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Relation of job search and choice process with subsequent satisfaction

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Abstract

This study examined whether how one goes about searching for and choosing a job relates to later job satisfaction. Contrary to Wilson and Schooler's [J. Personality Soc. Psychol. 60 (1991) 181] disruption hypothesis, the results suggested that people who engaged in a careful and deliberate search and choice process were more satisfied than people who used a more haphazard or intuitive approach. In addition, people who were dispositionally higher in the tendency to consider future outcomes were more likely to use a careful and deliberate approach to finding a job.

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1. Relation of job search and choice process with subsequent satisfaction

The renewed focus on hedonic experience in economic psychology (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Lopes, 1994) suggests that good decision making is that which leads to a greater state of well-being. Pursuing one's self-interest, however, requires appropriate predictions of the likely hedonic consequences of different

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courses of action. The question of how people arrive at satisfying decisions has not been given much attention in psychology or economics. The purpose of the present study was to apply methods from both the job choice and behavioral decision theory literature to begin to understand how the decision-making process (i.e., information search and choice method) relates to satisfying outcomes in the job search context. The process wherein people search out, compare, and ultimately choose between job opportunities is important to both job seekers and employers. Unsuccessful search resulting in an inadequate match of abilities and interests has been associated with employee burnout and withdrawal (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), as well as absenteeism, turnover, and decreased productivity (see Kristof, 1996).

Because of the importance of successful job searches, a substantial number of studies have examined individual differences, motivational factors, and specific search behaviors that relate to job search success (see Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Nevertheless, there is a lack of understanding about how people search out and decide upon jobs, and how this process relates to satisfaction with job choice. In a recent meta-analysis of job search and job choice literature, Kanfer et al. (2001) urged that more research examine the determinants of particular search strategies, as well as how the use of such strategies relates to satisfaction with employment, in addition to common indicators of job search success (e.g., number of offers, length of search) that lack information concerning quality of employment.

1.1. The connection between processes and attitudes

There are two competing lines of research that offer different suggestions as to how information search and choice method should affect satisfaction with choice. Some researchers have found that deliberate and careful approaches to decision making may be counterproductive (e.g., Wilson & Kraft, 1993; Wilson et al., 1993; Wilson & Schooler, 1991). For instance, Wilson et al. (1993) found that decision makers who analyzed their reasons for making a particular choice experienced regret rather than satisfaction. Participants in their study chose between a poster of a classic painting or a poster with humorous content. When contacted three weeks after their choice, those who listed reasons for liking and disliking the posters were less satisfied with the choice they had made than were decision makers who were not asked to provide reasons for their decisions. Wilson and Schooler (1991) suggested that, just as automatic behavior can be disrupted when a person's attention is directed toward it, so can a decision be disrupted when a person is asked to reflect about the reasons for it.

Conventional wisdom suggests, however, that important decisions should be made only after deep thought and careful analysis of alternatives (Janis & Mann, 1977). Indeed, some research has suggested that careful decision-making leads to greater satisfaction and less regret over one's decision (see Aldag & Power, 1986; Bronner & de Hoog, 1983; Mann, 1972; Mau & Jepsen, 1992; Timmermans & Vlek, 1994). For instance, Kmett, Arkes, and Jones (1999) randomly assigned graduating high school students to one of three conditions. In one condition, students used a

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