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ABSTRACT

Most career decisions involve compromises. The need to compromise can be attributed to the fact that the characteristics of the options in the occupational world do not necessarily match the ideal career image of the career decision maker. This study examined the readiness to compromise and the content of compromise in 1,252 deliberating women and 751 deliberating men who used "MESHIV"--a computer-assisted career decision making system. Participants were aged 18 or older. The participants used MESHIV in one out of eight locations in Israel. Compromise was defined as the readiness to accept a range of levels instead of only the optimal level and as being indifferent with respect to certain complex aspects of regarding them "essential," "desirable," "indifferent," "undesirable," or "unacceptable." The findings revealed only a relatively few, small, yet interpretable differences between men and women in the readiness to accept career compromises. These differences in the readiness to compromise reflect differences in preferences. Specifically, gender differences were observed in complex aspects where one of the groups expressed a tendency for "unacceptable" (e.g., men were not willing to accept "providing mental help", whereas women expressed "unacceptable" for "using technical skills"), whereas the other group a tendency for "desirable" or "undesirable" in those same aspects. A tendency to report "desirable" or "undesirable" in one group (e.g., "teaching" for women) and "indifferent" in the other group (e.g., "teaching" for men) was also observed. (ABL)

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Gender Differences in the Readiness to Accept Career Compromise

Most career decisions involve compromises. The need to compromise can be attributed to the fact that the characteristics of the options in the occupational world do not necessarily match the ideal career image of the career decision maker (cdm). The way individuals handle the need to compromise has significant implications on their career decision making process and their occupational outcomes, and hence on the quality of their life. The increased recent concern with compromise (e.g., Pryor, 1987; Gati, Shenhav, & Givon, in press; Gottfredson, 1981; Hesketh, Elmslie & Kaldor, 1990; Leung & Harmon, 1990; Taylor & pryor, 1985) reflects recognition in the theoretical and practical significance of this issue.

Career compromises can be studied from the viewpoint of decision-making theory (Brown, 1990; Gati, 1986; Gelatt, 1962; Kaldor & Zytowski, 1969; Katz, 1966; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984; Pitz & Harren, 1980). From this viewpoint career decisions involve a choice among occupational alternatives. Any consideration or factor relevant in this choice is labelled an aspect. Variations in the aspects may be represented by qualitative or quantitative levels. The optimal level is the most desired level. Additional levels may also be considered acceptable. Together with the optimal level, these levels constitute the range of acceptable levels. In this framing the readiness to compromise is expressed in this range of acceptable levels, where a larger range reflects a larger readiness to compromise.

In an empirical investigation of compromise processes, Gati, Shenhav, and Givon (in press) found an inverse relationship between importance of aspects and compromise: low importance was related to a larger readiness to compromise. We assumed that low importance reflects that the cdm is willing to regard more variations in an aspect as acceptable (that is, to accept a larger compromise), disregarding (or attributing a low weight to) the discrepancy between his or her optimal level in that aspect and the corresponding characteristics of the occupational alternatives. Thus, a change in the relative importance of an aspect (i.e., lowering it) is correlated with the compromise the individual is willing to accept regarding that aspect (i.e., larger compromise).

The relative importance attributed to the various aspects considered during career decision making reflects the relative importance of work and other life roles (Super, 1980). For example, a person presently attributing high importance to the role of student, but having to work to support himself, may reflect this in assigning a relatively high importance to the aspect "flexibility of working hours". This process is mediated by the within-aspect preferences. Specifically, changes in the relative importance of the various life roles may lead to modifications in the perceived desirabilities of an aspect's levels, and hence also to a change in the relative importance of the various aspects. Accordingly, we assume that differences in the life-roles of men and women have impacts on the perceived desirability of the levels of career-related aspects, and hence on their readiness to make compromises in those aspects.

Several studies (Hesketh, Elmslie and Kaldor, 1990; Leung and Harmon, 1990; Tylor and Pryor, 1985) have pointed out differences in the readiness to compromise and the content of compromise between the sexes. Specifically, it was found that women are usually less willing

to compromise on fields of interest while men prefer to compromise on fields of interest but are usually less willing to compromise on prestige. We hypothesized that the differential readiness to compromise and the content of compromise (i.e., in what aspects to compromise) will be influenced by the different sex-roles and reflected in the range of levels considered acceptable in the various aspects relevant for the decision.

Method

Participants

1252 deliberating women and 751 deliberating men who used "MESHIV" - a computer-assisted career decision making system, participated in the study. (The theoretical rationale of MESHIV is discussed in Gati, 1986). 32% were 18-20 years old, 39% 21-22, 16% 23-24, and 13% 25-30 and above. 86% had 12 years of schooling, 8% had 13-14 years, and 6% had 15 or more years of education.

Procedure

The participants used MESHIV in one out of eight locations in Israel (public or private career counseling centers) out of their own initiative, as part of their career decision making process, or were introduced to it by their career counselor (and used the system inbetween counseling sessions). One of the major purposes of the dialogue is to identify a limited sized set of career options which are compatible with the individual's preferences. During the dialogue with MESHIV, the users were asked to rate the degree of importance they attribute to the various considerations or aspects. Then, the users were asked to report their preferences in the important aspects. The users' monitored dialogues served as the data. This data included, in addition to the users' preferences, information regarding their age, sex, and years of education (but not personal identification).

For each of the first 13 aspects included in MESHIV, labelled "simple aspects", five ordered variations or levels are presented to the individuals (e.g., for the aspect of the "degree of variety" - "little variety", "below average variety", "average variety", "above average variety", "high variety"). With respect to each simple aspect the user is asked to indicate his or her preferences: (a) first, the most preferred variation or level in that aspect, labelled the optimal

level (e.g., "above average variety"), and then (b) additional levels he or she is willing to consider and to compromise on (e.g., in addition to "above average variety", the individual can report his or her willingness to consider occupational alternatives characterized also by "average variety" and "high degree of variety"). The other levels (i.e., "below average variety" and "low variety") are considered unacceptable. The list of the 13 simple aspects is presented in Table 1.

In addition to the 13 simple aspects included in MESHIV, there are 30 "complex" aspects which belong to four major categories (relationship with people, object of work, abilities and skills, field of interest). For example, "team-work" is one instance out of many concerning relationships with people. Table 2 presents the list of these 30 aspects. For each of these complex aspects the user is requested to report his or her preferences on the following scale: "essential", "desirable", "indifferent", "undesirable", "unacceptable".

Thus, we obtained for each participant (a) the range of acceptable levels for each of the 13 simple aspects (0 -- no acceptable levels in addition to the optimal level, i.e., no compromise, 1 -- one level acceptable in addition to the optimal level, ... , 4 -- all five levels of the aspect are regarded as acceptable, i.e., maximal compromise), and (b) the readiness to compromise in each of the 30 complex aspects: "essential" and "unacceptable", reflect no readiness to compromise (scored 0), "desirable" and "undesirable", reflect some readiness to compromise (scored 1), and "indifferent" reflects the largest possible compromise i.e., all levels acceptable (scored 2).

Results

Table 1 presents the readiness to compromise in the simple aspects and Table 2 presents the readiness to compromise in the complex aspects. The data is presented separately for women and men. The results show that generally only small differences exist between men and women in their readiness to compromise. However, a few noticeable differences can be observed. In the simple aspects women were ready to compromise more than men only in the aspect of professional advancement ($F(1,2000)=5.87$, $p<.05$).

Table 2 presents the results for the complex aspects. The differences which are worth mentioning include a larger readiness of women to compromise in "providing mental help" than men ($F(1,1992)=11.23$, $p<.001$), and a larger readiness of men to compromise in "guidance and teaching" ($F(1,1992)=15.95$, $p<.001$), "using technical skills" ($F(1,1994)=15.65$, $p<.001$), and in the fields of "outdoor" ($F(1,1995)=11.60$, $p<.001$) and "technology" ($F(1,1995)=24.10$, $p<.001$).

No overall differences between men and women were found in the readiness to compromise in the simple aspects (see bottom of Table 1), nor in the complex aspects (bottom Table 2). Finally, the across-subject correlations between the readiness to compromise in the simple aspects and the complex aspects were .28 and .21, for women and men, respectively. These correlations reflect that there are also individual differences in the readiness to compromise (i.e., there are individuals who are more ready to compromise both in the simple and the complex aspects, and there are others who are willing to compromise less in both types of aspects).

Discussion

In the present study compromise was investigated in terms of within-aspect preferences. Specifically, compromise was defined as the readiness to accept a range of levels instead of only the optimal level (in the simple aspects) and as being indifferent with respect to certain complex aspects or regarding them "desirable" or "undesirable". The findings revealed only a relatively few, small, yet interpretable differences between men and women in the readiness to accept career compromises. These differences in the readiness to compromise reflect differences in preferences. Specifically, gender differences were observed in complex aspects where one of the groups expressed a tendency for "unacceptable" (e.g., men were not willing to accept "providing mental help", whereas women expressed unacceptable for "using technical skills"), whereas the other group a tendency for "desirable" or "undesirable" in those same aspects. A tendency to report desirable or undesirable in one group (e.g., "teaching" for women) and indifferent in the other group (e.g., "teaching" for men) was also observed.

The study of compromise in the present investigation is different from that of some recent studies (Hesketh, Elmslie and Kaldor, 1990; Leung and Harmon, 1990; Tylor and Pryor, 1985). Previous studies focussed only on the three aspects which Gottfredson's theory (1981) refers to (sex-type, prestige, and fields of interest) and ignored other relevant aspects for career decision making (Pryor, 1982; Super, 1980).

The observed correlations between the readiness to compromise in the simple and in the complex aspects reflect that there are also individual differences in the readiness to compromise. Thus, it seems that the variance in the readiness to compromise can be attributed mainly to within-individual differences (i.e., the readiness to accept

more compromise in some aspects and less in others) and to within-group differences (i.e., some individuals are more ready to compromise whereas others are less ready to compromise), and les to sex differences. The fact that the differences found between the sexes in the readiness to compromise were small can be attributed, perhaps, to a change in women's and men's approach to the career world, reflecting decreased sex-role differences among young adults of today.

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Table 1: Mean Compromise in "Simple" Aspects
(Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

Aspect	Male	Female	F (df)
Length of Training	1.33[1] (0.89)	1.27 (0.84)	2.19 (1, 1997)
Indoor/Outdoor	1.30 (0.90)	1.26 (0.90)	1.21 (1, 1997)
Amount of Travel	1.12 (0.89)	1.20 (0.85)	2.98 (1, 1997)
Working Hours (Conventional-Non Conventional)	1.14 (0.88)	1.17 (0.86)	0.43 (1, 1997)
Flexibility in Working Hours	1.32 (0.97)	1.32 (0.94)	0.00 (1, 1996)
Economic Security	1.18 (0.91)	1.24 (0.93)	1.70 (1, 1997)
Professional Advancement	1.29 (0.78)	1.38 (0.82)	5.87 * (1, 2000)
Authoritativeness	1.23 (0.85)	1.27 (0.84)	0.66 (1, 1997)
Income	1.21 (0.70)	1.26 (0.74)	2.37 (1, 1998)
Social Status	1.17 (0.83)	1.22 (0.85)	1.91 (1, 1997)
Variety	1.25 (0.80)	1.32 (0.77)	3.45 (1, 1998)
Responsibility	1.23 (0.84)	1.24 (0.81)	0.92 (1, 1998)
Independence	1.24 (0.81)	1.23 (0.80)	0.08 (1, 1998)
Across Aspects Mean	1.24 (0.63)	1.26 (0.62)	0.42 (1, 2000)

[1] The scale of compromise is 0 - No Compromise to 4 - Maximal Compromise

Table 2: Mean Compromise in "Complex" Aspects
(Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

Aspect	Male	Female	F(df)
Relationship with People			
Physical Treatment	1.03[1] (0.65)	1.07 (0.64)	1.77 (1, 1992)
Mental Help	1.01 (0.66)	1.11 (0.59)	11.23 * (1, 1992)
Counseling/Counsultation	1.18 (0.55)	1.16 (0.53)	0.24 (1, 1992)
Guidance/Teaching	1.21 (0.58)	1.10 (0.55)	15.95 * (1, 1992)
Negotiation	1.11 (0.57)	1.08 (0.60)	1.27 (1, 1992)
Team Work	1.18 (0.56)	1.22 (0.58)	2.40 (1, 1992)
Management/Supervision	1.13 (0.55)	1.16 (0.57)	1.90 (1, 1992)
Community Service	1.11 (0.66)	1.19 (0.61)	8.94 * (1, 1992)
Reception	1.13 (0.64)	1.15 (0.63)	0.44 (1, 1992)
Object of Work			
Tools & Instruments	1.32 (0.59)	1.38 (0.60)	4.61 * (1, 1941)
Paper and Pencil	1.29 (0.58)	1.34 (0.58)	3.24 (1, 1941)
Materials	1.25 (0.59)	1.32 (0.59)	6.21 * (1, 1941)
Abstract Ideas	1.16 (0.55)	1.15 (0.53)	0.09 (1, 1941)
Plants/Animals	1.04 (0.68)	1.03 (0.67)	0.23 (1, 1941)
Computer Terminal	1.30 (0.59)	1.22 (0.62)	7.13 * (1, 1941)

[1] The scale of compromise is 0 - No Compromise to 2 - Maximal Compromise

Table 2 - Continued

Aspect	Male	Female	F(df)
Abilities/Skills			
Verbal	1.18 (0.57)	1.13 (0.56)	4.14 (1, 1994)
Numerical	1.15 (0.55)	1.11 (0.61)	2.53 (1. 1994)
Technical	1.12 (0.61)	1.01 (0.66)	15.65 * (1, 1994)
Artistic	1.10 (0.64)	1.10 (0.59)	0.14 (1, 1994)
Manual Dexterity	1.14 (0.61)	1.14 (0.59)	0.00 (1, 1994)
Analytical	0.95 (0.53)	.99 (0.52)	3.32 (1, 1994)
Organizational	1.07 (0.55)	1.08 (0.56)	0.08 (1, 1994)
Interests			
Business	1.08 (0.55)	1.06 (0.60)	0.50 (1, 1995)
Organization	1.10 (0.51)	1.11 (0.56)	0.21 (1, 1995)
General Culture	1.16 (0.60)	1.09 (0.54)	8.24 * (1, 1995)
Service	1.11 (0.62)	1.12 (0.56)	0.05 (1, 1995)
Arts & Entertainment	1.03 (0.63)	1.07 (0.63)	1.87 (1, 1995)
Outdoor	1.04 (0.64)	0.94 (0.66)	11.60 * (1, 1995)
Science	1.03 (0.60)	1.00 (0.62)	1.29 (1, 1995)
Technology	1.04 (0.58)	0.90 (0.65)	24.05 * (1, 1995)
Across Aspects Mean	1.12 (0.26)	1.11 (0.26)	0.44 (1, 1935)

[1] The scale of compromise is 0 - No Compromise to 2 - Maximal Compromise