How Students Decide About Their Careers?
A Case Study of Management Students of Textile Institute of Pakistan, Karachi

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Abstract

A young person of today is faced with an increasing number of options before taking a decision. This becomes especially difficult when the decision has to have implications on the whole future life of a person, such as the decision about what field to choose for studies, what career to opt for, or what institution to join for professional studies. The youth of our country has more opportunities and options before them than their predecessors had in their time. This excess of options spawns a complicated state of affairs for our adolescents. A person's decision-making method matures as time passes, because of the biological changes in the individual and the continuous learning process of the person. Usually, in Pakistan, our students lead a very protected and pampered life.They are not used to taking decisions for their lives. When it comes to joining a university, they go to the same sources of power, i.e. their parents, but in this situation parents are not that much of a help. We tested this situation to find out whether this analysis of ours is really true.

Keywords: *Career decisions, Pakistani youth, social learning theory, the career genogram, Birth order.*

1. Introduction

In our society, most of the important decisions about a person's life are taken by his/her elders.This system worked well in the past when experience used to come with age and there was not much to learn. So, for an average person, the major decisions of life and career were successfully taken by the previous generation. But now the proliferation and accessibility of knowledge has diminished the importance of age-based experience. Today even a so-called educated, trained and experienced person finds himself in positions of helplessness because of ignorance in many fields. How can such a person guide a young man which field to take or which institution to join? The question arises, what are the factors that influence the decision taken by a person who is to become an adult soon.

In our country, as in most of the developing countries, the number of choices before a person has been considerably less than that in the developed world. But that scenario is changing at a very fast rate, and now our young people also face similar problems

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when confronted by a need to take a decision that can change their future lives. In traditional societies, the role of older people has been profound in all decision-making processes. Their reasons are based on the knowledge and power structures of these societies. The systems in use had been of such nature so as to give supremacy to those who were in the later stages of their lives. But in modern societies, experience in one field does not enable a person to understand other fields as the fields are so diverse in their genesis. With every coming day, there is a large addition in the body of knowledge available to the common man. Thus the older generation is not capable to guide the young in their major decisions. The students thus remain indecisive about their careers. There are many reasons for individuals to become career indecisive. Perfectionism, unavailability of career related knowledge, inability to understand oneself, fear of failure, fear of commitment, and family interaction patterns, are some of the important reasons. Career Indecision is a developmental problem within the career maturation process "that results from a lack of information about self or the world of work" (Chartrand et al., 1994).

As time passes, continuous accumulation of knowledge through education and experience makes people mature to take their own decisions. Career maturity is the extent to which individual students are able to make career-related choices without help. Super defines it as the "individual's readiness to cope with the developmental tasks (for) that stage of development" (Super, 1990).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Decision Making

Any organism that is not following a rigid and fixed life has to make decisions continuously in order to survive. Most of the decisions these organisms make are unconsciously made by their bodies. In the case of human beings, the brain decides what is to be done. Most of the time a person does not have to think consciously to make a decision. This eases the life of a person considerably. In spite of this, a person has to make certain conscious decisions in his daily life. How do people decide? This is a very difficult question to answer in its raw form. The process a person follows while taking a decision is dependant on a multitude of factors.

First of all, it depends on the problem at hand. Routine problems do not need as much effort on the part of the decision maker as do non-routine problems. Furthermore, many non-routine problems become routine ones with the passage of time. Deciding about future career is a problem that is not routine for an average individual in an open capitalist society. In Pakistan, for instance, the urban population of large cities has a large number of career options available. This situation is starkly different from what it was in the case of the parents of the young people.

A person's decision making method matures as time passes, because of the biological changes in the individual and the continuous learning process. The process of how a person decides is observed by many researchers and psychologists in the past. In the following sections, we will briefly go through various theories presented by researchers to analyze this process.

practice becomes more and more impossible with the growing age of the person and the fast changing world. Most, if not all, people born about thirty years ago find a world very different from the one they grew up in. This makes it very difficult for them to make valuable and correct decisions for their children. The parents are not even aware of the things the younger generation has learnt about the world, and thus they, in many cases, are helpless when it comes to decide for a career for their young ones.

Researchers have identified four different individual approaches to making decisions by people: Analytical, Conceptual, Directive, and Behavioral (A. J. Rowe et al., 1984). People usually construct simplified models that observe the essential features from problems without capturing all their complexity (Simon 1976, Forester 1984). Analyzing data for students of ninth grade students, Super and Overstreet identified "planfulness" as a major dimension in vocational maturity (Wash & Osipow, 1988). The level of change in a person's decision making habits determines his level of maturity. Researchers have also observed that individuals differ in their preparedness to face the challenges of changing realities (Wash & Osipow, 1988). In one study, Staley (1996) found that Career Indecision was positively related to fear of success and negatively related to self-esteem. Vondracek found that Career Indecision was related to identity status (1995). Patton and Creed found girls to have higher indecision scores than boys (2001). Students remain indecisive about their careers because of the complexity of the world around them. "Most significant decisions are made by judgment, rather than by a defined prescriptive model (Bazerman, 1994)." Furthermore, People have a tendency to stick to a decision or to escalate commitment even if it is proved to be wrong afterwards (Bobocei & Meyer, 1994).

2.2 Cognitive-Structural Theories

People perceive, organize, and reason differently. The factors behind differences are dealt with in Cognitive-structural theories. These theories look at the way people carry on their thinking activities.

Some of the cognitive-structural theorists include:

a. William Perry

b. Lawrence Kohlberg

c. Carol Gilligan

a. William Perry's Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development

William Perry (1970) has theorized that college students "journey" through 9 "positions" in their intellectual development. This journey is rather fluid and cognitive structures go through a series of constructions and reconstructions. As new knowledge is added, a deeper understanding who one is and how the world is grows. The stages can be defined in terms of a student's attitude towards knowledge in general (Perry 1981).

b. Lawrence Kolhberg's Theory of Moral Development

Moral development is a topic of interest in both psychology and education. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg modified and expanded upon Piaget's work to form a theory that explained the development of moral reasoning. Piaget described a two-stage process of moral development, whereas Kohlberg theory of moral development observed six stages within three different levels. Kohlberg extended Piaget's theory, proposing that moral development is a continual process that occurs throughout a person's lifespan.

c. Carol Gilligan's Model of Women's Moral Development

According to Carol, men tend to reason and moralize with a voice of justice, while women's moral reasoning is with the voice of care. Although all beings reason with both voices, women are predominantly found in a position of nurturing and so they are more likely to reason with sentiments of care, whereas men are concerned more with right versus wrong.

2.3 Rational Decision Making Model

A human being when confronted with more than one choice always tries to rationally decide for a solution. This normally follows a six step Rational Decision Making Model (Harrison, 1995).

1. Define the problem.

2. Identify the decision criteria.

3. Allocate weights to the criteria.

4. Develop the alternatives.

5. Evaluate the alternatives.

6. Select the best alternative.

2.4 Learning Theories

A person continuously learns from within his/her environment. A student learns more than others as he is also exposed to structured knowledge presented before him as part of his studies. This continuous learning should change his decision making behavior with time.

a. Experiential Learning Theory

In this theory, Rogers (1994) distinguished two types of learning: cognitive (meaningless) and experiential (significant). Cognitive Learning corresponds to academic knowledge such as learning vocabulary or multiplication tables whereas Experiential Learning refers to applied knowledge such as learning about which university is better for higher

education. The key to the distinction is that experiential learning addresses the needs and wants of the student. According to Rogers, experiential learning is facilitated because of personal involvement of the learner.

b. Situated Learning Theory

Lave (1990) argues in his theory that learning is dependent on the activity, context and culture in which the learning process takes place. This contrasts with most classroom learning activities which involve knowledge which is abstract and out of context. Social interaction is a significant component of situated learning-learners become involved in a "community of practice" which embodies certain beliefs and behaviors to be acquired.

c. Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory of Bandura (1977) emphasizes the importance of a student observing and modeling behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of other people. Bandura states: "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Ibid, p. 22).

3. Role of Parents

Parents play an important role in decision making of students in our country. Assessing family influence in career counseling links us with current contextual theory. Career decision theory has evolved through the years and now include contextual and relationship factors. Career literature now reflects how researchers can utilize the experience of family in the career counseling process (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005).

Retrospective Questionnaires

Retrospective questionnaires can be used to assess family influence in making career decisions. The following are some instruments found both in the literature and made available in unpublished form. In Amundson's Significant Other Questionnaire, Amundson (1998) has created a unique clinical approach by inviting important family members, like parents and siblings, into the guiding process. They are asked to give their perspectives on a student's abilities, interests, and personal characteristics.

Taylor's Family Work History

Taylor (2003) has used a family history worksheet that involves more than one generation. She said that we should interview six individual family members or close family friends from at least three different generations (cohorts, parents, grandparents). With the selection of six people, she asks that we gather information about the first paid experiences of the interviewees. Interviewees are also asked to describe their favorite job and employer.

Family Constellation Questionnaire

Peterson and Gonzalez (2005) have created a family constellation questionnaire to assist the understanding of family influence and building a career genogram. This tool serves as a guide to gather information regarding one's contextual factors.

Chope's Family Protocol

Using variables from professional experience as well as relevant research, Chope (2006) developed the instrument for practitioners to elicit historical information about a family's influence on a student. His questions point to the planned fantasies of the family. The questions inform researchers of the family's impressions of particular roles that men and women play in the workforce.

The Career Genogram

The most commonly recognized instrument for gathering information about the influence of the family is an occupational family tree, also known as the career genogram (Okiishi, 1987). The genogram informs the investigation of current as well as multigenerational career development patterns, in the form of a picture. The roles, behaviors and attitudes of family members can be extracted with this instrument. Family patterns of all types can be spotted and the pressures of differential family standards can be understood. To create a family genogram, significant information from extended family members should be gathered.

Career-O-Gram

Like the genogram, the career-o-gram (Thorngren & Feit, 2001) allows us to explore contextual issues in a family through a pictorial representation. With a focus on career history, it is used to evaluate the many contextual influences on a person's career decision- making process. Gathering information takes place with appropriate clinical questions.

Critical Incidents

Time lines have been a hallmark of developmental career theory (Super, 1990). Using a time line, a person may explore the critical incidents that have taken place in one's life, which could be considered disruptive or enhancing to their career paths.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Data collection was done initially through circulation of a questionnaire that asked 10 basic questions. The choices were arranged in a Likert scale from very true to very false. The required data were about their decision-making process in joining the institution. A total of 40 questionnaires were distributed among the students of final year TMM and AMM classes. A total of 32 completed questionnaires were collected. In order to get a clearer in-depth picture, twelve students were selected at random and were interviewed

by the investigator. All the interviews took place at the teacher's office. To be able to get true responses, the interviewer endeavored to create a relaxed atmosphere for the students. The questions put forward before them also reflected this strategy. The interview was focused on the career decision but, depending on the responses, a little digression was allowed to ease the respondent.

5. Critical Analysis

Debating the collected data critically, the analytic technique of "Explanation Building" is used as discussed by Yin (2009). The explanation resulted from a series of iterations:

- Making initial theoretical statements on the basis of given theories.

- Comparing the findings of cases against these statements.

- Revising the statement if needed.

- Comparing other details of the case.

- Repeating this process with other cases.

Chope's Family Protocol (2006) helped set a direction for the assessment of the findings. After careful analysis of the data, the following categories emerged:

Father's Occupation: The interviews clearly show a preference for business studies in the families and in students where father is self employed. Interestingly, most of the cases showed a family connection with the field of textiles.

Family role in decision making: 9 out of 12 cases reported very powerful and restricting role of the family in their children's career decisions. The interviewees were very pleased with the gradual easing up of the family's control over their decisions with the passage of time.

Role of friends: Only in the cases where family interference was not evident, the opinions of the friends were considered. In that too, father did the searching and confirming work for the information provided by the friends.

Critical Incidents: The role of critical incidents in a person's life and its impact on career decision making was not observed in a meaningful way in the limited number of cases (Super, 1990). In one case at least, its importance was witnessed. Place in the birth order: In agreement with the Family Constellation Questionnaire of Peterson and Gonzalez (2005), the studies showed that the eldest child was given more say in his/her decisions as compared to the younger ones.

Need for counseling: Half of the cases stressed the need for career counseling and thought that their decision could have been different if there was an option of proper counseling. They all felt that students as well as their parents did not have much information about the available fields of study.

Peer Comparisons: The students seemed to compare their financial positions with that of their friends when asked for assessing satisfaction with their decisions.

Future plans: Almost all of the respondents said that they would go for higher education. Though some of them wanted to postpone it for a year or two, for getting some experience or for arranging the finances. They all reported that now the decision is theirs.

Career Indecision: It was observed that many respondents were undecided about the career choices and were also unsure about their chances of getting admission in the selected field. So they appeared in the tests of more than one university and then made the final decision.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Critical examination of different aspects of this study and literature review suggests following interventions and suggestions:

a. Many students were of the opinion that there is a need for proper career counseling. The absence of career counseling created a situation where friends and family members entered the scene and offered career options unsuited to the tastes and aptitudes of the students.

b. The parents played the role of know-it-alls for their offspring and this was not appreciated by the students. Many students were relieved to find their decision making abilities recognized and respected by their families after their education in the university. It is suggested that to ensure students' interest in studies, their parents should not impose their decisions but rather help them in making decisions by themselves.

c. It was reported by respondents that the universities did not pay much attention to their promotions and thus many eligible and promising students were not aware of the programs offered by them. The universities can initiate career counseling programs helping the students and also promoting themselves.

The birth order of the students was also found to be a factor in the perception and treatment of the person as one who cannot make correct decisions. This assumption needs to be checked and the people should not underestimate the abilities of their younger brothers and sisters.

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