



The construction and initial validation of the Work Volition Scale

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ABSTRACT

This study constructed an instrument measuring work volition for adult populations, defined as the perceived capacity to make occupational choices despite constraints. In Study 1, an exploratory factor analysis produced a 3-factor structure containing subscales assessing general volition, financial constraints, and structural constraints. The full Work Volition Scale (WVS) and three subscales demonstrated adequate to strong internal consistency. In Study 2, a confirmatory factor analysis replicated the factor structure from Study 1 with a new sample. The hypothesized factor structure of the WVS was a good fit to the data and was internally consistent. In Studies 2 and 3, work volition correlated in hypothesized directions with work locus of control, core self-evaluations, career barriers, career compromise, and adaptive personality traits, providing evidence of construct validity. Additionally, none of these correlations was large enough to indicate overlapping constructs. Finally, work volition added unique variance in the prediction of job satisfaction above and beyond the variance accounted for by work locus of control, core self-evaluations, and the big 5 personality traits, suggesting incremental validity of the construct. Research implications are discussed.

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The world of work is profoundly changing and these changes have had a trickledown effect on how researchers study the processes by which adults make career decisions. Although the notion of a grand career narrative still exists for a select few, most adults likely compromise their personal work preferences to some degree in order to find work that can provide for themselves and their family (Duffy & Dik, 2009; Savickas, 2005), or encounter constraints on their ability to choose occupations (Blustein, 2006). These compromises speak to an individual's perceived capacity to make occupational choices despite constraints – what we have conceptualized here as *work volition*. In the present study, we seek to construct and validate an instrument that measures work volition among adults.

Theoretical background

Ideally, as individuals make career choices, they will match their personal preferences with what is required in the work environment, thereby leading to maximal satisfaction and performance. Numerous empirical studies spanning varying career development theories have supported this idea, and indeed some individuals do have the power to use their personal preferences as the dominant force in deciding what career to enter (e.g. Holland, 1997). However, these theories of career choice have generally been conceptualized and tested with samples of white, middle to upper middle class college students, who have high levels of power regarding the careers they will pursue and who have yet to enter the working world full time (Blustein, 2006). Unfortunately, our knowledge of the choice process of individuals not falling into this group (e.g., people of color, non-college aged adults, and people already in the working world) is limited. Scholars over the last 10 years have taken steps to address this substantive and empirical limitation (e.g., Diemer & Ali, 2009; Fouad & Byars, 2005), and we take an added step by constructing an

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instrument of work volition specifically geared toward adult populations, theoretically based on the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF; Blustein, 2008).

The PWF (Blustein, 2008) was developed to speak to the work lives of all individuals, not just those from privileged backgrounds or with a broad range of choices. Blustein (2008) noted that for all individuals, work can be a mechanism to fulfill the needs of survival, relatedness, and self-determination, which in turn may lead to greater life meaning and satisfaction (Blustein, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schultheiss, 2003). Critical to this link, however, is power to be able to choose the work they wish to pursue. Blustein (2006) noted that, “the loss of control, which is a hallmark of the current labor market (Sennett, 1998), may in fact strike at the heart of the self-determination process” (p. 227). Although most work can fulfill the need for survival to some degree, it may be substantially more challenging for people to find work that meets relatedness and self-determination needs. For example, people who have a limited range of vocational options generally hold occupations that do not correspond to their personal preferences (Blustein et al., 2002). When person–work environment fit is poor, it often leads to job dissatisfaction, a lack of organizational commitment, and greater quitting intentions (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005).

The recently developed PWF has emphasized the notion of work volition. Similar to any psychological construct, it is critical that a precise definition be offered. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, volition is defined as “the power of choosing or determining”. Though never explicitly defined within his work, Blustein (2006, 2008) has extended this basic definition of volition to the work domain, by highlighting the negative effects of a lack of power and volitional constraints in choosing or determining one's job choices. Accordingly, we combine the basic definition of volition with the theoretical writings of Blustein and define work volition as: *the perceived capacity to make occupational choices despite constraints*.

It is important to note that numerous constructs have existed prior to the PWF that likely relate to work volition that have a strong empirical base (e.g. career barriers, work locus of control) or are established components of specific vocational theories (e.g. realism of choice). Simply put, conceptualizing the work volition construct and developing a scale to assess it is not “reinventing the wheel,” but building on existing theory and related constructs to conceptualize and measure the construct. In the following section, we briefly review these related constructs and discuss how work volition may be similar and unique.

Related constructs

Career barriers

Career barriers are central or periphery to most of the major theories of career development, and a robust literature exists on the construct. The types of factors that can act as barriers to vocational choice are innumerable, and commonly studied barriers include economic, family, and personal factors. For example, in the present economy, there are literally not enough jobs to fit worker demand (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). When jobs are available, many workers will face family related barriers, such as work family conflict, geographic restrictions, and burdens to provide financial support. For many workers, family preferences can become paramount to personal preferences, particularly for racial/ethnic minorities, poor and working class people, and older workers. External barriers, such as racism, sexism, and/or homophobia, may also impede an individual's career development. These factors, such as a disability, can place limits on the careers one can pursue or could lead to experiencing hiring and workplace discrimination.

Career barriers and work volition are closely related, yet likely distinct constructs. Career barriers pertain to specific constraints on an individual, whereas work volition pertains to a subjective belief in one's power to make job choices. We contend that career barriers act as a pre-cursor to work volition, with more barriers leading to lower levels of perceived volition. The degree to which these constructs overlap will be tested empirically in the present study by comparing work volition scores to general and specific barriers measured by the Career Barriers Inventory (Swanson, Daniels, & Tokar, 1996).

Work locus of control

Work locus of control pertains to one's control within the work setting, and has received considerable attention in the I/O literature. Individuals expressing a more internal work locus of control have been found to be more satisfied and productive at work, more committed to their careers and organizations, and report less psychological strain (Wang, Bowling, & Eschleman, 2010). Although both work locus of control and work volition are concerned with perceptions of choice, work locus of control pertains to one's control within the work setting, whereas work volition pertains to one's perceived capacity to make job decisions. As such, we expect these constructs to be related but distinct, and will test this overlap empirically in the present study.

Synthesis and realism of choice

The constructs of synthesis and realism of choice are each subcomponents of Super's (1953) developmental theory. Super's synthesis describes the career decision process as an evolution through four developmental stages. The theory suggests that career decision making is influenced by personal experiences and is determined by exposure to career opportunities and personal barriers such as limited income, ability, and personal identity (Super, 1953). Work volition is similarly tied to the perception of opportunities and barriers, but focuses more on one's sense of power given these opportunities and barriers as they ultimately apply to making occupational choices. Realism of choice refers to how related an individual's career choice is to his/her personal interests, skills, resources, and limitations. We hypothesize that work volition is related to, but distinct from, realism of choice as

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