Relationships among Career Exploration, Job Search Intensity, and Job Search Effectiveness in Graduating College Students

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This paper examines the linkages among the constructs of career exploration, job search intensity, and job search effectiveness. Viewing job search intensity as a part of the job choice process, job search intensity is hypothesized to mediate the relationships of self and environmental exploration with a job seeker’s initial compensation and job satisfaction. Using a sample of 219 graduating college students, results suggested that job search intensity mediated the relationship of environmental exploration with initial compensation. The results supported the concept of readiness and action-based stages in the job choice process. Support may be needed to guide job seekers through both stages. © 2000 Academic Press

The job search process is a central issue in career research. The ultimate goal of the job search process is to attain a job that matches one’s personal and financial expectations (Blau, 1994; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987). This has both immediate and long-term career consequences. Attaining a desirable job is likely to increase the chances of attaining a more satisfying and higher paying job offer. The initial career success is likely to lead to positive career consequences in later career stages (Berlew & Hall, 1966).

Two variables appear to be important for conducting an effective job search: career exploration (Phillips & Blustein, 1994) and job search intensity (Schwab et al., 1987). Career exploration entails information gathering about oneself and employment opportunities (Stumpf, Collareli, & Hartman, 1983). It entails a readiness or cognitive preparation to identify desirable and realistic job opportunities. This activity is likely to lead to a more efficient and effective job search process. Job search intensity refers to the degree of job search effort by a job seeker (Blau, 1994). It entails behaviors that are likely to lead to job interviews and job offers, such as applying for jobs through different recruiting sources and preparing for effective job interviews. Schwab et al. (1987) hypothesize that the...
greater the job search effort, the greater the opportunities to receive job offers and to receive them in a timely manner. This, in turn, may impact job search effectiveness. Job seekers who receive more offers and offers more quickly should have more freedom to accept a desirable job than job seekers who have difficulties receiving job offers.

Research with career exploration establishes linkages with indicators of job search effectiveness (Stumpf, Austin, & Hartman, 1984) and work attitudes (Nevill & Super, 1988). However, research with job search intensity research is limited mostly to the determinants of job search intensity. Schwab et al. (1987) hypothesize that financial need and self-esteem are predictors of job search intensity. Both should increase the motivation to pursue job opportunities. Research demonstrates that self-esteem (Ellis & Taylor, 1983) and self-efficacy (Saks & Ashforth, 1999) are significantly associated with job search intensity. Blau (1994) reports that financial need impacts active job search behaviors with three diverse samples. This provides empirical support for the hypothesized predictors of job search intensity. Research assessing the consequences of job search intensity focuses exclusively on receiving job offers (Wanberg, Watt, & Rumsey, 1996; Saks & Ashforth, 1999). While Schwab et al. (1987) hypothesize that job search intensity is related to job search outcomes, such as compensation, this hypothesis is untested.

From both a theoretical and practical perspective it is important to discern the impact of career exploration and job search intensity on job search effectiveness. From a theoretical perspective, it may be important to demonstrate linkages among these constructs. Phillips and Blustein (1994) suggest that renewed interest in this subject could be beneficial to career theory. To what extent do the cognitive processes associated with career exploration influence job search behaviors associated with job search intensity and how do both of these influence indicators of job search effectiveness? From a practical perspective, this information could provide better counseling to job seekers.

To address this issue, this paper builds a framework of job search that includes both career exploration and job search intensity. The framework assumes that job search intensity mediates the relationship between career exploration and job search effectiveness outcomes. It then empirically tests and evaluates the framework.

A FRAMEWORK OF JOB SEARCH

In their seminal article on job search intensity, Schwab et al. (1987) described job search intensity as a function of motivation. They argued that self-efficacy and financial need were the primary motivational factors to increase the effort to search for a job. While this is an important perspective, job search intensity may be more central to the career literature if it is viewed from a job choice perspective. The essence of the job choice process is to find gainful and desirable employment. The job choice process entails information gathering about job
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