

# Career Decision Making Research

For some it can be very difficult to make a career decision. It seems that the most important and pressured decisions we make in our lives are made with the least amount of thought and with the least amount of information.

More time and effort is often spent planning a week's vacation or choosing a new pair of glasses than in exploring and planning a career path. Why?

Because we may have strong emotions and needs attached to the decision.

Sometimes there can be barriers to good decision-making. But why?

1. We may deny there is a problem or assume there is no solution or grab the first solution that pops into our mind. Or, instead of making very important decisions, we may simply postpone making them.
2. We may not consider the long-range consequences or truly value we want to achieve. We will overlook possible solutions because our thinking is rigid or defeatist.
3. We do not take the time to really fantasize about the best and the worst possible outcomes for each alternative in order to consider the advantages and disadvantages.
4. We may not gather all the information we need to make the decision. Often, it's our wishful thinking that a solution will be quick or our intuition will give us an easy answer.
5. We may not know how to gather the information or take enough time to carefully weigh all the alternatives. Decision making is a complex process.
6. We may not have developed any goals or have taken the time to develop a careful plan for accomplishing set goals.

It is common for people - even conscientious college students - to believe that simply deciding where to go is all they have to do to get there, but lacking a clear plan of action.

Career indecision often stems from a variety of reasons including:

- lack of readiness,
- lack of information, and
- inconsistent information.

One popular model that has been put forward is based on the decision-making theory that states "an individual observes a problem which is explained as a gap between the current situation and the expected outcome and then explores possible alternatives." So it is with career decision making. As this theory goes, the best decision can be considered the one that helps individuals achieve their goals.

Therefore, individuals who have difficulties making career decisions may be experiencing one or more of the following barriers:

- no or unclear goals,
- little knowledge about alternate choices,
- poor motivation to make a choice,
- or, may be indecisive.

Career exploration is especially effective in helping young adults make career decisions. Most research concludes that career exploration is essential during early adulthood as it fosters the growth in self-awareness and occupational knowledge needed to commit to a vocational choice.

In addition, exploration early in one's development has been linked to increased likelihood of seeking out information in later stages of a career.

Career 'exploration' is defined as "those activities directed toward enhancing information about the self and the environment to assist in career decision-making and development."

For many college students, indecision has been linked to perceived external barriers which often include:

- never having had to make a substantial decision.
- financial issues,
- role conflicts,
- societal expectations, and
- family influences.

It should be noted though that indecision has been primarily linked to the lack of self-confidence. Thus, the belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals in a competent manner is essential toward an effective career decision.

Research has shown time and again that performance / accomplishments is the strongest contributor to our belief in our ability to succeed in specific situations.

The belief or confidence in one's capabilities to achieve a goal or an outcome can be enhanced by the following four informational sources:

- 1) personal performance / accomplishments,
- 2) observational learning,
- 3) verbal encouragement & persuasion, and
- 4) emotional motivation.

Research has also found a significant negative relationship between perceived internal barriers and career decision-making. Because career decision-making attainment has been linked to attitudes about 'work' and career related behaviors, it can be beneficial for those students to receive career interventions to help plan how to cope with those perceived barriers.

When we can recognize the internal barriers and challenges caused by our own emotions, which is often caused by other external factors, we will be in a much better position to make good decisions.