



Vocational self-concept crystallization as a mediator of the relationship between career self-management and job decision effectiveness

Qingxiong Weng^a, James C. McElroy^{b,*}

^a School of Management, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Shanxi Province 710049, PR China

^b Department of Management, Iowa State University, 3189 Gerding Business Building, Ames, IA 50011-1350, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 August 2009

Available online 31 October 2009

Keywords:

Career self-management

Job decision effectiveness

Vocational self-concept crystallization

Mediated effect

ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of career self-management and vocational self-concept crystallization on job decision effectiveness and how vocational self-concept crystallization mediates the relationship between career self-management and job decision effectiveness. Six hundred and eleven Chinese employees participated in the research. Using hierarchical regression and structural equation modeling, the results showed that: (1) career self-management has a positive direct effect on vocational self-concept crystallization; (2) career self-management has a positive direct effect on job decision effectiveness; (3) vocational self-concept crystallization has a positive direct effect on job decision effectiveness; and (4) vocational self-concept crystallization partly mediates the relationship between career self-management and job decision effectiveness.

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1. Introduction

Topel and Ward (1992) posit that employees in the United States will experience ten employers over their forty year work lives with two-thirds of these job changes coming within their first ten years in the labor market. In China, young people under the age of 30 average a job change at least once every five years (Zhou, 2006). In other words, it is common for today's employees to experience multiple careers and multiple job movements during their working lives (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), whether voluntary or mandatory. The increased fluidity in employees' careers has led to an increase in research on career mobility and job change (Donohue, 2006; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Rather than working one's way up the corporate ladder within a single organization, today's professionals manage their own career paths, creating what is referred to as a boundary-less career, as they seize new and often different job opportunities to obtain training, enhance their human capital, and increase their marketability (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

Individuals are not equally adept at making such decisions, however, as some find suitable jobs with their initial employer, while others are unable to find appropriate jobs even after multiple job changes. This begs the question of the sources of individual differences in job decision effectiveness.

Thompson and Subich (2006) found that social status was related to career choice certainty, but that this relationship was fully mediated by career decision self-efficacy. Using person–job fit as measure of career decision-making effectiveness, Singh and Greenhaus (2004) revealed that individuals who used rational career decision-making made more effective job choices. In recent years, some scholars have investigated high school students' career decision-making processes (e.g. Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007), but there is still limited research about the mechanisms used in making effective career decisions, especially with respect to job changes.

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 515 294 2534.

E-mail addresses: wqx886@126.com (Q. Weng), jmcelroy@iastate.edu (J.C. McElroy).

Singh and Greenhaus (2004) noted that it would be valuable to understand the context of job change by examining the motivation behind peoples' decisions to change jobs. They use career self-management as the process by which individuals collect information about themselves, identify a career goal, and engage in career strategies that increase the probability that their career goals will be achieved (Greenhaus, 1987). Orpen (1994) also found that career self-management influences employees' career success, but no one has examined the relationship between career self-management and job decision effectiveness. The first aim of this study is to address this gap in the literature.

Our second objective is to further develop Super's (1984) statement about the role of vocational self-concept in the career development progress, and evaluate its influence on job choice decision-making. In line with theoretical works (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordaan, 1963), we argue that people who have a diffuse sense of self will have difficulty deciding on a career, likely because it makes the self-appraisal task more difficult. In this paper we define this sense of self, relative to vocations, using the concept of vocational self-concept crystallization. Vocational self-concept crystallization is defined as the "degree of clarity and certainty of self-perception with respect to vocationally relevant attitudes, values, interests, needs and abilities" (Barrett & Tinsley, 1977, p. 302). Thus, our intention is to explore the role of both career self-management and vocational self-concept crystallization in job selection decisions. We do this by examining the role of employees' career self-management before joining their present organization, and by analyzing the mediating role of vocational self-concept crystallization in the relationship between the career self-management and job decision effectiveness, as shown in Fig. 1.

2. Job decision and job decision effectiveness

The job choice/decision is seen as either a decision to pursue a particular job or to accept a particular job if an offer has been made. Arguably, factors important to an individual may vary at different stages of the job search process as applicants become more aware of available opportunities and their own preferences. Compared with job decisions, career decisions refer to any decision that has implications for one's career, including a decision to change jobs, occupations, a voluntary turnover decision, or a decision to specialize or develop general skills. Simply stated, job decisions are a subset of career decisions, but a change in one's job is the underlying component that links many different types of career decisions (Latack, 1984). Career choice has been given much more attention by researchers than has job choice, despite the fact that their psychological processes are similar.

Career choice research has focused on both students and employees. According to Singh and Greenhaus (2004), research on students' career decisions generally has examined the choice of an educational major, occupation, career field, or vocation (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Phillips, 1982), while employees' career decisions generally involve the selection of a career goal, initial career entry, mobility decisions, relocations, and other inter-role transitions (Murrell, Frieze, & Olson, 1996).

A number of studies have found that congruence is a significant factor in differentiating people who change careers from those who do not (Donohue, 2006). Congruence, or "fit," is seen as an indicator of an effective career decision (Holland, 1985), but what constitutes fit varies across researchers. Some focus on the match between an individual's personality or self-concept and characteristics of an occupation (Holland, 1985), while others look more specifically a match between a person's skills and abilities and the requirements of one's organization and/or job (Cable & Judge, 1997). There is even some debate as to whether congruence, or fit, is best represented by the match between the person and their job, career, organization, or even work group (Singh & Greenhaus, 2004).

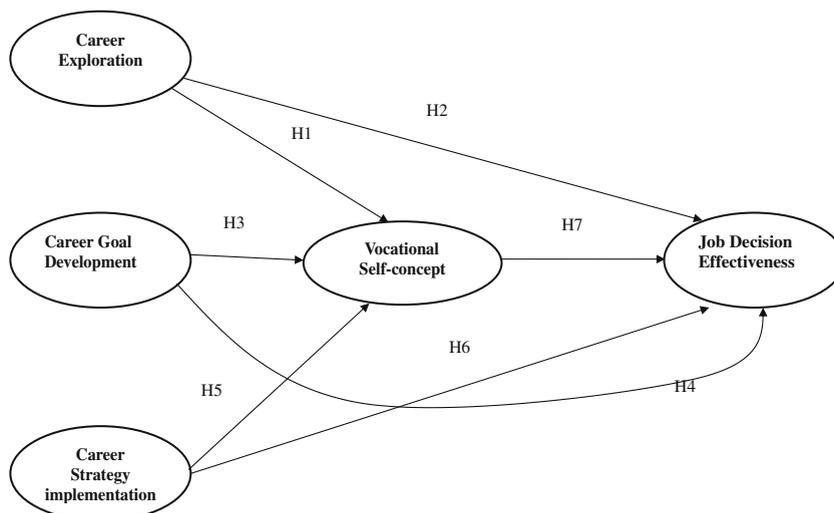


Fig. 1. Hypothesis model.

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