels of reliability were reported on the career choice importance scale. The 3 items contributing to this scale were: (item 14) ‘I don’t need to make a vocational choice at this time’; (item 15) ‘My future work or career is not that important to me right now’; (item 16) ‘I don’t have strong interests in any occupational field’. Item 14 was scored higher than items 15 and 16 across all three time intervals. Closer investigation identified that when item 14 was removed from the scale, reliability improved slightly (0.67 for Time I; 0.48 for Time II; 0.46 for Time III) but not enough to exclude the item in further analysis.

2.4.3. Organizational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979)

The OCQ (Organizational Commitment Questionnaire) was used to measure organizational commitment. The measure consists of 15 items such as ‘I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful’ answered on a seven point scale from 1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘strongly agree’. The authors report that the measure has high internal consistency ranging from 0.82 to 0.93 with a median of 0.90. Test–retest reliabilities were reported between 0.62 and 0.63 over a 3-month period across two samples. This measure was used in all three phases of the study. In this sample internal reliability coefficients across the Time periods were as follows: Time I 0.77; Time II 0.87; Time III 0.89.

2.4.4. *Job satisfaction*

The Satisfaction Index (JDI) scale is an extensively reviewed measure of job satisfaction (Crites, 1985; Harwell, 1997; Kerr, 1985; Kinicki, McKee-Ryan, Schriesheim, & Carson, 2002; Parsons, 1995; Sunberg, 1995). It consists of 72 items spread across five scales: work on present job, present pay, and opportunities for promotion, supervision, and people on your present job. Subjects are asked to respond to items with a 'Y' for 'yes', an 'N' for 'no' and a '?' unsure. Items consisting of words or phrases for example 'fascinating' and 'routine' are the first 2 items under the heading 'work on present job'. Items are scored '3' or '0' depending on direction of item for example a rating of Y on the item 'poor' may be scored '0' while a rating of 'Y' on the item 'good' would be scored '3'. In all cases an item rated '?' is scored '1'. Recent research (Kinicki et al., 2002) has demonstrated that the measure has sound internal consistency, test-retest reliability, convergent and discriminant validity. Based on a total sample of 211 samples, average internal consistency reliabilities for the measures were: 0.87, 0.88, 0.86, 0.88 and 0.89 for pay, promotion, coworkers, work and supervision respectively. Using 50 samples in total, average test-retest reliability were reported as pay 0.65; promotion 0.63, coworkers 0.59; work 0.67 and supervision 0.59. This measure was administered at Times II and III of the study. In this study the Cronbach alphas were reported during Time II/III as work on present job (0.78/0.87), present pay (0.79/0.80), opportunities for promotion (0.80/0.85), supervision (0.79/0.86) and people (0.82/0.87).

2.4.5. *Performance data*

Performance data was collected at Times II and III. Managers of employees applied a 5 point rating scale as follows: 1 = Exceptional, 2 = Exceeds expectations, 3 = Meets expectations, 4 = Needs improvement, 5 = Below expectations. This data constituted part of the employees' normal performance appraisal. This scale was designed by the Organization, and was the only measure of Performance available. It is acknowledged that the scale, as designed, has two limitations. Firstly, it appears to be measuring two different dimensions—expectations and needing improvement—and that these can be orthogonal. Secondly it is biased because the positive anchor is more positive than the negative anchor is negative. Thirdly, the scale used is from '1' exceptional rather than the generally accepted convention '5' for exceptional. To facilitate interpretation of results, the rating scale was reversed to make it consistent with standard practice.

2.4.6. *Met expectations*

In order to determine how graduates' experience compared to their expectations prior to joining they were asked two questions: 'How well does your job match what your expectations were prior to starting?' and 'How well does your job match what you were told during the recruitment process?' Both questions were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 'Much worse than expected' to 5 'Much better than expected'. Met expectations were measured at Times II and III.

2.5. *Summary of data*

Age and gender information is reported elsewhere. In general all measures declined over time, with changes on some measures (i.e. decidedness, comfort, organizational commitment, and satisfaction with supervision) being significantly different after 1-year at work.

2.5.1. Analysis relating to Hypothesis 1: job satisfaction and career decision status

It was hypothesized that a significant relationship existed between the outcome measures of job satisfaction and career decision status. This is because a satisfying work experience affirms the employee's career decision and choice of occupation, and this then led to higher levels of job satisfaction.

With few exceptions, the magnitude and the significance of correlations between the measure of job satisfaction (as measured by the JDI) and the Career Decision Profile remained consistent across the two time periods. At Time II comfort rather than decidedness was most closely associated with job satisfaction. At Time III comfort and decidedness were associated with all job satisfaction sub-scales except promotion.

To determine whether changes in career measures between Time II and III were dependent on satisfaction unstandardized residuals were calculated for the career measures and outcomes at Time III (controlling for Time II). This method was resulted in accordance with recommendations by Irving and Meyer (1999). Irving and Meyer (1999) are critical of previous research (i.e. Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1998) that correlates residual scores with single outcome measures rather than corresponding changes in outcome measures. Correlating residual scores with an outcome measure at a single point in time is considered to unnecessarily inflate the number of significant relationships between variables. In this study unstandardized residuals were calculated to reflect changes in career decision status and changes in outcome measures by entering the measure at Time III as the dependent variable, and the same measure at Time II as the independent variable. The unstandardized residuals were then saved as new variables. Significant correlations were identified on most aspects of job satisfaction: work ($r = .30, p < .05$); pay ($r = .34, p < .05$); supervision ($r = .28, p < .05$); and people ($r = 0.36, p < .05$). Career Choice Importance was found to be negatively correlated with both pay ($r = -.32, p < .05$) and promotion ($r = -.26, p < .05$). Decidedness was found only to correlate with satisfaction—people ($r = .27, p < .05$).

Changes in levels of comfort rather than decidedness were consistently related to changes in job satisfaction scores. This is consistent with the relationships reported at Time III when only a weak and non-significant correlation ($r = .07$) was found to exist between the Job in General Scale and career decidedness. A positive and significant relationship ($r = .039, p < .01$) was found between the job in general scale and comfort.

Direction of causation. More detailed analysis was conducted to determine the direction of causation. Did being satisfied in a job promote higher levels of comfort with career decisions or did being comfortable with career decisions promote job satisfaction? To determine direction of causation a technique referred to as cross lagged panel correlations was used. Kenny (1999) defines cross lagged panel correlation (CLPC) as a method for ruling out the plausible rival hypothesis of spuriousness using longitudinal data. The method is explained in more detail in Kenny (1999).

As per Kenny's (1999) recommendations correlations between job satisfaction at Time II and comfort at Time III were compared to comfort levels at Time II and job satisfaction at Time III in order to determine the causal predominance of comfort over job satisfaction. Results of correlations are outlined in Table 2.

In all cases job satisfaction at Time II was a better predictor of comfort levels at Time III than comfort levels at Time II predicting Job satisfaction at Time III. This suggests that job satisfaction is more likely to predict levels of comfort than comfort predicting levels of job satisfaction.

2.5.2. Analysis relevant to Hypothesis 2: organizational commitment and career decision status

It was hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between organizational commitment and decidedness and that this would be moderated by whether expectations are met. It is expected that those people who are decided about with their career choices and have their expectations met are more likely to be committed to an Organization. Those graduates with high decidedness and unmet expectations will be less organizationally committed. The hypothesized relationship is illustrated in Fig. 1.

Correlations between the career measures and organizational commitment measures across Time I, Time II and III are reported in Table 1.

Scores on organizational commitment across the three time intervals appear to be significantly related to a number of the career measures. Most notable is that comfort with status of career decision making consistently correlated with organizational commitment across all time intervals (see Table 1).

To determine whether met expectations mediated the relationship between career decidedness and organizational commitment, analysis was undertaken focusing upon organizational commitment and the career measures at Time III. Time III (i.e. after 12 months of employment) was selected as the interval of analysis since this represented the most informed of the three time intervals. To establish mediation, the four steps advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Judd and Kenny (1981) were utilized (see Kenny, 2004 for more details). These four steps and the findings at each step are outlined below:

In Step 1 we investigated whether the initial variable (career decidedness) was correlated with the outcome variable (organizational commitment). This produced a significant standardized beta coefficient of 0.36 ($t = 3.29, p < .01$).

In Step 2 we determined whether the initial variable (career decidedness) was correlated with the mediator (met expectations). This produced a significant correlation of 0.26 ($t = 2.24, p < .05$).

Step 3 according to Kenny (2004) requires a demonstration that the mediator affects the outcome variable. Y is used as the criterion variable in a regression equation and X and M serve as predictors (estimate and test path b). Kenny (2004) maintains that it is not sufficient just to correlate the mediator with the outcome; the mediator and the outcome may be correlated because they are both caused by the initial variable X. Thus, the initial variable (career decidedness) must be controlled in establishing the effect of the mediator (met expectations) on the outcome (organizational commitment). This resulted in significant relationships between career decidedness and organizational commitment and between met expectations and organizational commitment.

Finally we determined whether M completely mediates the X–Y relationship. If it did then the effect of X on Y controlling for M should be zero (estimate and test path c'). The effects in both Steps 3 and 4 are estimated in the same regression equation.

Reference to the standardized beta coefficient (0.26, $t = 2.47, p < .01$) suggested that Met Expectations did not fully explain the relationship between decidedness and organizational commitment. It was concluded that met expectations only partially mediated the relationship between career decidedness and organizational commitment. While the relationship that exists between career decidedness and organizational commitment can be partially attributed to met expectation, removing the influence of met expectations does not dissolve the relationship.

Table 1

Correlations between organizational commitment, satisfaction and career measures across Time I, II and III

Career measures	Time	Organizational commitment	JDI—Work	JDI—Pay	JDI—Promotion	JDI—Supervision	JDI—People
Decidedness	Time I	0.40**	—	—	—	—	—
	Time II	0.21	0.24*	0.09	0.04	0.16	0.12
	Time III	0.36**	0.43**	0.24*	0.18	0.25*	0.25*
Comfort	Time I	0.42**	—	—	—	—	—
	Time II	0.38**	0.55**	0.27*	0.09	0.30**	0.28**
	Time III	0.44**	0.57**	0.46**	0.22	0.48**	0.37**
Self-clarity	Time I	0.32**	—	—	—	—	—
	Time II	0.09	0.29**	0.14	−0.02	0.15	0.22*
	Time III	0.29*	0.31**	0.17	0.18	0.14	−0.07
Knowledge of occupations and training	Time I	0.36**	—	—	—	—	—
	Time II	0.24*	0.31*	0.09	0.04	0.16	0.23*
	Time III	0.07	0.10	−0.04	−0.04	−0.01	−0.19
Decisiveness	Time I	0.29**	—	—	—	—	—
	Time II	0.21	0.09	0.01	−0.07	0.01	−0.15
	Time III	0.18	0.07	−0.13	−0.17	0.09	−0.09
Career choice importance	Time I	0.30**	—	—	—	—	—
	Time II	0.30**	0.20	0.07	0.24*	0.16	0.07
	Time III	0.11	−0.11	−0.22	−0.06	0.04	−0.01

Note: * $p < .05$, two tailed; ** $p < .01$, two tailed.

Table 2

Determining direction of causation: correlations between satisfaction (Time II and Time III) and comfort scores (Time II and Time III)

Scales	Comfort Time II	Comfort Time III
JDI—Work Time II		0.65**
JDI—Work Time III	0.47**	
JDI—Pay Time II		0.41**
JDI—Pay Time III	0.23	
JDI—Supervision Time II		0.50**
JDI—Supervision Time III	0.48**	
JDI—People Time II		0.43**
JDI—People Time III	0.31**	

Note: ** $p < .01$, two tailed.

2.5.3. Analysis relating to Hypothesis 3: performance and career decision status

It was hypothesized that there will be a significant relationship between performance and career decision status. Crook et al. (1984) reported a significant relationship between career maturity and work achievement. Intuitively it is appealing to suggest that those people who are decided and comfortable with their career choice are more motivated to perform well and that this is demonstrated as higher performance ratings.

Performance data at Time II was discarded from the study due to a lack of variability among scores. At Time III, correlations were conducted to determine the strength of relationship between performance and job satisfaction. A significant interaction was found only

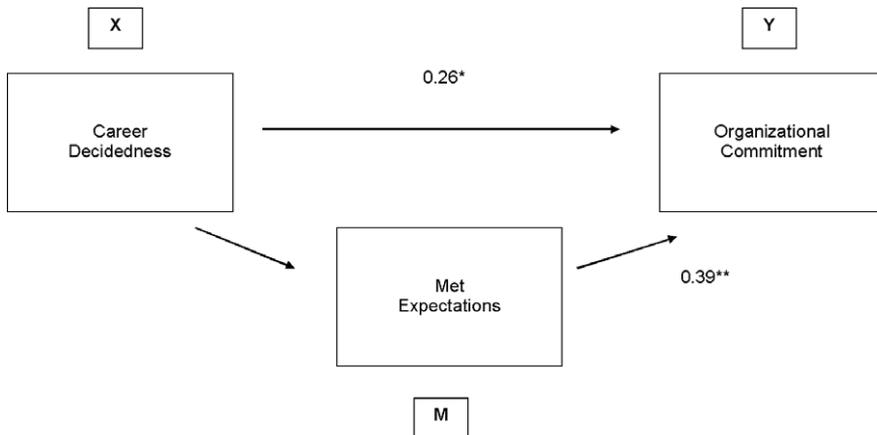


Fig. 1. Establishing relationships between predictors (X and M) and criterion (Y).

to exist between scores on the self-clarity scale and performance ($r = .24, p < .05$) although this is considered a small effect when Cohen's (1988) criteria is applied. This result suggests that those students who have rated their self-clarity as high are also rated highly by their supervisors. It could be that those people who recognize their abilities, skills and attributes have more accurately matched themselves to roles that they are well suited for.

The absence of a significant relationship between career decision status and performance in this sample should not necessarily be interpreted to suggest that such a relationship does not exist

3. Discussion

This study was designed to test three important hypotheses underlying the relevance of career decision status to a contemporary work environment. Hypothesis 1 proposed that a significant relationship would exist between job satisfaction and career decision status. Evidence was found linking both decidedness and comfort to levels of job satisfaction and closer investigation revealed that comfort rather than decidedness appeared to be the better predictor of job satisfaction. It was further proposed that job satisfaction was more likely to be responsible for changes in comfort than vice versa. Hypothesis 2 proposed a significant relationship between organizational commitment and decidedness, and that this relationship was moderated by met expectations. A significant relationship was found between career decidedness and organizational commitment and met expectations partially mediated this relationship. Hypothesis 3 proposed a significant relationship between performance and career decision status and furthermore that being decided and comfortable about career decisions might serve to immunize a graduate against the effects of dissatisfying work when their expectations were not met. There was little support for this hypothesis. Self-clarity (i.e. having a clear sense of identity, interests, abilities, personality and how these fit with different occupations) was found to predict performance. However, more comprehensive measures of performance data are needed to enable generalizations of results beyond this study.

In general comfort was associated positively with the other self-reported outcome measures. This raises an important question: Is the career decision status measure of comfort

simply a different measure of personal affect? Are people who claim to be positive about the status of their career decisions simply more positive in general? Some evidence exists to suggest that comfort represents another measure of emotional stability (in the form of stress, depression and anxiety). Lounsbury, Tatum, Chambers, Owens, and Gibson (1999) reported a negative correlation between decidedness and neuroticism, and a positive correlation between decidedness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. It could be that the inability to decide is a consequence of high negative affect, or that those people with high levels of conscientiousness simply make time and plan ahead. Preliminary analysis conducted in other studies (Earl & Bright, 2004b) explored the relationship between comfort and personality scales as measured by the Congruence Personality Scale (Pryor & Taylor, 2000). The study identified a significant correlation between comfort and the social scale ($r = .25$, $p < .05$, small–moderate effect (Cohen, 1988)) and emotional stability scale ($r = -.44$, $p < .001$, moderate to large effect (Cohen, 1988)). Comfort was also found to be correlated with scales of depression ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$, small to moderate effect (Cohen, 1988)) and stress ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$, small to moderate effect size) on the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). These effect sizes suggest that the comfort scale may be worthy of further investigation by counselors in the context of psychological well being. Lucas and Wanberg (1995) reported similar findings with career decidedness negatively correlated with anxiety and positively correlated with optimism. Comfort was negatively correlated with anxiety and positively correlated with locus of control, optimism and self-esteem.

It would be worthwhile considering our longitudinal study over a longer period of time. It may be that the trend is non-linear in nature. Investigation over a longer time period may provide evidence of plateauing, or improvement. However, in order to answer this question data would need to be collected using a much larger sample than this study utilized, or at least have greater on-going participation rates. It would also be worthwhile investigating whether decidedness and levels of comfort change in line with changes in situation (i.e. family responsibilities, mortgages, redundancy etc.). Subject attrition is also problematic. It is plausible that the career decidedness or satisfaction of those who dropped out of the study was significantly different to those that remained.

There are methodological limitations in this study that require acknowledgement. In future designs we would advocate the use of multi-faceted measures of performance; including a control group to determine whether measures declined over time rather than as a result of exposure to the organization or work type. Comparisons of employees at different career stages over time or repeating this study again with a new sample of employees would also help to cross validate relationships reported in this study.

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