

# Positive Self-Concept: A Vital Factor to Overcome Career Indecision

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## Abstract

The study of career indecision has long been a focal point in the career development literature. Career indecision can be described as a developmental phase through which individuals may pass on their way to reaching a decision. Positive self-concept is a vital factor to overcome career indecision. Self-concept is a person's way of perceiving himself and may be either positive or negative. Whether a person develops a positive or negative self-concept depends on how he is treated and how he perceives such treatment. Scholars have reasoned that individuals form a self-concept around work because the evidences demonstrate that it relates to life and workplace success. That is, individuals with positive self-concept are more successful in career decisions and development. Therefore, comprehensive programs can be effective in reducing career indecision and increasing career certainty. Individual with positive self-concept will be able to contribute to taking sound career decision and increasing organizational effectiveness, health and productivity. This study is recommended using an experimentally one so that individual's career indecision can be analyzed in order to determine if the findings will be duplicated.

**Keywords:** Career development, Career indecision, Self-concept

## 1. Introduction

In the modern, globally-competitive environment, the need for substantial changes is always felt (Beheshtifar & Ziaadini, 2012), and the best source of competitive advantage of an organization depends on its staff. Strategies, business models, products and services can be imitated by competitors (Beheshtifar & Nekoie-Moghadam, 2011), and organizations' success depends on their employees' performance (Abtahi, 2002). Individuals in an organization represent a distinct resource, so the career development of employees in today's organizations is considered.

Besides, dramatic changes in organizations have created new 'career realities' that focus on the individual and require them to take responsibility for their own career development. Organizations increasingly incorporate self-development features into their career management interventions. In general, these initiatives emphasize job-related issues, reinforced by the use of competencies that focus on performance at work. However, individual career development goes beyond the assessment of strengths, weaknesses and

training to improve job performance (Beheshtifar, 2011). In career planning, it is needed to determine movement paths in different levels. To choose a proper path, career decisions making is important.

Career decision making examines how people make decisions (decision-making style) as well as an individual's beliefs that he/she can successfully accomplish behaviors that will lead to desired outcomes (decision-making self-efficacy) (Esters, 2007). In making career decisions, many factors must be weighed. Sometimes a career compromise is necessary, reconciling what is desirable with what is attainable. Career decisions may be framed in three ways: in terms of alternatives, in terms of relative importance of each consideration, and in terms of preferences within each consideration (Hall, 2005). However, a third area, career indecision, has been a major focus of vocational research over the last few decades. Career indecision has been used to refer to the problems individuals may have in making their career decision as well as the precursors that may influence or impede career choice (Esters, 2007).

Negative career thoughts invariably manifest in emotional, verbal, and behavioral responses and can impede the career decision process. Research has found that negative career thoughts significantly contribute to anxiety, and this anxiety limits career development behavior. Similarly, negative career thoughts has been empirically linked to low job satisfaction, low skill confidence, academic undecidedness, low employment seeking status, job avoidance behavior, career un-decidedness, perfectionism and career indecision, depression and career indecision, career indecision, and career indecisiveness (Austin, et al. 2010).

The study of career indecision has long been a focal point in the career development literature (O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993). For some time, career psychologists have devoted considerable attention to diagnosing, understanding, and counteracting career indecision (Yates, et al. 2010). Interest in career indecision is spurred by researchers, practitioners, and counselors who are concerned with:

- (a) How individuals make career choices, and
- (b) How those same individuals go about implementing those choices.

These investigations often involve antecedent and outcome variables associated with career indecision (Slone & Hancock, 2006).

Generally, career indecision is the inability to specify a career choice within a career decision making milieu (Stewart, 1995). One of the reasons why career indecision is arguably one of the central issues in career psychology is because of the high financial and psychological costs that occur as a result of career indecision (Gordon & Meyer, 2002). Therefore, managers should identify factors to overcome this problem. Positive self-concept is one of them.

Historically, self-concept research focused almost exclusively on a self-concept that minimized the role of specific dimensions and facets. However, in recent decades researchers have placed an increasing emphasis on multiple dimensions of self-concept (Mishra, 2007). Self-concept refers to the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence (Yahaya & Ramli, 2009).

Franken (1994) states that "there is a great deal of research which shows that the self-concept is, perhaps, the basis for all motivated behavior. It is the self-concept that gives rise to possible selves, and it is possible selves that create the motivation for behavior" (Yahaya & Ramli, 2009). Therefore, it is expected that positive self-concept be important to the organization domain, and it is more appropriate for studying organizational behavior as a factor to decrease career indecision. Despite the importance of career development, indecision and indecisiveness has seldom been the subject of research by scholars. So, this study will investigate the effect of positive self-concept as a crucial issue to overcome career indecision in organizations.

## 2. Concept of Career indecision

A “decision” is a commitment to a course of action that is intended to yield outcomes that serve the interests and values of particular people (Yates, 2003). Meanwhile, the notion of “*indecision*,” which can be defined as a state in which a person remains uncommitted to any particular course of action despite having acknowledged the need for some such commitment. And a given person is said to be “*indecisive*” to the extent that he or she exhibits indecision chronically, beyond some norm. Clearly, a truly comprehensive understanding of human decision processes requires accounting not only for instances in which people decide but also for those in which they fail to decide—that is, when they are indecisive (Yates, et al. 2010).

Career indecision is defined as an inability to make decision about the vocation one wishes to pursue (Guay, et al. 2003). Slaney (1988) noted that career indecision has been used to refer to the problems individuals may have when making career decisions (Talib & Aun, 2009).

Also, career indecision is defined as difficulty in making career decisions. While many individuals do not face such difficulty in choosing their careers, others may experience a number of problems that can lead to an inability to decide. Therefore, the identification and management of career indecision is an important step in the provision of career guidance and support. Recognizing that indecision exists, accurately identifying the source of that indecision, and offering support and guidance to individuals in overcoming it will significantly improve one’s ability to make sound career choices (Richard, et al. 2007). Career indecision has been a focus of vocational research over the last few decades. It is defined as an inability to make a decision about the vocation one wishes to pursue (Guay, et al. 2003).

Career indecision can be divided into two categories: developmental and chronic indecision. The former is generally viewed as a developmentally normal problem resulting from a lack of information on the self and on the world of work, whereas the latter is defined as a pervasive inability to make a decision about one’s career (Guay, et al. 2006). Larson, Heppner, Ham, and Dugan (1998) identified four types of career indecision: (a) planless avoiders, (b) informed decisives, (c) confident but uninformed and (d) uninformed (Feduccia, 2003).

Thus, career indecision can be described as a developmental phase through which individuals may pass on their way to reaching a decision. Career indecision may also impinge on other career issues such as choosing a major, making career choices or even unemployment (Talib & Aun, 2009).

## 3. Structure of career indecision and its outcomes

The career development approach added a developmental perspective on careers to the traditional individual differences view of occupations (Beheshtifar, et al. 2011). Career data derive from the use of two well-known instruments. The first one is the Career Decision Scale which provides measures of career certainty and its counterpoint, career indecision. Career indecision occurs when an individual is unable to choose or decide upon a specific occupation or career field. The second one is Driver & Brousseau’s (1983) Career Concepts which provides measures of four different individual notions of career success- -linear, spiral, steady-state, and transitory. Each one is an enduring cognitive structure, which defines the meaning of a career for a person in terms of job content as well as two dimensions of career movement- - frequency of movement and direction of movement (Patz, et al. 1991).

Career indecision has been related empirically to various intra-individual constructs. For example, personality traits such as perfectionism, self-consciousness, fear of commitment, and anxiety were positively associated with career indecision. In contrast, rational decision-making style, self-efficacy beliefs, and level of ego identity were negatively related to career indecision (Guay, et al. 2003).

Cohen, Chartrand, and Jowdy (1995) used the four following psychological characteristics to identify groups of individuals representing these types: career choice anxiety, generalized indecisiveness, need for career information, and need for self-knowledge. Results revealed a four-group typology that included chronically undecided (high levels of career choice anxiety, high generalized indecisiveness, high need for

career information, and high need for self-knowledge) and developmentally undecided individuals (moderate levels of career choice anxiety, low levels of generalized indecisiveness, high need for career information, and moderate need for self-knowledge). In addition, results of this study indicated that individuals in the chronically undecided group had higher levels of identity confusion and feelings of inferiority than individuals who were in the developmentally undecided group (Guay, et al. 2006).

In the literature on career decision-making there is often confusion regarding what constitutes career indecision versus career indecisiveness. Osipow (1999) draws a distinction between the notion of indecisiveness as a trait and career indecision. He argues that indecisiveness is defined as a chronic and permanent inability to make decisions across different situations, whereas career indecision refers to a normal transitory phase in the process of making a particular decision. However, career indecision can fluctuate from person to person depending on a number of factors, like the need for career-related information, career readiness, and self-efficacy (Creed et al., 2005).

Meier (1991) recognized four major sources of career indecision:

- lack of self-information,
- lack of information relevant to the current organization,
- decision-making fear and anxiety, and
- situational constraints (Feduccia, 2003).

Besides, Epperson (1990) developed five clusters of indecision and found that most indecisive individuals are included in the first three clusters: (a) high on anxiety, low on self-esteem, and with external locus of control; (b) low on anxiety, high on self-esteem, with internal locus of control, and in need of occupational information; (c) attempt to juggle interests in relationships, work, and leisure activities.

In another model, Osipow, Carney, and Barak (1976) identified four dimensions of career indecision. The first dimension, labeled Lack of Structure, describes a lack of experience and confidence in dealing with career decision making. External Barriers, the second dimension, represents a need for further support or world of work information to make a decision. The third dimension, labeled Approach– Approach Conflict, captures the problem of having to choose from several attractive career possibilities. Finally, the fourth dimension, Personal Conflict, reflects career decision-making difficulties such as wanting to pursue a career against the wishes of someone important (Corkin, et al. 2008).

Jones and Chenery (1980) proposed a career indecision model that theorized career indecision in a three-dimensional construct. The decidedness dimension relates to how committed individuals are to their choice of a career. The comfort dimension connotes the level of satisfaction individuals feel over their career decision status. On the other hand, the last dimension relates to the explanation of why a person could be undecided. These were identified as lack of self-clarity, lack of occupational educational information, indecisiveness, and career choice salience (Talib & Aun, 2009).

Causes of career indecision range from lack of information to internal conflicts, external barriers, and self-doubt (Richard, et al. 2007). Mau (1995) studied the rational decision-making style as related to the career decision-making status and treatment gains based on a computer-based career intervention. She defined rational decision-making style as characterized by making decisions deliberately, systematically, and logically. The results of her study indicate that employing decision-making strategies based on an individual's preference significantly increased students' career decidedness and decreased career indecision, choice anxiety, and reason complexity. She found that the rational decision-making style is positively associated with career decidedness and negatively associated with the exploration stage of decision-making, but it is not predictive of treatment gains (Feduccia, 2003).

#### 4. Positive self-concept

There is no shortage of ways to define self-concept. Perhaps the simplest one is found in Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied linguistics, which says that self-concept is the image a person has of himself or herself. A measure of person's self-concept sometimes is included in the study of affective variables (Jing, 2007). Self-concept is defined by Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) in sum as a person's values and identities, both personal and social.

The main factors determining the formation of the self-concept of an individual are the environment as well as people with whom the individual lives, who play a very crucial role in the mould of the self-concept. Johnson-Pynn et al. (2003) claim that people describe a given individual in terms of various personality traits and when these traits are consistently applied, the person often accepts them as descriptions of him or her (Kimani, et al. 2009).

Researchers studying the structure of self-concept found evidence that self-concept is a multidimensional construct and they used various ways to describe the complex phenomena (Huang, et al. 2001). self-concepts are cognitive structures that can include content, attitudes or evaluative judgments and are used to make sense of the world, focus attention on one's goals and protect one's sense of basic worth (Oyserman & Markus, 1998).

Within self-concept, Rosenberg (1979) identified three broad regions:

- 1) The extant self-concept (what are we like),
- 2) The desired self-concept (what we wish to be like), and
- 3) The presenting self (how we show ourselves to others) (Emil, 2003).

In general, self-concept is the totality of a complex, organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his/her personal existence (Emil, 2003).

Following is explained the dimensions of self-concept summarily:

1. Individual self-concept: This kind of self-concept relate to individuals' abilities and weaknesses. This level could be strengthen or weaken via comparing individual's abilities and weaknesses to other's.
2. Relational self-concept: People usually judge themselves in regard to the relationships. If one assumes a proper picture of relations, his/her self-esteem will reinforce.
3. Collective self-concept: It refers to membership in workplace or out of it. In this level, individuals describe themselves in terms of their conditions within group (Golparvar, et al. 2007).

#### 5. Effect positive self-concept on career indecision

Career theory and empirical findings provide support for the relation of personal factors to career development (Kelly & Lee, 2002). Self-concept is considered a main personal factor which could influence on career decisions or career indecisions.

Leonard et al. (1995) introduced the self concept as a source of motivated behavior (Leonard, et al. 1997). Self-concept is a person's way of perceiving himself and may be either positive or negative. Whether a person develops a positive or negative self-concept depends on how he is treated and how he perceives such treatment. As a person interacts with others, he evaluates his behavior on the basis of the environment, for example religious leaders, parents, colleagues and other members of the community if the reactions of such others are positive he is likely to accept (Modupe, 2010).

Studies show self-concept has positive effects on organization. Social work behaviors in organizational context are those behaviors that are not required for one's job performance but are important for organizational effectiveness. Such behaviors are in fact important role expectations for the employee, colleague and group member roles. Individuals who value or identify with these roles will have the motivation to make those "extra" efforts to meet such expectations (Huang, et al. 2001).

Scholars have reasoned that individuals form a self-concept around work because the evidences demonstrate that it relates to life and workplace success (Beheshtifar & Rahimi-Nezhad, 2012). That is, individuals with positive self-concept are more successful in career decisions and development.

Weng & McErolly (2010) found that vocational self-concept crystallization has a positive effect on job decision effectiveness. So, vocational self-concept crystallization partly mediates the relationship between career self management and job decision effectiveness.

Wanda (1996) examined the relationship among the fear of success (FOS), self-concept, and career decision making of adolescents. Statistical analysis of the results reveals that the rural youth demonstrated a higher FOS than reported by urban youth in previous studies. Contrary to other studies, male participants reported a higher FOS than did female students. FOS was found to be related to both career certainty and career indecision: lower FOS was related to higher career certainty whereas higher FOS was related to higher career indecision. FOS was also found to be related to self-esteem. As FOS increases, self-esteem drops, career indecision rises, and career certainty decreases.

## 6. Conclusion

Role of organizations are inevitable to improve any country and success of any country depends on its organizational success (Moaeri, 2002). However, human resources departments should not only solve specific problems, but also must ensure the success of the organizations in facing potential challenges of the future. One of these challenges is the demand for qualified and talented staff (Porkiani, et al. 2010).

Research into career development has devoted much attention to the categorization of various problems related to career indecision, suggesting that career decisions have the following features: “there is an individual who has to make a decision; there are a number of alternatives to select from; and there are many attributes that are considered in the comparison and evaluation of the various alternatives” (Taylor, 2007).

On the other hand, many of the successes and failures that people experience in many areas of life are closely related to view themselves and their relationship with others. In addition, self-concept is learned. No one is born with a Self-concept. It gradually emerges in the early months of life and is shaped and reshaped through repeated perceived experiences, particularly with significant others. Self-concept continuously guards itself against loss of self-esteem; far it is this loss that produces feelings of anxiety. If Self-concept must constantly defend itself from assault, growth opportunities are limited (Modupe, 2010).

The findings confirm effect self-concept on career indecisions. As Burnett (1991) found that specific facets of self-concept (General, Verbal, Academic, Honesty/Reliability and Problem-Solving Self Concepts) were related to self-reported decision-making behaviors.

However, human development and career development does not fit into a little box and choice of a career may be one of the most important of life's choices. There are many factors that contribute to career development. Likewise, comprehensive programs and shorter term interventions can be effective in reducing career indecision and increasing career certainty. On the other hand, employees should be given tasks which they are able to contribute to a positive self-concept. Employees can experience success if the instruction or task is structured in such a way that it matches his mental and physical ability.

However, promoting high self-concept is important in organizations. Influencing the self-concept of the employees is one way of attracting and retaining them. There is research evidence that self-concept of the employees affect their behaviors, satisfaction, and achievements. Individual with positive self-concept will be able to contribute to taking sound career decision and increasing organizational effectiveness, health and productivity. Managers and employees beliefs play an important role for effective and productive employers need to have positive and realistic attitude about themselves and their abilities before they are able to reach. Consequently, positive self-concept should be reinforced among employees. The study is recommended using an experimentally one so that individual's career indecision can be analyzed in order

to determine if the findings will be duplicated. Also, determining other factors that may help to decrease career indecision is important.

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