



**THE EFFECT OF THE DECISION TO PURSUE A CERTAIN  
CAREER BASED ON A NUMBER OF VOCATIONAL  
COUNSELING SESSIONS ON JOB SATISFACTION AND  
WORK ENGAGEMENT AS INDICATORS OF QUALITY OF  
LIFE AT WORK**

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**Abstract**

*The overall goal of this research was to investigate the effect of the decision to pursue a certain career based on a number of vocational counseling sessions on quality of life at work. The study involved 60 subjects of both genders. Participants were asked to complete two questionnaires: Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Utrecht scale (UWE). They were asked to fill in the questionnaires honestly and were informed that the collected data will remain confidential. It was revealed that those who received vocational counseling are more engaged at work than those who did not receive counseling. The study presented some possible explanations for these findings and future research directions are provided.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *consiliere in cariera, angajament organizational, implicare in munca*

**Keywords:** *career counseling, organizational commitment, work engagement*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1. CAREER COUNSELING**

During his tenure as president of the American Psychological Association, Martin E.P. Seligman (1998) identified "the development of human strengths" as the forgotten mission of psychology. Maybe clinical psychology has neglected

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positive development, but has not forgotten the importance of psychological counseling approaches of development and prevention to help people cope with life's challenges. Psychological counseling has not treated clients as passive beneficiaries of modeling and reinforcements from the outside, a second deficit of psychology according to Seligman. Psychological counseling has always seen people as active shapers of their lives, responsible for their own development.

In a second article, Seligman said "positive psychology needs a taxonomy to guide formulation and build a good life." Making a taxonomy of strong points is an interesting project, due to its theoretical importance and practical applications. Counseling services have built several such taxonomies in the past 50 years (Crites, 1965). These taxonomies typically describe human strengths as attitudes and coping skills needed to meet the developmental tasks that society requires from its citizens. Coping behaviors are instrumental acts that practice human strengths needed to achieve "the good life" described by Seligman (1998).

Career counselors have been particularly active in proposing a taxonomy of the strengths of the people as a means of defining the scope and operational objectives of career development counseling. Taxonomies on career development (Super, 1963; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963) organizes general coping behaviors using Erikson's epigenetic frame (1968) about the values and strengths of human character. The taxonomies of career development identifies how these strengths are exercised as fundamental human adaptive responses to the professional career field. Adaptive responses cataloged in the taxonomies related to career development are seen as ongoing processes of human development and mechanisms for positive change. For example, hope as a strength manifests itself in attitudes and behaviors related to planning. Planning is an essential variable in all professionally maturing models (Super, 1983).

Through vocational counseling researchers relate to development interventions that build human strengths and develop adaptation responses that individuals need in order to choose an occupation and to ensure that they meet the challenges that the occupation entails. This area is not limited to professional orientation. Vocational counseling also focuses on career and its management over time, not only vocational matching. However, it is important to be noted that the hexagonal model of vocational guidance of Holland (1997) serves as a viable taxonomy regarding psychological strengths, being a model with strong construct validity and extensive empirical support. In contrast, the models of career development are taxonomies of psychosocial strong points and can be useful when

one considers building the human strengths and civic values identified by Seligman.

## 1.2. JOB SATISFACTION

Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as a "positive emotional state resulting from personal assessment of labor". Smith et al. (1992) defined satisfaction as "any feeling or emotional response to the situation of employment or aspects of the employment situation." Finally, Dawis and Lofquist (1984, cited in Smith et al., 1992) define satisfaction as 'assessment of the degree to which the employee's working environment meets the needs of the individual "(Smith et al., 1992). These definitions are the starting point in defining the concept of satisfaction and are similar to other definitions which see satisfaction in terms of emotional orientation on the work and role within the organization.

A general definition of job satisfaction is as follows: affective (emotional) reaction to a job resulting from the comparison of current results with the expected labor. Satisfaction is thus a "function of the reward system of correspondence between the work environment and individual needs" (Smith et al., 1992).

## 1.3. WORK ENGAGEMENT

One of the first theorizations of the concept of work involvement belongs to Kahn (1990). According to the description he made, involved employees are fully connected physically, cognitively and emotionally to the roles exercised in the workplace. Thus, commitment does not refer to anything but focusing energy toward achieving the organization's objectives. Employees with increased involvement in work are more likely to work harder and invest more effort than employees who are disconnected from work. Theorists in industrial-organizational psychology propose several definitions of involvement in work, but one that has been imposed is proposed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). The two researchers see work engagement as an active and positive state in report to work that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption.

According to the authors, the concept of force refers to a high energy level and mental resistance during activities at work, while dedication refers to the way in which the employee is strongly connected to work and the presence of a sense of meaning of work, excitement and challenge. Absorption refers to the concentration achieved by full employment with a positive emotional state, so that the employee perceives time as passing faster. Studies that have considered this issue have

assessed differences between individuals in relation to involvement in work by using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale and revealed that these differences are influenced by conditions and personal resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demero & Schaufeli, 2009). Moreover, recent studies have indicated that involvement can also vary from day to day, even in the same person. So, depending on the events of the day, employees will present a higher or lower level of involvement in activities at work.

## **2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES**

### **2.1. OBJECTIVE**

The overall objective of this research is to investigate the effect of the decision to follow a certain career based on a number of vocational counseling sessions over the quality of life at work. Specific objectives were to investigate the differences between employees who chose careers based on vocational counseling sessions and employees who have chosen careers on their own in relation to satisfaction at work and investigated the differences between employees and elected career counseling sessions based on vocational and employees who have chosen careers in relation to their own work engagement.

### **2.2. HYPOTHESES**

Hypothesis 1: Employees who have chosen careers based on vocational counseling sessions have a higher level of satisfaction in the workplace compared with employees who have chosen their career on their own.

Hypothesis 2: Employees who have chosen careers based on vocational counseling sessions have a higher level of involvement in work compared to employees who have chosen their career on their own.

## **3. METHOD**

### **3.1. PARTICIPANTS**

The study involved 60 subjects employed in different organizations and in different areas, including 30 employees who chose careers based on vocational counseling sessions and 30 employees who have chosen careers on their own. The sample was one of convenience. Subjects were selected because they were the

easiest to recruit for the study and we did not take into account the selection of topics that are representative of the whole population.

## 3.2. INSTRUMENTS

### 3.2.1. Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)

Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) is a scale consisting of 36 items and 9 facets assessing employee attitudes about work and different aspects of the workplace. Each facet is assessed with four items and a total score is calculated by adding together all items. The scale used is composed of a scale from 0-6, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Items are formulated both positively and negatively, so about half must be reversed. The 9 faces are pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, contingent rewards (rewards based on performance), the operating procedures (rules and procedures), colleges, nature of work and communication. Although the JSS was originally developed for use by companies operating in the services are, it applies to all organizations. The rules provided on the official website of the scale include a variety of types of organizations, both from the private and public sector.

### 3.2.2. Scala Utrecht (UWES)

The Utrecht Scale (UWE) for measuring the level of involvement in work encompasses three dimensions: force, absorption and dedication (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, cited in Virga et al., 2009). In its original form, the scale consisted of 24 items, but it came to form with 17 items after psychometric tests indicated giving up seven of them. Therefore, Vigor has 6 items, Absorption 5 items and Dedication 6 items. Their scoring is done on a scale of frequency in seven steps, where 0 means never, and 7 means always. Virga et al. (2009) present a Cronbach Alpha index of the UWE-17 scale between .80 and .90. The three-factor structure of the scale UWE 17 scale and UWE 9 is supported by several factor analysis theoretical studies (Hakanen, 2002; Hallberg & Scaufeli, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003, cited in Seppälä et al., 2008). Romanian adaptation of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale was conducted by Virga et al. (2009) on 329 participants, employees both in the private and state organizations. The authors conducted two parallel forms of validation of the scale, but they found

that one variant showed the greatest factor internal consistency, around .90 over the version given by three factors (Cronbach Alpha between .70 and .80).

### 3.3. PROCEDURE

Participants were invited to complete the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Utrecht Scale questionnaire (UWE). Each participant was explained the purpose of research (investigating the effect of the decision to follow a certain career based on a number of vocational counseling sessions over the quality of life at work). They were asked to complete the questionnaires as sincere as possible and were informed that the data collected will remain confidential. Once the data was collected about their participation in vocational counseling sessions and scores of the two questionnaires, the data were input into SPSS and analyzed the differences between employees who chose careers based on counseling sessions and employees who chose careers on their own in relation to job satisfaction and work engagement.

## 4. RESULTS

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and symmetry distribution indicators for the variables

	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic
Age	60	26.7167	5.54517	1.345
Work engagement	60	76.0667	13.45786	-1.124
Job satisfaction	60	128.1500	11.66601	-.489
Valid N (listwise)	60			

  

	Skewness Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Age	.309	2.988	.608
Work engagement	.309	2.276	.608
Job satisfaction	.309	-.172	.608
Valid N (listwise)			

In Table 1 mean, standard deviation and symmetry distribution indicators for the studied variables are observed. Thus, it is observed that the distribution symmetry indicator values are within normal parameters (skewness -1, +1, kurtosis, -3, +3).

Table 2. Mean and standard deviations for the variables as a function of attending career counseling

	Career choice	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Work engagement	Without counseling	30	71.5333	15.69259	2.86506
	With counseling	30	80.6000	8.92729	1.62989
Job satisfaction	Without counseling	30	127.7667	12.59634	2.29977
	With counseling	30	128.5333	10.85876	1.98253

In Table 3 is observed averages and standard deviations for the variables depending on participation in counseling.

Table 3. Results of the t test for independent groups depending on attending career counseling

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
Work engagement	Equal variances assumed	4.067	.048	-2.751	58
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.751	45.991
Job satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	1.268	.265	-.252	58
	Equal variances not assumed			-.252	56.767

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Work engagement	Equal variances assumed	.008	-9.06667	3.29623
	Equal variances not assumed	.008	-9.06667	3.29623
Job satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	.802	-.76667	3.03634
	Equal variances not assumed	.802	-.76667	3.03634

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means	
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
Work engagement	Equal variances assumed	-15.66479	-2.46854
	Equal variances not assumed	-15.70167	-2.43166
Job satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	-6.84456	5.31122
	Equal variances not assumed	-6.84737	5.31404

Table 4 shows independent groups t test results depending on participation in counseling. There is a statistically significant difference with respect to involvement in work between persons who participated in career counseling programs and those not counseled ( $t(58) = -2.75, p < .01$ ), people who have benefited from counseling are characterized by a significantly higher level of involvement in working as opposed to people who have not benefited.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The overall objective of this research is to investigate the effect of the decision to follow a certain career based on a number of vocational counseling sessions over the quality of life at work. Specific objectives were to investigate the differences between employees who chose careers based on counseling sessions vocational and employees who have chosen careers on their own in relation to satisfaction at work and investigated the differences between employees who elected their career based on vocational counseling sessions and employees who have chosen careers in relation to their own work engagement.

In the study 60 subjects participated from various organizations and various areas, including 30 employees who chose careers based on vocational counseling sessions and 30 employees who chose careers on their own. Participants were invited to complete the questionnaires Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) and the Utrecht Scala (UWE). Each participant explained the purpose of research (investigating the effect of the decision to follow a certain career based on a number of vocational counseling sessions over the quality of life at work). They were asked to complete questionnaires as sincere as possible and were informed that the data collected will remain confidential. Once the data was collected about their participation in counseling sessions and the scores of the two questionnaires, the data was input into SPSS and analyzed the differences between employees who chose careers based on counseling sessions and employees who chose their careers on their own in relation to job satisfaction and work engagement. The authors expected that employees who chose careers based on counseling sessions will have a higher level of satisfaction in the workplace compared to employees who have chosen careers on their own.

The results indicated that employees who chose careers based on vocational counseling sessions have a higher level of commitment compared to employees who have chosen their career on their own. This is most likely due to the fact that employees who mainly chose their workplace based on a thorough analysis of their strengths, their interests and their values, are more likely to match this job and so to be more committed. On the other hand, employees who have chosen work according to their strengths do not use their potential and their abilities in the tasks they have, which is why they are less committed. Employees who have a job in which they have no interest do not engage in work activities so intensely as

compared to employees who are interested in their work, which is why the first ones have a level lower level of dedication.

The results indicated that employees who chose careers based on vocational counseling sessions have a higher level of vigor compared to employees who have chosen their career on their own. This is most likely due to the fact that employees who chosen careers based on their strengths deposited less effort in fulfilling their duties at work compared to workers who do not have jobs suited to their strengths. If their workplace requires their strengths, then it'll be easier to accomplish tasks and therefore will have a higher energy level. In addition, employees who have to work activities that are interchangeable, maintain attention naturally, they find it difficult to be distracted and deposited less effort to stay focused, which is why they have a higher level of force. On the other hand, employees who are not interested in activities at work have to make an effort to stay focused and keep their attention when they performed the tasks, so it is expected they have a lower level of vigor. And not least, employees whose values are in line with the company's values have a higher level of intrinsic motivation, so therefore a higher force at work. On the other hand, employees whose values do not match the company's values have a lower motivation level, because they believe that what they do is meaningless, which is why they are more likely to have a low level of work vigor.

The results indicated that employees who chose careers based on vocational counseling sessions have a higher level of satisfaction at work compared to employees who chose their career on their own. This is expected for at least three reasons. First, employees who have chosen a career based on the strengths they have, are more likely to have higher performance at work and therefore be appreciated more by colleagues and superiors and at the same time receive greater rewards. Also, the less effort they make to carry out tasks successfully, make their work easier and are less stressed compared to employees who have not chosen careers based on their strengths. Therefore the first category of employees have a higher level of workplace satisfaction. Secondly, employees who mainly work according to their own interests are naturally more involved in the tasks they carry out and submit less effort to remain task- centered which makes them more satisfied with their job.

And lastly, individuals who have chosen a job in line with their value system feel they are significant and impact others, which may increase their job satisfaction. On the other hand, employees who do not have the same value system

as their companies may feel that they do not make a difference and impact, which can lead to a low satisfaction at work.

### 5.1. LIMITATIONS

The first limit of this research is the small sample. To make generalizations at the population level regarding vocational counseling and its effect on satisfaction in the workplace and on labor involvement a larger sample is needed. Secondly, engaging in work was self-reported. To get a more realistic picture about their involvement study based on the assessment of superiors and colleagues of employees will show how much they are involved in work.

### 5.2. FUTURE RESEARCH

To investigate the effect on the activity of vocational counseling at work, it is recommended to investigate the differences related to the performance of the employees who have chosen their careers based on counseling sessions and employees who have chosen their own career. In addition, it is recommended to make longitudinal studies related to different aspects at work (job satisfaction, work engagement, intention to quit etc.), since the effect of vocational counseling could be a short-term one. And lastly, it is important to investigate specific methods of vocational counseling that leads customers to choose the right occupation, because the possibility exists that some forms of counseling are inefficient and do not have the desired effects. Thus, it could be identified what type of vocational counseling is best suited for career choices.

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## REZUMAT

*Scopul general al acestei cercetări a fost reprezentat de investigarea efectului deciziei de a urma o anumită carieră pe baza unui număr de ședințe de consiliere vocațională asupra calității vieții la locul de muncă. La studiu au participat 60 de subiecți de ambele genuri. Participanții au fost invitați să completeze 2 chestionare: Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) și Scala Utrecht (UWES). Aceștia au fost rugați să completeze chestionarele cât mai sincer și au fost înștiințați că datele recoltate o să rămână confidențiale. A fost evidențiat faptul că cei care au beneficiat de consiliere vocațională sunt mai implicați la locul de muncă decât cei care nu au beneficiat de consiliere. Sunt prezentate anumite explicații posibile pentru aceste rezultate și sunt oferite direcții viitoare de cercetare.*