

Career Decision State Survey©

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The Career Decision State

At the conceptual level, the career decision state is a subjective state of being in the moment regarding a career goal or career aspiration and is composed of both cognitive and affective components. This existential state raises such questions as “Who am I? (Identity), “To what goal am I headed? (Direction)” “What are my feelings regarding my goal?” (Satisfaction, Confusion), and “Do I believe in myself to make an appropriate choice and to attain a goal? (Self-confidence, Self-efficacy). When individuals enter a career center seeking career counseling or are about to embark on a professional program of study, they are in a subjective state of being referred to as the Career Decision State. The question is raised, are individuals ready to make important decisions or to pursue training leading to a career? The Career Decision State Survey (CDSS) is brief inventory that takes a snapshot of one’s readiness for such efforts according to three constructs, certainty about a career goal, satisfaction with a goal, and vocational clarity regarding one’s career and life goals.

Readiness for Career Decision Making

Readiness (Sampson, Peterson, Reardon, & Lenz, 2000) alludes to the extent of one’s preparation for deliberate and effortful career problem solving and decision making. It consists of two independent dimensions, capability and complexity. Capability refers one’s ability to solve a career problem and to make a career decision, whereas complexity alludes to the personal and social context in which a career decision is made. A state of high readiness occurs when one’s capability exceeds the complexity life circumstances and vice versa for a state of low readiness. In cognitive information processing theory (CIP) we assume that individuals, under normal circumstances, are capable of making career decisions with minimal professional assistance. However, an individual’s capability for career decision making can become limited when he or she becomes overwhelmed or confused by negative thoughts and emotions or by extraordinarily challenging life circumstances. The Career Decision State Survey is an instrument that assesses the capability component of readiness for effective career problem solving and decision making.

The Career Decision State Survey© (CDSS)

The CDSS© is a six question instrument that measures three constructs,(a) Occupational Certainty, (b) Satisfaction with Career Choice, and (c) Vocational Clarity which together assess readiness for career decision making or for matriculation in professional programs of study. The first question on the CDSS is the Occupational Alternatives Question (OAQ; Zener & Schnuelle, 1972, modified by Slaney, 1980) measuring

certainty with respect to one's career goal and asks, "List all occupations you are considering right now?" The second question is a follow-up to the first question on the OAQ and asks, "Which occupation is your first choice. If undecided, write undecided." The third question is the Satisfaction with Career Scale (Zener & Schnuelle, 1972, modified by Holland, Gottfredson, & Nafziger, 1975) which asks, "How well satisfied are you with your first choice? And place a check next to the appropriate statement: (1) Well satisfied, (2) Satisfied but have a few doubts, (3) Not sure, (4) Dissatisfied and intend to remain, (5) Very dissatisfied and intend to change, and (6) Undecided about my future career goal. Questions 4, 5, and 6 measure Vocational Clarity and were taken from the My Vocational Situation inventory (Holland, Gottfredson, & Power, 1980). These questions call for True or False responses to the following: (1) "If I had to make an occupation right now, I'm afraid I would make a bad choice;" (2) "Making up my mind about a career has been a long and difficult problem for me;" and (3) "I am confused about the whole problem of deciding on a career."

Scoring the CDSS

The CDSS consists of three scored dimensions. The OAQ (questions 1 and 2) is scored, 1 = first choice and no alternatives, 2 = first choice but with alternatives, 3 = alternatives only, and 4 = no alternatives listed. The Satisfaction with Career Choice (question 3) is scored 1 through 6 as outlined above. The Vocational Clarity Scale is scored 1 = True and 0 = False for each item with a range from 0 = all false, and 3 = all true.

Interpreting the CDSS

Low scores and all three dimensions, 1 on OAQ, 1 on Satisfaction, and 0 on Vocational Clarity, indicate a high state of readiness and suggest an individual possesses a high state of career identity, is focused on a career goal, and is well satisfied with his/her choice. Higher scores on the three dimensions, such as a 3 on the OAQ, 5 on the Satisfaction Scale and endorse 2 or more items as True on the Vocational Clarity Scale suggest an individual who is uncertain regarding a career goal, dissatisfied with the goal state and appears to be experiencing considerable confusion and lack of self-confidence in making a choice. An individual who earns high scores is regarded in a low state of readiness for effective career decision-making or for matriculating in professional training program. In such a case, further assessment is warranted such as administering the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, and Saunders, 1996) as a measure of capability for career decision making, or the Decision Space Worksheet (DSW; Peterson, Leasure, Carr, & Lenz, 2009-10) to assess the complexity of an individual's decision context. We advocate that higher scores on any of the three dimensions warrant serious consideration of further diagnostic assessment.

Validity of the CDSS

All three dimensions of the CDSS, certainty, satisfactions and vocational identity, captured significant ($p < .01$) independent variation the prediction of CTI total scores. The dimensions of certainty and vocational clarity significantly ($p < .05$) differentiated students enrolled in undergraduate rehabilitation programs from students enrolled in graduate rehabilitation programs (Leierer et al., in press).

Possible uses of the CDSS

The authors view the CDSS as an instrument currently in further development with respect to validity and reliability, hence the © designation, but researchers attending this NCDA program are encouraged to use the instrument in the three ways listed below and share their findings with the authors.

1. As a screening instrument for clients seeking career counseling to ascertain whether further diagnostic readiness assessment would be in order. The CDSS may be administered on a client intake form. Scores on the CDSS are associated with dimensions of the CTI. Scores on the CTI, in turn, are associated with anxiety, depression, vocational identity, locus of control, and psychological adjustment.
2. As a measure of readiness for matriculation to a program of study administered at orientation. The CDSS may also be routinely in academic advising throughout the program to ascertain whether there are changes in commitment to a career goal.
3. As an evaluation measure in career counseling or in a career development course to assess changes in the career decision state. The CDSS could be administered in a pretest-posttest manner.

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