



## **Higher Perceptions and the Psychological Importance of Career Control in Determining Career Outcomes**

By Erik Bean, Ed.D.

Associate University Research Chair

Center for Leadership Studies & Organizational Research

University of Phoenix

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Higher Perceptions and Career Outcomes.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Career Control and Career Outcomes.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Interaction Between Higher Perceptions and Career Control.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Psychological Importance of Career Control.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Free Career Planning Resources.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>7</b>

## **Introduction**

Career development is a crucial process that influences an individual's life course. Finding a career and balancing it is a very personal experience and only you can gauge your progress and happiness. It is not necessarily a linear process, particularly in today's turbulent times. The process is affected by various factors, including higher perceptions and career control. Higher perceptions refer to an individual's subjective beliefs about themselves, their abilities, and their potential for success. Career control refers to an individual's ability to manage and direct their career development. This white paper explores the relationship between higher perceptions and career control in determining career outcomes. In addition, the psychological importance of career control in achieving career success is a process in which each individual must initiate on their own, but there are many tools designed to bolster one's choices.

### **Higher Perceptions and Career Outcomes**

Higher perceptions play a vital role in an individual's career development. According to Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, higher perceptions shape an individual's behavior, and behavior, in turn, affects career outcomes. Bandura (1997) posits that individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs tend to engage in more proactive behavior and are more likely to persevere in the face of obstacles. On the other hand, individuals with low self-efficacy beliefs tend to avoid challenging tasks and are more likely to give up when faced with difficulties. Thus, higher perceptions are critical in determining an individual's career outcomes.

According to Lent and Brown (2008) higher perceptions are positively related to career adaptability, career satisfaction, and career commitment. Career adaptability refers to an individual's ability to cope with career-related transitions and changes. Career satisfaction refers to an individual's level of contentment with their career, while career commitment refers to an

individual's attachment to their career. The study also found that individuals with higher perceptions were more likely to experience career success. Therefore, higher perceptions play a crucial role in determining an individual's career outcomes.

### **Career Control and Career Outcomes**

Career control is another critical factor that influences an individual's career outcomes. Krumboltz's (1979) examined learning theory of career development and state that an individuals' career outcomes are a result of their actions, the environment, and their cognition. Individuals who take an active role in managing their careers tend to have better career outcomes than those who do not. Thus, career control is critical in determining an individual's career success.

Judge and Bono (2001) found that individuals who perceive high levels of control over their careers tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career success. The study also found that individuals who perceive high levels of control over their careers tend to have better mental health outcomes. Therefore, career control is a critical factor that influences an individual's career outcomes.

### **The Interaction Between Higher Perceptions and Career Control**

Higher perceptions and career control interact to determine an individual's career outcomes. Individuals with higher perceptions tend to have a more significant sense of career control. Judge and Bono (2001) found individuals with high self-esteem tend to perceive greater control over their lives and their careers. Similarly, Lent and Brown (2008) observed that individuals with higher self-efficacy beliefs tend to engage in more proactive career behaviors, such as career exploration, career planning, and career goal setting. Thus, higher perceptions and

career control are interconnected and work together to determine an individual's career outcomes.

### **The Psychological Importance of Career Control**

Career control is psychologically important for individuals. According to the self-determination theory individuals have three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to an individual's sense of control over their life and their choices. Competence refers to an individual's sense of mastery over their environment. Relatedness refers to an individual's sense of belongingness and connection with others. Career control satisfies the autonomy and competence needs of individuals and, in turn, leads to greater job satisfaction and career success.

The global pandemic has dramatically changed the job market, causing millions to lose their jobs, switch careers, or take a break from work altogether. In such times of uncertainty, it is essential to have control over one's career. Career control refers to the ability to influence one's work-related decisions and outcomes. Research has shown that having career control can have significant psychological benefits.

For example, Pratt and Ashforth (2016) argue, "Individuals who have greater career control tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction" (p. 630). This is because having control over one's career allows individuals to pursue work that aligns with their values and interests. They are more likely to be engaged in their work and have a sense of purpose. Moreover, career control can help individuals cope with work-related stressors.

According to Tait and Padgett (2016), individuals who have greater career control are better able to cope with job demands and experience lower levels of job-related stress. "Career

control can help individuals cope with work-related stressors" (p. 185). Staying active and building skills outside of work can help foster this process.

Career control can also have a positive impact on individuals' mental health. Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall (2018) state that, "Individuals who have control over their careers are less likely to feel helpless or powerless in the face of changing circumstances"(p. 30). Having control over one's career can provide a sense of security and stability. Individuals who have control over their careers are less likely to feel helpless or powerless in the face of changing circumstances.

However, the pandemic has made it challenging for individuals to have control over their careers. In many cases, individuals have had to take jobs that are not aligned with their interests or values, or they may have had to take a break from work altogether. This lack of control can have a significant impact on psychological well-being. Kooij et al. (2016) maintain that individuals who experience a lack of control over their work tend to have higher levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout.

So, what can individuals do to maintain or regain control over their careers during these changing times? One strategy is to develop a strong sense of personal agency. According to Bandura's (2016) social cognitive theory, personal agency refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to influence their environment actively. Individuals who have a strong sense of personal agency are more likely to take action to improve their work-related outcomes. They are more likely to seek out opportunities for growth and development, and they are more likely to advocate for themselves in the workplace.

Another strategy is to engage in career planning. Career planning involves setting goals and developing a plan of action to achieve those goals. By engaging in career planning, individuals can take control over their career trajectories. They can identify their strengths,

interests, and values and use this information to make informed decisions about their careers.

Career planning can also help individuals navigate career transitions more effectively. By having a plan in place, individuals can reduce the uncertainty and anxiety associated with career transitions.

### **Free Career Planning Resources**

According to the University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index (2021), “More than 1 in 4 Americans do not have access to the right tools and resources to achieve their career goals” (p. 30). In addition, “44 percent of Americans do not have someone in their professional life who advocates for them” (p. 31). In 2023, this statistic has jumped to 56 percent (University of Phoenix, 2023). Taking ownership, therefore, is essential. To that end, there are many great free resources available on the internet for career planning. Here are some of the most useful ones:

- **CareerOneStop:** This website is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor and provides comprehensive information on career exploration, training, and job search. It includes tools for assessing your skills and interests, exploring careers, finding training programs, and searching for jobs.
- **O\*NET Online:** This website provides detailed information on hundreds of occupations, including job duties, required skills and education, and salary ranges. It also includes tools for assessing your skills and interests and exploring potential careers.
- **MyNextMove:** This website, also sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides an interactive tool for exploring careers based on your interests and experience. It also includes information on job outlook, salary, and required education and training.
- **LinkedIn Learning:** LinkedIn Learning offers thousands of courses on a wide range of topics, including career development, leadership, and technology. Many of these courses are free with a LinkedIn account.
- **Coursera:** Coursera offers online courses from top universities and organizations on a variety of topics, including career development and job skills. While many courses are not free, there are some available for free or at a reduced cost.

- Glassdoor: Glassdoor provides information on companies, including employee reviews, salary information, and job listings. It also includes a career center with articles on job search strategies and career development.
- Indeed Career Guide: Indeed offers a career guide with articles and resources on job search strategies, resume writing, interviewing, and career development.
- The Muse: The Muse is a career advice and job search website that provides articles, advice, and tools on topics such as job search strategy, resume writing, and networking.
- CareerBuilder: CareerBuilder offers job search tools and resources, including a career advice section with articles on job search strategy, resume writing, and interview preparation.

Overall, these resources can be extremely helpful for individuals looking to explore potential careers, assess their skills and interests, and develop the skills and knowledge needed for their chosen profession.

Career control is essential for psychological well-being, especially during these changing times. Individuals who have greater career control tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction, lower levels of job-related stress, and better mental health outcomes. However, the pandemic has made it challenging for individuals to have control over their careers. To maintain or regain control over their careers, individuals can engage in career planning and develop a strong sense of personal agency. By doing so, one can take control over their career trajectories and improve their psychological well-being. The process will not happen on its own and does take time. One must take steps, even small ones daily. As Ben Franklin so poignantly said, “Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today.”



## References

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman.
- CareerOneStop. (2023). Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.careeronestop.org/>
- Coursera. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.coursera.org/>
- Glassdoor. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm>
- Indeed Career Guide. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice>
- Judge, T.A., & Bono, J.E. (2001). Relationship of core self-evaluations traits--self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability--with job satisfaction and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*(1), 80–92.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.1.80>
- Krumboltz, J. D. (1979). A social learning theory of career decision making. In A. M. Mitchell, G. B. Jones, & J. D. Krumboltz (Eds.), *Social learning and career decision making* (pp. 19-52). Jossey-Bass.
- Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. D. (2008). Integrating person and situation perspectives on work satisfaction: A social-cognitive view. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 73*(3), 442-454.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.06.004>
- LinkedIn Learning. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/>
- The Muse. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.themuse.com/>
- MyNextMove. (n.d.). Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.mynextmove.org/>
- O\*NET Online. (2023). Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.onetonline.org/>

Pratt, M. G., & Ashforth, B. E. (2016). Fostering meaningfulness in working and at work. In S. A. David, I. Boniwell, & A. C. Ayers (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of happiness* (pp. 625-638). Oxford University Press.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 54–67.  
<https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>

Sverke, M., Hellgren, J., & Näswall, K. (2018). The changing nature of work: Implications for occupational health psychology. In S. Leka, R. J. Sinclair, M. Jain, & J. W. T. Chan (Eds.), *Contemporary occupational health psychology: Global perspectives on research and practice* (Vol. 3, pp. 15-39). Wiley-Blackwell.

Tait, M., & Padgett, M. Y. (2016). Job crafting and employee well-being: A systematic review of intervention studies. In K. M. Nielsen, & P. L. Notelaers (Eds.), *Work engagement: A handbook of essential theory and research* (pp. 179-193). Psychology Press.

University of Phoenix. (2021-2023). University of Phoenix Career Optimism Index. Retrieved from <https://www.phoenix.edu/content/dam/edu/career-institute/doc/2023-uopx-career-optimism-index-study-research-findings-dma-snapshots.pdf>