

# **The Relationships Among Goal Instability and Career Thoughts, Career Decision State and Performance in a Career Development Course**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships among goal instability and career thoughts, career decision state, and performance in a career development course. Participants enrolled in an undergraduate career development course at a large southeastern university completed measures of goal instability, career thoughts, career decision state, and performance in course activities. Bivariate correlations and multiple regression analyses were conducted. Results demonstrated that goal instability was significantly related to career thoughts, career satisfaction and tension, and performance in the course. The strongest relationship was demonstrated between goal instability and career thoughts, indicating that more goal instability is related to more negative career thoughts. Goal instability was not significantly related to career decidedness. Implications for practice and research based on the results of this study are discussed.

## **Overview of the Study**

- Lack of research examining motivation in the context of career problem solving and decision making; goal instability used to conceptualize and measure motivation.
- The Goal Instability Scale (GIS; Robbins & Patton, 1985) measures an aspect of the self pertaining to personal goals.
- Individuals with low goal instability are expected to independently create career objectives and energetically engage in the career development process.
- Individuals with high goal instability require the support and encouragement of others to pursue the career development process.
- Goal-setting theory assumes that action is purposeful, and studying one's goals and goal attainment is a good way to measure an individual's purpose and motivation to achieve (Locke, 1996).
- Intrinsic life goals are associated with greater health, performance, and well-being (Bustein, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

## **Measures**

- Goal Instability Scale (GIS; Robbins & Patton, 1985)
- Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996)
- Occupational Alternatives Question (OAQ; Zener & Schnuelle, 1972; modified by Slaney, 1980)
- Satisfaction with Choice Question (Zener & Schnuelle, 1972; modified by Holland, Gottfredson, & Nafziger, 1975)
- Career Tension Scale (CTS; Reed, 2005)
- Course Performance Contracts (total points earned, extra credit points obtained, and earned grade in the course)

## **Results**

- 258 participants enrolled in the course; 57% male, 63.2% Caucasian, 71.3% upperclassmen
- Research Question 1: What is the relationship between goal instability and career thoughts?

- Significant relationship ( $p < .001$ ) indicating more goal instability is related to more negative career thoughts. Decision making confusion the strongest relationship accounting for 40.9% of the variance in goal instability.
- Research Question 2: What is the relationship between goal instability and career decision state?
  - Occupational decidedness (measured by the OAQ) not related to goal instability. Both satisfaction with career choice and career tension were found to be negatively related to goal instability, accounting for 18.2% of the variance.
- Research Question 3: What is the relationship between goal instability and performance in a career development course?
  - Goal instability significantly related to performance in course; more goal instability related to less total points earned, fewer extra credit points obtained, and lower overall earned grade.

### **Implications and Discussion**

- Career service practitioners could use the GIS to create interventions that encourage students to develop and strengthen intrinsic goals, pertaining to such things as personal growth and health, which might generalize to greater satisfaction in their career decision making.
- GIS is brief, so could be used as a screening device to determine if individuals are having difficulty identifying orienting life goals; examining specific items might be useful for practitioners in developing treatment plans and interventions for clients.
- Providing career services to individuals in group or individual format might serve to decrease levels of goal instability and increase self-efficacy in the career decision-making and problem-solving process.
- Career interventions that incorporate both cognitive and behavioral activities, with opportunities to learn and receive feedback from others, assist in fostering goal setting and motivation.
- For individuals with high goal instability, practitioners might start at the very beginning of the career decision-making process, such as the Communication phase of the CASVE cycle (cognitive information processing theory; Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002).
- Due to the strong relationship between goal instability and career thoughts, incorporating the CTI workbook and Individual Learning Plan would assist practitioners and clients in developing specific learning objectives and goals, while simultaneously assisting clients in identifying and challenging their negative thoughts related to the career decision-making and problem-solving process.
- This was an exploratory study, so need for future studies to replicate and extend research; studies might use samples varying in age, setting, SES, and ethnicity to increase generalizability.
- Future research might examine goal instability and other measures of career decision state, including the My Vocational Situation (MVS; Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980), and secondary constructs on the Self Directed Search (SDS; 1997).

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