Frustration-Instigated Career Decisions: A Theoretical Exploration of the Role of Frustration in Career Decisions

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Frustration-Instigated Career Decisions: A Theoretical Exploration of the Role of Frustration in Career Decisions

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From a career decision-making perspective, frustration may be an important catalyst for career change. Literature is discussed and used to develop propositions that present perceived frustration, not just as a state of discomfort but as an impetus for career change. Self-perception and achievement need are presented in relation to frustration to speculate about specific career decisions that might be enacted in a state of frustration. A framework is developed to represent career decisions based on proposed relationships. Implications are discussed for human resource development specialists, managers, and employees and suggestions are presented for conducting future research.

Keywords: frustration theory; self-perception; career development

Although the career planning process can be described in developmental terms composed of careful planning and reasoning (McMahon, 2006), many scholars emphasize that careers are often littered with tangential movements, disjointed job choices, and based on emergence of opportunities (Bloch, 2005). These two divergent perspectives illustrate the challenge in identifying and explaining career planning and development. Common themes across much of the career development literature are those of self and self-identity, perceived opportunities, confidence, and perceived control to name a few (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Chen, 2003; Giles & Larmour, 2000). Other widely accepted career development factors include career planning and more concrete factors...
such as skills, knowledge, industry, tangible opportunities, and growth in an industry (Chen, 2003; Giles & Larmour, 2000; Herr, 2001).

As a force for change and development in organizations, human resource development (HRD) specialists are faced with the changing nature of careers, complex organizational challenges, and the need to understand all aspects of career development (McDonald & Hite, 2005, 2008). An overlooked aspect of career development that may improve researchers’ understanding of the process is perceived frustration and its potential impact on career decisions. As Maier (1949) explained, discomfort or frustration is not necessarily negative and recognition of unrealized goals or outcomes can often be an impetus to change. The idea that frustration incites change in individuals has been examined in relation to some organizational variables such as burnout (Lewandowski, 2003) and workplace deviance (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007) but not directly in terms of career development. Therefore, this article addresses career development from a psychological focus that includes aspects of self-perception, achievement need, and the psychological state of frustration in relation to career decisions.

**Career Decision Making**

Bloch (2005) developed a theory of career decision making that incorporates aspects of complexity and emergent opportunities that influence career decisions. In Bloch’s opinion, the formal descriptions of reasoning and planning that accompany long-term careers is not realistic and often careers are described as a series of decisions based on the opportunities and demands that become apparent. That career development is fluid and does not always occur in a logical progression is supported in other career development literature (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Giles & Larmour, 2000).

Based on decision-making literature, most researchers agree that individuals begin a problem-solving or decision process when expected outcomes are not realized (Huber, 1993; Koole, Smeets, van Knippenberg, & Dijksterhuis, 1999; March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1965). A similar focus can be applied to career decisions in that individuals plan careers or make decisions when a perceived need to do so arises (Bloch, 2005; McMahon, 2006). Enacting any behavior requires a decision and in most cases, decision making is thought of as a drawn-out process of comparing alternatives and deriving a satisfactory, if not ideal, conclusion (Huber, 1993; Sivanathan, Molden, Galinsky, & Ku, 2008). The reality of decision making can be quite different from this rational perspective and decisions are made incrementally and with less than perfect information (Bazerman, 1990; March & Simon, 1957). One decision is intertwined with previous decisions and each decision affects future decisions and the decision maker (Koole et al., 1999; Lindblom, 1959; Sivanathan et al., 2008). Thus, career decisions are best understood within the context of the individual and dependent on factors related to self.
Self-Perceptions

Individuals develop preferences and beliefs about themselves, who they are in terms of characteristics through experiences, relationships, and cultural and societal norms (Bandura, 1986; Bem, 1967). The basis by which self-image is formed has been approached from different perspectives. Bem’s (1967) self-perception theory focuses on an individual’s propensity to define oneself based on behaviors whereas other researchers emphasize the individual’s natural state of self-knowledge (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). People change their behavior to maintain a self-perception that supports their desired image and even seek to manage perceptions of others (Bem, 1967; Bono & Vey, 2007; Chen & Fang, 2008; Festinger, 1957; Schlenker, 1980). Self-perception can act as a driver of decisions as individuals attempt to align self-perception with actual behaviors (Bem, 1967; Koole et al., 1999; McFarland, Yun, Harold, Viera, & Moore, 2005).

Related to careers, self and identity have been linked to career development from many perspectives, including self within the context of relationships and culture (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Donnay & Borgen, 1999). Issues of self are indelibly linked to career development through a person’s attempt to navigate his or her world and define not only self but the place and purpose he or she has in the world. Three constructs have been the focus of research and include self-esteem (Brockner, 1979), self-concept (Leonard, Beauvais, & Scholl, 1999), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). These three constructs represent very specific aspects of self-perception and each has been related to career and self-development.

Self-Concept

Self-concept is regarded as the inventory or set of beliefs a person holds about his or her abilities, traits, and characteristics, and influences a person’s expectations for success (Dickhauser & Reinhard, 2006). Concepts of self have been introduced in career development literature for decades. Super (1957) discussed the importance of synthesizing deeper personal drives, interests, and values into occupational choice and provided founding thought that supports the importance of self in career development. Later, Super and Hall (1978) related self and occupational interest as essential aspects of career planning and development and Schein (1978) introduced and acknowledged the importance of self-concept in relation to career development and labeled it as a career anchor. Self-concept as a career anchor, according to Schein, is defined as a person’s sense of abilities, values, motives, and deeper needs that drive career decisions and reactions to challenges and opportunities. A strong self-concept is an internal anchor that provides emotional protection and fortifies career decision making as it holds a person steadily to his or her deeper values and motives.
From a psychological perspective, self-concept was defined by Leonard et al. (1999) as the self-image or perception one holds of his or her traits, competencies, and values. According to Leonard et al., individuals differ in the level and strength of self-concept. The strength of one’s self-concept is defined as the strength of an individual’s belief that a specific trait, skill, or attribute is possessed. An individual with a strong self-concept has firm beliefs about traits, etc. and holds tightly to his or her belief about self whereas an individual with a weak self-concept would question or be unsure about self. According to Leonard et al., as individuals form perceptions about their own traits, competencies, or values and receive feedback confirming or disconfirming their perceptions, self-concept is defined and redefined. Moreover, individuals behave in ways that preserve self-perception and they rationalize behaviors in ways that allow consistency between perceived self, thoughts, and behaviors (Schlenker, 1980). Dickhauser and Reinhard (2006) examined expectations for success in a three-part study and found that self-concept, among other factors, emerged as one important factor related to expectations individuals formed for their success and the outcomes to be attained.

Two measurable factors that have been closely linked to self-concept and are representative of self and ability, respectively, are self-esteem and self-efficacy (Banajai & Prentice, 1994; Brockner, 1979; Campbell, 1990). Considering these additional constructs may add depth to the view of self-perception and its relevance in career decisions.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem represents general feelings of worth (Brockner, 1979). The body of research on self-esteem hints at the fragile nature of our self-perception and shows that self-esteem is related to self-perception and can influence behavior (Campbell, 1990; Krizan, 2008). Swann, Griffin, Predmore, and Gaines (1987) found evidence that high- and low-self-esteem individuals differed in how they reacted to feedback. Low-self-esteem individuals are more likely to accept negative feedback than high-self-esteem individuals. Self-esteem has also been related to self-preservation behaviors such as rationalizing negative outcomes and feedback (Banajai & Prentice, 1994; Park & Maner, 2009), engaging in competitive behavior (Wells & Marwell, 1976), developing a clarity of one’s self-concept (Campbell, 1990; Stinson, Wood, & Doxey, 2008), and being attracted to organizations (Turban & Keon, 1993). Harrington (2007a) included self-esteem and frustration intolerance as influential factors in dysfunctional response behaviors and found that lower self-esteem was related to procrastination. Additional investigation was conducted by Besser, Flett, Hewitt, and Guez (2008), who examined perfectionism and other factors including self-esteem and showed that individuals with perfectionist tendencies suffered negative physical reactions, including increased blood pressure, and lowered self-esteem when faced with negative feedback. These studies
provide evidence that esteem is related to behavior and is aligned with the idea that individuals seek to preserve and develop a self-image that meets their preferred or desired image (Banaji & Prentice, 1994).

**Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1977, 1986) presented self-efficacy as it relates to work behavior and defined it as the belief individuals hold about their ability to perform a specific task. High self-efficacy is related to persistence and accepting challenges, a strong belief in one’s ability to overcome obstacles, and a belief in one’s ability to successfully perform specific tasks. Self-efficacy has been linked to work performance and other organizational behaviors and has become a commonly accepted construct in understanding training and performance issues (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Self-efficacy has been discussed as an influence in career decisions and goals and as an influence in a person’s job performance (Ashforth & Saks, 2000). In a study of newcomers, Ashforth and Saks (2000) noted that self-efficacy was related to a sense of personal control. Individuals with high self-efficacy seek and exercise control in work situations more often than do individuals with low perceptions of self-efficacy.

These three constructs, although related to one another, also include a unique aspect of belief in self and it is proposed that all three constructs comprise the definition of self-perception. Therefore, self-perception is defined and composed of strength in one’s beliefs about self in general, feelings of self-worth, and belief in one’s ability to perform work tasks: self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, respectively. A high self-perception is characterized by strong self-concept and positive self-esteem and self-efficacy. Low self-perception is reflected by weak self-concept and negative self-esteem and self-efficacy. The three constructs are proposed to work together to culminate into an overall evaluation of self; thus if one or more of the constructs is low, self-perception will be lower.

**Achievement Need**

A vast number of factors influence career decisions and, broadly speaking, the situation and individual play an important role in the decision-making process. Focusing on the individual, a multitude of dispositional traits and characteristics have been examined as antecedent factors related to individual behavior (cf. Digman, 1990; George, 1992). One trait that helps to explain level of motivation and influences decision-making behavior is achievement need. Achievement need is the extent to which an individual desires progressive gains or improvement in valued outcomes (Atkinson, 1958; McClelland, 1966; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). According to McClelland (1966), an individual enacts behaviors that will satisfy the need to feel accomplished. Individuals differ in achievement need and this need translates into
motivation and helps to explain why some individuals differ in level of desire for attainment.

Taken alone, achievement need has been used to explain several different organizational behaviors and attitudes, including work attitudes, feedback-seeking behavior, and goal orientation (Klich & Feldman, 1992; Singer & Tang, 1996; Tang & Gilbert, 1995; Vancouver & Morrison, 1995; Whinghter, Cunningham, Wang, & Burnfield, 2008). For example, Klich and Feldman (1992) found that individuals high in achievement need sought more feedback than individuals low in achievement need. Moreover, individuals high in achievement need preferred information specifically related to goal attainment. Whinghter et al. (2008) examined goal orientation, a construct related to achievement need, and found that less perceived frustration was experienced by individuals with high goal orientation. For the purpose of this article, achievement need represents the level of career goals pursued by an individual and the desire for career-related outcomes such as promotions, recognition, or compensation. Considering findings about achievement need and examining it within a specific context of perceived frustration and self-perception may provide insight into understanding and predicting career decisions.

**Frustration**

Frustration theory provides insight into how behavior may change when an individual feels a sense of frustration over unmet needs, or dissatisfaction with self or situations depending on goals (Maier, 1949). Maier presented four characteristics of frustration-instigated behavior: aggression, regression, fixation, and resignation. For example, in the case of resignation, associated behaviors could range from a psychological detachment from work and coworkers, remaining in a job and accepting the circumstances, or a more extreme form of behavior such as leaving a job or organization. Each of the four characteristics illustrates a continued state of experienced intrapersonal conflict, and none of the feelings associated with the characteristics directly helps an individual to attain a goal or meet a need. However, to eliminate the state of frustration, an individual may set a new goal, take a different course of action, or enact other changes to move away from a state of frustration (Behling & Schriesheim, 1976).

Applied to organizational behavior, frustration was proposed to instigate withdrawal, aggression, goal abandonment, and the facilitation or inhibition of task performance (Spector, 1978). Most researchers examine frustration as a periphery factor, a side effect of other phenomena, and often focus on the association of frustration with negative emotions such as anger and hostility (Kuppens & Van Mechelen, 2007). Ashforth and Saks (2000) examined newcomer perspectives and perceived control and found that when newcomers’ expectations of control were unmet, perceptions of helplessness and maladjustment resulted. The authors speculated that based on post hoc analysis,
unmet expectations of control resulted in proactive or reactive orientations depending on individual differences and that newcomers did not necessarily act out or react in response to frustration but they sought to exercise or increase personal control. Another example of extant research that touches on frustration is a study by Judge, Scott, and Ilies (2006). In their study, emotion and workplace attitudes were examined in relation to perceived organizational justice and workplace deviance. The authors found that reactions to perceived injustice were highly dependent on intrapersonal characteristics and emphasized that a focus on individual differences is required in future research. Other researchers focus on frustration as an antecedent factor and typically view frustration as a negative state with potential negative outcome such as workplace deviance or turnover. Lawrence and Robinson (2007), for example, theorized that frustration might result from the use of power in organizations, regardless of the intention, and was likely to incite employee misconduct. Similarly, Brecher and Hantula (2005) speculated that frustration might result in situations of escalation of commitment and the occurrence of negative feedback.

Focusing directly on frustration, Whinghter et al. (2008) examined workload frustration and described frustration as a negative emotion. Actual reactions to workload, however, depend on a person’s tolerance for frustration. The authors focused on goal orientation as a possible moderator and found that goal orientation moderated the relationship between frustration and workload. Working from a different perspective, Harrington (2005, 2007b) based his work in rational-emotive theory rather than frustration theory and developed a measure of frustration intolerance. The author discussed possible dimensions of feelings of intolerance for frustration and distinguished intolerance for frustration from other factors such as self-worth.

It is logical that frustration, being a relatively negative feeling, could result in negative employee behaviors, but feelings of frustration might also be used by an employee to enact positive change. The extent to which an individual perceives frustration may depend on many factors, but frustration literature suggests that individuals have varied levels of tolerance for frustration and prompts that result in feelings of frustration (Maier, 1949; Rosenzweig, 1938; Whinghter et al., 2008).

Aspects of the four characteristics of frustration-instigated behavior may be reflected in some career decisions but there is no research that clearly suggests possible career decisions made in the context of different levels of frustration, self-perception, and achievement need.

**Frustration-Instigated Career Decisions**

In typical career management, individuals make decisions continually as they progress through the organization. As with any decision, career-related decisions are sometimes carefully devised plans associated with long-term career goals whereas other career decisions are made to obtain short-term
outcomes or as spontaneous reactions to some opportunity, event, or situation. Many factors, including those focused on in this article have been examined in extant research, and some have been linked to career decisions. However, frustration is not focused on in HRD literature. There are a plethora of individual and situational factors that influence career-related decisions (Bloch, 2005; Osipow, 1990), but three constructs are focused on in this article to isolate and discuss influences of the constructs on career decisions.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed and combined effects of perceived frustration, self-perception, and achievement need. The framework and propositions are speculative. However, given the supporting research, particularly in perceived self and achievement need, some ideas can be proposed. The figure is represented as stacked cubes, with each cube representing a different career decision depending on levels of frustration, self-perception, and achievement need. The bottom four cubes represent decisions from a perspective of low self-perception, and the top four cubes represent high levels of self-perception. The front cubes represent low levels of achievement need and the back-most cubes illustrate higher levels of achievement need. The left-most cubes are related to low levels of frustration in combination with high and low levels of self-perception and achievement need, and the right-most cubes represent high frustration levels combined with high and low levels of self-perception and achievement need.

Each combination of factors is posited to result in a different type of career decision. To clarify presentation of the proposed career decisions, Figure 1 is
positioned to emphasize the career decisions focused on in the first two sets of propositions labeled Lateral-Down, Lateral-Up, Constructive Drastic, and Rapid Change. Those career decisions most relevant to the first two sets of propositions are bolded for emphasis in the figure and the remaining decisions are grayed.

### Lateral Downward and Upward Career Decisions

As the frustration literature emphasizes, feelings of frustration are uncomfortable regardless of whether the resulting behavior is positive or negative (Maier, 1949; Rosenzweig, 1938; Whinghter et al., 2008). In highly frustrating circumstances, it is likely that a person will be moved to change, but the exact behavior depends on intrapersonal factors (Ashforth & Saks, 2000; Judge et al., 2006). Considering achievement need and self-perception in conjunction with frustration adds breadth to proposed career decisions. Achievement need in general indicates a desire to reach goals and attain relevant outcomes (McClelland, 1966). A low achievement need might make a person inclined to accept fewer tangible outcomes or make less progressive career decisions. Active goal attainment behavior might be less prevalent. A low self-perception might influence further a person to forego opportunities to compete, seek control, or attain positive outcomes. Aligned with what Maier (1949) labeled as regression behaviors, individuals in a highly frustrating circumstance may wish to remove themselves from the situation but based in a low achievement need and self-perception, they may be willing to accept change that does not yield tangible benefits such as higher pay or greater skill attainment (Ashforth & Saks, 2000; Stinson et al., 2008; Whinghter et al., 2008). Therefore, it is posited that a person will be more likely to make lateral or downward career moves when frustration is high, achievement need is low, and self-perception is low.

**Proposition 1a:** When perceived frustration is high and achievement need and self-perception are low, career moves will be more likely to be lateral or downward, labeled Lateral–Down.

Changing one aspect in the frustration, self-perception, and achievement need combination might make a difference in the decision outcome. In highly frustrating situations in which achievement need is low but self-perception is high, a person may have higher expectations about what he or she can do, should be, and should attain (Besser et al., 2008; Dickhauser & Reinhard, 2006). A high self-perception may require the individual to preserve and build a high self-image, but lower achievement need may not incite strong intrapersonal demands to expend energy to obtain exceptional outcomes. A more typical outcome might be that a person seeks some positive change but not a drastic one. Therefore, highly frustrating situations where individuals have low need for achievement but high self-perception, lateral or upward movements might be acted on.
Proposition 1b: When perceived frustration is high, achievement need is low, and self-perception is high, career moves will be more likely to be lateral or upward, labeled Lateral–Up.

Constructive Drastic- and Rapid-Change Career Decisions

The more frustration perceived, the more likely that a person will be inclined to change (Brecher & Hantula, 2005). Extreme frustration has been most often related to extreme behaviors such as anger and hostility, but also noted is that frustration can result in positive outcomes (Kuppens & Van Mechelen, 2007). In situations perceived as highly frustrating, it is proposed that career decisions are more likely to result in drastic changes as individuals will seek first to remove themselves from highly frustrating circumstances (Kuppens & Van Mechelen, 2007). By definition, both self-perception and achievement need are related to a strong sense of worth and desire for attainment, respectively, and in conjunction with frustration may produce drastic but relatively positive outcomes. In the realm of career decisions these would be most closely related to aggression defined by Maier (1949). The ability to withstand obstacles despite perceived risks is likely for high-self-perception, high-achievement-need individuals even when they are faced with difficult career circumstances. Individuals may seek not only to rid themselves of frustrating circumstances but also to place themselves in an improved circumstance. Therefore, in situations where perceived frustration, achievement need, and self-perception are high, it is posited that career moves may be drastic but constructive and intended to yield higher outcomes.

Proposition 2a: When perceived frustration, achievement need, and self-perception are high, career decisions are likely to be constructive but drastic, labeled Constructive–Drastic.

In highly frustrating situations where achievement need is high but self-perception is low, individuals may lack the ability to overcome obstacles or deal with difficult career circumstances that cause frustration (Ashforth & Saks, 2000; Bono & Vey, 2007). While seeking a means to eliminate frustration, the resulting decision is less likely to include specific and purposeful action to place oneself in more positive circumstances that yield higher outcomes. The goal may be to get something different but not necessarily something better. Therefore, it is posited that career change will be rapid and impulsive.

Proposition 2b: When perceived frustration and achievement need are high and self-perception is low, rapid career change is likely to take place, labeled Rapid Change.

The second two propositions focus on career decisions in situations where there is low perceived frustration and varied levels of achievement need and
self-perception. The career outcomes posited to occur are shown in Figure 2 and labeled Finish, Systematic, Constructive Development, and Acquisition. Again, for clarity, Figure 2 is repositioned so that career decisions relevant to the second two sets of propositions are visible and bolded for emphasis.

**Finish and Systematic Career Decisions**

It is likely that when perceived frustration is low there is less possibility for abrupt changes to one’s career (Brecher & Hantula, 2005). In addition, it is proposed that when achievement need and self-perception are low, a person is not likely to plan and enact behaviors that will yield long-term career development and improvement (Whinghter et al., 2008). Thus individuals may enact **resignation** behaviors, according to Maier’s (1949) terminology, and accept or resign themselves to their current situation. The term **Finish** is applied to identify the career decisions posited to reflect behaviors such as maintaining satisfactory performance in a current job, but giving little attention to career progression.

**Proposition 3a:** When perceived frustration, achievement need, and self-perception are low, career decisions will be made to complete a current job or assignment, labeled **Finish**.

When self-perception is high, the increased sense of self may spur a person to expect more from career opportunities. If achievement need is low,
extensive or speedy outcomes may not be pursued. So even while achievement need and frustration are low, planned and sequenced career movements might take place and more attention may be placed on career development to preserve a high self-perception and meet expectations of success (Dickhauser & Reinhard, 2006). More Systematic changes are posited to result in this case. A person is likely to seek a traditional path or career movement and perhaps one that is determined by the organization that allows for attainment over time.

Proposition 3b: When perceived frustration is low, achievement need is low, and self-perception is high, systematic career progression will take place, labeled Systematic.

Constructive Development and Acquisition Career Decisions

In a case of low perceived frustration, there may be less urgency in making career changes as the situation itself is not perceived as demanding or uncomfortable enough to incite change. Frustration may not be acting as the primary stimulus for change. However, when paired with high achievement need, an individual may be focused on changes that yield improved circumstances, career progression, and attainment to satisfy high achievement need (Whinghter et al., 2008). Considering high self-perception further supports the likelihood that a person will expect success and positive career outcomes (Dickhauser & Reinhard, 2006). Therefore, it is proposed that a person will be more strongly focused, or experience fixation, to use Maier’s (1949) term, and work diligently to develop oneself and make career decisions that lead to increased knowledge, skill attainment, or other valued outcomes. A constructive and progressive development of career goals and attainment is posited to occur in career decisions related to low frustration, high achievement need, and high self-perception.

Proposition 4a: When perceived frustration is low, and achievement need and self-perception are high, career decisions will be constructive and developmental, labeled Constructive Development.

When low perceived frustration is paired with low self-perception but high achievement need, it is posited that the more likely career decisions will be those that yield more tangible outcomes but are based on less planning for intentional progression. Again a lower level of self-perception relates to lowered levels of expected success (Dickhauser & Reinhard, 2006), whereas the higher achievement need might drive behavior toward satisfying achievement needs through attainment of outcomes. Given the high achievement need, the fixation might be on acquiring outcomes rather than developing, for the long run, a predetermined career path. Thus an individual is likely to seek acquisition of more short-term attainable outcomes or unforeseen opportunities.
Proposition 4b: When perceived frustration is low, achievement need is high, and self-perception is low, career decisions will be made quickly for short-term goal attainment, labeled Acquisition.

Discussion

It is likely that everyone experiences some level of frustration during career progression. Depending on the circumstances and the individual, different career decisions are likely to result. The framework developed in this article includes three constructs related to career development: perceived frustration, self-perception, and achievement need. It is proposed that these factors have a combined influence on career decisions and that specific career decisions can be estimated based on varied levels of these factors.

Frustration inherently incorporates a certain level of discomfort that may not necessarily result in negative behavior, but it is likely to affect career decisions (Behling & Schriesheim, 1976; Maier, 1949; Lewandowski, 2003; Spector, 1978). Similarly, self-perception and achievement need play an important role in career development by considering career decision within the context of the individual (Judge et al., 2006). Examining frustration, self-perception, and achievement need in relation to career decisions adds a deeper psychological foundation from which to understand career choice, planning, and development. Understanding more about career decisions within the context of frustration holds practical implications for HRD professionals, managers, and individuals.

HRD Implications

The primary implication of the framework proposed in this article is to begin dialogue among HRD professionals, employees, and supervisors about the potential impact of frustration on career decisions. Understanding that perceived frustration may be more than an irritating state of discomfort and that it may incite a desire for career change is relevant to understanding and shaping career decisions. It is important to develop awareness in people that a sense of frustration is not, in and of itself, negative and recognizing a state of frustration can help to refocus career decisions, ensuring that individuals work toward constructive changes and away from emotional reactions.

Awareness that perceived frustration is a signal to examine one’s career, self-perception, and career goals could save some people from countless attempts to change jobs in an attempt to ease the discomfort of perceived frustration. A better understanding of frustration-instigated career decisions could help individuals define and plan careers that are satisfying and for some individuals, fulfill a higher purpose. Career decisions, even in frustrating circumstances, can become progressive and meaningful rather than reactive decisions to eliminate or reduce frustration. Common knowledge indicates that employees
feel frustration in career or personal progress at times, but examining specific ways to acknowledge frustration and its importance in career development can be productive for organizations and employees.

Many of the factors theorized to be of importance to career decision making can be assessed and developed during career counseling or training. For example, career self-efficacy was increased among groups of women attending specific career training (Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000). In another study on self-efficacy, Nauta, Kahn, Angell, and Cantarelli (2002) found that self-efficacy does not singularly drive interests but that exploring and developing career interest influences self-efficacy. Self-esteem is affected by negative outcomes as shown in the Besser et al. (2008) study on perfectionism in which lowered self-esteem was experienced by individuals receiving negative feedback. Similarly, frustration can be discussed in terms of sources and possible outcomes and dealt with in positive ways. Awareness of frustration as a possible instigating factor in career decisions opens discussion to possible sources of frustration and possible solutions.

Human resource development practitioners fulfill many responsibilities to employers and employees in terms of enacting change and emphasizing employee development to build a stronger organization. Career development is changing and individuals and organizations are viewing work and careers differently, thus requiring HRD professionals to expand their understanding of careers, organizational issues, and individuals (McDonald & Hite, 2008). Individuals are becoming more proactive in managing their careers (Nicholson, 1996), and organizations are recognizing that effective management and development of the human component in organizations has strategic benefits (Nicholson, 1996; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). It is necessary for organizations to align employees’ talents and strengths with strategic direction of the organization. This alignment can be accomplished more effectively by understanding why individuals seek career change and how frustration affects the desire for change.

The changing nature of careers and work is recognized by organizational leaders who recruit individuals with attitudes that fit with the organizational culture (Chatman, 1989; Greenhaus & Callanan, 1994; McDonald & Hite, 2008; Turban & Keon, 1993). Managers are also aware of the increasing freedom of choice some groups of employees, particularly those with high or rare levels of skill and education have about where and how they work (Nicholson, 1996). Understanding how and why career decisions are made might contribute to an organization’s ability to create an environment that openly seeks to develop self-awareness in individuals and to hire individuals that have a clear understanding of what they want from work and the organization. It is this clarity that may facilitate recruiting and selection so that people can be placed into organizations and jobs in which they can be productive. Furthermore, although turnover is expected in organizations, precisely who leaves and why is not always clear. Understanding the role of frustration in career decisions
might reduce unwanted turnover and improve the effectiveness of human resource planning, employee selection, and employee development.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The purpose of the framework is to isolate and examine the influence of frustration in career decisions while considering self-perception and achievement need. These factors have not been examined in relation to one another and in association with career decisions. However, in future empirical studies, additional factors should be included to expand our knowledge about the role of frustration in career decisions. For example, some variables relevant to career decisions include age, ethnicity, gender, education, skill levels, seniority, and industry (Chen, 2003). Situational factors such as relationship with supervisor, work–family conflict, and overall life satisfaction may also play an important role in explaining sources and correlates of frustration and the impact of frustration on career decisions (McMahon, 2006).

In addition to demographic and situational factors, other variables that might be related to perceived frustration and its impact on career decisions should be considered. Perceived opportunities, networking ability, and career search skills might add to the overall picture of career decisions. The influence of frustration even beyond other well-researched factors, and in relation to them, would add to our understanding of career decisions. Also important are factors that may coincide with frustration. When experiencing frustration, people may become despondent and it may be more difficult to make decisions in general. Depression and negative affect should be considered in any investigation and test of the proposed framework as these factors might influence the process by which people make decisions and change the very nature of the career decision process.

The process of examining the impact of frustration on career decisions may prove challenging, but there are a number of ways to approach future research. Grounded theory or ethnographic approaches might be useful to investigate career decisions in light of perceived frustration to develop and examine career development and frustration theory simultaneously (Tesch, 1990). Investigating posited relationship by interviewing individuals in varied states of perceived frustration about career decisions would allow for elaboration of the proposed framework. Working from a more basic viewpoint and carrying out general conversations and interviews could shed light on how much or little recognition and importance is placed on perceived frustration in career decision streams.

Cross-sectional research would allow for a broader view of proposed relationships and might be helpful, particularly after qualitative investigation. A cross-sectional examination of the proposed relationship, for example, might provide initial evidence of the connectedness and relevance of frustration, achievement need, and self-perception. Including additional factors is possible too, and a large-scale cross-sectional data collection effort would allow for
several factors to be assessed among many individuals. Regardless of the approach, additional investigation into frustration in relation to career decisions adds depth to career development literature.

**Conclusion**

This article focuses on frustration in relation to career decisions and includes discussion of self-perception, achievement need and frustration. Specific career decisions are posited based on existing research. Although career development literature emphasizes the sometimes spontaneous and complex process of career development, factors that might incite such changes have not been examined in depth. Frustration may provide some additional understanding of career decisions and provide a better understanding of career change and development. Career development remains an important topic, and information to help people make better career decisions is useful to individuals and human resource development professionals.

**References**


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